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Editor's Note

With discussion about sex from Sue, the hostess of the "Sunday Night Sex Show," images of drug problems on the five o'clock news and edgy lyrics from Courtney Love, these topics—sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll—are often on the forefront of many people's minds. Although many of these contemporary issues often go undiscussed in everyday, casual conversation with friends and/or family, it is important to address them.

As journalists, we strive to broaden our skills by reporting and writing on subjects that are often uncomfortable or unfamiliar. As editors, we challenged our staff writers to push their personal boundaries and limits and develop stories they may have normally shied away from.

In this issue, you will read stories that are edgy, unconventional and distinctive. Each story provides a glimpse into different lifestyles. We hope you enjoy reading these stories as much as we did.

Thanks for reading! If you have any questions, comments or story ideas, we would love to hear from you. Please call us at 360.650.3737 or e-mail us at klipsunwwu@hotmail.com.

Best wishes,

Annie Billington
School teacher by day and punk- rocker by night, Leanne Uttech talks to one of her kindergarten students at Columbia Elementary School.
Guitars and ABC’s are a huge part of Leanne Uttech’s life. Megan Burcham talks with this punk rocker kindergarten teacher. Photos by Megan Burcham and courtesy of Leanne Uttech.

Leanne Uttech jumps in the air doing scissor kicks in red and black plaid pants and a black tank top while singing short, catchy lyrics to the crowd. Her leopard-print guitar strap hangs across her slim left shoulder holding the red guitar she rapidly strums. Her right arm is adorned with a red and white striped wristband and a blue heart tattoo on her shoulder with her husband’s name, Timothy, tattooed in the middle. At first glance this punk rocker might seem like she could kick some ass, but when she smiles, her dimples blow her cover.

Uttech, 27, is the lead singer of an old school power punk band, The Temper Tantrums, which started about five years ago in Bellingham. To the kindergarten students she teaches, however, she is simply known as Mrs. Uttech.

She earned her education degree from Western Washington University in 2000 and has taught at Columbia Elementary School in Bellingham for the past three years. Uttech and the other members of The Temper Tantrums have toured several states to perform at bars, all-ages clubs, house parties and festivals for the past three summer breaks.

“My students know I’m in a band,” Uttech said smiling. “Sometimes I’ll bring our CD’s in, and they’ll all dance at playtime. It’s a fun age to teach, though, they get excited about everything; I could stand on my head and they would clap.”

Uttech said some of her student’s parents have come to her local shows. When she knows parents are coming to a performance she usually wears longer sleeved shirts to cover her tattoo.

“About a year ago some parents heard we were having a show,” she said laughing. “It was funny, there were all these 35-year-old women cheering in the crowd.”

While attending Western in 1998, Uttech and her roommate at the time, Effie Martinson, dated brothers who were in the local band, The Thriftshop Junkies. Uttech and Martinson did not want to be known as the girls who went to see their boyfriends at the punk rock shows, so they decided to form their own punk band. They chose Martinson to play bass, Uttech would play guitar and sing and their friend Melissa agreed to play the drums.

“(Uttech) and I had never played the guitar or bass so we had to teach ourselves how to play,” Martinson said.

Their new band practiced using their boyfriend’s equipment since they did not have any of their own. Uttech said that in the beginning, her band performed at shows...
Uttech sings and plays guitar for her band The Temper Tantrums, an old-school power punk band she started five years ago as a Western student.

The Thriftshop Junkies were playing at.

"At first we would open shows for The Thriftshop Junkies, but soon they started opening for us," Uttech said with a smile. "I think people liked that we were an all-girl band."

The group began playing local venues in Bellingham such as The 3B Tavern, The World Famous Up & Up Tavern and house parties. They enjoyed performing and decided to play at festivals. In 2000, the band played at Tom Fest, a Christian music festival, for a large crowd, which included a public relations representative from the Betty Rocket label. He brought their album back to label headquarters in California and eventually signed the band.

The Temper Tantrums were wary of signing any contracts at first, but after learning the label would send them on tours, they agreed. In the summer of 2001 the band traveled to almost every state playing anywhere people would come to hear them play.

Uttech said they traveled across country in a 12-passenger van, which pulled a trailer complete with their band equipment. The bands daily routine was similar each day, which consisted of waking up and grabbing breakfast, while mapping out where they would travel next. The band stayed in hotels and homes of people who hosted the shows. Uttech said a few of the places they stayed were pretty weird but they were lucky they did not stay anywhere too scary.

"It was hard because some of the people we stayed with were so excited and they wanted us to stay up and hang out," Uttech said. "This one kid had been planning this for two months, but we were so tired we just wanted to sleep. Some people don't realize it's not just one night for us, we were doing that every night for two months."

Uttech said during the first summer tour about 10 percent of the crowd knew who they were. By summer of 2003 about 50 percent of people in the crowd were familiar with their music and many came just to see The Temper Tantrums perform. Martinson said touring is her favorite part of being in the band.

"I have the normal stage fright like most people," Martinson said. "But when you're up there on stage the energy from the crowd is the best."

The band's drummer, Melissa, quit in 2002 and have not had a permanent drummer in the band since. In the summer of 2003, Uttech's husband Tim, former guitarist for The Thriftshop Junkies, filled in when the band went on tour.

Some of the band's musical influences are the Ramones, the Huntington and the Screaching Weasles. Uttech describes The Temper Tantrums music as fun and furious.

"When people ask us what kind of music we play I tell them it's kind of like the Powerpuff Girls meet the Ramones," Uttech said. "There's no yelling or screaming in our music.
though. Our songs have harmonies and choruses you can sing along to."

The band's first album included a song about their Christian faith. For their second CD, however, The Temper Tantrums wanted to classify themselves as more than just a Christian punk band.

"We're just a punk rock band that doesn't do drugs or swear in their lyrics," Uttech said.

Robert Appel, 20, is the lead singer and guitarist for Flip the Switch, a band from California. He has seen The Temper Tantrums live, twice on their first two tours and said he would love to see them again. Appel said he found out about The Temper Tantrums through another band on the same label.

"I really don't listen to punk, mostly Ska, but there was just something about The Temper Tantrums, I liked," Appel said. "Probably because it was an all girl group."

Uttech grew up in Everett, Wash, and attended Valley View Baptist Academy from kindergarten until 12th grade. She graduated when she was 16-years-old with a class of 12 other people.

"My school was very small," Uttech said. "It was kind of like home school with workbooks every student had to complete. I worked hard because I wanted to get out of there so fast."

Uttech's mother worked at the Academy and her father played in funk bands in the 1970s and 1980s.

For part of her childhood, Uttech said her dad's drug and alcohol abuse kept him from performing in bands or holding down a full-time job. He eventually sobered up, began attending church and became a more sensible and involved parent, Uttech said.

"My dad was a big musical influence when I was growing up," Uttech said. "He would play the keyboard and have my sister and I sing different parts of the song."

Uttech said both of her parents are supportive of her being in a band but her mother was paranoid at first.

"My mom thought, 'Oh no, my baby's going to go to the devil!' Uttech said.

Uttech's parents have seen a few of The Temper Tantrums' shows. Her dad likes to wear the band's sweatshirts and patches as everyday attire and loves to tell people that his daughter is in a band, Uttech said.

Martinson is a special education teacher at Geneva Elementary School in Bellingham. She said last summer was her last touring with The Temper Tantrums because of her job responsibilities and she does not want to be away from her husband for two months.

"Last summer he had a job with summers off so he could come on tour with us," Martinson said. "But now he has a new job that won't allow him to do that."

Uttech said she is unsure of the band's future because she is the only original remaining member. Along with teaching kindergarten, Uttech is also working toward her master's degree in education.

"I hope to keep playing music for as long as I can," Uttech said. "Music is part of my life but it's hard to make it happen right now because (the band members and I) are just so busy."

Uttech said she would like to continue performing with her husband Tim and possibly change the sound of their music.

"Maybe we'll get into some new wave punk rock; add some keyboards," Uttech said. "I don't think we'll ever be a soft rock or acoustic band."

Uttech rocking out at a show.
THE MORE

AFTER
much of human history, alcohol has served as a calming agent, social lubricant and all-around party starter balanced out the following morning by the crushing pain of a hangover. But is there a way to avoid the day- 

er anguish? Leah Hadfield puts some "hangover-prevention" pills to the test at several of Bellingham's thirst- 

ching locales. Photos by Joshua Fejeran.

The evening began during happy hour. Jen, my partner in crime, joined me in Rumors' 
dark and airy bar for a night of experimentation. We hopped onto the bar stools and each lit 
a cigarette to start the night off properly.

Three women with short spiked hair laughed heartily at the end of the bar. The dank air in 
the sparsely populated room suggested that patrons would be sweating to funky disco and 
'80s music before the night's end. We had come for stiff drink. Eventually, we would do our 
own dance in the wild streets of downtown Bellingham on a Thursday night.

As our tall and friendly barkeep brought the first round of vodka tonics, we prepared our- 
selves for the chance to get drunk without the dreaded hangover. We each popped two of 
the white, flat tablets that were oddly difficult to swallow. Neither of us knew what these sup- 
plements for soaks would do, but our journey had begun and we were prepared for the con- 
sequences. We were going to get drunk – we had to get drunk.
THE ILLUSION BEGINS

A slew of "hangover prevention" pills and supplements have hit the market in the last few years that promise to counteract the negative effects of alcohol consumption. The manufacturers' marketing efforts claim the pills work by absorbing, or efficiently metabolizing, the toxins in alcohol that are thought to cause hangovers. Some people might be seduced by the idea of drinking without consequence, while others are skeptical of the pills' ability to avert a hangover.

Lindsay Wall, a senior at Western Washington University is an employee at General Nutrition Center. She is not a heavy drinker but has tried RU-21's white, salty pills because she said customers respond best to personal testimony when looking to try new things.

Every time she tries a new product, she makes sure to carefully follow the package instructions. Wall said the pills work best when consumers follow the suggested method since the pills change the way the body metabolizes alcohol.

Several months ago she went to a bar in Seattle with a group of friends and drank a batch of mixed drinks.

"It was like an experiment (taking RU-21)," Wall said. "I had my boyfriend be my babysitter, otherwise I would have forgotten when to take the pills because I was drunk."

Jen and I kept track of our drinks on a scrap of notebook paper.

RU-21's black and yellow packaging had the profile of a human head with two red dots that seemed to suggest the product would be good for our brains. It even claimed the pills would maintain our health. The recommended dosage was two tablets for every two drinks. The drawback I quickly learned is that it can be difficult to keep track of how many drinks, shots or beers you have consumed.

The huge, red Chaser pills are also hard to swallow. "Is that a horse tranquilizer?" a friend jabbed as I took the plunge into the second leg of my experiment of the so-called alcohol metabolism regulators. I drank six Pyramid Hefeweizen and one Sierra Nevada Pale Ale. My drinking companions ordered me to chug, and were surprisingly concerned that my experiment be done in the most scientific manner possible. I took the next two Chaser pills after several hours of drinking and warding off criticism that I was not trying hard enough.

Shannon Haff, a senior at Western Washington University, tried Chaser when she was at The Keg celebrating the wedding anniversary of two of her friends. She drank shots of Jose Cuervo tequila followed by five Bud Lights.

"It's hard because if you're having that much to drink, it's hard to remember to take a pill unless you have someone to remind you," Haff said.

Haff, who said she only drinks a few weekends each month, was skeptical of the pills at first because she was not sure what they would do.

"On a normal night of drinking, I wouldn't drink that much," Haff said. "The fact that I was taking alcohol metabolism pills made me feel like a superwoman."

THE SCIENCE BEHIND IT

According to Chaser's Web site, the primary cause of hangovers is congeners. These chemical compounds are byproducts of the fermentation process that give alcoholic beverages their flavor, aroma and color. Congeners are technical impurities, however, and can trigger a negative reaction in some people. But according to the manufacturers of Chaser, "you can completely counteract negative alcohol abuse effects."

Dr. Emily Washington Health Center at Western Washington University, warned that hangover pills' seductive claims are not backed by scientific research. The Food and Drug Administration classifies hangover pills such as Chaser and RU-21 as nutritional supplements, meaning they need no legal mandate to prove their claims.

According to the RU-21 Web site, these pills were developed at the Russian Academy of Sciences. The concoction was meant to allow KGB officers to drink vodka while on assignment without feeling sick the next day.

"They have no clinically proven action by double-blind studies on alcohol absorption or the metabolites of alcohol, like acetaldehyde, which is a free radical toxin to body tissues," Gibson said. "Nor do they have any effect on how intoxicated one gets, nor how much 'hangover' happens the next day."

Gibson said the pills contain harmless ingredients such as vitamins, minerals, amino acids and sugar. Chaser contains activated calcium carbonate and vegetable carbon, which are meant to act as stomach lining protection, Gibson said. The combination is similar to the medications given in emergency rooms when a person overdoses on a
A toxic substance such as alcohol. But Gibson, who has worked in chemical dependency treatment for 15 years at Bellingham’s St. Joseph Hospital, said the quantity of carbon found in the pills is not enough to counteract the significant gastritis that occurs from alcohol ingestion. Gastritis is irritation and inflammation of the stomach lining that leads to nausea, pain and vomiting.

“I can tell you emphatically that there is no such thing as a proven hangover prevention pill,” Gibson said. “I work in chemical dependency treatment, so if there were such a chemical compound, I assure you I know about it.”

THE MORNING AFTER

My aching body, quenching thirst, accompanied by the beat of some asshole drummer boy in my head is the unpleasant ensemble after a long night of drinking, lancing and traipsing around town. Sometimes, I feel like I’m dying inside.

After drinking last night and trying the Chaser pills, I was left with a pounding headache and little motivation to get out of bed until noon. I pulled my cozy down comforter up to my chin and closed my eyes, hoping that the throbbing in my brain would disappear.

Haff thought the Chaser pills were effective in helping prevent a hangover. She noted, however, that she usually takes a multi-vitamin after drinking, so he was not sure what helped to stave off the hangover.

“I was really dehydrated, I just didn’t have the headache,” Haff said. “I usually get a burly headache if I get a hangover.”

Wall said she was dehydrated, but did not have a headache after taking RU-21. She was tired, but not painfully hungover. She said she was functioning and went to work all day.

Hans Anderson, a Western student, has tried hangover pills twice, although he does not remember the brands. A friend who often got hangovers recommended the pills to Anderson.

He tried the pills on a rambunctious party night and said he felt better than the 12 people he drank with. Anderson admitted, however, that he tends to nurse a glass of water toward the end of the night anyway.

The only known ways to lessen the effects of a hangover are to drink plenty of non-alcoholic fluids and eat during alcohol consumption, which Gibson said slows the absorption of alcohol through the intestinal lining. Chaser’s fine-print warning even suggests that consumers drink plenty of water.

Gibson explained that people respond differently to alcohol based on gender, genetics and metabolic differences.

“There is also an issue of progressive tolerance; the more exposure one has to alcohol, the more it takes to get an effect,” Gibson said. “This doesn’t mean that damage is not being done. The liver is an unpredictable organ and will react with inflammation to small amounts of alcohol in one person and minimal reaction in another person with large quantities ingested.”

Haff said she ate dinner before going out, and probably had some french fries during the night. But she admitted that she usually does not remember to drink water during or after drinking.

After Jen and I each drank five vodka tonics, a “German chocolate cake” shot and shared a pitcher of Pabst Blue Ribbon, we stumbled toward our after-drinking refuge — the Pita Pit. I devoured the crunchy and crispy veggie pita in hopes that I would be safe from a hangover when I awoke in the morning or early afternoon. But I was not so lucky and spent the next day on the couch watching TV.

WORTH THE EFFORT?

Haff and Wall suggested they would use the products again if they were going to drink a lot. Haff laughed as she recommended the pills to students who have to study the day after drinking. She was unsure if students going out to party would want to pay for avoiding a hangover or would remember to take their pills.

“It’s a lot to remember to avoid a little temple pain,” Haff said.

Supplements such as RU-21 and Chaser are geared toward moderate drinkers. Gibson said the Health Center’s position on a safe level of drinking is no more than two alcoholic drinks per day.

“It is never ‘healthy’ to drink beyond that level, for any reason,” Gibson warned. “The costs to the body and the brain are too great, and the only prevention is moderation or abstinence.”

Drinking in moderation? Sure, it happens, but it does not make for great stories about skinning your knee or face and not remembering how it happened. What would people gripe about during 8 a.m. class if it weren’t for hangovers?

So suck it up and take the chance that you might be hungover, like I did — no guarantees.
A colorful, vibrant array of dildos, vibrators and sex toys is the centerpiece of many Passion Parties.
It is all a part of the party—gels designed to stimulate, sex toys and hands-on experimentation. Jessie Bowden explores Passion Parties—the Tupperware party of the new millennium.

Photos by Jessie Bowden and Brie Cross.

For two hours, Mischievous Michelle and Jazzy Jess sat in the middle of Lusty Leslie's living room, discussing dildos and touching tickling toys. Tossing aside their inhibitions, the group of nine women were tutored in the art of Passion Party products.

"Passion Parties are the Tupperware of the millennium," Passion Parties consultant Shellee Wells said.

In fact that is almost exactly what a Passion Party is; the same concept, just a different product line. Instead of a wide variety of food storage containers, Passion Parties sell a wide variety of edible creams and sex toys.

Started in 1994 by President Pat Davis and located in San Francisco, Passion Parties is a company of women helping to empower other women through education, in a fun, relaxed environment.

"It is difficult for women to go into some of the stores to get enhancement products," Wells said. "Our presentations are very professional. The terminology is very technical. We talk about the penis, we talk about the vagina."

Western sophomore Kjendal Hicks agreed the party was a fun way to become familiar with some of the products without having to visit sex shops and buy toys without knowing about them.

"The Passion Party consultant was really honest about the products and told us how everything works," Hicks said. "It's much more intimate than a sex shop."

Products in sex shops cannot be tried or tasted. Wells said the same types of items are sold at stores such as Lovers Package, however everything is wrapped-up and people do not really want to ask questions.

According to the Passion Parties mission statement, "Sexual aids can provide new and entirely positive sources of pleasurable satisfaction for each partner."

"We're promoting happy, healthy, monogamous relationships," Wells said. "I love being able to help women feel empowered by taking charge of their own sexuality."

Wells became a consultant just over a year ago, after attending a party and purchasing some products for herself.

"After I went to the party I can honestly say it saved the sex life in my marriage," Wells said.

Passion Party consultants not only help women's sex lives, but they can also make a lot of money. Consultants have the ability to earn up to 40 percent of their personal sales plus much more.

Every consultant when starting out must buy a $250 starter kit.

"The first party I did, I made my money back," Wells said.

A bartender with two kids, Wells said she was working every day, sometimes up to 10 hours. As a Passion Party consultant, she said she works eight to 10 parties a month and makes double what she did as a bartender.
Consultants not only make money off their own sales but also up to 5 percent on the sales of recruits. They can earn monthly incentives, which can be applied towards a car and/or a home. Trips, jewelry and other awards are also available.

"One year ago, when I started there were 67 (Passion Party) consultants in Washington," Wells said. "Now there are 175. It's a great thing to get into right now."

This year Passion Parties is celebrating ten years of success with sales exceeding $20 million annually.

Women who choose to have Passion Parties, do so for many different reasons; birthday parties and bachelorette parties are very common.

"We were going to have a girl's night," Hicks said. "(The party) just seemed like a fun thing to do."

Immediately upon entering the Passion Party, and removing their shoes, new arrivals were each instructed to make a name tag. Easy enough, they thought. Not so fast—in an effort to start the fun and possibly relieve some apprehension about the party, guests' nametags also had to have an adjective starting with the first letter of their name, describing sex in some way.

The party's host, Lusty Leslie, was happy to help some less creative girls, "Keepum Comin' Kelly" and "Mischievous Michelle," she said.

Once wine glasses were filled, names tags were on and all the party guests were seated in the living room in a circle around a table of party products, the party's consultant, Susan Clark or Slippery Susan began the party.

"That's the first time I've seen that name," she said to Bend-over Bonni as she held out a purple gift bag for Bonni to pick a prize from.

"Oh you got a reusable penis ice cube," Slippery Susan said. She followed this icebreaker with a welcome and, "Remember this, we are going to taste on our left hand and smell on our right, don't mix them up."

The room full of ladies held out their hands as Slippery Susan circled the group pumping sparkling lotion on their right hand and cinnamon-flavored "Fireworks," an edible body lotion, on their left. They sniffed and licked and decided that the sparkles would be great for dressing up "the girls" or breasts, and were told that "Fireworks" comes in other flavors, such as cherry and pina colada.

Next, a small dollop of minty green paste was placed on everyone's left index finger. Once everyone had some, Slippery Susan instructed them to put their hand down their shirt and rub the paste over one nipple.

"Do you notice one's a little jealous of the other?" Slippery Susan asked.

Just then, Mischievous Michelle threw her order form and catalog in front of her quickly reddening face. Giggles filled the room until the next product was brought to their attention.

"All the stuff isn't kinky sex stuff," Hicks said. "I bought a pheromone perfume, which (the consultant) let everyone try."

The "Pure Instinct" pheromone-based scent, is a powerful attractant, that communicates sexual readiness and heightens the partner's desires. It reacts differently with each individuals own body oils, according to the Passion Parties brochure.

"It smells different on everyone because it reacts to everyone's own scent." Hicks said.

Wells described one party she consulted for, at which she told the guests, a room full of college girls, that the "Pure Instinct" would get them more attention than they were accustomed to.

The girls insisted that the perfume would not work. However, the thought of a perfume that attracted men took over and the girls tried it anyway. That night after the party, Wells saw the girls at a bar.

"They ran up to me and said 'Thank you, thank you! I have never been hit on so many times in one night,'" Wells said.

Slippery Susan and Wells are both firm believers in their products.

"I won't sell anything I don't believe in," Wells said. "People ask, 'Does this stuff work?' I say everyone is individual. Some things may not work on some people. But no one has ever called up and said, 'This stuff sucks.'"

Slippery Susan continued to ease the group into other products, such as "Silky Sheets," a product that's intended to be sprayed on cotton sheets before bed to leave them feeling like "luxurious" silk. Slippery Susan, however, let the guests in on a little secret.

"This is great if you've ever been the one that gets stuck in the wet spot," she said. "Spray this on and it pulls out all the moisture."

Wells said she calls this product "never sleep on the wet spot again."

Other products included the "Cremesicle Edible Massage Cream," the "Super Deluxe Smitten" and "Ready to Go," a cream intended to intensify sexual enjoyment.

"Does that come in a bigger bottle?" Affectionate Amy asked with a laugh and rosy cheeks.

Giggles again filled the room.

"Well does it?"

The giggles turned into even louder laughter.

The little bottle would be plenty, Slippery Susan informed the group. It was time to try one last gel.

"I am going to need four volunteers," Slippery Susan said scanning the room.

Placing a popcorn kernel-size drop of gel onto each volunteers' index finger, Slippery Susan instructed them to find a room and try out the gel. Upon the volunteers' return, faces blushing and legs...
crossing, Slippery Susan explained that the product was called "Pure Satisfaction Unisex Enhancement Gel." According to the product description, this gentle stimulant for both men and women often results in enhanced sensitivity and greater potential for sexual fulfillment and pleasure.

Pleasure was the look on each of the volunteers' faces. Before they said anything, everyone could tell the gel had worked.

"I call this one 80 orgasms in a bottle," Wells said. "A lot of women have trouble reaching orgasm. This does the trick. When I bought it I was like 'I'm gonna spend $40 on this crap and it's not gonna work. I was wrong.'"

Next the women went on to bigger things, literally. The "Bullet," an $11.50 vibrator that provides the clitoral stimulation, which over 70 percent of all women need in order to experience orgasm, went vibrating off the edge of the table.

Soon everyone was passing around the "Decadent Indulgence," a 9-inch long, 1-inch wide, $140 dildo with "eight levels of accelerating vibrations, three unique patterns of graduated rhythmic motion, nine strategically placed heavy-duty rotating pleasure beads and deep penetrating rotating head, nubby ticklers and caressing fluttering wings."

Hicks said the best part of her party was passing around the vibrators.

"It was like a room full of school girls messing with each other," she said. "Turning them on and throwing them in each other's laps."

A quick two hours after the party began, Slippery Susan's presentation was complete. As everyone finished filling out their order forms, Slippery Susan set up to take the orders in a private room.

"Do you have a calculator?" Jazzy Jess asked. "I'm on a budget."

For the umpteenth time, the room erupted in laughter. One by one, guests walked through the kitchen into a private room to place orders.

"Everyone had a blast," Hicks said. "It was definitely the best party I have ever been to. I absolutely recommend them to everyone." 

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**Passion Products**

- **Silky Sheets:** Spray between your sheets a few minutes before bedtime to enjoy the luxurious feeling of silk ... and a scent that can stimulate sexy surprises. $11.00
- **Buzzin Brush:** Unwind with a sensual scalp and neck massage. Who knows where else the nubby, dual-speed vibrating brush will come in handy. $12.00
- **Ready to Go:** Apply a pearl-size bead to the clitoris for a cooling, tingling effect that will intensify sexual enjoyment. $15.50
- **Passion Powder:** Get your fancy tickled from head to toe with this erotic, tasty treat. Feather tickler included to ensure no part of your body is left out. $9.00
- **Nipple Nibblers:** Great taste is just the start of this treat. From the moment it is smoothed on, the sensitivity rises. $9.00
- **Edible Undies:** Everyone wins with this tasty unisex design. Completely edible, right down to the candy strings. $7.50

Information and products from a Passion Parties catalog.
From coffee to soda to No Doz, four people recount their experiences about their addiction to caffeine. Erin McGourty digs deeper into the buzz behind coffee, soda and pills. Photos by Joshua Fejeran.
Nick Bond sits in front of his computer screen at 2 a.m. on a school night, tapping his pencil. He struggles to stay focused as he tries to finish an assignment on time. He has stood up to switch CD's three times. After spinning in his black computer chair for another 15 minutes, he gives up. Bond throws his pencil onto his old wooden computer desk in frustration and rubs his temples. He cannot continue until he runs to the nearby Shell station to get a 20 ounce Dr. Pepper. This will be the fourth trip he has made during the day for a caffeine fix.

"If I don't have (caffeine) I get headaches. I'm more irritable and I'm generally in a bad mood," says Bond, a 23-year-old Western Washington University student.

Most colleges offer services for those with addictions to alcohol and drug. Campus police can test for belligerence or marijuana use, but many students today are addicted to a drug that doctors and security officials rarely consider harmful. Western has multiple espresso vendors, and still the lines for a pricey cup of a student's daily caffeine fix continue to snake around counters and out the doors. A student can get caffeine through coffee, soda, No Doz pills and even chocolate. The options for caffeine are plentiful.

Coffee shops and pop machines wait like dealers on street corners. Stuart's Coffee House and The Underground Coffee House mix the opportunity to obtain the drug with the opportunity to see live music. Starbucks reaches out to students with study spots available to continuously offer another dose of the drug as students struggle to stay awake through reading and studying. Other caffeine suppliers make the drug available through drive-up windows so students do not even have to get out of their cars to get a fix.

Although Bond does not frequent coffee stands, he often falls victim to Red Bull energy drinks, which contains 80 milligrams of caffeine per can. Although he will drink an occasional cup of coffee, he drinks three to six soft drinks every day. He compares his addiction to caffeine to smoking because it is expensive and has physical costs to the body.

Spending an average of $20 a week on caffeine, Bond's addiction places a heavy burden on his budget. He moved out of his parent's Missouri home five years ago. As he drove across the United States in his station wagon, he began a life on his own for the first time.

"I didn't consider caffeine an addictive drug until I had to start paying for it myself," Bond says. "Now I know how much I'm paying for it and how much I consume."

According to the Viking Union Drug Information Center, a five ounce cup of drip coffee can increase alertness. Three cups or more can cause headaches, anxiety and even insomnia. One seven ounce cup of drip coffee contains 115 to 175 milligrams of caffeine and if more than five grams of caffeine is ingested at once, in any form, it can send a person into a convulsion or coma, and can even cause death.

Sabrina Edwards, 24, is slightly alarmed by these statistics as she takes a close look at her position as a Starbuck's assistant store manager in Smokey Point. The sound of the steamer hisses in the background as she re-pins her short blonde hair out of her face and
sinks into a red lounge chair against the glass windows.

Resting during her lunch break with the smell of fresh brewing coffee surrounding her, Edwards admits to drinking an average of 18 shots of espresso a week during her shifts and after work. She also adds chocolate and tea to her everyday dosage of caffeine. Working at Starbucks has made it difficult for her to limit her caffeine intake.

"I'm around (caffeine) all day," Edwards says. "I think, 'oh that looks good,' or 'oh that smells good,' as I make everyone else's coffee. It's similar to why alcoholics go to bars: it's the temptation."

Western's Student Health Center's "Ask the Doc" question and answer service, claims that regular use of caffeine, in any form, can lead to dependence. The drug has an addictive quality that creates a withdrawal syndrome if the dose of caffeine for the day is suddenly discontinued.

Edwards watches the customers enter through the tall, glass doors. Some of them have fingers that shake; others pace in line. Often edgy and easily distracted, customers shift their weight from one foot to the other, waiting for their turn to order a drink. Edwards says she thinks some of these customers are fighting caffeine withdrawals.

Edwards hands tremble slightly and her eyes widen as she imitates one of her regular customers. She describes his complicated drink as a triple short, steamed breve latte with three ounces of coffee. He drives through her window at Starbucks four times a day. Edwards says the customer looks like he needs his dose of caffeine and needs it fast. She knows that when he drives away she will see him again before her shift is over.

Edwards explains that coffee makes it easy to consume a lot of caffeine in a short period of time. Espresso combines several shots of caffeine in a small amount of liquid, making it easy to drink quickly.

Her favorite drink is an iced-vanilla, double grande Americano with a splash of half-and-half and caramel sauce. The drink contains two espresso shots in 8 ounces of liquid. She sighs and says that if she does not have caffeine for a few days, she feels the beginning of a driving headache.

Edwards says she sees caffeine as a luxury in the Northwest because it is so trendy and available. She thinks the majority of people drink coffee or energy drinks because it is popular and convenient, rather than as a means of staying awake. She believes caffeine to be too accessible and convenient for anyone to notice or care how much they consume.

She reflected back to her time as a Western student three years ago, and realized she only drank caffeine when she was trying to stay awake to study. She sees firsthand that students are at a high risk of caffeine addiction, although she knows that using caffeine is just as prevalent later in life as it is for students.

Nils Landis, a 35-year-old electrician, is a prime example of what Edwards describes. Landis sits beside his wife with a cup of fresh, hot decaf at Stuart's Coffee House. The two watch as people quickly hustle in and out of the vintage-style coffee shop with steaming mugs of fresh-brewed Tony's coffee. Landis looks longingly at the cups containing the caffeine that he used to enjoy as he grips the side of his to-go mug.

"I went three weeks without coffee or decaf," Landis says. "I was getting crushing headaches, cold sores around my mouth and vomiting."

Landis grew up with coffee as his beverage of choice and began drinking it when he was 6-years-old. He says his father always has a hot pot of coffee brewing. Landis has been addicted to diet pills, nicotine and illegal drugs throughout his life. He says he is no longer addicted to any drug, but found his addiction to caffeine the most difficult to overcome.

"Physically it was more difficult to stop drinking coffee than smoking," Landis says. "It was a psychological yearning. It's a different kind of addiction."

Landis discovered the serious side of his addiction when he consulted massage specialists, acupuncturists and Chinese medicine doctors regarding the physical problems he was having. He injured easily and did not heal well. He dislocated his shoulder, damaged his knees and experienced pain from the heel of his left foot up to the palm of his left hand. The more Landis worked out at his gym, the more he noticed he was not seeing any results.

"The low point was when the doctors told me my adrenal glands were down to 20 percent," Landis says. "The glands had shut down on me and I would die if I kept drinking coffee."

Adrenal glands sit on top of kidneys...
and produce adrenaline for the body. Landis' glands, which were once stimulated by the large amounts of caffeine in his tri-daily triple shot Americano, were now unable to create adrenaline without the drug. Once doctors discovered his glands were not operating properly, they were able to pinpoint caffeine as the culprit.

"Caffeine stimulates adrenaline glands," Landis says. "So, you become an adrenaline junkie more than a caffeine junkie."

Landis' wife, Bre, rests a supportive hand on her husband's arm. His addiction has affected their relationship as well. After years of marriage counseling, the couple appears stronger than ever.

"(My addiction) affects our relationship," Landis says. "I get jittery and anxious when I drink coffee. I get angry and depressed when I do not have it. I often snap at (my wife) if I'm like that."

As Landis recalls his addiction another couple walks past with their steaming coffee drinks, increasing the irony of meeting in a coffee shop. Landis notes that Stuart's does not offer decaffeinated chai beverages.

"Decaf coffee is giving me the same feeling that I used to get drinking regular coffee," Landis says. "If there aren't any alternative drinks at coffee shops, then I don't think (my wife and I) will be able to go to them anymore. The temptation is too high. It's hard because we really like hot drinks. They're warm and comforting."

Each morning Landis gets up at 4 a.m. to begin his two-hour drive to a construction site south of Bellingham. He works on his electrical tasks, but without caffeine he gets agitated and angry when something goes wrong. He wants to work faster before he has to begin his two-hour drive back home. Without his three shots of espresso, Landis is concerned that he may fall asleep at the wheel and crash during the long drive home at dusk.

Western student Lisa Marko, 24, understands that caffeine is a risk not only for students, but also for the average adult. She says caffeine is available to anyone who is willing and able to buy it.

"Anyone who has to get up in the morning is at risk," Marko says.

Marko took No Doze, an over the counter medication that contains about 100 milligrams of caffeine in one dose, off and on for three years. She started taking it on a weekly basis to feel a rush and used it to help her stay awake. The drug made her jittery and hyper. She considered herself addicted when she realized it was difficult to stop taking the drug.

"I would be cranky if I didn't have it," Marko says. "I was also tired all the time without it."

Marko no longer takes the drug. She did not want to continue feeling tired without it and decided to quit while she still could. Marko would recommend the drug to someone under certain conditions, such as a student needing to stay awake. Marko says she did not plan to use the drug repeatedly.

Bond agrees with Marko that caffeine is an aid to homework. After drinking a few bottles of Dr. Pepper, his eyes are unable to close long enough to sleep. He finishes his report on an upcoming trip to China, but the caffeine that is still flowing through his system has caused insomnia.

"If I'm out of money and pop and I've got stuff to do, I get a terrible headache," Bond says. "I have often not gotten my work done. This is probably why I am not an 'A' student."
Today, an increasing amount of women are expressing themselves and gaining empowerment through singing, songwriting and performing. Christina Twu sheds light on a few of these artists. Photos by Christina Twu.

Everybody’s Debbie practices in their basement space on Washington Street.
When Janis Joplin first belted out her gritty heartbreak from the depths of her aching, drunken heart, her fiery soul would reincarnate generations later in the voices of women in rock today. Given music as a therapeutic outlet, pro-woman record labels and a generation of new songwriters, many women and girls have captured the residual embers of '70s female folksingers and magnified them into a full-fledged fire.

Jesse Sykes, 36, singer/songwriter of Seattle's The Sweet Hereafter, chose "Reckless Burning," a brooding goodbye ballad, to set the tone for her first record. The first track on the album was her way of saying "hello" to the music industry.

"(The record) could have really worked against us, but it didn't," Sykes says. "I wanted people to sort of commit (to the record) from the get-go. I wanted it to sort of be a ballsy statement."

Signed to the Seattle-based Barsuk Records, home to smart-mouthed pop bands including Kind of Like Spitting, the now famed Death Cab for Cutie and bluesy dream-pop band Rilo Kiley, it would appear that Sykes was a label misfit, but she says this ended up working to the band's advantage.

The cinematic country-noir record documents relationships Sykes has had throughout her adult life and her own fear of falling in love. Although some of her songs reference women as love interests, the album is almost entirely about her relationship with her boyfriend of six years, Phil Wandscher, currently the twangy guitarist of The Sweet Hereafter.

"I do sing from a male perspective a lot," Sykes says. "If you truly have empathy, you can sing about (love) from both directions. It's really important to be a generalist sometimes."

Linda Allen, nationally recognized songwriter and West Coast representative for the Traveling Musician's Guild, has dedicated her life to helping people find their voices and empowering themselves through song.

As an instructor of music therapy, Allen says she hopes to pass on the collective experience in songwriting, to move beyond the boundaries of personal experiences. She feels the ability to be a generalist, something that Sykes emphasized, is progressive in songwriting.

"We were tremendous optimists because we believed a song could shift the world on its axis," Allen says.

Little signs of adolescence haunt Little's candle-scented room, save the secret chest of tapes on her shelf which effectively conceals the Wilson Phillips and Belinda Carlisle albums. When Little speaks, she is coy and modest, laughing nervously and blushing often.

When Sykes feels she has reached the point in her songwriting where she can identify with the entire human experience.

"Love is love, loss is loss, whether you're a man or woman," she says. "To me, anything with a beautiful melody is potentially hazardous for heartbreak."

Song as Therapy

Allen's latest record, "The Long Way Home," portrays the traditional folk of Joan Baez.

For the past 30 years, 58-year-old Allen has taken a long road of worldwide travels and tours, including her hospice tour to Japan, Australia and Thailand during the Vietnam War. The content of her songs is dedicated to the oppressed or disenfranchised, and influenced her role as a mother, the experiences of battered women and the working class.

"Justice is the core (of my songwriting)," she says.

Allen, currently a Bellingham resident, is pursuing her doctorate in art therapy, something she felt compelled to do after seeing so many others silenced by the abuses of the world. One of her main missions in her thesis is to teach workshops that find a voice for women who have been disempowered.

"We cut off our voices from fear," she says. "With recent students in the class, some have come in with mental illness, with addiction, under crisis situations because of divorce. What I'm hearing from them is that they're feeling alive again. They're cutting through the numbness. They're waking up."

Allen says the creative energy that might result from one of her workshops often inspires people to heal past broken relationships.

"When you start finding the (creative energy) that awakens you, it starts flooding (other areas of) your life," she says.

Demystifying Rock Stars

Dana Little, 25, plays keys and piano. She also plays the Rhodes, a brassy-sounding keyboard reminiscing the wonders of '70s technology. Little shares vocal duties with two other women in the Bellingham-based band Late Tuesday.

No signs of adolescence haunt Little's candle-scented room, save the secret chest of tapes on her shelf which effectively conceals the Wilson Phillips and Belinda Carlisle albums. When Little speaks, she is coy and modest, laughing nervously and blushing often.

Little says meeting her friend and Late Tuesday bandmate, Tara Ward, was a sign that she should keep writing songs.

"(Ward) was older and had done more (music) at The Inn (University Ministries) and so I looked up to her," she says. "She
was really intimidating to me. I had snuck into one of those practice spaces in the (Performing Arts Center) and was playing some songs that I had written. And someone knocked on the door and ... she walked in and said, "That sounds really nice."

When Little impersonates Ward, she uses a tiny, squeaky voice to exaggerate an endearing quality. "I'm sure I went home to my roommates in the dorms and was like, 'Tara Ward just came in and said she liked my songs.' That was huge," she gasps.

Remembering her first encounter with a local rock star makes Little blush.

Ward and Little would eventually become friends. Little says Ward helped her work past the initial criticism she received from writing her first "real" song, when her musician stepfather seemed unimpressed with it. Later, Ward would help her write the hit Late Tuesday song, "Save Your Breath."

Little has since learned the performance poise that comes with a few years of being in a band.

She runs downstairs into her living room and sits down in front of her slightly-out-of-tune, but well-loved piano. Her audience of five to eight people—in and out of the room—are not aware that she is about to perform her once-rejected song.

As she begins to sing and her fingers patter out the chugging staccato of "I Must Go" that resides somewhere between a Sarah McLachlan song and the "Peanuts" theme, her rich voice fills the room. She is no longer the shy, blushing girl looking out her bedroom window, but a frank, composed articulator. Her song is simple, efficient and heartfelt. In a word, honest.

"I never try to be impressive or flowery with what I say," she says.

Little compares writing songs to keeping a journal and recalls a moment when this form of honesty, which seems to manifest in her songs, helped her communicate with her mother.

"With 'I Do' on the second album about divorce, I had no idea how I felt about those things," she says, "I just sat down at the piano because I had this phrase, 'I do' for awhile in my head, so I was like, 'Okay, I'll sit down and see what happens.' I came out with one of the quickest songs I had ever written."

Little pauses and clears her throat. Her eyes are glassy for a moment.

"And it was just so honest," she continues softly. "I would have never sat down and said those words to (my mom), you know: 'This is what I think divorce does to kids who grew up with it.' But she's heard the song, and she knows how I feel."

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In the tradition of U2, Domonique Herrin, 34, and Pia Fischer, 31, of the band Everybody's Debbie, did not know how to play any instruments when first starting a five-girl band.

Fischer, bespectacled and pixie-haired, says she has no sense of embarrassment on stage.

"Someone else completely takes over," she says. "It's not me, anyway. It's totally not me. I can't even look at myself. I always have a good cringe when I look at pictures or a video afterwards."

Herrin, whose youth is preserved by the shock of pink hair atop her head, says she keeps Fischer's vivacious stage tactics in mind when writing lyrics for the shameless Fischer to sing.

At first, Everybody's Debbie only intended to play cover songs. Their first original song was an accident, Herrin says. "I remember just playing some smashy chords that weren't even chords and writing our first song," Herrin says. "We used the lyrics to 'Love is a Battlefield.' Then we were like, 'Well, if we changed the music, we might as well change the lyrics.'"

Although Everybody's Debbie exudes general silliness, their lyrics have subtle political connotations. These undertones are rarely heard over the garage rock feedback of crunchy guitars. They are emblematic of the rock band right before they are "discovered"—the Go Gos and the Bangles before they went pop.

"The most poppy song we have at the moment is a politically motivated song about how shitty our administration is," Fischer says.

The band members' respective boyfriends and husbands, consisting of members from Bellingham bands, the DTs, Enders of Ozone, The Narrows and an editor for What's Up! Magazine, made it natural for them to ease into the Bellingham scene.

"Let's face it," Fischer says, "All across the board, we had support for this."

Although she grew up in a family that was artistically inclined, Herrin says only the men in her family were considered real artists.

"My brother got a drum set when I was a kid," she says. "I got a Barbie Dream House and horseback-riding lessons."

Later, Herrin began to question why a love for rock 'n' roll was fostered more in her brother than in herself. She grew weary of being promoted as an all-girl-band for shows and resented the accusation that Everybody's Debbie played "the female card" as a gimmick to get gigs. Herrin finds it no coincidence that all the interviews the band has participated in so far, have revolved around their five-girl nature.

Singer/songwriter Linda Allen plays at a festival in Kitsap county.
around the fact that they are female.

"It just seems so irritating that (being a girl in a band) has to be a help or hindrance," she says.

Fischer agrees.

"We love to do this, and I hope that comes across," Fischer says. "I hope that it's less about five girls playing music, and more about, 'What a great band. Incidentally, they're five girls.'"

**Pro-women Labels**

Slim Moon, owner of the Olympia-based Kill Rock Stars Records, says he would be lying if he said he did not make gender distinctions when signing artists to his label.

Moon, 36, initially started the record label in 1991 as a spoken work outlet. Moon put out a split 7-inch spoken word record with Riot Grrrl icon Kathleen Hanna of Bikini Kill (now playing in Le Tigre). From then on, Kill Rock Stars would be considered one of the most influential labels in the Riot Grrrl Movement, along with Mr. Lady and K Records.

"It's not like we have to scrape at the bottom of the barrel to find promising women to play on our label," Moon says. "They're basically just there."

Although Moon finds it important to elevate women in rock, he says he has extremely high standards when signing a new artist. "We're picky and elitist," he says. "We think we sign the best music in the world."

Moon says that right now, women happen to be playing the most interesting underground music, and may have different motivations in playing music than boy bands, since women generally lack the rock star role-models that men have.

"If girls don't want to be silenced, they have to make their own rules," Moon explains. "They're going to want to create a new and interesting aesthetic."

Moon's inspiration to launch Kill Rock Stars as a pro-woman label stems from the mid-'80s, when he was avidly attending hardcore shows as a teen. By 1991, Moon says the more aggressive rock scenes were still very much just a male dominated scene. It infuriated him to see that powerful men signing bands in that scene, however sexist they were, denied that they were deliberately excluding females.

"People that are just doing the same old shit sign the same fucking boy bands," he says. "If everyone has that attitude, then nothing's going to change."

**Smoosh: The Next Generation**

"Uh huh, uh huh. Yo, yo," Asy, 12, soundchecks her song "Rad", a favorite of her elementary school-age friends.

Asy and her sister Chloe, 10, who compose the self-described indie pop band Smoosh, are untainted by the pain of puberty, heartbreak or whims of a patriarchal music industry.

Asy, who writes song lyrics, sings songs and plays keyboard, plans on switching to electric guitar for half of her set in the future. Smoosh plans on going rock, she says, and their 7-year-old sister is soon to join the band as the bassist.

Their father, Mike, remembers Asy's baby days.

"(Asy) would pull herself up and start banging on the piano before she could walk," he says.

Chloe, 10, plays her set at Clamor Magazine's benefit concert with her and her sister, Asy's, band Smoosh.

Chloe never planned on walking away with a drum set when Mike took the girls to the music store to string his violin and unleash his own "untapped musician," Mike says.

There, Chloe saw a red, sparkly drum set that caught her eye, she says. Death Cab for Cutie drummer Jason McGerr approached her and said he would give her lessons if she bought the drum set.

Less than two years later, Smoosh has been opening for Sleater-Kinney, Death Cab for Cutie, Nada Surf, Cat Power and the Presidents of the United States of America.

Right now, Asy and Chloe are fascinated with Tori Amos and Sleater-Kinney.

They admit they would be nervous if Amos walked into the Vera Project lounge right then, and Chloe said she was inspired by Sleater-Kinney drummer Janet Weiss.

"Their drummer is really good," she says. "She uses toms a lot, like me."

The girls play on and off stage. Asy pipes in and tells a playground story about her sister Chloe.

"(Chloe) is really good at tetherball and beats all the boys," she recalls with a giggle. "I told this boy that Chloe liked him when she was standing right next to me."

Chloe continues the story.

"(The boy) said he didn't like me because I was a tomboy," she says.

Asy jumps in to complete the epic story.

"And then (Chloe) was like, 'Grrrrl!,'" Asy growls like her sister.

The girls giggle. A few minutes remain before they strut onstage at Seattle's all-ages club, The Vera Project. Chloe is wearing her black newsboy hat slightly cocked to one side, and Asy is clutching her flexible, plastic toy doll she named Peggy Sue.

Peggy Sue goes to the shows with Smoosh at all times for good luck. Right before performing, Peggy Sue's arms and legs have been molded into the "air guitar" stance. ✼
For Kashmir Erickson, exotic dancing means more than just taking off her clothes. **Zeb Wainwright** takes an intimate look at the life of a Bellingham stripper. Photos by **Joshua Fejeran** and **Lisa Hobbs**.

In the evening, as most people are still unwinding from a hard-day's work, Kashmir Erickson’s job is usually just beginning. Erickson gets naked for a living. She has been a stripper since she was a teenager, and now dances for Kashmir’s Dream Angels, an in-house stripper business she also owns. She gladly comes into homes for an hour or more of titillating pleasure, full nudity included, provided the customer can part with $160 and does not expect to get laid.

At first glance, nothing about Erickson indicates she is a stripper. She is quiet, with a somewhat shy demeanor and speaks softly. Dressed in all black, she walks into her dining room and pulls up a chair to sit down. Her tight-fitting Harley Davidson Las Vegas shirt flows seamlessly over her thin frame towards her even tighter black pants with silver zippers on the front pockets, interrupted only by a slightly visible tattoo that nearly wraps around her entire waist.

Her entire persona changes, however, when she goes to work. While she may arrive at a customer’s house wearing a long coat and carrying a boombox, as soon as the dancing begins, she says it does not matter who she is dancing for, she is just there to do her job. She removes her coat, and then her clothes within a half hour.

Often, the people who keep Erickson in business are hard-working, nine-to-five men and women in the Bellingham community. Erickson and her dancers often get requests from customers that many people would never expect to patronize a stripper.

“We’ve had counselors, principals, teachers and people who worked with kids, but I guess they’ve got to have fun, too,” she says with a smirk. “Maybe 80 percent of the guys we go dance for are married. Usually the wives are out of town or at work. You often see pictures of them on the walls, and you know these people are married. Most even have their wedding rings on.”
Nikki, one of Erickson's dancers who has worked with her for a year, was called to perform a private dance for a man in Bellingham. Despite paying for the dance, he seemed to have moral issues with Nikki stripping naked and dancing for him.

"You could tell he was really religious," Nikki says. "He was very strange. He would not make eye contact with me at all. He would look at my body and look down, look at it and look down. I thought, 'Uh-oh. Somebody is having a little guilt issue.'"

While the morally-troubled religious man was simply shy and did not cause any trouble, Erickson says she stresses safety for her girls and usually advises them to bring a bouncer.

"One thing I do for my dancers' safety is I make them call me when they get there to make sure they got there okay," she says.

Perhaps the most common problem Erickson and Nikki experience while dancing is, some men think the girls will give them more than a strip-tease.

Erickson says, however, that she does not forbid her dancers from starting relationships with customers.

"I give my girls pretty much free reign when guys ask me if they are going to get anything extra," she says. "I tell them to talk to the dancers about that. Whatever happens between two consenting adults is their own business. I am just selling a dance."

Erickson began strip-teasing guy's sexual taste buds when she was a teenager living in Denver working at a lingerie store as an erotic model.

"A friend of mine owned a lingerie store and they were always looking for lingerie models to model behind glass," Erickson says, running her hands through her curly, light-blonde hair. "The guys would stick the money through a little slot in the glass and the more tips they gave, the better the show behind the glass would be. I quit working there because a guy pushed his way back into my little room with me and (the owners) were supposed to be watching this stuff on camera and they weren't watching. They didn't really do anything about it. It didn't get too weird, but it did freak me out enough to leave."

Erickson's career as a stripper over the years took her from a small lingerie store to numerous big city strip clubs before she realized that she was tired of working for someone else. Her passion for dancing and desire to start her own stripping business led her to begin her business, Kashmir's Dream Angels, in 1997.

Unlike Erickson, Nikki has never danced for a strip club. Originally getting into the business to earn some extra money, she has stuck with it because it pays well.

"I was looking to make some extra money, so I asked Kashmir about it and I did a couple of shows," she recalls. "It didn't seem to be all that bad. It's easy money."

Nikki works three jobs and says she makes more money working 10 hours per week stripping than her other two jobs combined, but she does not plan to do it for very long. She plans to quit when she has saved enough money for school. Despite her reasons for stripping, she still feels like she is stereotyped.

"A lot of people figure that because I do this, I must not be very intelligent and that's a big mistake," she remarks, sounding slightly annoyed. "I get a lot of people who will go to say things and they will use words that have more than two syllables and they will ask me if I want them to explain it again. Just because I dance for extra money doesn't mean I have an IQ of three. I think that is one of the misconceptions a lot of people have."

Erickson says that she faces criticism and stereotyping as well. She says she used to go to the bars when she was away for a call to go dance because she lived so far from Bellingham. Because of how she would dress, often in a short skirt and knee-high boots, she faced sharp criticism from other bar-going women. She laughs as she recalls a fist-fight she was involved in, because some girls thought she was a prostitute.

"There were these girls who were talking all this crap behind my back, insinuating that I was a prostitute, and I was pretty much ignoring them until they..."
came up and they pushed me," Erickson says. "So I turned around and whacked her on the head and we ended up kind of getting into it."

Erickson says she does not go to the bars anymore because of incidents like that; instead she conducts her business at home, but that does not mean she is free from wrongful accusations from other women.

"One of my girls was dancing out on Lummi Island at a bachelor party and a girlfriend came in and tried to beat up my dancer up in a jealous fit," Erickson laughs. "The ladies were calling me asking me where their husbands and boyfriends were."

Erickson relaxes in her dining room chair as she pets Tigger, one of her 10 cats. The stereo in her bedroom resonates softly in the background.

Erickson works approximately 20 hours a week, half of which is spent dancing. The rest of her work hours consist of taking calls and scheduling dances. Because she spends so little time working, she is free to make crafts, think up new business ventures and spend time with her two teenage sons.

"What's cool about it is if I have to do a show to make money, I'm only gone for an hour," Erickson says. "It's not like I spend the whole day gone. I'm able to spend a lot more time with my kids. I make just as much money as people who spend the whole day working a normal job. I just have a lot more time to be in their lives. I don't see how people do it—to raise kids and work all day."

Erickson is humble. She does not like to share with others how much money she makes per year. She says the hourly rate for stripping is high, although she is by no means rich.

"Let's just say I'm comfortable," Erickson says. "I'm not rich, but I'm comfortable. I probably could be rich if I put that much effort into it but, you know, I'm the type of person that just wants to know my bills are paid and have a little money for fun. I don't have big dreams of owning a mansion with a pool."

Relationships can have an impact on anyone's career, and both Erickson and Nikki agree that relationships can be one of the downfalls to their line of work. Love can, and often does, put a strain both on the couple themselves as well as on the dancer's work life.

"I don't date, but I'm sure it would make things difficult," Nikki says. "Maybe they will be ok with it in theory, but not when it comes to putting it into practice."

Erickson takes the opposite approach. She does date, but she makes sure she is upfront with any potential mates.

"I have to really find a guy who can deal with it," she says. "Most guys can't. When I'm on the hunt for a boyfriend, I am looking for one who is not really possessive, and who is kind of open."

Erickson has been with her current boyfriend for about five months. She says fate brought the two together when he called her up to request her services.

"My boyfriend right now, I actually met at a show," she laughs as a huge smile appears on her face. "He called to hire me and I saw him and said 'Oh, baby!'"

Even given the circumstances under which they met, Erickson said her boyfriend, at times, gets uncomfortable with what she does.

"Sometimes he gets a little bit jealous or whatever and so I gently remind him how he met me. He knew what he was getting into," she remarks.

Both Erickson and Nikki...
remain ring-less, and Erickson says she never plans to marry. She believes marriage is just a legal, governmental intervention into a couple's relationship, although she concedes she might marry a well-to-do man who wishes to take care of her.

"I don't believe in marriage, not unless he's filthy rich," she says. "I just don't want the government involved in my relationship and that's how I feel it would be. I don't need a piece of paper saying we are together. The only advantage I can see to marrying somebody is if you are going to get half of their stuff or something, and that's not what love is all about."

The fact that so many of her customers are married also puts doubts in her mind about how sacred marriage really is.

Stripping in an area like Bellingham is not without its downsides however, Erickson says. She feels that it is a pretty conservative town, a fact that presents her with many roadblocks. Erickson says she has problems finding dancers and cannot advertise her services anywhere but the phone book.

"Trying to find dancers to hire them is a little bit difficult and I face a lot of discrimination as far as advertisement goes," she remarks cynically.

Erickson says she used to advertise in various publications such as the Bellingham Herald, the Bellingham Weekly, the Echo and the Thrifty-Nickel but her ads were eventually pulled.

Bellingham Herald editor and publisher Christine Chin says that the reason the Herald pulled the ads was because there did not seem to be much of a market for them. She said that the Herald felt that because the county is fairly conservative, it did not make sense to keep running the ads.

"I do believe that the kinds of ads that we publish reflect the population, lifestyle trends and issues," Chin says. "Other markets are more accepting of these kinds of businesses and ads, but I don't believe this community is."

When Erickson does find dancers, however, it does not take long for them to get into the groove.

"Most of my girls, they have never done it before," Erickson says. "They have never danced before, so what I like to do is bring them to a show like a bachelor party or something like that. Usually, after 10 or 15 minutes they get the gist of it. It's pretty simple. I am even throwing around the idea of exotic dance lessons."

"Sometimes having to stop at the gas station can be interesting," she laughs as she cuddles with one of her cats. "I have gotten pulled over and had to stand outside on the freeway and it's dark and raining and I am in high heels; stuff like that can be a pain, so I have invested in a long coat."
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