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WHAT’S INSIDE:

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Autumn is the season of transition at Western. A new academic year embarks, and the accompanying anxiety and excitement consumes university life.

New students curiously walk the campus, helping each other navigate the unfamiliar environment. Old friends meet and catch up on the events of summer. Days become shorter, and the colors of Bellingham change.

Klipsun is also in transition. The magazine's format has changed to embody shorter features and increased visual content. Inside this issue, readers will discover a great range of transitions that Western students and members of the greater Western community experience.

I encourage sports fans to read Shannon Barney's story about a former Western athlete's progression to playing in the NFL. Those interested in politics should read Chris Taylor's interview with RFK Jr., or Chrystal Doucette's story about a Western student who survived cancer because of a stem cell transplant.

I thank you for your support of Klipsun and student publications. If you have any questions, comments or story ideas, call us at (360) 650-3737 or e-mail us at klipsunwwu@yahoo.com. Thanks for reading.

Sincerely,

Paolo Mottola Jr.
Editor in Chief

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The Metamorphosis

Matthew Anderson
Matthew is a senior journalism major in the news/editorial sequence. Without his addiction to caffeine, he never would have finished this story. As one of the oldest students in the department, he would like to thank his younger and more mature peers for their unflagging friendship, without which he'd already have dropped out.

Survivor: A Student’s Battle with Cancer

Chrystal Doucette
Chrystal is a senior journalism major who hopes she has graduated by the time her article is published. She would like to thank all of her sources for their openness, especially Kathryn, who shared an unbelievable story and entrusted this magazine with its care. Kathryn's goal is to inspire other survivors, and Chrystal believes each day she fulfills that goal.

Vine to Wine

Evan McLean
Evan tries to model his reporting as a combination of detective Columbo, Hunter S. Thompson and April O’Neil. He would like to emphasize his future will consist of poorly paid jobs trying to end and replace the corporate conglomeration of the media. He has been published in the Planet and The Western Front.

Ready for Prime Time

Shannon Barney
Shannon is a senior journalism major in the public relations sequence and a business administration minor. She appreciates those who took the time to share their stories about Michael Koenen. She would like to thank the friends and family who gave her the foundation to do what she loves to do. You know who you are.

The 21 Run

Travis Sherer
Travis is all kinds of a senior at Western. Travis would not like to thank anyone — except alcohol . . . and Travis. Travis' hard work, determination and sheer sticktoitiveness made this article possible. Travis did not consume any alcohol during the night of jubilation; he does, however, acknowledge that the mood-altering toxin came up huge.
According to Western Washington University's Accountability Performance Report, the five-year graduation rate for freshmen is just above 50 percent. Since roughly half of you reading this are not expected to leave Western with a degree in your hand, here are some red flags to be wary of and some tips to help you stay in school.

—Jesse Smith

Don't get pregnant or impregnate. Granted, this may seem to be common sense, but the ineffective use of prophylactics has been the downfall for many college couples. While this is no plug for abstinence, sex before marriage, or the Student Health Center's morning-after pill, students should be careful.

Don't date someone still in high school. Sure, the idea of going to a second senior prom is tempting, but is it really worth the risk of losing out on the Western experience by constantly having "drama back home?" Also, you miss out on all those social experiences where you meet people (read: parties), by going home every other weekend to be with your significant other. If they really love you, they will also decide to go to Western.

Don't hang only with high-school friends. Your whole high school came to Western. Becoming a dropout is inevitable for some, but those who come in large contingents to attend Western seem to be the likely victims. Maybe it is the lack of branching out and actually meeting people that comes along with bringing all of your friends to Western. Possibly it is the feeling that Western resembles your local community college, only with smarter people. Regardless, if you fall into this category, be especially cognizant of the other steps to make sure you avoid becoming one; especially if you are from the Seattle or Tacoma area.

Don't let logic escape you. The kid I knew who shaved off his pubic hair and kept it in a Tupperware container above his TV was a dropout, to no one's surprise. My former roommate, who played Tony Hawk's Pro Skater so much he could not leave his computer to take a midterm, was also a dropout. I do not have a whole lot of advice to give here. Just use common sense.

Don't get too into non-school-related activities. I am not going to lie, I envied the kid whose girlfriend told me they had sex six times a day. But guess who is still here? Not him. Other activities to not get too wrapped up in: sleep, drugs, alcohol, isolation from other people.

Well, that is about it. Stick with these five tips and you just might make it through Western.*

*Minus any financial difficulties, major family complications and passing Math 102.
‘It Is On!’ with United State of Electronica

By Lauren Miller

With an album released March 15 through Sonic Boom recordings, United State of Electronica rises from humble beginnings as a band with no design to a dance party sensation circling the globe. Vocoder specialist and keyboarder Noah Star Weaver sits down at his parents’ house in Sedro-Woolley, Wash., to discuss the transitions the band has made from playing its first show at Western in March 2003, to touring in Japan and opening for such groups as Presidents of the United States of America and Death Cab for Cutie.

How would you describe how the band was when it started compared to today?

It began very loosely and spontaneously. There’s really no deliberate design behind it. When we began as a band, we asked anyone who would come to play music with us and jam with us. Somehow that turned into some dance tracks. We played a show as a joke, and we saw how people responded, how people were having such a good time at the show. We actually didn’t know that we would become what we are today.

What do you think was the catalyst that put your band on the map?

Coming up to Western and seeing people freak out. We’ve never seen that happen at a show before. We had just seen, for the first time, Andrew W.K. play when he came to Western. Our show was automatically energized from that. Our songs transformed my brother Ben and his friends into a sweaty dance mayhem. That was definitely one catalyst in our minds, realizing what we could do with our shows, how we could make people feel and flip out.

The band recently toured in Japan, the first time you’ve traveled out of the country. How did the band adjust to playing for a foreign audience?

Pretty much every way possible, except for people freaking out and losing their minds at the show. It was a whole new world. Without a guide, we wouldn’t have even made it out of the airport. But they took care of us really well. It couldn’t have gone any better.

How did your experience in Japan differ from your experience at home?

Way bigger. As in a lot more people... yeah, like a 10-piece horn section, 20 more dancers and kids on roller skates.

Do you model yourselves after other bands, or get your influence from any of them?

We’re definitely inspired by a very wide variety of people from other groups. Our biggest inspiration for putting on a live show is Andrew W.K. To see what’s possible when you give everything you have to the audience and then have the audience give everything they have back.

How have the relationships with the band changed since you’ve started?

We’re still the best friends in the world. We’ve all known each other for years. As for Wonderful (Noah’s other band), I’ve been playing with them for about nine years. It has always been more of a family.

What question would you want to be asked?

What does music mean to you?

Everything. Music is my life and love, and all I ever want to do.
In a small basement office in Lynden, Wash., two women work tirelessly saving lives. Nursed animals are returned to the wild with the help of the Wildlife Rescue & Rehabilitation Center.

On this day, they must rescue and care for a goose.

Krista Unser, 41, a volunteer worker, receives a call early in the morning about a goose that has been mauled by a dog in Ferndale. Alicia Hartley, 37, another staff volunteer, and Unser decide to finish feeding the baby birds in the center before departing.

They arrive at the five-acre spread that Bev Smith, a 69-year-old retired teacher, calls home. Unser and Hartley take out their nets and stealthily surround the goose.

"We only get one chance to catch him," Unser says.

Swinging her net down for the pickup, Unser nudges the goose into Hartley's net. Unser peers into the cage at the goose, flapping its wings in an attempt to escape.

"Oh, he's not looking too good," Unser says as the goose struggles to get on its feet.

Unser advises Smith that it's best to return the goose to the property after recovery. Smith agrees. The intent is to transition the injured animal from the temporary stay at the center back into the familiarity of its original environment.

After returning to the center, Unser and Hartley prepare the goose for treatment in its new home. Hartley gently pulls the goose out of its cage and covers its face so it can't see. The goose begins to calm a bit.

"When you cover their eyes, they feel they are safe," Unser says. "They think if they can't see you, then you can't see them."

They begin to examine the goose. It has treatable neck wounds, and the wings are healthy.

"Take a look at his back," Unser says.

Hartley spreads the back feathers to find sores and, upon further inspection, they find maggots. While they check its legs and pelvis, the distinctive pop of a broken bone echoes in the room.

Injury on top of injury. Unser and Hartley come to the grim decision that the bird must be euthanized.

Instead of transitioning a goose from the wild and back, they must prepare it for death.

While she arranges a heavy dose of anesthesia, Unser quietly remarks, "So, I guess you're not going back to where you came from, buddy."

Unser slowly injects the anesthesia into the goose's wing. They wait.

Its chest heaves up and down slowly as it injects more anesthesia. A heavy silence hangs in the air. Suddenly, the goose's wings extend and flap loudly. Feathers fly into the air as the goose experiences muscle contractions. Seconds later, its body falls limp.

"He's gone," Unser says as she checks the goose's heart with a stethoscope.

Sometimes even the stress of moving to the center can be too much for the animals, and death is the only option.

"It's not the fun part, but it can be the necessary part," Hartley says. "It's better to put him down rather than have him suffer and endure more stress."

Unser and Hartley prepare the goose for delivery to the humane society for disposal. It's time to help the little duck they picked up on the way back to the center.

Another life in transition.

— Lauren Miller
How to prepare for your puppy

My girlfriend got me a PlayStation 2 for Christmas (I know I am pretty lucky). I enjoyed it for about a month and a half, until she got me a birthday present—a puppy. I then stopped playing video games, not because I didn’t like them, but because I no longer had the time. However, now I am willing to give up the time for my adorable, blonde Labrador/ Pit Bull mix-breed puppy.

I knew my puppy was going to be a lot of work. But I had no idea just how much work until the day I picked up the little mutt. This guide will help anyone attempting to make a transition from a dog-free home to a puppy-proof zone.

Step one: Choosing your best friend

Read about different breeds of dogs to help you choose the best one for you.

The Animal Planet Web site has a breed selector which can help you find out what breed is right for you. All you need to do is complete a questionnaire, and it will show you which breeds match your lifestyle.

"(Choosing the right breed) has a lot to do with anyone's activity level," says Laura Berger of Tail-s-a-Wagging, an animal daycare, pet sitting service and training facility.

The breed selector will show results only for purebred animals, which cost anywhere from $300 to $2,000. I originally wanted a Boxer, but they are expensive and I found through my research that, statistically, mixed-breed dogs have fewer health complications than purebred dogs. If you buy a $500 dog from an inexperienced breeder, your puppy could be a product of incest.

"There is no such thing as a free dog," Berger says.

Step two: Battening down the hatches

You will never realize how dirty your floor is until you bring your puppy home.

"When we brought Parker home, every two seconds he had some piece of garbage in his mouth," says my girlfriend, Matania Thoreson. "And that was after I cleaned."

Anything on the floor is going to get chewed. You are going to have to watch your dog constantly, which means no video games.

Puppies also have no bladder control. Ideally, you should take a puppy out once an hour to go to go "potty," Berger says. Which means either coming home in between classes or having someone let your puppy out for you. This can take five seconds or 20 minutes, depending on the dog. But when you let it outside, make sure the puppy does its business. Eventually your puppy will learn that when it goes outside, the first thing it has to do is relieve itself. This will also teach them that the only place to go to the bathroom is outside.

I am lucky that Matania helps me with Parker as much as she does.

Step three: Making time

Anyone going to school, working and trying to raise a puppy will tell you that they wish they knew a Doc Brown with a Flux-capacitor, because one thing is for sure — there is never enough time.

The best thing about two- to three-month-old puppies is that they get tired really easily. Parker was easy because a quarter-mile walk would knock him out for the rest of the day. But when he was awake, he was a terror.

"We couldn't do anything," Matania says. "I had to wait until he went to bed to even read a book or study."

We were constantly watching him; trying to make sure he didn't chew on the neck of one of my roommates' Fender Stratocasters or have an accident on the floor.

Your dog will be your best friend if you give it attention, effort and more than anything, patience. Now that Parker is a 5-month-old puppy, I have returned to playing PlayStation 2. However, I frequently pause my games to pull underwear and dryer sheets out of Parker's mouth.

— Mike Murray

Tips for choosing the right breed:

• Attend dog shows
• Talk to breeders if you are looking for a purebred
• Use the American Kennel Club Web site
• Look at the grooming necessities of the breed you are interested in
• Every breed has a rescue group, so turning to those can result in a slightly older dog, if you want to skip the puppy stage.

Before bringing your puppy home:

• Puppy proofing: make sure anything you don't want them to get into is secured.
• Get a crate: all dogs should be crate trained whether they sleep in it at night or not. It will help if they ever have to travel, get groomed or stay at the veterinarian.
• Buy dishes, leashes, chew toys, etc.
• Plan a healthy diet: choose a quality dog food, and make sure the dog has water at all times. Your veterinarian or obedience school instructor can recommend a food which will be right for your pet.
• Enroll your dog in a puppy kindergarten or basic obedience class to help with socialization. A goal for your puppy is to meet 100 different people in its first month in your home and three to four different dogs a day for a month, as well as anything else your puppy will need to be used to.
• Read books on your breed: even something as simple as "Puppies for Dummies" can help. If you have a mixed-breed dog, read a book on each.
UNDER THE NEEDLE

Photography by Chris Taylor
Design by Kelsey Parkhurst
Tattoos can look cool, but after watching someone go through the process of getting the actual ink inserted under the skin, many may think twice before getting one of their own.

'99 Bellingham High School alumna Erika Hammond, 24, of Seattle had a friend draw her a picture of an angel while she was in high school.

Steve Hate, tattoo artist and owner of Old School Tattoo and Piercing, created the tattoo on Hammond’s left arm on April 15.

a | Hammond smokes a cigarette outside the tattoo parlor after having the first part of her tattoo outlined on her shoulder and back. The outline of the tattoo took approximately two hours. Next, Hate will shade in parts of the angel’s body and wings, which he says can be the most painful part.

b | Hate points out an area on the tattoo sketch that he will make adjustments to. Hate believes his slight adjustments will make the wings of the angel look better.

c | Hammond bends over as Hate shades the wings of the angel. “This is one of my favorite pieces of art that I own,” Hammond says. “I’m glad I have a piece of art that I can actually look at.” Hammond’s six other tattoos are relatively small compared to the angel.

d | Hate’s reflection is seen in a nearby mirror as he focuses on Hammond’s shoulder. This is Hammond’s seventh tattoo. She got her first tattoo after graduating from high school.

e | Hate, who has been a tattoo artist for 10 years, applies the traced tattoo onto Hammond’s shoulder and back. The ink sketch will then be used as a guideline.

f | Hammond winces as Hate hits a sensitive area on her lower arm with the needle. After taking four hours to complete the tattoo, Hammond said her body felt like it was going into shock.
RFK Jr. at Sam Carver Gymnasium May 5. PHOTO BY CHRIS TAYLOR

in short,

RFK Jr. on the lengthy topic of the environment

By Chris Taylor

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. addressed more than 3,000 members of the Bellingham community May 5 at Sam Carver Gymnasium with the environmental concerns facing today's society.

As part of Western's Distinguished Lecture Series, Kennedy not only attacked President George W. Bush's "roll-backs" of environmental polices and labeled him as "the worst environmental president to every set foot in office," but explained his love for nature and the environment.

The son of Robert F. Kennedy and nephew to former President John F. Kennedy, Kennedy made several comparisons between the values of Republicans and Democrats or "red and blue states." He humorously added, "Seventy percent of Republicans are really Democrats that are just misinformed."

I attended the open question and answer sessions for students at 3 p.m. where I was able to ask him one question and I also caught him before his speech walking from the Viking Union through Red Square to Carver Gym.

What do you feel is the biggest environmental concern facing our society today?

The answer is the White House, without a doubt. Five years ago if you asked the blue book test question to executives of the 10 biggest environmental groups in America, which is called The Group of 10, what they saw as the gravest environmental problem, they would tell you all different stuff. Some would say sprawl, population, habitat destruction, global warming, whatever.

Today they will all tell you the same thing. It's George W. Bush. This is the worst environmental president we have had in the history of America. He is literally eviscerating all of our environmental laws right now. He has already done tremendous damage to the existing laws, virtually every one of them.

Even with our population increasing the way it is, we have the capacity to deal with those problems. All we need is leadership and political will. We are losing right now at a critical moment in our history.

What kinds of transitions can journalists make to cover the environment better?

The issue is corporate control. It's not completely the journalists' fault that these issues aren't being covered. It's that the economics have changed. The abolishment of the Fairness Doctrine has caused a consolidation that has driven editors into bottom-line thinking. Eighty percent of investigative reporters have lost their jobs over the past 15 years. They have gotten rid of foreign news bureaus and rather than covering the issues that are really impacting our day-to-day lives, they send 200 journalists to cover Michael Jackson. Also, environmental reporters have been pulled onto the beat to cover terrorism. The environment is a much larger threat to our country than any kind of terrorist.

What can college journalists do?

I don't know, but I think the best book that has been written on what's happening to journalists today is David Brock's "The Republican Noise Machine." You should read that because it's really important to be aware of what's happening today. Also, everyone should sign up on www.stopglobalwarming.org. It's a virtual march and we are trying to sign up as many marchers as possible to march on Washington, D.C.

I saw a picture of you in the Bellingham Weekly that showed you when you were young fishing in the Olympic Peninsula. Do you still do that today and where are your favorite places to go?

Yeah, I still fish. I live in the country north of New York City and I go fishing or I'm out with my hawks. I train hawks and I go hunting with them. I'll do that almost every day when I go home. So either I'm fishing or out with my hawks.

If you could step in Bush's shoes, what advice would you give him?

Oh, don't even ask that.
Michael Kammerer and Rick Shepard risked their marriages and careers to be true to the physical identities they felt inside. Matthew Anderson explores the story of two individuals who are taking massive steps to change their lifestyles and how both are using their knowledge to help others. Photos courtesy of Michele Kammerer. Design by Kelsey Parkhurst.

Sometimes when Michael Kammerer would clock out at roughly 7 a.m. after working a 24-hour shift as a fire captain at Station 62 in West Los Angeles, he’d go into the bathroom and put on a bra. He’d cover that with an androgynous T-shirt, grab his belongings and head off to nursing school.

Before he made it to the college, though, he’d finish his transformation.

“I’d drive to the parking lot, put my falsies in, do my makeup and hair,” Kammerer says. “Then I’d go to school as Michele. It was a really scary experience, because it was a real important baby step for me.”

That was back in the early ’90s, during Michele’s transition from male to female. She was taking nursing classes at a local community college so that if her coworkers forced her out of the fire department, she’d have something to fall back on.

“People think of firefighters as manly men, heroic, strong,” says Janis Walworth, Michele’s business and life partner. “It’s a bit more scandalous for a male firefighter to become a woman than for someone sitting behind a desk or waiting on people.”

Rick Shepard joined the Navy in 1965 at age 17. He spent most of ’67 and ’68 aboard a ship in the Gulf of Tonkin in Vietnam.

“The military has a big shoe fetish,” Shepard says. “You could be sinking to the bottom of the ocean, but your shoes had better be shined. One of the ways you’d buff your shoes was with spit and pantyhose. Well, I had two pair — one for them and one for me. There were a couple times when I’d pull the curtain in my bunk and put them on.”

Though Shepard didn’t begin her official transition to womanhood — to Erika — until 1998, the process had begun informally much earlier.

“I knew I was different when I was 8,” she says. “I had my first cross-dressing experience at that time. It was innocent, with a girl across the street. She said, ‘Let’s play dress up!’ I said, ‘What’s that?’ Oh, boy.”

On the playground, Shepard was expected to play football with the other boys.

“The girls would be over by the fence, giggling,” she says. “I wanted to be over there; I wanted to know what was going on. I used to go to sleep praying to wake up a woman.”

When she hit puberty and her body began to grow masculine, Shepard felt her connection to femininity slipping away.
“I was losing the grasp on something that was very dear to me,” she says.

After returning from Vietnam, Shepard got married.

“I was thinking it would all go away,” she says. “Wrong. I tried to tell the wife in our second year of marriage, but she didn’t hear it. So I cross-dressed in secret for 25 years.”

She got her master’s degree and landed a job as an explorational geologist — a ‘high-tech prospector,’ she calls it — and worked around the world in such exotic places as Norway, Australia, South America and Alaska.

“I had a beard for 17 years as a geologist,” Shepard says. “I could look in the mirror, past the beard, and see the feminine side of me. I was trying to hide it, but I knew it was there. ... I was wearing my favorite dress when I shaved my beard off. The self-loathing got so bad I was either going to off myself or do something. In July 1998, I started hormones.”

The physical transition lasted until 2002. But even today, Shepard’s transformation isn’t complete. Physically, she changed from a man to a woman. Mentally, though, she sees herself not as a woman, but as a transsexual. It’ll probably be that way forever, she says.

“It’s because of the way I look, the way I sound, the shape of my body,” she says. “As you go on this transition, you begin to be more and more at ease with yourself. You kind of reach a point where you’re OK with where you are.”

Most interesting to Shepard is the ‘why’ of transition. Why would a person do this? What does it feel like?

“Look, it’s not about sex,” she says. “I don’t have sex anymore. It’s about who I am. Being male felt like being in prison.”

Walworth and Kammerer, who were married legally in London in 1999, founded the Center for Gender Sanity in L.A. in 1997. They moved the business to Bellingham a couple of years ago, and offer consultations for businesses needing help dealing with a transvestite/cross dresser.

“Transvestite/cross dresser: Individuals who regularly or occasionally wear the clothing socially assigned to a gender not their own, but are usually comfortable with their anatomy and do not wish to change it (i.e. they are not transsexuals). “Cross-dresser” is the preferred term for men who enjoy or prefer women’s clothing and social roles. Contrary to popular belief, the most male cross-dressers identify as straight and often are married. Very few women call themselves cross-dressers.
Kammerer still was raising a family during those years. She had a wife and two children, and she waited until they had graduated from high school before beginning her transition.

“It ended my relationship with my second wife — ended it as a couple living together,” says Kammerer, who still is good friends with her former wife. “It ended on the day I transitioned. I expected it, but I had hoped that true love would win out.”

Shepard and her wife Barbara split up, too — but only briefly. Today, they’re happily together.

“One morning, we were both getting ready for work, and I heard ‘Damn!’ from her part of the house,” Shepard says. “I ran over there to see if she’d fallen or something. She said, ‘I’ve got a run in my pantyhose. Do you have a pair I can borrow?’ ”

Epiphanic moments like that have been footholds for Shepard throughout the process. They’re moments of realization, moments when Shepard gets the feeling that everything will turn out well.

Once, during an after-work dinner outing, Shepard felt another such moment.

“I looked down at my glass of white wine, and on the edge of my glass there was a lipstick mark,” she says. “My lipstick mark. There was an explosion inside of me.”

Shepard calls those experiences “moments of congruence.” Like Kammerer and most other transsexuals, Shepard went through a period where she had to live as a woman, to experience what she wanted to become.

“A few times I’d be walking past one of the windows, and I’d see my reflection,” she says. “That’d be a moment of congruence. I’d think, ‘All right, I’m doing it. I haven’t been pummeled to death or beat up.’ The core of the why is the moment of congruence.”

Kammerer made a plan to transition on June 28, 1991, on her 22nd anniversary with the fire department. By then she’d be mentally and physically prepared, she says. And her pension would be locked in place should she have to leave the department.

“I’d transition at work, be there a couple days, then take a vacation,” she says. “It was a difficult transition for my coworkers, subordinates, superiors — it’s hard for people. The fire department isn’t exactly queer- or woman-friendly. When I was transitioning, there was no Janis. There were no books. I was on my own.”

Walworth unearthed her affinity for the transitioning consultation business years ago, when she was in school getting her master’s in counseling.

“I wasn’t sure that I wanted to be a therapist,” she says. “I wasn’t comfortable with the medical model, where you assign a diagnosis to people and consider them sick.”

After meeting Kammerer, Walworth knew she wanted to help the transgender community. She decided to work with employers.

“I wanted to help (transsexuals) without charging them anything,” Walworth says. “The transition is expensive. You can’t transition if you don’t have money.”

Sexual Reassignment Surgery can cost from $3,500 to $100,000, depending on the processes undertaken, and most insurance companies won’t pay for it. In Washington state, Sexual Reassignment Surgery isn’t covered by managed care plans for public employees, according to the Washington State Health Care Authority.

Walworth’s strongest point of advice is this: transitioners must adhere to their own schedules, do things when they want to and not when someone else does.

“Until the transitioner comes out, they want to be in control of that process,” Walworth says. “They need to act in such a way to retain control of that information. If rumors start, that really gets hard to handle.”

That’s exactly what happened with Kammerer. A few people knew the situation and more people suspected it. Rumors shot through the department.

“Information about my pending transition was too hot, too juicy to keep under wraps,” Kammerer says. She says she came out of those years OK, though. And she never did become a nurse. Kammerer stayed with the fire department for another 12 years, eventually retiring in 2003 after 33 years at LAFD.

Shepard’s workplace transition — at Georgia Pacific — was similar to Kammerer’s, she says.

“Three of us were in Denver for a conference,” she says. “My coworkers got pretty drunk and started yelling at me about how stupid and selfish I was, what kind of pervert does this anyway, etc.”

Overall, those were the only coworkers who treated her poorly, Shepard says. But whether a person has few challenges or a million, the transsexual transition is a difficult one, she says.

“My wife said to me once, ‘You’re killing my husband.’ ” Shepard says. “My dramatic response: ‘I would have killed him anyway.’ When you decide to make this transition, you have to have decided what it’s worth. And the answer has to be ‘everything.’ ”
A Western student’s battle with cancer

Western senior Kathryn Barcom has spent all of her collegiate career battling Hodgkin’s Lymphoma, a cancer of the lymph nodes. An experimental stem cell transplant saved her life. Chrystal Doucette talks with Kathryn about her optimistic outlook on life. Photos courtesy of Kathryn Barcom. Design by Aaron Apple.

Editor’s note: Kathryn contributed to Klipsun’s January 2005 issue. She is also a member of the Student Publications Board, which hires employees for student publications, including Klipsun.

Until December of 1999, Western senior Kathryn Barcom barely knew what it was like to have a cold. The bubbly Kennewick High School graduate, with long locks of curly blond hair, was pursuing theater at Central Washington University. She completed only the first quarter. During finals she began experiencing a harsh cough and fever. She did not know it yet, but cancer cells were building a tumor inside her lungs.

“I had never been detrimentally ill,” says Kathryn, now 24. “The only surgery I’d had was my tonsils out when I was 10.”

She went to see two doctors during break, and both told her she had asthma. Thinking the stress of being away from home for the first time had affected her health, she finished break and tried to resume her studies in January.

Her boyfriend, Western senior Alex Clark, 25, who met Kathryn at Central, noticed her coughing during lectures, which often forced her to leave the room.

“She was always coughing,” Alex says. “A really horrific, deep cough.”

Two weeks into the quarter, Kathryn found herself fighting a fever of 106.5 degrees and seeing green spots. She visited a clinic in Ellensburg, where they took an X-ray of her chest. Doctors said it looked white. Someone from the clinic immediately drove her to the hospital. There, doctors told her she would need to stay overnight while they ran a diagnosis. Hours later, a doctor entered her room and closed the door.

“I don’t know how to tell you this, but you have cancer,” Kathryn says, repeating the doctor’s words. “We don’t know exactly what kind, but we know the mass filling your lung is a tumor.” He told her she had a straw’s width of oxygen remaining in her lung and needed to go to Seattle for treatment immediately.

Kathryn, who did not truly understand what cancer was at the time, was more concerned over finals and packing her dorm than she was over her illness.

“He just told me I have cancer and I’m gonna die, and I told him I’m in school,” she says.

Before she took an ambulance to Seattle, Kathryn called her parents and told them the news. After she hung up the phone, they also left for Seattle.

Treatment

At the University of Washington Medical Center in Seattle, Kathryn learned she had Hodgkin’s Lymphoma, a cancer of the lymph nodes. Hodgkin’s Lymphoma is one of the easiest cancers to cure in its early stages. But Kathryn’s cancer was in its latest stages, making it difficult to treat.

Dr. Julie Gralow, an associate professor of medicine at the University of Washington specializing in breast cancer, admitted Kathryn for treatment.

“She was 18 at the time and had a lot of symptoms, including fevers, weight loss and breathing difficulties,” Gralow says.

To treat the cancer, doctors decided to try the Stanford Five, a regimen consisting of five kinds of chemotherapy.

As a result of the treatment, her immune system became weak, causing her to feel constantly nauseous. She finished her weekly treatment in the Tri-Cities, and on May 2, 2000, the tumor that had once engulfed her lungs was small enough to radiate. On June 9, she began 21 cycles of daily radiation treatment.

The radiation therapy ended July 7 and Kathryn became cancer-free. Her long locks of curly hair, which had once been her prized feature, began growing back, only wavy this time. Best of all, she was in remission, which meant the doctors anticipated no cancer in the future.

Alex wanted to go on a road trip to celebrate, and they traveled to California to see relatives who had visited her in the hospital and supported her during treatment. During this time, she says, “We fell in love.”

Adjusting to life

Kathryn had been forced to leave school for six months while undergoing treatment, and when fall came, she was eager to return.

“People strongly advised against it. I didn’t want to lay around

Chemotherapy is not a cure for cancer, not even remotely,” Kathryn says. “All chemotherapy is, all it is, is a legally regulated poison.”
my house,” she says, with determination in her voice. “I didn’t want to read, watch TV, I didn’t want to do anything I did when I was ill because every sedentary activity reminded me of being sick.”

Kathryn returned to Central and auditioned for a musical. In high school, she always had the lead part, but when she auditioned this time, she found herself unable to dance. Without a role, she realized that her body was not physically ready for the challenge. More than that, her love for performing had disappeared.

Kathryn stopped going to plays and started fulfilling her undergraduate requirements, with a new path before her. During the winter of 2001, Kathryn applied for an internship at Walt Disney World in Florida. She was accepted. Her parents advised her against leaving, but her determination prevailed.

“I was concerned about what would happen if something, anything went wrong,” says Tom Barcom, her father, who lives in Kennewick.

Three options

Kathryn began the internship in March, where she worked as a train conductor. At Walt Disney World, no one knew she had had cancer. No one walked up to her, as they had at Central, to ask how she was feeling. She was living a dream. But on June 8, the day before her 21st birthday, the dream ended. She began feeling the same symptoms she felt the year before — a severe fever and weakness. She also noticed a lump on the inside of her collarbone the size of a small bead. In less than a week it had grown to the size of a pea.

Kathryn visited a hospital in Florida on her birthday. A doctor removed the swollen lymph node and tested to see if it was cancerous. It was. The doctor said any relapse made her cancer automatically fatal, as it would be in its latest stages.

For the second time, she called her parents to deliver the news. Then, she headed back to Seattle. She celebrated her birthday with family and friends, complete with a limousine her mom rented.

“People weren’t there just because it was my birthday,” Kathryn says. “They were also there because I was dying.”

When she arrived at the UW Medical Center, doctors presented her with three options. The first was to retry the same chemotherapy and radiation, although doctors were certain it would fail. The second was to make her comfortable through pain relievers and sedatives, accelerate the process and wait for the cancer to take over. The last option was a highly experimental autologous peripheral blood stem cell transplant, in which Kathryn’s own stem cells would be cloned and inserted into her body, replacing her adult cells with stem cells.

Kathryn decided to go through with the experiment, even if only to help science. Starting in June 2001, she underwent three-day cycles of high-dose chemotherapy to prepare her body for the experiment. On July 19, she checked into the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance, a collaborative outpatient treatment center that pools resources from UW Medicine, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, and The Children’s Hospital and Regional Medical Center. Seven females, including Kathryn, and six males underwent the treatment through the SCCA in 2001.

All of her inpatient treatment took place at the UW Medical Center. Her mom, father and boyfriend were at the hospital nearly day and night. Alex, who had considered quitting

Kathryn during chemotherapy with Aunt Paula at the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance in August 2001.
"I had never been detrimentally ill," Kathryn, now 24, says. "The only surgery I'd had was my tonsils out when I was 10."

School previously, did so to be with Kathryn.

"(The situation) forced me to accept reality and grow up, but also to cherish the sweet and innocent things in life," Alex says.

Two tubes led from Kathryn's chest to a blood cell separator machine. Blood went from her body into the machine, which collected the stem cells. On August 29, doctors began a process of "lethal dose" chemotherapy, the largest dose allowed in the United States, intending to drop Kathryn's immune system down to zero.

Gralow, who was not involved with Kathryn's transplant, says the risks with lethal-dose chemotherapy include infection, anemia, and bleeding.

"The doses of chemotherapy that Kathryn received prior to her autologous stem cell transfusion were indeed 'lethal,' meaning that if we didn't 'rescue' her after chemo with her previously frozen stem cells, she would not have been able to make her blood cells and would have died," Gralow says.

Kathryn's skin shed layers; she lost her taste buds, parts of her digestive tract, her eyelashes, hair and eyebrows, and her ability to salivate. Eventually, she lost the ability to speak.

"Chemotherapy is not a cure for cancer, not even remotely," Kathryn says. "All chemotherapy is, all it is, is a legally regulated poison."

Her immune system became so weak that light or sound was enough to cause pain. On Sept. 6, 2001, the stem cell transplant began.

**Rebirth**

Kathryn calls her recovery a "torturous rebirth." At first, the stem cells attacked her body, and without a way to fight the cells, her body remained helpless. All doctors could do was wait.

"It is the happiest moment and it is the most horrifying moment," Kathryn says. "Because you're in excruciating pain, and at the same time it is your second chance at life."

Kathryn's mom, Barbara Barcom, who lived in the hospital room during the stem cell transplant, says she wanted to take her daughter's place.

"I just felt like, 'Oh my gosh, I don't know what to do,' " Barbara says. "I just prayed real hard."

Kathryn's cells merged with her body, and on Sept. 26, 2001, her blood count had reached normal levels. While at the hospital, she had to learn to walk again, one step at a time. She found that eventually the worst pains disappeared. By Thanksgiving, she could return home.

She says her personality changed from that of an extroverted performer to that of an introvert. As a result of her treatment, sections of her esophageal lining are raw, and she often feels fatigue. The chemotherapy has also shortened her normal life expectancy.

"But for the amount it has shortened my life, it has lengthened my life," Kathryn says. Of the seven females who underwent the treatment at the SCCA in 2001, only five are alive today. All six males survived.

If nothing surfaces within the next two years, Kathryn will again be in remission, which will mean a 50-50 chance of getting cancer again. She looks at it with half-empty, half-full optimism. So far, no cancer cells have been detected, and she is excited for the upcoming mark of success.

She says it is important for young people fighting cancer to understand that people do survive. Her advice to others is to visualize being in good health. "If you can really picture that in your mind during the worst times, then I think it can help," Kathryn says.

Tom says he is amazed with Kathryn for overcoming her obstacles and proud of her accomplishments.

"It's almost like I think more of her than you could think of a person," he says.

When Kathryn was sick, people advised her not to attend school. Their advice only fueled her desire to finish college. Spring quarter 2005, she will graduate with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Communication, and she plans to continue on to graduate school. This summer, she will intern at music company K Records, a music company in Olympia. She also spends time making her own music.

"She was always a go-getter, but she is even more so now," Barbara says. "She has had to grow up really fast."

Someday, Kathryn says she hopes to contribute to the SCCA and other organizations that helped her and her family.

"I want to be a positive story for those that are going through something similar," Kathryn says.
Mechanic using tools to become veterinarian

Through the doors of the Bellingham Harley-Davidson motorcycle dealership, past the twisted metal and shiny chrome, through the nondescript white door and tucked into the southwest corner of the workshop, 31-year-old Ryan McIntosh turns his wrenches on other people's road warriors.

But McIntosh does not have any visible tattoos or piercings. He doesn't have long hair or a leather vest, just some black jeans and a small goatee dangling off of his chin. After spending eight years as motorcycle mechanic, McIntosh is going back to school for his bachelor's degree in hopes of one day becoming a veterinarian.

"When I was a kid I lived in the country in northern California," McIntosh says. "I would spend the afternoons shooting 'rock-chucks' in the fields."

The "rock-chucks," or marmots, McIntosh shot, he then brought home to give them to his mother for inspection, McIntosh says. After she inspected them for fleas, he would take the carcass out into the backyard and dissect the animal out of curiosity.

"I was a teenager in the country with a lot of guns and bored in no time," McIntosh says. Though he may have been a curious teen, McIntosh has kept his head level while working and going to school.

"Ryan's a worker, self-motivated," says his boss Stephen Marino, service manager for the Bellingham Harley-Davidson. "I don't want to lose him."

McIntosh says he has a lot of flexibility because anywhere he moves, he can get a job. Being able to rely on a job that pays just under $50,000 per year anywhere he wants to go allows McIntosh the freedom of being where he wants, not where he has to be.

McIntosh’s wife, Kristina, says that working on Harleys is taxing on the body though.

“(Ryan) has worked with a lot of older Harley-Davidson mechanics whose bodies are just shot,” Kristina says. “He doesn’t want to have to retire at 49 because he blew out a knee.”

McIntosh, who has not yet lived in Bellingham a year, says he is planning on finishing school in six years. Shortly after he moved to Bellingham, he says his 8-year-old Rottweiler, Buddy, had to be put to sleep. McIntosh says that confirmed his desire to become a veterinarian.

Before moving to Bellingham, McIntosh took Buddy to a vet in Spokane. The vet said Buddy had nothing wrong with him. But after the move to Bellingham, he took Buddy to another vet who informed him that Buddy had two different types of cancer.

"Part of being a vet is euthanizing animals," McIntosh says. "I was there when they put Buddy to sleep. Seeing it done and seeing how gentle the process was is what solidified my want to be a vet."

"I was there when they put Buddy to sleep. Seeing it done and seeing how gentle the process was is what solidified my want to be a vet."

-McIntosh

McIntosh lives with his wife, two cats and a Chihuahua. Though both cats and dogs live in his household, he says he is still a dog person.

"I've had some good cats, but I like dogs," McIntosh says. "You can take them camping or for walks. Cats just get annoying. They meow constantly and claw the furniture."

McIntosh may be trading wrenches for scalpels in the next few years, but it is unlikely he will abandon his bike on what appears to be his end of the highway.

"I think he will always work on Harleys," Kristina says. "He has so many biker buddies he could always have a job working for Harley."
Seduced by the bean: A caffeine addict confesses

By Kim Sklar-Fowler

Since I had my first cup of Folgers Classic Roast instant coffee six years ago, I've been a caffeine addict. I love everything about coffee.

I've heard about the side effects and the nightmares of caffeine withdrawal. So one day, I decided to see what effects my caffeine withdrawal. So one day, I decided to see what effects my drug of choice was having on me.

Roland Griffiths, Ph.D., a professor of psychiatry and neuroscience at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, says the onset of withdrawal symptoms occur within 12 to 24 hours after stopping and can last up to nine days.

I wanted to see what caused this habitual user to give up her morning cup of coffee filled one-inch from the top of the cup and capped-off with a mix of nonfat and vanilla soy milk? I realized I had a problem.

Not long ago, my roommate pulled our matching Starbucks mugs out of the cupboard to make a hot espresso drink, I realized we were out of milk.

Unhindered by our lack of dairy goods, we rushed out the door and sprinted to our neighbor's house. The only barrier between us and our afternoon latte was a locked door.

But then we saw a gleam of hope — the glare of the metallic sink shining at us through the window. Irrationally, I plunged my arm inside only to conclude that my arm was too short to lift the latch. But it was no matter.

Once the entrance was open, I quickly bounded over the window sill, into the pasta-stained sink, onto the faux-wood linoleum floor and over to the refrigerator.

Bounty in hand, I turned around and saw my roommate with her disheveled hair and manicured grin, madly clutching the spatula. All of a sudden, I realized what an absurd act of criminal behavior we had just committed for a couple of cups of milk.

This apartment siege quickly put my caffeine dependence into perspective. Had it really come to the point where I was incapable of functioning without caffeine?

The night before, my personal beverage strike turned out to be uneventful. My only symptom was fatigue. However, the Cleveland Clinic, a hospital ranked as one of the top four hospitals by the U.S. News & World Report, says withdrawal from normal caffeine usage is rare and that only those with excess use (more than 500 mg, or five cups of coffee, a day) will experience symptoms of withdrawal.

So, as a two-to-three-cup-a-day user, my caffeine habits are safe for now. I have proved to myself that I can survive without my morning java, but the truth is that I'd rather not.

Local woman reflects on gastric bypass surgery

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Local woman reflects on gastric bypass surgery

Mary Ann Skrabala has lost 70 pounds since her surgery. PHOTO BY JAMIE TRUDEL

She asks those interested, "Is it worth it to you to take that risk?"

— Jamie Trudel
Consuming wine is an experience of taste and aroma. But how are such rich flavors achieved? Evan McLean talks with commercial and private winemakers and uncorks the components of quality wine. Photos by Chris Taylor. Design by David Wray.
Randy Bonaventura examines the stocks on a row of Chasselas Dore grapes.

Randy Bonaventura has a job that makes other men jealous and drunk. He hands me a glass. Looking down I see 7,000 years of tradition swirling, waiting for me to consume it.

Bonaventura is a winemaker, and has been one for six years.

Nestled in the Nooksack Valley, Bonaventura's employer is Mount Baker Vineyards, which has been making wine for more than 30 years and was the first in the region to do so. Glancing from my burgundy drink I can see six acres of young, budding grape vines running perpendicular to Mount Baker Highway 542.

This winery is one of three in Whatcom County, among countless connoisseurs who craft the beverage in their own home. Fruit, berries and even flowers can be made into wine. Grapes are the norm, with different types creating different types of wine.

The Vineyard

Walking down a row of Chasselas Dore, Bonaventura explains that wine traditionally comes from viniferous grapes. He grows six different varieties, which make up approximately 10 percent of the winery's production.

"Four of those are Puget Sound, or early ripening grapes," he says breaking off a new shoot. "Siegerrede, Madeline Angevine and Muller Thurgau grapes are hybrids, bred for early ripening in this region."

The cooler climate in Northwest Washington produces grapes with less sugar, especially the Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris. Bonaventura says mixing these more acidic yields with the rest of the grapes trucked over from Eastern Washington gives his wine balance.

"The Vireyard that we have here produces soft, velvety wines," Randy Bonaventura says.

"In the past few years the grapes have come over ripe, meaning the sugar content is too high," he says. "The additional acid in our grapes helps make up for that and really compliments the style we have here."

He bends over to point at what looks like an organic weld in the stock of a Chasselas Dore vine. The only way to maintain a relatively uniform variety of grape is to graft its branches onto an already thriving root stock. The branch yields a certain type of fruit while the root stock influences how well it takes to different soils and bacteria.

"American root stock isn't susceptible to a vine disease which attacks the root structure," he says, standing back up and eyeing the new growths on the vine.

Scanning the rows, I can see little buds that Bonaventura tells me will bloom in late June. For the next three months he will have weather reports sent to his phone and e-mail several times daily to follow how well his grapes will ripen.

"Luckily the Nooksack Valley has a reputation for being the warm eye of the storms that pass through here," he says.

Warmth is the most essential factor in grape ripening in this region, he says. Being able to determine ripeness becomes an art.

"I do a lot by just flavor and sight to check for ripeness," he says, fondling a bunch of new buds. "Tests really don't affect the process — except mildew and bacteria."

Bonaventura refrains from using her...
biocides and occasionally sprays sulfur or flint to help combat mildew formation. As the grapes ripen, he leaves them on the vine as long as possible until eminent heavy rains threaten to overload the skin and rupture the fruit — then he harvests.

All of the grapes are picked by hand both on site and in Eastern Washington. Machine picking mashes the grapes, destroying their structure. This can give the wine a harsh, tannin flavor. Bonaventura explains that hand picking retains the grape structure so that much of the fermentation happens within the whole grape.

"The winemaking style that we have here produces soft, velvety wines," he explains while escorting me into the fermentation cellar. "We're finding people are enjoying getting into the flavors in a glass of wine other than just oak and tannins."

**The Red and the White**

Winemakers form reds and whites in ways distinct from each other. For red wines, Bonaventura fills a stainless steel tank with the fruit and yeast. Different yeast strains are used to change the juice's sugar into alcohol in different ways.

"This red mash we would let sit at about 90 degrees for about seven to 10 days for a good fermentation," he says, leaning against a silver vat.

As the mash is gradually warmed, the grapes lose their form and the juice begins to ferment, getting its red color from the peels. During this process seeds are eventually filtered out to reduce biting flavors from developing too harsh.

"I feel this gives the wine a more elegant taste, full of flavors rather than tannin bite," Bonaventura says.

After approximately a week in the tank, the wine is filtered from the peels and put into barrels. Bonaventura squeezes the peels dry for what he calls a topper wine. Later he uses it to top off barrels that have lost some wine to evaporation.

Reds are not all fermented together. Bonaventura is adamant about not only keeping specific grapes separate, but those from different areas of a vineyard as well. He says some hill slopes or specific rows generally stay warmer and give off better grapes and better wine.

"Cab Savs (Cabernet Sauvignons) and Merlots don't have as much elegance as a Pinot Noir," he says, pointing at different barrels labeled with names and years. "So when we get Pinot Noir grapes, we make sure to keep the grapes, juice, wine and even topper wine separated."

White grapes are pressed and juiced directly off the vine. Since all grape juice is white originally, the skins and seeds are removed to keep this complexion. The juice is also fermented in large vats, but at a much colder 55 degrees and for approximately 20 days.
"Making wine is like making a meal from scratch or sewing your own clothes," Afrose Ahmed says. "We're really disconnected from all the 'things' in our lives, especially the matter we put into our bodies."

"Whites take a little bit longer to ferment, and that is where you get your fruitiness," Bonaventura says. "For one unit of sugar loss the temperature rises one degree, so we need to mind the whole process."

Whites generally go straight into a bottle from the fermentation tank, while reds are stored longer in oak barrels.

The Cellar

Guiding me underground, Bonaventura explains how these barrels are kept in a cool place where some oxygenation can occur through the grain of the wood. Pinot Noir and Syrah wines complete barrel fermentation the quickest at nine to 14 months, whereas Cab Savs can take two years.

"The oak barrels soften the wine and give it the maturity of age," he says, pointing down a long, darkened row of barrels stacked four high.

The barrels cost approximately $800 and can hold roughly 59 gallons, or 23 cases of wine. New barrels can give the wine an oak flavor, while older ones tend to carry flavors from past harvests.

"The wood is neutral at about three years," Bonaventura says, pressing a fingernail into a barrel's grain. "We don't like to keep them more than five years. We usually retire them as planters in gardens."

He emphasizes that barrels should not be left empty. So the duration of aging tends to correspond with other activities at the winery. For instance, a Syrah can be bottled after nine months or 14 months because the next year's harvest falls in between.

Bonaventura appears quite pleased when he says he has to taste every barrel to find distinct tastes and qualities, "sometimes twice." The wine is classified in four tiers, ranging from a lower supermarket grade to the higher "proprietor's reserve."

The Homebrew

Next, Bonaventura fills me in. These steps taken by commercial wineries can be done on a smaller level, in a home or garage. Home wine-making kits, available at specialty stores, can be used for grapes, raspberries, or even dandelions. Yes, even that pervasive, invasive species can make a sweet mead in three to four weeks.

Western senior Afrose Ahmed learned how to make dandelion wine earlier this year. Giving me the recipe of flowers, lime, lemon and orange juice, she explains how she was compelled to learn how after she tried a friend's homebrew wine.

"Making wine is like making a meal from scratch or sewing your own clothes," she says, smiling. "We're really disconnected from all the 'things' in our lives, especially the matter we put into our bodies."

Dandelion wine does not take as much expertise as other wines. No special equipment is required and it's ready to drink in three weeks, she says. The flowers, without any green parts, are boiled with lemon, lime and orange juice. Yeast is boiled separately and then added to the juice after it is cooled and filtered.

"When you drink wine that you have made, especially when it's from mostly non-processed materials, you know everything about it," Ahmed tells me, sitting down while holding a bottle filled with a yellow-orange liquid.

She says she spent approximately $7 on the whole affair and made four bottles. She tells me there are many different ways to make dandelion wine, saying that she found several recipes online.

"It's definitely not like anything I've ever tasted before," she says while handing me a brimming short and stout port glass. "When I first had it, it smelled pretty fruity but tasted like hard alcohol, but not as harsh. This batch that I made is a little too sweet."

The process of making wine seems personal both on a commercial and individual level. A relationship develops between a winemaker and his or her brew. The craft of toying with chemical and physical reactions that yeasts have with sugar is simply amazing. Our climate doesn't stop Whatcom County residents from preparing wine, if anything, it encourages them.
Many college graduates dream of leaving school with their number one job lined up. For Western senior Michael Koenen that dream has arrived in the form of a football jersey, helmet and contract. Shannon Barney talks to Koenen about his future career in the NFL and the dedication and love that guided him there. Design by Kelsey Parkhurst. Photos by Amanda Woolley and Matthew Anderson.

After college, many students outfit in shirts and ties to begin their careers. Western senior Michael Koenen will suit up in his football uniform. He just filled out his W-4. His occupation: professional athlete. His employer: the Atlanta Falcons.

Koenen signed a two-year free agent contract with this NFL team. For the next two years he is a Falcon.

His 5-foot-11-inch, 195-pound frame has the stature of an athlete. Dirty blonde hair and a smile are present while he sits at the eatery in the Sehome Village Haggen with girlfriend, Devin Dykstra.

"I was kind of chubby in middle school. I was always athletic, but I didn't get all the praise," says the 22-year-old Koenen. "I didn't stand out because I was a little chunky."

With a bit of hesitation, Dykstra's eyes shoot across the table. "Let's define 'a little chunky' — he was fat," she says with a hint of sarcasm and a smile.

Koenen can justify.

"I love my food. My mom always said eat what you put on your plate," he reassuringly responds. "I was pretty fat, but I was always coordinated."

Sunday April 24, 2005 was a big day for Koenen. It was day two of the NFL draft. He became a free agent after not being selected in the first seven rounds.

"Literally every two to three minutes (coaches) called," says Koenen's agent, Kristine Rosendahl, after finding he had not been drafted on day two.
Rosendahl says approximately 12 NFL teams were interested, but the Falcons offered Koenen what he is most looking for — a solid chance to play.

Four days later, the once Western Viking was on a plane to Georgia to begin training as a Falcon with his new team.

"It was definitely intimidating," Koenen says about the trip. "Everyone was so big. It was definitely humbling."

The transition from college football to the professional level could be construed as challenging.

"I think he will handle it like any other player. Mikey has the confidence to put his mind to it," says Rob White, a Western teammate and friend. "I don't think mentally it will be hard for him to do."

After working with Koenen for five years, Terry Todd, Western's punting and kicking coach, expresses similar assurance.

"He has confidence in his skills, and I think it will carry through for him," Todd says. "He doesn't take his position for granted."

Rosendahl reaffirms the same thoughts about Koenen and his mental capability to handle the responsibility of being in the NFL. She says Koenen takes his role very professionally.

"He comes from such a good stock," Rosendahl says about Koenen's upbringing.

The physical move from the Northwest to the Southeast is another aspect the new NFL athlete must deal with. Despite the change, the move is exciting for him because he has lived in the Bellingham area most of his life. He heads to Georgia shortly after his finals.

After the draft concluded, there was an intense wait because Koenen had not yet been selected.

"It was so exciting to be there — it was like riding a roller coaster," White expresses with excitement. "Michael was the calmest of all of us."

Despite his calm composure, he was nervous while waiting for the call from Rosendahl.

"I was relieved because I sat there for 15 minutes without my phone ringing," Koenen says. "But it was definitely exciting."

Shortly after, he signed to the Atlanta Falcons.

Mike Koenen, Koenen's dad, says those who joined him that day had a collective sigh of relief when they found he had signed with the Falcons. Mike hoped someone would give him the opportunity, expressing that his son could prove himself once his foot is the door.

"My dad will always make fun of me because I would go home and fall asleep," Koenen says smirking. "I would always wear myself out here and then go out there and pass out."

Koenen says his dad always pushes him in life and continues to instill in him a lot of confidence.

"I can piss him off like no one else can — we butted heads more than a few times," Mike says with a chuckle. "I always pushed him."

Being athletic was natural for Koenen. "My dad told me I could kick a ball before I could walk," he says.

He made sure he was already for action in elementary school.

I have always worn sweatpants and shorts to school, because I couldn't run as well in jeans," Koenen explains. "I wanted to wear clothes that I could play basketball at a drop of a hat."

Growing up in Ferndale, Wash. and attending Ferndale High School gave him the opportunity to participate in football, soccer and basketball.

His high school accomplishments are as numerous as his college records. He was selected first team for football in 3A All-State selection as a senior. He started and lettered all three years in basketball and soccer. He was also voted all-league MVP as a senior in soccer.

He expects to graduate this spring with a general studies major.

Koenen began his career at Western with a bang. His first made punt was 54-yards, which at the time beat Western's record. He broke that record with a 73-yard punt later in his career. As a sophomore he led the nation in punting with an average of 44.9 yards. He was a first-team NCAA Division II All American punter in 2002.

Although Koenen's accomplishments are vast, his dad says there is more to him than sports.

"Michael's biggest asset is not his leg, not his football ability, it is his heart," he says. "He's a caring, good person."

After work, many employees will take off their slacks and ties, turn on the TV, and if by chance a sports channel is the pick; keep an eye out for Falcon number 9.

The Falcons offered Koenen what he is looking for: a solid chance to play.
Turning 21 is the liberation every underage student dreams about. Travis Sherer accompanied Jeff Serrill and friends for his celebration of legality. Photos by Amanda Woolley. Design by Kelsey Parkhurst.

May 8, 9:14 p.m.: "I'm not going to school tomorrow," says Western junior Jeff Serrill, slouching in the shadowy corner of the dimly lit Dos Padres Restaurant bar. He cocks his blue, Special Blend brand hat, which matches his jeans and blue polo shirt, to the side and readjusts his posture while the bartender takes the group's drink orders. In front of him is a recently polished-off pitcher, a half-empty glass of beer and a full Jack and Coke.

"So when's he going to puke?" asks Whatcom Community College student Jordan Burke.

"It's a night when you can get fucked up and don't pay for any drinks - unless you have asshole friends."

-Moses Magnus

This sort of behavior is so common during the morning - or evening — of a student's 21st birthday that it is often referred to as a rite of passage. But Western anthropology professor Kathleen Young defines a rite of passage as being associated with birth, death, marriage and graduation among other events.

Rites of passage are characterized by being separated from the rest of the culture, dressed in different clothes and undergoing a ceremony before being reincorporated into society with a new status. Young says the coming of age to acquire new rights, such as alcohol use, is not a rite of passage.

The main difference, she says, is that these are more individual celebrations, rather than cultural. A rite of passage typically dictates that a large part of the culture celebrates this event, rather than being focused on the individual.

10:05 p.m.: "I'm gonna die," Serrill declares spinning around from the bar after taking a shot of Bacardi 151. His drink total, which he keeps track of with ink slashes on his forearm, is in the double digits and he's still going strong — but about to be cut off.

"I just burnt myself with my own cigarette and struggles to regain his balance less than a foot away from the counter.

He catches the Rogue Hero bartender's attention after he burns himself on the chin with his own cigarette and struggles to regain his balance less than a foot away from the counter.
Earlier in the day, his parents took him to the Boundary Bay Brewery & Bistro for lunch and bought him a sampler, which includes six glasses of different beers.

Because the day-long festivities, such as Serrill’s, are increasing in popularity, it could be an experience characterizing a subculture.

Jennifer Lois, an assistant professor of sociology at Western, says a subculture is a small collection of people who share the same beliefs generated from the same outlet whether it’s through shared experiences or the media.

While the origin of this behavior takes many forms, such as through parents, media and friends, Lois says this could be a characteristic of the college subculture.

“Not all (rites) are like ‘go out in the woods and kill bears for three weeks and you’re a man,’” she says.

Rogue bartender Moses Magnus, 23, has a less academic observation of 21st birthdays.

“It’s one of the big birthdays. Sixteen, 18, 21,” he says. “It’s just about being young and stupid. It’s a night when you can get fucked up and you don’t have to pay for any drinks — unless you have asshole friends.”

10:25 p.m.: “Where the fuck are we?” Serrill yells while looking both surly and confused at the same time. Out of everyone in the group, his chair is directly across from an old taken down sign, which reads “Rogue Hero.”

“It’s a valid question, dumb ass,” he adds after asking the question four times and receiving only laughs in response. “If I’ve never been in a bar before, how could I possibly know what bar we’re in?”

Serrill’s speech is noticeably slurring, and he struggles to stand. Once he sits down, a bartender tells the rest of the group to refrain from giving him more alcohol for “a little while.”

“Where’s the paparazzi?” he yells, looking in my direction. This nickname started at Dos Padres, but every drink he swallows magnifies its comedic value. His mood has changed rapidly from five minutes ago, when he continually shook the hands of, hugged and professed his love to everyone he could find, including me — more than once.

Magnus says that more days than not, the bar serves at least one customer celebrating his or her 21st birthday. While a bar has to stop serving a customer when he or she appears intoxicated, Magnus says it’s difficult to estimate how many rookies drink until they puke because it all depends on how late in the evening the customer comes in.

“Usually rookies will drink too much,” he says. “And usually it’s their friends coming in and trying to fuck them up.”

Many call it a “power hour,” in which a person consumes 21 shots before closing time. The danger of alcohol poisoning caused North Dakota and Minnesota to consider legislation that would extend their drinking ages to 21 years and eight hours.

11:09 p.m.: “Happy birthday, man,” says a urinating Rogue bar patron while Serrill hunches over the toilet retching with his right hand resting against the stall keeping him on his feet — and his left hand flipping off Burke and Pearsall.

The pool is over and Burke’s guess of 11:15 edges McColoch’s of 11. Serrill lost track of the drink total 15 minutes ago when he was at 15 drinks, and some of the dashes have since smudged together.

“Are you going to drink anymore?” Pearsall asks after Serrill finishes puking.

Serrill is finished for the night. Now, with his arms over Burke and Pearsall’s shoulders, he’s able to exit the Rogue and wait for a cab. While waiting, they walk up and down State Street chanting “al-co-hol,” dragging Serrill’s feet behind them.

“Dude, what’s your address?” Burke asks when the cab approached. Serrill only looks at them in bewilderment and mutters “9-11”, so Burke runs into the bar and gets it from one of his roommates.

“I’m glad that you only get one 21st birthday,” Serrill says the next day in a scratchy voice. “The last thing I remember is taking a shot of 151 and I think that did me in.”

Nevertheless, a hung-over Serrill stumbles into his 9 a.m. class on time the next morning.
Klipsun is a Lummi word meaning “beautiful sunset.”