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Klipsun magazine is named after a Lummi word meaning beautiful sunset. Western's Journalism Department publishes Klipsun twice per quarter.
Sara Crowley is a journalism major with a concentration in East-Asian studies. One day she plans to travel to Appalachia and produce a documentary on the disappearing hillbilly culture. Sarah has written and edited for The Western Front and has had articles published in the Wilderness Journal. This is her first contribution to Klipsun.

Sara Buckwitz is a journalism and Spanish major. Her work has appeared in the Utne Reader, The Western Front and Klipsun. When she's not writing, she tries to make time to play outside in the rain.

Erica Oakley is a senior public relations major and history minor. Her dream is to do PR for an NHL team. An avid Calgary Flames fan, she also loves country music and the smell of cow. She also owns the Mighty Ducks trilogy and is proud of it.

Linnea Westerlund is a junior public relations major. This is her first contribution to Klipsun, and she has previously been published in The Western Front. After trying every food imaginable, she believes there is nothing better than the Swedish meatballs from IKEA.

Natalie Quick is a public relations major, political science minor and has studied Japanese for seven years. She listens to Dave Matthews Band to relax and daydreams about Tahiti. After a few years in the PR field, Natalie plans on attending graduate school in Washington or California. Although this is her first Klipsun article, she has been published in The Western Front.

Mina Vedder is a senior public relations major with a concentration in East-Asian studies. She loves geography and hopes to become nomadic someday, traveling as an international news correspondent. This is her first contribution to Klipsun and she has written for The Western Front.

Bill Bennion is a journalism major who hopes to move to Olympia after graduation and pursue a career in public relations. When not working or riding his motorcycles, he finds time to whittle away at a college degree. He has previously been published in The Western Front and South Puget Sound Community College's Sounds Newspaper in Olympia.

Soren Velice is a journalism major who loves extreme kayaking, adventure journalism and the combination of the two. After graduation he wants to pursue a story deep in the canyon or high on the mountain top. He has been published in hooked on the Outdoors, Paddler, Holland Herald, Airtime, Coast Magazine, Kayak Magazine and The Western Front.
Her cauldron may bubble sometimes, but not with the dark myths that made practicing ancient witchcraft an evil secret. Sarah Crowley peers into the world of Wicca as practiced by modern Bellingham witch Betsy Fox. Photos by Chris Fuller.

Betsy Fox doesn't own a black cat or cast evil spells, and her broom is stored safely in the closet. Fox, however, calls herself a witch.

Only a trace of witchcraft adorns the living room of her comfortable home in Bellingham's northside. Stained glass fixtures dapple the room's walls with tiny gems of light. Indian princesses and pagan nymphs settle in frames on the walls, while an antique cuckoo clock softly ticks in the hall.

Next to a miniature cauldron on the mantle, Samantha, Endora and Tabitha, characters from the 1960s comedy sitcom "Bewitched," smile beguilingly from their gilded frame. Fox says role models like Samantha and Glinda the Good Witch from the "Wizard of Oz" reinforced her desire to become a witch. Fox, however, resembles none of these blond-haired, blue-eyed stereotypes — her Rubenesque figure is crowned by a head of chestnut waves, and expressive chocolate-colored eyes peer out from behind her wire-rimmed glasses.

Fox practices Wicca, a belief system based on pre-Christian traditions that originated in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Followers worship two main deities, the god and the goddess. Most Wiccans believe the sun represents the god and the earth represents the goddess. The god and goddess create fertility for all the cosmos. This faith instills in Wiccans a respect for all living things and their natural environments.

In ancient history, witchcraft was known as the "craft of the wise." Many who followed witchcraft were healers with knowledge of herbal medicine. In modern times, Wiccans continue to use natural remedies for anything from headaches to quitting smoking.

As a child growing up on Vashon Island, Fox developed a love of the ocean. Being near the water gave Fox a deep appreciation of nature, which ultimately led her to practice Wicca.

"I grew up mostly non-religious and I was never baptized," she says, remembering her childhood on the island. "I worshipped the water and the ocean ... The way I feel about the ocean translated well into the way Wiccans feel about the earth," she says while clasping her ring-adorned hands in her lap.
Local Wiccans weave ribbons around a Maypole during a Beltane celebration (upper left). Betsy Fox at her Bellingham home (center). Part of the Beltane festival celebrating the coming of spring includes sprinkling wine on the ground (lower right).
Almost cherubic in appearance, Fox's hands lack any resemblance to the twisted, gnarled ones of the stereotypical Hollywood witch.

Fox admits that as a child she attempted to cast spells and mix potions, using sand and salt water, along with the occasional jellyfish. She had a makeshift shrine by her bedside comprised of beach wood, rocks and Lipton tea-box figurines. Her magical wand was a dried stick scavenged from the beach.

"No one could touch it except me," she says, chuckling at the memory.

Fox says her parents laughed at her early attempts at witchcraft. In college, however, Fox became serious in her pursuit of witchcraft, finding her niche in Wicca.

As a fine arts student at Fairhaven College, Fox connected with nature in her art, especially pottery.

"(The pottery) would come out looking organic and fertile," she says, "almost like genitalia."

In 1985 Fox read "The Spiral Dance" by Starhawk, an author Fox says is well-known for educating readers about bringing people together through magic.

Fox says the book has inspired many people to pursue witchcraft. Soon after reading the book, she began attending twice-weekly Wicca classes taught by Fritz Muntean, a religious scholar and Wiccan high priest, in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Fox says her studies covered topics like self-transformation, the theory of magic and group dynamics. Only after she had mastered these areas, as well as learning about the holidays and symbols, was she deemed competent enough to lead her own group.

After five years of intensive study, Fox was ordained a high priestess by Muntean.

"Anyone can call themselves a witch," she says, her voice taking on a more serious tone, "but to call oneself a high priestess means you can lead a group in ritual and have it be effective."

As a high priestess, Fox led her own coven — a group of witches who worship the gods together — for more than five years. A full-time job and a new baby pushed her to retire from the coven in 1996. Leaving the coven, however, did not end Fox's practice of Wicca.

"Wicca made me feel like I was coming home," she says as she opens her "book of shadows," a well-worn, handwritten volume of Wiccan passages, which Fox says was handed down to her from her teachers.

She points out a black pentagram on the first page. A speckle of blood is dabbed in the pentagram's center.

"That's actually my menstrual blood," Fox confides. "It's a piece of me. It's marking my territory in the spirit world."

She says menstrual blood is the root of fertility and a symbol of rebirth. Fertility is a fundamental tenet of Wicca. Wiccans believe the god, in part of an eternal cycle, fertilizes the goddess, thereby creating and supporting all living things.

Fox's cauldron is tarnished from use. Nearly the size of a goldfish bowl, it contains a mixture of Epsom salt, alcohol and herbs. During celebrations, the mixture is lit on fire and the cauldron is placed on the ground for people to jump over.

This custom, Fox explains, is meant to increase fertility or luck.

"You're supposed to make a wish when you jump over the cauldron," she says.

Wiccans, along with pagans, observe Beltane, a festival held on May 1 celebrating a merge between the supernatural and human worlds.

Fellow Wiccan Elaine Nichols celebrates in the holiday along with Fox at Ferndale's Hoevander Park. Blooming lilac-hued bushes and endless fields provide a picturesque backdrop for the celebration. In the center of the enclosed picnic area stands a wooden maypole. Rainbows of
ribbons cascading from the pole are used for a dance, where participants intricately wrap the ribbons around the pole. The essence of patchouli wafts through the open air.

Nichols has been involved in paganism and Wicca for 10 years. She regularly joins the worship circles Fox leads. "I grew up in a home that didn’t pressure me to believe in any particular religion," she says, adding that paganism felt right to her.

Many Wiccans and pagans share beliefs and worship together, Nichols says. Cauldrons and brooms play positive roles in ceremonies. 

Like Nichols, Fox says she doesn’t consider symbols like the cauldron negative because they are all based on legends passed down to Wiccans from their teachers. In fact, she says, legends of witches flying on broomsticks are not without merit.

"Folklore has it that (witches) mixed up poisonous herbs with grease and smeared it on their brooms," she says, her eyes twinkling mischievously. "Then they would ride the broom naked — thereby ingesting the poison through their genitals."

Fox says the ensuing hallucinations would cause the witches to feel like they were “flying out of their bodies.” Fox learned this tale of how the broom flying legend began during her witchcraft training.

To Wiccans, most of these symbols are light-hearted legends based mostly on folklore, yet they have a purpose in rituals. The broom, for instance, is used to “weep the circle clean” of any negative energies that might influence the magic being done.

The cauldron, Fox says, symbolizes the womb and all vessels that hold liquid. Cats are “familiars,” spirits that assist witches; the pointed black hat is symbolic of power.

Historically, however, society believed symbols of witchcraft were evil or Satanic.

This is not a surprise to Fox. "Wicca is not Christianity," explains Fox. "Witches don’t believe in Satan or the Christian God."

"An, ye harm none," she says, is the whole of Wiccan law. Any witch who violates the tenet is not embracing the modern ideals of Wicca.

Fox says wonderful events can occur when practicing Wicca. She says people can break themselves of bad habits or attract a new lover. But Fox is also willing to admit the not-so-wonderful possibilities of the craft.

Fox says spirits are a reality, both good and bad. In circles, Wiccans may invoke the spirit of the goddess to come into the room.

"When conducting serious circles, I rarely let new people in," Fox explains, adding that it’s smart to always have an experienced person there. "Otherwise, someone who is psychically open might allow a not-so-friendly spirit to come into them, and it might follow them home!"

That’s why not just anyone is allowed to join in, she says. People who are uptight or insensitive do not fit in. Open-minded, relaxed people are a better addition to the circle.

"There are exceptions,” Fox mentions. "At festivals or holiday celebrations I’ve let new people join and haven’t experienced a problem."

On this sunny yet brisk afternoon, the front door of Fox’s home is propped wide open, an easy exit for bad spirits. The fragrances of freshly mown grass and fragrant flowers mingle in the living room air.

It’s this peaceful atmosphere that prompts Fox to hold ceremonies in the privacy of her home. Song and dance are an integral part of the process.

Fox occasionally dons a ceremonial cloak for celebrations, but prefers a softer, more everyday look. Her figure is draped with a flowing skirt in shades of blue and her stockinginged legs end in Birkenstock-clad feet.

But Fox is also comfortable without clothes. She says she prefers to conduct her Wicca circles in the nude. She calls these “sky-clad” circles. Circles like these are conducted for many reasons — worship being the most common.

"More energy is manifested this way," she says of the nude sky-clad circles. "You literally shed all your barriers when you do it like this."

Prejudice has forced many witches to practice underground. Sky-clad worshipping and the private nature of ceremonies often spark controversy among fundamentalist religions.

"If you live in Lynden or a Bible Belt town there’s a danger of people judging you," Fox says.

She says she has been fired from their jobs for revealing their Wicca devotion, so most prefer to keep their practice a secret.

Fox doesn’t believe prejudice is any reason to hide her beliefs, and she hasn’t let it sour her tolerant view of other religions, despite attacks on her own.

She says witchcraft sometimes attracts people for the wrong reasons. Shows like Warner Brothers’ “Charmed” present a skewed picture of witchery.

"It’s always portrayed as good against evil," Fox says. "In reality, most of us don’t want that type of drama in our lives."

But Fox did not become a Wiccan to lead a dull life. She says Wicca allows her to live her life more fully.

"I’ve always been afraid of being a sheep, just following along mindlessly," she says.

Fox does not spend her midnight hours cackling or casting evil hexes, but instead uses Wicca as an opportunity to worship, combining her reverence of nature with spirituality. Dispelling negative cultural stereotypes, Fox’s passion has opened her to lead a rewarding and multifaceted life.

"I am an artist, magician and scientist," she says confidently.

With her eyes focused intently forward she adds, "I have an overall love of beauty, romance and a joy of looking into others’ eyes."
Smashing through the bounds of a male-dominated ring is no small feat. **Sara Buckwitz** plunges into Angelica Acuña's world of right hooks and gnashed teeth to discover the perseverance of a true fighter.

The air is warm and thick — humid like a jungle — but spongy mats of blue and red cover the floor rather than supple dirt of brown and green. The moisture doesn't float down from low-flying clouds, it pulses off the 15 bodies sweating as they strive to perfect a left jab or a right hook. With each impact of naked fist to padded glove, a boxer hisses, releasing the pent-up air in his or her lungs. Feet shift, smacking the mats as the defender absorbs the impact. In the corner farthest from the door, Angelica Acuña, 25, focuses on her boxing form and technique among the wild sounds of the Double Action Training Academy in Ferndale.

After two hours of training, the brownish-black curls of Acuña's hair stick to her glistening forehead. She has restrained the bicep-length mass of curls in a ponytail atop her head. The shaved sides of her head cool her in the warmth of the gym.

In the White Cobra Boxing Association, Acuña commands notice. Her three matches in less than six months make her the most experienced of the female boxers on the team. Her 5 feet and 2 inches make her the shortest adult on the team and her dedication keeps her in the gym four days per week.

"I've been wanting to box forever ... I just grew up watching those pay-per-view events [during] big gatherings at my house. I always wanted to do it for the conditioning ... more
than anything, but I also wanted a shot in boxing for some reason," Acuna says.

Since her introduction to the sport in October, she has rearranged her life to accommodate her training schedule. Outside the gym workout, she runs two miles daily while balancing two jobs, raising her children and playing on a softball team.

She works at St. Francis Extended Health Care and St. Joseph’s Adult Day Health Center. Acuna jokes about her job at St. Joseph’s, saying she feels like she is paid to have fun playing games such as Rummy Cube with the seniors.

She trains in the evenings under the supervision of coach James Ferguson, 56. He taught boxer Dallas Malloy, the first woman to fight in the Amateur Boxing Association. The two of them won a lawsuit against the U.S. Amateur Boxing Federation to provide equal rights for women to box.

Acuna proved her commitment to the sport and to Ferguson after a few weeks of training.

"There was a strength you could see in her: the way she arrived at the club, sat down, opened up her bag, started wrapping her hands," Ferguson recalls. "She was very purposeful. You could see it in her eyes; she was there to go to work."

Other boxers took notice of Acuna as well, says Susan Thomas, another female fighter.

"Acuna can take a lot of punches — she's a tough little cookie ... a little fireball," Thomas says.

When boxing, Acuna throws punches constantly. Some of the more experienced male boxers complain to Ferguson about how hard she hits.

The first time she sparred, Acuna recalls she didn't know how she would react to being hit by another person and worried she would feel angry. Remembering the first bout, she is thankful Thomas was her opponent. Any anger or hurt that Acuna felt, Thomas diffused by complimenting her effort and giving her suggestions for future competitions.

Acuna captured all of her fights on video, which her two children watch, though they have never seen a live match. When Acuna comes home from practice, her 2-year-old daughter Aaliyah comes up to her with her right fist raised and says, "Momma, Momma, Box? Box?" Acuna smiles, her dimples appearing as she emulates her daughter’s gesture. Her 9-year-old son Michael doesn’t show his interest, but Acuna knows he brags to his friends about her.

Her mother, two aunts and grandmother — unaware of Acuna’s boxing — visited her last November. Acuna showed them a video of her sparring with another team member. Her family members’ reactions varied from fear to excitement.

"My mom and two aunts are like in shock," Acuna says. "They’re like, 'Oh my God, what are you doing? Don’t tell me you’re taking up boxing, of all things.'"

When her 73-year-old grandmother, a boxing aficionado, realized Acuna was in the video, she put on Acuna’s gloves and bombarded her with questions.

Acuna remembers the event while resting her chin on her fists. Her plump cheeks cause little crows’ feet to form around her eyes. Her round face seems too young to belong to a fierce White Cobra boxer, but boxing is her passion. Her relatives support it, though they have only attended one match.

"And in a way it’s good, that’s how I want it, too. It’s just ... I get away from everything — from my house, everything. I just do my boxing — I don’t let anything get in the way."

"I would do anything, if I had to. For boxing ... If we win nationals or anything like that, and you make your way to the USA team ... it’s like, I’m going to have to sacrifice my family. And I don’t mind that because I’m really doing it for them too," she says.

So far she has sacrificed 20 pounds of herself through exercise. In her training, she maintains a weight of 119 pounds. Originally, she aimed to box against smaller women at 112 pounds, but after three weeks of starving herself and not losing the weight, she decided to fight at 119.

Though women in general have difficulty finding matches in a young sport, it is especially hard for Acuna because she is so short. She trained for months, reached her ideal weight and traveled to Tacoma only to find her opponent had withdrawn from the fight. So she chose to compete at the Golden Gloves with a woman half a foot taller, seven pounds heavier and 10 years more experienced.

The top rope of the ring paralleled the top of Acuna’s head, whereas it only reached the armpits of her opponent. During the three two-minute rounds Acuna boxed with determination. She plowed into her opponent with solid hits for the first two rounds. She kept her arms close to her body for defense. But, between the second and third rounds, she ran out of gas.

Sitting in the corner with her coach beside her, looking at the blood-stained canvas, she wondered what she was doing there. She wanted to quit, but she finished, taking a lot of punches and finding it difficult to block, weave or dodge.

Ferguson, who has boxed since he was 4 years old, likened Acuna to a Ferrari going 200 mph that hit empty at a stoplight. He said she beat her opponent during the first two rounds, but lost it in the third — a mistake she avoided in her April 29 bout at Savard Boxing Gym against Grace Chan, the first fight in her own weight division.

Acuna entered the ring with the poise of a cobra. She stood there as if naked in the jungle, a square jungle, baring her muscles. Chan came straight for her, but after three punches from Acuna, her opponent hit the ropes and caught herself on the canvas. Forty seconds into the match with three eight-counts, Acuna claimed her throne as queen of the jungle.
Roping Tradition

A far cry from the dusty corrals of bygone westerns, rodeo wrangler Cody West dreams of becoming a professional cowboy. Erica Oakley examines this student's ambitions of roping and riding to the top. Photos by Erin Fredrichs.
been his pattern since childhood when he rose early and watched cartoons, much to the annoyance of his older sister.

Forfeiting late-night habits, however, has prepared West for the life of a cowboy.

As a cowboy, West participates in two rodeo events, team roping and calf roping.

Unlike team roping, calf roping is a solo event. The cowboy begins with one end of a rope clenched between his teeth and the other tucked into his belt. A separate rope, tied to the saddle horn, is used to catch the calf. After the 200 to 300 pound calf is roped, the cowboy jumps off his horse, flips the calf on its side and ties the hind legs and one of the front legs. West says it is necessary to tie only three legs to hinder the calf. When the cowboy completes the sequence, he throws his hands into the air and time stops.

West says he also tried steer wrestling once, but after being thrown, doesn't plan to try it again. He also stays away from bulls because of warnings from his mom.

"When I was a little kid, my mom and I would walk by the bulls and my mom would go 'Ew, bulls, icky, icky,'" West recalls, a nostalgic smile spreading across his face. "This is when I was a little kid and so I always thought that."

Linda West says she told her son bulls were icky and to keep him away from them.

"I was worried he would be a bull rider," she explains. Cowboys involved in bull riding are more likely to be injured by getting stepped on or stabbed with horns.

West says he sticks to roping events because they are safer than other events.

"I'm a very cautious person," he says, smiling as if embarrassed to admit it. "I have a high sense of self preservation."

West credits this to his mother, who worries about his safety.

"Everything that they do is dangerous," she says, sounding as if she is familiar with the risks her son takes. "But the roping is relatively harmless."

"It's not really that dangerous," West explains. "The big worry of all ropers is that in the team roping ... sometimes when you wrap the rope around the saddle horn you get a finger caught in that and you can cut your finger off."

West's only serious injury happened in a similar way.

"When I was 16, I was at home practicing with my uncle and grandpa ... I got my thumb caught in the rope," he explains. "I thought I sprained it or something."

To date, this is the only bone West has broken.

"I had to have two operations on my thumb," he says, proudly showing off his thumb like a kid with a new owie. "They ended up putting a metal plate, five screws, and bone out of my elbow [into it]. It's still crooked and doesn't work very good."

Breaking his thumb was not West's biggest concern.

"My big worry was 'how am I going to tell my mom?'" he says, letting out a hearty chuckle, as a genuine smile reaches all the way to his eyes.

Linda West admits the injury frightened her.

"There was a period of time I couldn't watch because I was scared it might happen again," she explains. "I had to get over it."

Despite growing up in Everett where rodeos were not a big thing, West's mom says she doesn't mind Cody being a cowboy.

"She knows how important it is to me, so she'll support whatever I do," West explains.

His father, Sherrill West, who also rodeos, supports his son as well.

"My dad loves the fact that I rodeo," West says proudly. "He rodeoed, but never took it as seriously as I do."

West takes his hobby very seriously. To him, pressure to perform well is the most challenging aspect of rodeos.

"That's how you try and earn a living is by roping," West says passionately. "It comes down to the point where you have to catch to make money and you get a little nervous ... Right before I go, I try to relax because I get pretty nervous."

"To win you have to have it be just reflex. You just have to do it enough so you know the right feel."

"Practicing helps you become where it's more of an automatic response compared to thinking about 'how's this, how's that, how's my positioning on my horse,'" he adds.
Speaking of horses, West says his quarterhorse, Pistol, is his proudest accomplishment. He trained Pistol himself and gets many compliments on the horse, as well as requests to buy him.

"There’s a lot of times people come up to me and compliment me on my horse, that they’d like him or they want to ride him or that they want to buy him and it makes me feel good," West says, his smile showing his pleasure.

"I’d like to have another horse," he adds. "Most people have their good horse and their practice horse, because roping two or three days a week at home and then taking your horse on the weekend — that’s a lot of exercise. And hauling them that many hours in a horse trailer is hard on them."

Horses, like rodeos, have always been a part of West’s life. When he was 9-years-old and competing in junior rodeos, he rode a little pony.

"I’ve always had my own horse, my own pony," he explains. "My sister and I, when we were little kids, each had white ponies and we used to race around our pasture, but we got in trouble from Mom and Dad because it was too dangerous."

West says Pistol can also be a little dangerous, especially in the springtime when he gets frisky. Sometimes he likes to buck his rider off.

"Just as soon as you’re vulnerable, he’ll get you," West explains laughing, eyes twinkling as if he is sharing a joke. "It’s getting to be that time of year, and I’m starting to get scared."

It is also the time of year when amateur rodeos begin after a winter break. West will pull on his cowboy boots, don his cowboy hat and tack his trusty pal Pistol with his freshly-oiled bridle and saddle to win another buckle to add to his collection.
Kenny White sits at his captain's desk in Bellingham's Fire Station One. He is dressed in jeans and a T-shirt. With his legs crossed casually, he slowly sips coffee from a paper coffee cup. He looks younger than 38, with blond hair and a boyish grin. White's relaxed appearance on his day off contrasts sharply with the stress he describes in his job as a firefighter and certified paramedic.

He explains what runs through his mind when the siren begins to wail, interrupting his sleep. He forces his eyes open, but does not want to get up. "I am not going to get up," he tells himself as his feet hit the floor. "I am not going," he says as he starts to get dressed. "I can't do it; I am way too tired," he says. But he always finds himself in his uniform and heading downstairs. He can't stop to take a shower or grab a cup of coffee. In 60 to 90 seconds he must be out the door and ready to save lives.

Exhaustion often overcomes White. He may have just returned from another call and only managed to squeeze in 20 minutes of sleep. He may have had such a disturbing call that he cannot fall asleep when he does finally return.

Everyone at the station struggles with sleep deprivation. Each firefighter and paramedic works 24 hours straight and then has 48 hours off. Often they work on calls through the night with very little sleep. White says he normally comes home the day after his shift so exhausted that he must spend the day sleeping to catch up on what he lost while working.

"Our sleep patterns are horrible," White says. Call volume is one of the obstacles firefighters and paramedics face in trying to control the intensity of the job, White says. Due to dramatic growth in Whatcom County and a greater awareness of the services of 911, the Bellingham Fire Department responded to approximately 10,000 dispatches in 1999.

White says he puts pressure on himself to perform his job perfectly. With lives at risk, White knows the consequences of a mistake can be tragic.

"I kind of have a warped sense of stress," White says, running his hands through his short crewcut. "Wanting to perform at a high level is what is stressful."

He believes most of the people at the station, all of whom are both firefighters and emergency medical technicians, are perfectionists.

"Nobody likes to make even the slightest mistake," he says.

The team must work together efficiently, giving the patient immediate help and clearing the scene of people who are in the way. Each
team works together for the entire shift, taking an average of eight to 10 calls in the 24-hour period.

On especially busy days, the team takes more than 14 calls in one shift, leaving little time to relax. The wailing siren often interrupts dinner, and meals are sometimes re-heated several times.

Between calls, team members practice drills, such as setting up ladders and ropes, or receive new training, such as ice-water rescue. They also must learn new street names and driving routes by studying maps.

When White returns to the station from a call, he turns to friends like Jay Comfort to help him relieve tension.

Comfort, 32, began his career in the Bellingham Fire Department in May, 1990, the same time as White. The two became friends, going through more than 2,500 hours of paramedic training together.

"Kenny and I are a lot alike in wit and sarcasm," says Comfort, his blue eyes twinkling mischievously. He describes his buddy as intelligent and highly motivated, and their relationship as a lot of fun.

White and Comfort, like most other firefighters, use humor to get through difficult experiences on the job. It usually begins as a sick joke, White admits reluctantly. The joke may be a blunt question about a death to make light of a serious situation. This gives the team members an opportunity to talk about what happened on the call and how they handled the patient's condition.

"Getting their feedback, whether it's good or bad, it's a huge stress relief," says White, referring to his co-workers.

By discussing for several minutes the details of what happened and the steps he took to help the patient, White says he is able to let the tragedies go and focus on the next call.

"You're going to have bad calls," he says. "It's inevitable."

For especially tragic incidences, such as the 1999 Olympic Pipe Line explosion that killed three people, the station may participate in a formal debriefing session. This process involves a facilitator and every person from the station who was a key part of the call. The facilitator opens the discussion to the team, allowing people to talk about the frustrating or rewarding parts of the task.

The debriefing process began in the department 15 years ago after firefighters started experiencing stomach pain, anxiety and depression, says fire Capt. Robert Gray.
"Keeping it bottled up doesn't work," Gray says.

The facilitator points out symptoms, such as insomnia and nightmares, and gives resources for additional help. Gray estimates the station does four to five debriefings per year.

Comfort believes the stress and sleep deprivation caused by his job take years off his life. He says his facial hair grows faster the days he is working, something he thinks is related to the intensity of his job. He laughs and touches his tan face as if to make sure it is still clean-cut.

Comfort clearly remembers the winter night he was working at the reserve station in the county, where only one paramedic and one firefighter are on duty at a time. Just a few hours before his shift ended, the dispatcher called them to the scene of a multiple-car accident — an eight- to 10-car pile up on a bridge over the Nooksack River — with an individual crushed inside a vehicle and a car on fire. Comfort shakes his head, still in disbelief. He knew he and his newly hired partner would face an overwhelming scene with help several minutes away.

Despite the high stress of the profession, the turnover rate in Bellingham's department is low. The department's public information officer, Brody Loy, estimates that 95 percent of the firefighters and paramedics stay until retirement.

While both White and Comfort love the physical and mental challenges of their job, they are not sure they will be able to handle the intensity of being paramedics until retirement. White didn't expect to stay with the department for as long as he has and feels unsure about the future. Comfort would like to go back to working as a firefighter, to take a break from the added pressure of being a paramedic.

For now, White and Comfort release the tension of their jobs by being active outdoors. Comfort enjoys biking, skiing and hiking with his wife, Gwen.

When White is not working he runs four or five times per week, sometimes twice per day, and as far as 20 or 25 miles on Sundays.

White's wife of 10 years, Sheri, says she doesn't worry about him too much on the job. But she does see the effects of fatigue when he slowly walks in the door with a look of exhaustion on his face. He rarely goes into detail about difficult calls, but occasionally she senses that he is upset.

"Some days he'll have a call and I can tell something bugged him," she says, her voice soft-spoken and serious. "I usually hear more of the details a few days later."

But she knows he loves his job. Their joke among friends is that if they won the lottery, she would want to travel and he would like to keep working, she says, laughing.

"He really likes his job. It's not what he does; it's who he is. But it's pretty intense stuff."

In the office, White leans forward in his chair to describe his most dreaded calls: pediatric emergencies and calls to the homes of elderly citizens. White doesn't remember most of his calls; he says his mind is like an Etch-a-Sketch, erasing each call after it happens. But one call sticks out in his memory. His gaze softens as he remembers going to the home of an elderly woman who needed to go to the hospital. White says although the woman's condition was not an emergency, she knew it would be the last time she saw her home. He and his team carefully carried the woman back into her home for a final look at the familiar furniture and precious family pictures before taking her to the hospital.

"They know they are never going to go home again," he says as his eyes drift to the ceiling. "That's pretty sad."
The consequences of using and abusing drugs are easily passed from mother to unborn child. **Natalie Quick** tells the story of a couple who needs just one reason to never abuse drugs again — their new son. **Photos by Chris Fuller**

He screams. It's a frightened, high-pitched cry, like that of a small, abandoned animal. Tremors ravage his blotchy, feeble body. He gnars his toes and clenches his feet in a vertical flex, attempting to control his quivering limbs. His arms lash out violently in all directions; his eyes are sealed shut in frustration and anguish. Blue splotches form around his mouth, because he cannot breathe, control the heroin-induced tremors and cry at the same time.

Finally, he is able to lock his arms, momentarily stopping the tremors. Instantly, he is at peace. Silent and grateful, 6-week-old Aleister has a brief moment of sanity. Within seconds, the tremors will shake his emaciated arms and legs free from their locked position, and he will again fight to control his heroin withdrawals.

Kevin and Angela watch their son jerk and writhe in frustration. They feel a strange mix of guilt and sympathy. As former heroin addicts, they've tasted the bittersweet poison of heroin withdrawals. As his parents, they battle with the guilt and pain that their addiction has become his.

"The day Aleister was born was supposed to be the happiest day of our lives," Angela, Aleister's 29-year-old mother says. "But I just kept thinking, 'Oh my god, we're killing our child.'"

Angela had been using heroin frequently when she learned she was pregnant. Following the advice of her doctor, she stopped using heroin and began taking methadone, a popular though controversial heroin substitute, to start her withdrawal process.

A synthetic and addictive opiate, methadone satisfies the addict's physical craving for heroin. Some addicts, such as Angela, will gradually decrease their methadone dose until they are drug-free. Many maintain their dose, sometimes for decades, finding it the only way to stay productive and healthy.

Methadone didn't spare Aleister from debilitating opiate withdrawals, but did prevent Angela from experiencing the overpowering physical sickness created by immediate heroin withdrawals.

During the next four years, Angela will slowly decrease her methadone dose until she is liberated from the opiate — Aleister's liberation from the drug came shockingly once he left his mother's womb.

The first six weeks of his life were spent fighting desperately against his feeble body's raging pain and physical craving for methadone.

"Kevin and I both started abusing drugs when we were 13 or 14," Angela says. "We were alcoholics as teens and into the whole alternative punk-rock scene."

Angela sits beside Kevin in a small café. Her thin, brown hair is long and straight and occasionally falls in her eyes and face. Thoughtfully, she brushes it away from her sharp, brown eyes as she speaks.

"I used heroin and crystal meth off and on throughout the early 1990s." Angela says. "We were alcoholics as teens and into the whole alternative punk-rock scene."

"I think I was about 25 when I finally left Washington for Utah to try and kick my habit. I became an adrenaline junkie and basically tried to replace one habitual addiction with another. I was extreme skiing, rock and ice climbing and a motorcycle and river guide."

Angela looks to Kevin with a knowing glance. He sits close beside her, his tan cap slightly askew atop his thick, dark hair. Although recreational use of heroin replaced daily use while she was in Utah, they both knew her attempt to replace her drug addiction with an adrenaline addiction was not the cure.

**inherited addiction**
"I drank constantly. Now, looking back, I know I wasn't dealing with anything," she said. "I got a wake-up call when I was extreme skiing while high on heroin and shattered all three ligaments in my knee. I didn't tell the doctors I had been an addict, and they gave me morphine for the pain. That pretty much kick-started my habit again."

Opiates are derived from the dried "milk" of the opium poppy, which contains morphine and codeine, both commonly prescribed as painkillers. Heroin was created in 1874 and originally marketed as a safe, non-addictive substitute for morphine.

It was after her accident in Utah that Angela returned to Washington to recover from her knee injury. She ran into Kevin and they began using heroin together. Attempting to escape addiction once again, they fled to Utah.

"It was June 1999. About two days after we think Aleister was conceived, Kevin overdosed and (stopped breathing)," Angela says. She looks at 34-year-old Kevin, who sheepishly kisses her forehead in both embarrassment and gratitude. "We bought a half a 20-paper. It was super strong stuff. Kevin was cooking it, and I asked him if it was good. He said 'oh yeah' and then he didn't say anything else. I thought he'd just nodded, but then he started turning purple. I was slapping him, yelling, punching him. He was turning bluish-gray around the eyes and I realized he wasn't breathing. We were in the middle of nowhere — there was nobody I could call."

"She did CPR on me for like 17 minutes — I guess it worked," Kevin said with a slight grin. "I woke up to her slapping me and was soaking wet from her dumping water on me to try and get me to wake up. She was beyond frantic. I asked her what was wrong and she said 'You died.' I was like 'Bullshit.'"

Kevin shakes his head and adds, "I woke up the next morning, felt like shit and shot up again."

Because of these experiences, Kevin and Angela know each other's pain all too well. Together they work to fight both their addictions and the guilt from Aleister's helpless withdrawals.

"Heroin addiction is a physical disease that feels like it comes from the insides of your bones," Kevin says as he shakes his head. He fidgets uncomfortably for a moment, struggling to brush away the thick memories.
"my current methadone dose could kill three men"

"kevin and i both started abusing drugs when we were 13 or 14. we were alcoholics as teens and into the whole alternative punk rock scene"

"if i would have just stopped using at any point in my pregnancy i would have lost aleister"
He’s remembering the few short hours of the warm, blanketeting, euphoric heroin high.

“From the second time you use, you’ll want it for the rest of your life,” Angela says. “You’re throwing up constantly the whole time you’re high, but you just don’t care. It’s that great.”

All too soon, however, the warmth is replaced by a cold, physical ache for more.

“When you start coming down and seriously withdrawing, the need for the drug makes your body react so strongly that stuff just starts to come out of every orifice you have — you sweat, your eyes water, you puke, anything,” Angela explains. “It’s part of what all addicts fear. It’s horrible.”

“You don’t get high anymore once your body starts a habit,” Kevin says. “I’ve been in uniformed, calloused withdrawal, and resting one arm over Angela’s shoulder. “You’re just trying to stay normal, just keeping yourself from getting sick.”

Addicts violently fear the sickness. When they’ve developed a habit for the drug and quit using, their bodies cramp, sweat and shake viciously and they vomit continuously almost as soon as their high wears off. Their noses and eyes water incessantly and their bodies’ constant physical craving plays over and over in their heads, like a broken Jim Morrison record. The message is deeply encoded throughout their throbbing, aching, tremor-induced bodies — just a little more; how can I get just a little more?

“I started using heroin intravenously at 18 or 19,” Kevin says. “By 20, my addiction got to the point where I robbed 17 banks in the greater Seattle area to support my habit. It was about 1988. I got up one morning and just decided to rob a bank in Bothell.”

Angela nods in agreement. “You’ll do anything to get money,” she says.

Most wouldn’t associate Kevin’s friendly, polite demeanor with that of a serial bank robber. His child-like excitement and buoyant grin are inviting, his frankness unexpected.

“I would just go in and say, ‘This is a bank robbery, give me your 50s and 100s please, and don’t hit any buttons’.”

After his 17th robbery, Kevin became careless, and someone saw him get into his car after robbing a bank. The FBI arrested him and he spent 10 years in federal penitentiaries across the United States.

“The first thing I did when I got out of prison was use again,” he says.

Finally, in November 1999, Kevin joined Angela in treating their addictions by using incrementally decreasing doses of methadone. Angela began detoxification through the use of methadone shortly after learning she was pregnant.

“If I would have just stopped using at any point in my pregnancy, I would have lost Aleister,” she says. “If a mother uses frequently while pregnant, her baby will be addicted. If (she) stops, then the baby will start withdrawing and possibly die.”

She began taking prescription methadone, which prevents her otherwise intolerable withdrawal symptoms and allows the body to begin coming down slowly.

“My current methadone dose could kill three men,” she says. “That’s how big my habit had gotten.”

After Aleister’s birth, pediatricians at Bremerton’s Harrison Hospital planned to release Aleister to Angela and Kevin, and to prescribe morphine for the parents to administer from home for the infant’s withdrawals.

“Child Protection Services stepped in and said that Aleister was going to the Pediatric Interim Care Center in Kent,” Angela says. “We were scared and angry, but after awhile we decided it was our only choice.”

Kevin and Angela signed a voluntary release form that permitted Aleister to stay at PICC for up to 45 days.

“Within 24 to 48 hours, infants are feeling the full impact of their withdrawal symptoms,” explains Barbara Drennen, director and co-founder of PICC. The nonprofit infant care center was founded 10 years ago and is one of the only centers in America specializing in the treatment of drug-addicted infants.

During Aleister’s methadone withdrawal, his nervous system became hypersensitive to light, movement, touch, noise and even the sight of another person. Over-stimulation intensified the withdrawal traits and extreme discomfort.

Aleister spent the first six weeks of his life swaddled tightly in a cotton blanket. The swaddling prevented his limbs from convulsing with tremors, and allowed him to relax and breathe. Most of the day he lay in a dark room in a C-shaped, fetal-like position. PICC has found this to be the most comforting position for addicted infants.

“Bringing him here was the best decision we’ve ever made,” Angela says. “There’s so much we didn’t know. Had we brought him home, we would have damaged our baby physically and emotionally.”

Most parents, while anxiously awaiting the birth of their child, dote over painting their child’s bedroom a vivid color, filling toy chests with clanging thingamajigs and twirling doohickey, neatly folding multi-colored quilts and strategically placing singing teddy bears and dancing ponies around their crib.

Aleister’s condition demands a more desolate environment.

His world consists of silence, darkness and a still calm. The tight swaddling blanket and the white cotton T-shirt and diaper that absorb the tremor-induced perspiration that soaks his small frame comfort him. He demands tranquility in place of simple bedroom lighting and is consoled by silence, not rotating musical mobiles.

“Every instinct you have as a parent is wrong when they are going through withdrawals,” Kevin says.

As with most heroin addicts, Angela and Kevin will deal with addiction for the rest of their lives. Their bodies will respond almost instantly and violently to the opiates they once craved.

“I can smell it on people’s skin,” she said, practically shivering at the thought. “I watched the movie ‘Trainspotting’ and started throwing up.”

“I hate the drug,” Angela adds. “I can’t stand being around people who use it — not after seeing what Aleister went through because of us ... I just couldn’t.”

Through PICC and other outreach programs, Angela has completed several rounds of counseling.

“It’s so hard to not beat yourself up,” Angela says. “The guilt is so thick — he’s this way all because of something I did. You need physical recovery, but there’s mental and spiritual recovery as well.”

Kevin smiles. He’s proud of Angela’s progress.

“Without Kevin, I would have had a breakdown for sure,” Angela says. “So many of the babies at PICC have no one.”

Drennen says only 20 percent of infants at PICC are returned to their birth parents. Approximately 54 percent are given to a member of the extended family and the remaining 26 percent are given over to foster care.

Kevin, who celebrated his first “clean and free” birthday since his early teens on April 13, has Angela to lean on as he begins the slow climb out of addiction.

“The key to getting well is support — you have to have people to talk to,” Kevin says.

So what would they do if they found Aleister using opiates?

“We’d get him to treatment right away and try to have as much open communication about it as possible,” Angela says. “Since he was born addicted, he will always be predisposed. He could never take morphine, for example, because he’d be addicted right away.”

On April 21, Kevin and Angela took Aleister home from PICC.

“He’s doing great,” Kevin says. “This is giving us the chance to mold him into a real baby — not a drug baby. Because of PICC, it’s like we’re really a family with a baby that’s like other babies.”

They say they’re not sure what they’re going to tell him about how he became predisposed to the opiates.

“We’re still figuring out how we’re going to tell him everything,” Kevin says.

The couple recently decided to get married early next year.

“We figured if we can get through this, we can make it through anything,” Kevin says.

As for Aleister, he has progressed from a sickly blue to a soft pink and will continue to establish tolerance for sound, movement and light.

Kevin says Aleister is even “starting to coo and make other adorable baby sounds.”

With his continual improvement and determination, Aleister is well on his way to his own room full of clanging whirligigs and twirling thingamabobs.

JUNE 2000 VOLUME 30 ISSUE 5
THE GIFT OF SIGHT
In a country rocked with poverty and disease, many citizens of El Salvador cannot afford simple eye care. Mina Vedder details a Bellingham doctor's mission to deliver hope for the blind.

It's nearly 8 a.m., and the medical clinic in Santa Ana, the second largest city in El Salvador, is already bustling with people. A crowd of Salvadorans are waiting in line with the hope that the doctors there will be able to help restore their sight. An American doctor examines an old Salvadoran man who began his day at 2 a.m. to make a five-hour journey from his rural home to Santa Ana with the dream to see again.

The doctor examines the old man and hands him a pair of glasses. The man gingerly brings the glasses toward his face and hesitates, his hands shaking. Finally, he puts on this new pair of glasses — the only pair he has ever worn — and blinks a few times. The shapes and figures that have been fuzzy for years become sharp and full of color. The old man begins to cry.

For many Salvadorans, the need for eye care is not uncommon. El Salvador faces the problem of rebuilding its society following 12 years of a bitter civil war that began in 1979, between leftist guerrillas and the Salvadoran government. The war widened the poverty gap, making it harder for people to receive medical care and education. Doctors such as Christopher Covert-Bowlds volunteer their time and pay their own way to El Salvador, helping bring sight to the blind.

Covert-Bowlds, a family physician in Bellingham, spent nine days in El Salvador last winter working as a Spanish interpreter for his father, Joseph Bowlds, who is an ophthalmologist in Boston. Father and son worked together with a nonprofit organization named ASAPROSAR, Association for Salvadoran Rural Health, for its 12th annual eye-care campaign.

Dr. Christopher Covert-Bowlds

Lack of eye care is a serious problem in El Salvador. People go blind for conditions that are curable.

During cataract surgery, Covert-Bowlds assisted in cutting stitches and irrigating the eye, one drop at a time. It was difficult getting used to the operating microscope, he says, because of the 3-D view of the lens in comparison to the one-dimensional view the eye normally sees.

People in El Salvador go blind for conditions that are curable, Covert-Bowlds says. Glaucoma, a common eye ailment, is easily treatable with eye drops. However, in this third-world country, access to medication is hard to come by.

"One little old guy learned to read as a kid, but his eyesight had gotten so bad just from needing glasses and he just couldn't afford them," explains Bowlds. "So we gave him a pair of glasses. He was just crying and ecstatic for just finally being able to read again."

A vast majority of Salvadorans are poor and many families live in wattle huts, where the walls are made of branches glued together with mud. Most homes don't have running water and people sleep on dirt floors. Many of them have never owned a pair of shoes. Despite these factors, Covert-Bowlds says he admires the incredible energy of the Salvadorans who come halfway across the country to receive eye care.

"The spirit of the people, like those little old community organizers who would bring a whole group of people and kind of shepherd them along to get them to eye care, was incredible," says Covert-Bowlds, reflecting on his experience.

"The struggle to make a better life in spite of incredible odds — poverty, neo-liberalization, and the free-market economy — is devastating them," he says.

The Salvadorans are a long-suffering people whose government and landowners have never been particularly friendly to the poor, says Bowlds.

"The agriculture is based on the poor doing work for the coffee and sugar industry. The poor don't have much of an opportunity for education and social mobility," Bowlds explains.

"Working with ASAPROSAR gives me a lot of enthusiasm," Bowlds continues. "We don't just do our work and leave. It's an ongoing program."

"Chris was a big hit with the people," Bowlds says, speaking admiringly of his son. "He had enthusiasm, good humor and was always ready and eager to help out."

ASAPROSAR had its own medical facilities to aid in surgeries and basic examinations. Volunteer brought operating microscopes, artificial lenses for implants, eye drops and 1,200 pairs of glasses to aid in eye care.

The Salvadorans, who made the long journey to receive eye care, slept on mats in the clinics.

"People who come from far away sleep on the floor in the hallways leading to the operating room for a couple of days after surgery," explains Bowlds. "We want to make sure things are healing OK."

The Salvadorans' faith played an intricate part in Covert-Bowld's journey to El Salvador.

"It's the main reason I went," he says. "It's the faith of these people. Their faith put into action is a huge boost; I am motivated by their faith."

"Chris is passionate about what he believes in, the welfare of the community and society," says family physician, Jim Moren, a colleague of Covert-Bowlds. "He is knowledgeable, does his homework and follows through on this work."

Having witnessed the passion, faith and energy of the Salvadoran people, Covert-Bowlds hopes to return to El Salvador annually to participate in the eye-care program.

"For many impoverished Salvadorans, waiting in line at the clinic with hopes of regaining their sight is nothing short of a miracle. After years of Seeing blurry images and blotches of color, many are now able to see the face of a loved one or the beautiful mountainous valleys that surround Santa Ana. They no longer shed tears of sadness, but tears of joy."

El Salvador

JUNE 2000 VOL. 30 ISSUE 5
A delivery boy turned pharmacy owner establishes an extensive collection in Fairhaven. Bill Bennion descends into the dark basement brightened by history, old photography and a shock machine. Photos by Angela Smith.

Behind Fairhaven pharmacy a set of nondescript stairs leads down to a plain, brown door. Behind the door lies a windowless room, crammed from floor to ceiling with the remnants of a lifetime spent collecting. The floors are concrete, and the ceiling creaks and groans overhead. The scent of old books and time suggests a library or antique shop. The beams above have not been concealed, and the lighting comes from bare bulbs, but the host doesn't notice these things; this world is familiar to him.

His name is Gordon Tweit.

"What would you like to know about?" he asks. It is difficult to know where to begin.

Shelves are everywhere, some packed with rows of cans, bottles and books. A case filled with vintage cameras sits among old medical equipment, shelves full of books and picture albums. Pictures and maps hang above some of the shelves. Visitors may notice boxes, glass cases with ominous-looking medical instruments in them and equipment on the floor. Gordy leans on a counter near a makeshift table covered with framed photographs. Shelves above the counter hang with small boxes and bottles displayed as if for sale. But none of these products are for sale. Most haven't been sold in many years.

Gordy came to work at Fairhaven Pharmacy in 1941 as a delivery boy. He bought the store in 1962, then sold it in 1991 to former delivery boy Rob Johansen.

Gordy is tall and has a full head of white hair. He wears metal-framed glasses and an open-front sweater with metal fasteners. He leans casually with his hands folded or sometimes resting in his trouser pockets. He speaks evenly and cocks his head when trying to remember something. If he can't remember, he meanders off to look it up in one of his books or directories.

Gordy considers himself semi-retired. He still works upstairs as a pharmacist sometimes and maintains his space in the basement. It is not really a museum, he says.

"Everybody calls it a museum now; I just tell them it's my ... my little ... whatever it is," Gordy says. "I saved all this stuff when I worked here ... wasn't my store in those days, but when things would outdate, when things weren't used anymore, I put them down in the basement."

They have been there ever since.

In 1950, Gordy started collecting annuals.

"I also started my photo collection then," he says. "I kept collecting the pharmacy things hoping someday I would be able to do something with them, but at that time it was just a far-fetched dream."

That far fetched dream became reality when Gordy decided to retire in 1991.

"I decided then to come down here and try to figure out a way I could start displaying these things ... and use the basement to its best advantage," he says. "I kind of worked my way around and tried to figure out what I had around"
here to best display it," Gordy says. "People slowly started giving me things like the doctors’ tools over there and the shock machine."

The shock machine is a black box inside a wood case with four knobs and a dial marked "Dosage." It also has a fuse and a place to hook up leads to use on the unfortunate patient. Gordy says it was good for mental problems but the machine could also stop a heart.

Gordy has lived in Bellingham his whole life and has been collecting and documenting things for more than 50 years. While working at the pharmacy, he collected many items. He also collected things from the community and documented events with photography. He has taken pictures of building construction, piers being built and boats coming and going. He has city directories, annuals from Western, annuals from high schools and old school publications – almost anything namable. He has maps so old that entire sections of Bellingham had not been conceived.

The basement is basically a museum of stuff that interests him, he says. "I even have a whole bunch of sheet music over there, our family sheet music and so forth."

Gordy has old typewriters, adding machines, medicines and elixirs. Near the door sits his huge book of old written prescriptions. Behind a counter is a shelf of books, including his German book of homeopathic remedies. He has home medical books and the tiny pills that came with them. Just look up symptoms and the book tells which pill to take. He has bottles made of thick, brown glass with labels stating the contents. The ones with red labels contain poison. Gordy says pharmacists had to use small amounts to avoid harming patients.

During prohibition, people could only buy alcohol with a prescription. Gordy has all the files from those liquor sales. One doctor would write seven prescriptions for alcohol before opening each day. The money from those sales would cover his entire overhead, making the rest of the day all profit.

When Gordy retired in 1991 he sold the business, but not the building, to Rob Johansen. Rob keeps busy filling prescriptions and answering telephone calls. He stands behind the back counter at the pharmacy, among rows of medications and the various tools of his trade.

Rob says he thinks Gordy is an asset to the community, and a lot of people like the history and tradition of the pharmacy. "He shows a real interest and has preserved a lot of stuff that otherwise would have gone by the wayside. "He comes in almost every day and goes down in the basement and putters around down there, cleans up old stuff that he’s got," Rob says. "He’s got all kinds of stuff."

Gordy says school kids, elementary through college, tour his basement, and adults take tours too. While specific hours are from 1 to 5 p.m. on Fridays, he also is available for special arrangements. "I’m not like a regular museum or anything like that," he says. "But a lot of people come to me to ask me questions about Fairhaven."

Gordy has a specific goal in mind for his collection. "In my will, there are three areas where these things will go to: one of them is our regular museum, one of them is our maritime museum, and some of the materials have already gone, and more of them will go to the archives at Western, depending on what they are," he says. "But I definitely want those things kept together, here and there. I don’t want to sell them. I don’t want anything like that; they need to be saved for posterity."

It is easy to get lost in the history. Minutes may turn to hours in the windowless museum at the bottom of the pharmacy stairs. The items in the museum each have a story to tell, and Gordy provides the voice for that story. It is, after all, the story of his life.
Whether an ice-cold pint or a watered-down pitcher, the love of beer holds a special place in the hearts and guts of many. Soren Velice hunts down some beer aficionados who have taken their lager-lust from consuming to creating.

Next to the Ferndale library, in an unassuming garage, sits a time machine of sorts. The activities in Lloyd Zimmerman's garage every month or so return beer aficionados to 16th century Germany, where the law governing his brewery was first created.

Designed to operate in compliance with Germany's beer purity law of 1513, Whatcom Brewery has one characteristic that's rare in the modern world: very little electricity.

The first sight that greets employees and guests to the brewery is a large walk-in cooler — one of the few electric appliances there. The two hand-carved, pub-style tap handles on one of the cooler's walls were carved by owner, Trendwest Resorts salesman and occasional politician Zimmerman, who has run for mayor in Ferndale and once lost a coin toss for a City Council position. The tap handles are the first clue to the garage's alter ego.

Upstairs, the office is decorated liberally with more of Zimmerman's carvings, ranging from the tap handles to a Northwest Coast Indian-style salmon. One room houses an antiquated, hand-cranked grain mill and several dusty-looking plastic trash cans, another clue to the garage's true identity.

Using little electricity and no preservatives, Zimmerman's brewery produces about 1,000 gallons of handcrafted ales per year using only the four ingredients dictated by the purity law — barley, water, hops and yeast. The brewery uses no rice, a common additive ingredient, and no preservatives except the alcohol produced by fermentation and the hops themselves, which contain natural preservatives.

The Whatcom Brewery's gravity-fed, three-tank system is primitive compared with other breweries in Bellingham and Seattle that use more tanks and electric pumps to move massive quantities of beer. Zimmerman's equipment dates back to the early 1980s when his style of brewing became legal in Washington state. Prior to that, state law dictated the use of preservatives and pasteurization, a heating process that kills the yeast after fermentation.

"I picked up some old historic equipment and used it," Zimmerman said. "It could probably be built for 20 grand, maybe 15."

He bought the equipment in 1983 from Robert Kufner, a German-born brewer who worked for Budweiser before retiring in Washington.

Everything from the age-old meat grinder-cum-grain mill to Whatcom Brewery's gravity-fed, three-tank system is primitive compared with other breweries in Bellingham and Seattle that use more tanks and electric pumps to move massive quantities of beer.

"We're one of the most archaic systems in the state," the brewery's salesman and promoter Andrew Bauer said with a chuckle. Bauer, a Western finance major and occasional construction contractor who hasn't lost his athletic build to the industry-standard beer gut, earned his entire experience producing rather than consuming beer at Zimmerman's brewery.

"One summer I was contracting for Tom Teague, and he had a kegerator (a small refrigerator with a tap) at his house," Bauer related.
"We'd talk about the day over some fine Whatcom brew, and he got tired of me drinking all his beer, so he decided to turn me over to Lloyd."

Zimmerman and Bauer met and hit it off. Zimmerman said he needed help with all facets of brewery, and offered Bauer a job.

"He's got me doing everything from making beer, selling beer, kegging it up — not to mention the plumbing in here," he said, standing in the cooler in a tangle of myriad hoses routed from a carbon dioxide tank in another room to the eight kegs stacked like wood.

The brewing process begins in an upstairs loft in Zimmerman's garage, where the grinding mill sits — a huge version of the antique meat grinders found in attics and antique stores.

A loud, continuous crunching sound fills the room as the grinder pulverizes 250 pounds of barley.

Bauer or whoever is on hand next dumps the grain into a wooden 150-gallon tank called a mash tung. Water heated to 160 degrees Fahrenheit soaks the sugars out of the barley in a process called sparging.

The brewery's stocky head brewer Adam Goldstein, a graduate student in education at Western, then drains the sweet-smelling mixture, or lauder, into a large copper kettle discolored by repeated heating. He runs more hot water through the mash tung to extract as much sugar as possible, then heats it to boiling temperature with a gas flame to sterilize the mixture, now called wort.

Meanwhile, Zimmerman gives the spent grain to a local hog farmer who contacted the brewery when he found out about the operation.

"Without him, we'd have a serious problem with all the grain we use," Zimmerman said.

"Basically, nothing goes into the garbage," Bauer added.

As the beer boils in the kettle, Golstein adds hops to the brew twice to infuse the beer with their sweet yet tart flavor — once as it comes to a boil, and again as it begins to cool. The only electricity used in the brewing process powers a four-inch propeller in the bottom of the kettle, which ensures that the brew heats evenly and completely.

After it cools down to between 70 and 80 degrees, Goldstein transfers the 150 gallons of wort, propelled by gravity, into a well-worn 400-gallon fermentation tank. Goldstein adds yeast to enable fermentation, and the mixture sits for four to seven days or until the beer reaches the correct density, referred to as specific gravity.

The smell becomes so powerfully bitter it seems plausible that it caused the blisters all over the tank's blue paint. The fermentation process creates so much carbon dioxide that a lit match goes out as soon as it's lowered into the tank.

Once the brew reaches its correct specific gravity, the beer goes into the kegs lined up against the wall.

"One problem with us being as archaic as we are is here in the fermentation room," said Goldstein, holding up a cylinder of almost opaque extra special bitter, an amber-orange variety that contains 4.5 to 6 percent alcohol. "We don't have a way to cool it down in the tank, so it comes out real cloudy."

Yeast bite, a distinct tartness, is another side effect of the fermentation tank's lack of cooling. Yeast is still active above 55 degrees and doesn't settle to the bottom of the tank at higher temperatures.

After the beer is kegged, Zimmerman, Goldstein and Bauer move it to a 45-degree cooler, the brewery's most significant concession to modern technology.

"You want to keep it from changing," Bauer said. "It's like wine — it changes with time. However, wine gets better; beer gets worse."

From the brewery's cooler, the beer goes straight to the customer. Whatcom Brewery doesn't advertise except by word of mouth and in fact prides itself on its grassroots approach to marketing.

"Pretty much for all of us involved, it's a hobby," Bauer said. "We all have some other source of income. We've just been selling out the barn door — if we commercialize, it won't be fun anymore."

On average, Whatcom Brewery makes eight to 10 kegs per month, and production isn't likely to increase for now.

"If we were to quadruple, we would have everything paid for, but we're not looking at working that much," Zimmerman agreed.

"We're definitely poised for some expansion — ideally, we should be a brew pub," he said. "If it stops being fun, it stops being fun, though."

In the competitive environment of modern brewing, Zimmerman said he just wants to do something a little different.

"We're just striving to be 100 years behind the times."

Handful of barley

Lloyd Zimmerman with brew kettle

Fresh flowing ales
Noemi Ban's life was forever changed by one man's cruel vision of a perfect world. Meghan Pattee listens to her story of hope, perseverance and ultimate redemption outside the clutches of her Nazi captors. Photos courtesy of Noemi Ban.

Noemi Ban at 3 years old with her mother, Julia, and father, Samuel. Sister, Elizabeth, age 11 (lower left). Noemi age 18 (lower right).
Light seeped in through the two small rectangular windows of the cattle car as the train made its eight-day voyage to a secret destination. Eighty-five people were crowded inside the car while immense heat beat down on them like a raging inferno. When the train finally arrived at its destination, Noemi Ban stepped off with her mother, sister, baby brother and grandmother. Immediately, Ban was sent to the right and the rest of her family was sent to the left. That was the last time she saw them.

Sitting in her Bellingham home, the petite 77-year-old woman with silver hair points out a wall with framed black and white photos of her loved ones lost in the Holocaust and begins to tell her story.

Ban was a rosy-cheeked 19-year-old with jet-black hair and brown eyes when the Nazis took over in Hungary and established the first of three orders. Jewish people had to purchase a yellow, six-pointed Star of David to wear on their clothing to identify their religion.

The second order came painted on the side of their house. It said all Jews must go to the ghetto — a part of the city enclosed by four cement walls. Inside, the entire Jewish population waited in fear to see what would happen next.

Finally, the last order arrived from the Nazis, sending all men age 55 and under to labor camps. Her father was forced to go to the Ukraine and the family believed they would not see him again.

Ban's family remained in their home above the ghetto for three months, then the Nazis delivered the order to pack up minimal belongings and line up outside.

"We were allowed to take one pillow, one bed sheet, one package of food, one change of underwear and nothing of value," Ban said. "No one asked where we were going because everyone was so afraid."

The Hungarian S.S. Nazis searched the Jews amidst chaos and noise. Eventually they arrived at what would be their home for the next 10 days — a brick factory.

"We had to climb ladders to the second floor," Ban said. "I didn’t climb fast enough so I got pushed with the bayonet. I still feel it to this day," she added, clenching her fists.

After spending 10 days on a hard dirt floor, the Jews were then taken behind the brick factory to the railroad tracks and officially given to the S.S. soldiers who stood before a long train of cattle cars.

"When the S.S. took us over we ceased to be human," she said. "We were just a number."

Upon entering the dark cattle car Ban saw four buckets — two for fresh water and two for sanitary services. These were supposed to serve 85 people for eight days.

"I won’t forget the stench in that cattle car," Ban said with disgust. "Smell has a memory."

Chaos erupted inside the crowded car. Children were frightened and screaming, asking where things were and where they were going, but nobody seemed to know. After eight days, the train finally stopped. The S.S. ordered everyone to leave everything behind and start walking. People were told to line up, and as they approached, an emotionless S.S. officer wearing a shiny outfit with white gloves and clutching a horsewhip, divided the line in two.

The people in Ban's line were marched into a hall and told to undress, keeping only their shoes. Female guards shaved everyone's entire body, making each person unrecognizable to another. Through a window, Ban saw mounds of human hair piled to the ceiling and sorted by color. It was used for pillow and couch stuffing and to make fabric, Ban recalled.

"The guards were throwing dresses into the air and we had to wear them regardless of size," she said. "We were then led into the infamous Auschwitz."

Upon entering, Ban could see row after row of barracks. Each housed 600 prisoners.

Food at Auschwitz was scarce. Breakfast and dinner consisted of one cup of black coffee and one slice of bread. For lunch, prisoners were lined up in rows of five and given a bowl of soup to share. Later Ban discovered the "soup" was actually medicine to stop women's menstrual cycles. The first person in line received the bowl and, after taking a sip, passed it on.

"It was terrible," Ban said. "People got sick and got sores. I still can't share today because of bowl memories."

For three months prisoners did not have running water and thus resorted to washing their faces with coffee.

Prisoners lined up everyday for three to four hours in the morning and at night, and as people became sicker and weaker they began fainting in line. After prisoners fainted, officers threw them in heaps in the back of pick-up trucks and drove away, regardless of whether or not they were dead. Ban fainted once, but friends held her by the arms for three hours and she eluded the guards without suffering any harm.

At one point Ban was wandering through the barracks thinking the whole world had forgotten about the prisoners, when she thought she saw someone coming toward her.

"It was such a familiar face, but I wondered 'Who is she, wearing rags, without hair and looking like a skeleton?'" Ban said. After a minute she realized she was looking at her mere 65-pound reflection in the window.
As talk of what was happening circulated through the camps, people began wondering what happened to their families and where they had been taken. They asked, but no one would answer.

"Eventually, one woman guard stopped and yelled, 'Do you really want to know? Do you see that ash cloud, smell it? There your relatives go,'" Ban said. "We were choking on something and thought it was dust and dirt, but it wasn't."

Three weeks later Ban went to Buchenwald, joining 1,000 other women as slave workers assembling bombs in an ammunition factory.

The women saw an opportunity to retaliate against the Nazis. "We decided to make a sabotage," Ban said with a mischievous look in her eyes. They put the bombs together incorrectly so not a single one would explode.

"It felt so good to do something against the terrible power above us," she said.

She remained at Buchenwald with the other women for seven months without any knowledge that the war was nearing its end.

The women who had been transferred out of the camps and survived were taken back via the "death march" on a long, dusty road. One by one, Ban and others made their way to the back of the line and waited for an opportunity to escape. When the guard was not paying attention, the prisoners slipped into the thick forest and waited in a shack, not knowing their fate.

A couple of days later, footsteps approached, crunching the bushes outside the shack, and the door opened to reveal an American soldier. He told them to wait, and the next day he returned and freed the prisoners.

"He said, You're all free — this part of Germany surrendered," Ban said. "It was the most beautiful sentence I have ever heard."

Ban discovered upon returning to Budapest that her father, aunt and uncle had also survived the horrors of the Holocaust.

This was not, however, the end of her struggle for freedom.

"At first it was a joy to be free," she said after a brief hesitation.

This was followed by the realization of what had actually happened and that most of her family was dead.

"After I came home, I found my father alive," Ban said. "This was one very positive and wonderful feeling. Of course, it's there with the knowledge that I had to tell him what happened. As people started coming back to Hungary he started hearing little episodes, but he had no idea that this happened to his own family."

Ban had the painful duty of telling her father that the rest of their family had perished in the camps.

About four weeks after her return in early September 1945, Ban discovered her boyfriend, Earnest Ban, whom she had met before being imprisoned, was still alive. On October 26, 1945, they married.

In 1947 their first son Steven was born.

"With my first baby came a reaffirmation that I am alive and functioning," she said.

Two years later their second son George was born.

"My home was my castle," she said. "I was hiding and still afraid of everything."

Part of overcoming that fear was returning to school to become a teacher. Ban earned her degree and taught fifth-through eighth-grade boys for two years.

In 1956 the revolution against communism broke out, and Ban's family decided to make its escape. Guards caught them on their first attempt but decided to let them return on the condition that they promise not to try again. They promised, but Ban was not satisfied. She wanted to go to America, the land from where the soldier who saved her life had come.

In their second attempt, they sought assistance from a friend employed in a factory, who hid them in a giant ball of wool being transported to the Austrian border on the back of a truck. "when i stepped into the crematorium i was in ban re
The family, including the two boys, ages 9 and 7, was absolutely silent as it sat buried in the middle of the wool. At one moment, a guard stopped the truck at a checkpoint and poked a bayonet through the ball, the blade thrust inches from the family members’ faces.

They finally reached the border and were sent on an army ship to the United States where they chose to go to St. Louis and lived the immigrant’s life working in factories and trying to learn English.

"I worked in a factory making different kinds of hats for soldiers," she said. "My part was to hand-stitch sweat leather into the hats. I sat on a picnic bench with no back. The humidity was high and even higher behind me because they steamed hats right behind."

Along with working, she took care of her family and also had to go shopping without knowing English. This caused problems for her because she only knew the metric system, and everything at the store was measured by the English system.

"I couldn’t even order food because I couldn’t say how much in pounds and ounces," Ban said.

Ban decided she wanted to teach in American schools. She went to school at night to learn English and earn her degree. Three years later she graduated and got a job teaching sixth grade where she remained for 16 years. She earned many awards, including St. Louis Teacher of the Year in 1980, which adorn the walls of her home.

After retirement, she and her husband relocated to Bellingham where her son Steven was living. Her husband died of Alzheimer’s disease in June 1994.

Ban decided to start giving presentations at schools about the Holocaust in hopes that people would never forget what happened during that horrific time. Her speeches touch audiences in a way they have probably never been touched because very few have experienced the atrocities that she did and lived to tell about them. She is living proof of the Holocaust and finds healing in sharing her story.

During August 1996 Ban decided to return to Auschwitz with a friend, Ray Wolpow, who is a secondary education professor at Western. Wolpow wrote his dissertation on Ban's experience in Auschwitz. With his hands rubbing his eyes under his glasses, the dark-haired man with a surprisingly soft voice, tells, along with Ban, of finding the remains of crematorium number five, where Ban's family was killed.

"You can feel something awful happened there," Wolpow said in a shaky voice. "It's sacred ground, terrible beyond words."

"When I stepped into the crematorium I was in pain," Ban recalled. "I touched all the bricks, all the wires. Something was pulling me in."

Together they tried to say the Hebrew prayer for the dead, but they could not finish.

"We were crying, sobbing — our sorrow was so deep that we forgot all the rest of the words," Ban said.

Clutching a picture of Ban holding both hands in victory symbols, Wolpow told a story of her breaking out of Auschwitz. The tired travelers were visiting a building Ban had been in during her time in the camp when they came across a large, bolted metal door leading outside. Wolpow did not think getting through it was possible, but Ban’s determination proved him wrong.

"She gently pushes me aside, pulls the latch open, unlocks the deadbolt, picks up her foot and kicks the door open," Wolpow said, remembering Ban's triumphant courage.

One of her most cherished possessions from her return to Auschwitz is a heart-shaped rock, which sits atop her television in a sculpted pair of white hands. On their trip they boarded a train and traveled many miles through the night to the once unknown destination of Auschwitz. But this time, Ban stood at the gates of death a free woman, able to leave when she wanted.
Rumble Gulch huffed one last angry breath, sending a vindictive blast of wind up the ridge to the man standing idle at the top. When the wind scampere up the slope and crept around his head, torso and his legs, he began screaming anxiously.

**Get up boy! Get up! Mom is in the lodge. She's waiting for us with lunch. We're gonna be late for lunch boy, we're gonna be late for mom. Get up boy, get up!**

As his voice deteriorated into sobs of helpless, quaking pleas, the mountain hushed into a volatile silence. Howling wisps of wind followed the initial blast but the mountain did not threaten to strike again. They were the last expressions of the mountain's scorn, at least for now.

Despite the seven or eight skiers who stood as effigies next to him, the man who was standing atop that ridge was standing there alone. When it was clear the boy would not respond, the man darted futilely down the slope and toward the mess at the bottom until the waist-deep snow clutched his chest and strangled his rapidly abating hope for a rescue.

Still the man could not give up hope. **Somebody help me! Someone get down there! Help him. Please, for God's sake somebody help... somebody... somebody...**

The man, who stood so proud a few moments before, now stood as a hollow tree — lifeless, confused and staring into the broken, white aftermath. His son lay only slightly more lifeless, buried beneath 3,000 tons of hardened snow and ice.

It would be 45 minutes before Mount Baker Ski Patrol would deem the gully safe enough to initiate rescue. Of course by then it wouldn't be a rescue.

At 12:30 p.m. on Valentine's Day, 1999, Justin Parker, a 19-year-old snowboarder, traversed beneath a cliff along a notorious out-of-bounds slope. The slope, called Rumble Gulch, is visible from the ridge near the bottom of Chair 8 where the young snowboarder's father stood waiting, watching and eventually sobbing.

While traversing, Parker triggered a 12- to 14-foot deep, 45°-foot-wide fracture, which quickly transformed into a massive white wall tumbling at lightning speed toward him and the gully bottom. Eyewitnesses said the young snowboarder tried to outrun the avalanche, but the avalanche was too fast, too ambitious and it consumed the snowboarder in a heads-up vertical position 9-feet beneath the hardened surface.

The avalanche was far from finished, however, triggering more releases and gaining momentum as it raced toward the lower gully.

Two skiers below Rumble Gulch saw the avalanche pillaging toward them and attempted to ski out of the way. In a panicky debate, they parted in separate directions.

One of the skiers scurried out of the avalanche's path in enough time to watch the white wall carry his friend, Shawn Riches, 25, to an uncertain death hundreds of feet below.

His body and fate would remain a haunting mystery for those who searched through the boulder-size snow chunks and massive debris until summer's warm days melted the world-record snow pack, and with it, any remaining uncertainty concerning the man's death.

When the avalanche finally came to a rest, it had killed two, partially buried many more and had knocked several skiers down cliffs and slopes using the sheer force of its wind, according to the avalanche report.

Neither the young snowboarder nor the skier could have guessed their lives would end so abruptly.

Neither could have argued, however, that Rumble Gulch had not given them ample warning.

On Jan. 18, less than one month before the Valentine's Day avalanche, when the snow was falling at 2 inches per hour, the Avalanche Center issued an avalanche warning for the Cascades above 4,000 feet and specifically for northeastern-facing slopes. On that day, a snowboarder ducked beneath the pink ribbon designating out-of-bounds and headed into the last ride of his life on the northeastern-facing slope — Rumble Gulch.

As one of Washington's most popular ski areas, Mount Baker basks in the glow of several coveted reputations. *Christian Knight* investigates the treacherous mountain's track record. Photos by G. Trevor Phillips.
snowfall per year than any other ski area in the world. Its rustic, non-corporate demeanor appeals to some of the best snowboarders in the country. Recently, however, it seems to be working on a new, far more sinister reputation — a reputation as a killer.

And it has not been selective with its prey. It has killed sons and fathers, civilians and military persons, weekend warriors and die-hard locals — anybody who dares test it on a bad day.

Within the last two ski seasons, Mount Baker avalanches have killed three men and have left the fate of three more uncertain. This accounts for all three of Washington's skier-avalanche fatalities in the 1998-1999 ski season and three of Washington's four skier-avalanche fatalities in the 1999-2000 ski season.

Although the avalanches that killed those men in 1999 struck quickly, the stage for those catastrophic events was being set as the first snowflakes settled on Mount Baker's ski slopes.

While avalanche experts expect a degree of unpredictability in avalanche forecasting, they attempt to decrease that unpredictability by using the "avalanche triangle." The avalanche triangle has three components: snowpack, weather and terrain. Without the compilation of these three components, an avalanche is not likely to occur.

Avalanche experts have found that avalanches tend to occur most commonly on 35- to 40-degree slopes. Gwyn Howat, spokesperson for Mount Baker, said these are the slopes that seem to be ideal for advanced skiers and snowboarders. Coincidentally, she also said a lot of Mount Baker's in-bounds and out-of-bounds terrain is within this range.

"Most backcountry terrain around Mount Baker is highly conducive to avalanches," Howat said.

With one of the three deadly components of the avalanche triangle in place, the mountain needed the two remaining factors, snowpack and weather, to prepare for a busy season.

Although Mount Baker was blessed in 1998-1999 with a world record snowfall of 1,140 inches, that record proved to be a curse as much as a blessing. Howat said Mount Baker, along with most Cascade Mountain ski areas, receives marine snow, which is heavy, wet snow that stabilizes after 48 hours of settling.

In the 1998-1999 season, however, Mount Baker received so much snow, so often that the 12 inches of snow that fell during the day never had a chance to settle before 18 inches of fresh snow fell later that night. Thus, as Mount Baker's marketers boasted 18 inches of fresh snow on the daily snow reports, the second and third factors of the avalanche triangle's deadly components were delicately falling into place. Now the mountain would be waiting for one unwary trespasser to tie the avalanche triangle together into a massive, tumbling white knot of snow, ice and debris.

Howat said the avalanche victim or the avalanche victim's partner triggers 90 percent of all avalanches.

"To go into the backcountry here all you need is a lift ticket. We get a bunch of people who duck beneath ropes indicating out-of-bounds, who ride right beside warning signs and enter the backcountry without even knowing it," a Mount Baker ski patroller and avalanche safety instructor said.

In a response to this haunting problem, Mount Baker Ski Patrol decided to limit access to the backcountry. In February of 1999, they issued a significantly stricter policy requiring anyone accessing the backcountry from Mount Baker boundaries to carry a shovel and a transceiver, to have a partner, and to have knowledge of the terrain, route and avalanche conditions. If they fail to meet these requirements their skiing privileges will be revoked.

These instruments do little, however, if the skier or snowboarder does not know how to use them.

"People buy transceivers, shovels, everything, but don't know how to use them," the Mount Baker patroller said. "A lot of people don't even know how to turn the transceiver on. A transceiver is something you have to practice with to use effectively, but most people seem to
be intimidated by it when in reality that little transceiver could be what will save their lives.”

In an attempt to ensure that would-be backcountry skiers and snowboarders know how to use transceivers and other rescue techniques, Mount Baker instituted avalanche-training classes in March 1999.

Shortly thereafter, Mount Baker’s ski season ended for the spring and summer, closing the door on the three tragedies. The Mount Baker staff was unpretentiously confident that the stricter policy put into effect in February, the avalanche safety classes initiated in March and a more typical snow pack the next ski season would prevent anything of the sort from happening again.

They couldn’t have been more wrong. Shortly after the season opened the following December, a Navy man, described as an expert snowboarder who knew Mount Baker well, was seen for the last time on an in-bounds slope called “Sticky-Wicket.”

A Search and Rescue member assisted in two of the rescue attempts. He said despite several detailed rescue efforts, first by Mount Baker Ski Patrol, second by Search and Rescue and third by a Navy search team, the snowboarder’s fate remains a mystery: he’s most likely buried beneath the soft, billowy façade.

Four days later, Mount Baker regular and ex-employee Bob Henley entered the backcountry without a ski partner, transceiver or shovel. Evans said Henley did not tell anyone where he was going or that he was snowboarding at all. His car in the parking lot was the only clue he left behind for rescuers and ski patrol. Mount Baker officials, Search and Rescue and the Sheriff’s Department all believe his body lies lifeless somewhere in the Mount Baker backcountry.

In the wake of these two uncertain deaths and the buried tragedies from a world-record season last year, on Jan. 18, 2000, Brandon Weatherman, director of Mount Baker Ski Patrol, was patrolling along the edge of the ski area’s boundaries when ski patrol lost radio contact with him. Howat said after a few very tense minutes of non-response, the ski patrol rushed out to find Weatherman buried in an avalanche and unconscious.

Although Weatherman is one of the lucky few to escape the “white death,” his experience demonstrates the mountain’s unpredictability.

While the Mount Baker tragedies seem to express the reliability of the avalanche triangle, perhaps they express just the opposite. Mother Nature is a luring temptation to many factions of adventurers. She lures kayakers to steep rivers, climbers to granite walls and skiers and snowboarders to virgin slopes.

Some outdoor adventurers who indulge in Mother Nature’s games recognize she can be an innocent playmate one second and a sinister killer the next. In an attempt to suppress her more sinister side, adventurers use tools and training to help predict her volatile moods. They cannot, however, remove all volatility.

Mother Nature makes no promises. She might respect the respectful, but she does not bow to them. Nor does she change the rules for them.