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Western Washington University

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Dressing the Dead
A Western senior balances school and a taxing career as an undertaker

Courage Under Water
A WWII veteran recalls his experiences on one of Hitler's last U-boats

Cheap Dates
Entertain your date with less cash and more creativity

Hometown Hauntings
Fairhaven's ghostly guests give employers a scare
Editor's note

I'm a lists person. I get a strange delight from checking little Nike signs on my daily list of "Things to do."

This issue's stories of triumph, surrender and hope inspired me to create an ongoing list — a list of things to do before I die. Learning 12 languages, solving local hunger and playing the mandolin, while extraordinary, don't occupy a spot on the list. Other topics, however, such as mystery, money, romance and religion, definitely beg a place.

My list will surely grow just as Klipsun's repertoire will. But when my time is up, those little tingles of satisfaction from the checked swooshes won't mean as much as all the moments spent in between making the lists.

I hope these stories motivate you to build your own lifelong lists, but most of all I hope something inspires an appreciation for all you gain along the way to making your marks.

Thanks for reading,

Jessica Evans
Editor in Chief

Contributing writers

KATHRYN BRENIZE is a senior journalism major and Spanish minor who would like to thank the volunteers of the gleaning project for their generosity. She would also like to thank her family, Patrick and the girls for their constant love, support and faith in her.

MICHAEL LEE would like to thank Jason Hendrickson, Sid and Trudy Hendrickson and Justin Panik for their openness and trust in his work. He would also like to thank his family and friends for supporting him.

LINDSAY HAMSIK is a senior journalism student in the public relations sequence. She would like to thank the Kelseys for helping her find her mind when she thought she had lost it while writing her article.

KADI MATHERNE would like to acknowledge Linda, Peter, Audrey and Michael for their love without condition. She encourages people to look beyond their own truths to find value in each and every perspective.

TREVOR SWEDBERG would like to thank Brooke for her patience with his relentless phone calls and for her willingness to share her story. He would also like to thank his parents and brother for teaching him how to write good.

CALEB HEERINGA is a Western senior and journalism major in the news/editorsial sequence. He would like to thank the dozens of people he met through this story, who provided him with hours upon hours of entertainment and inspiration.

ADAM RUDNICK is a senior journalism student in the news/editorsial sequence. He wants to thank his family and his girlfriend, Lindsey, for the unlimited support and patience they have given him as he stumbles toward his degree, no matter the emotional and fiscal costs.

GRETA SMOKE is a senior journalism major and communication minor. She would like to thank all of her friends who helped her investigate her spooky story, especially her roommates and boyfriend. She would also like to thank her family for their support and encouragement.
Harvest for the Hungry

Bellingham residents band together to seek out and distribute unused produce. The Small Potatoes Gleaning Project collects this produce and gives it to homeless or hungry people in the Bellingham area.

By Kathryn Brenize

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Books to Bucks

Western graduate Jason Hendrickson isn’t financially worried. His sweet salary from Microsoft provides an endless supply of Dr Peppers.

By Michael Lee

Grass Roots Grow Deep

Devoted fans and dedicated musicians keep mandolins, banjos and acoustic guitars strumming to the tunes of bluegrass.

By Caleb Heeringa

Unsettling Disturbances

A peek at historic Fairhaven — famous for supernatural activity.

By Greta Smoke

U-234 Mission: Interrupted

Bellingham resident Karl Pfaff shares a personal account of his experiences aboard a WWII German submarine.

By Lindsay Hamsik

Life and Language of a French Professor

Senegal native Fallou Njog talks about culture in a dozen languages.

By Adam Rudnick

A Circle of Outsiders

A minority of Western’s religious students connect the earth with the divine through pagan practice.

By Kadi Matherne

The Final Touch

From embalming and dressing a dead body to assisting in funeral services, a Western student’s unusual occupation takes an emotional toll.

By Trevor Swedberg
Invested Interest

If you think you can’t save for the future because you’re not making more than $50,000 a year, you’re wrong. Here are a few ways to invest when you do not have a ton of cash.

**Low risk, low reward** investment: A smart way to invest money in the short-term with little risk is in money-market investing.

“Money-market funds merge your initial deposit with other deposits and then invest in government and corporate bonds,” says financial author Andrew Tobias, in his book “The Only Investment Guide You’ll Ever Need.” “They then act as a checking account that pays a slightly higher interest rate than banks, but they are not federally insured.”

On average, if you invested $500 in a money market before you started college and let sit there for four years, you would have $563.

**Medium risk, medium reward** investment: “If you are willing to make a long term, fairly conservative investment, I would definitely recommend mutual funds,” Washington Mutual financial consultant Brian Richardson says. “I generally like to see a client have a three-year time frame with mutual funds, so that they have time to work for them.”

In a mutual fund, you invest money in a fund that a professional investment company then takes and invests in the stock market.

**Big risk, big reward** investment: “If you’re looking for an ultra-risky way to invest, you’re looking at investing in penny stocks,” says Fred Berndt, registered investment advisor for Berndt and Associates. “If you do invest in these kinds of stocks, you want to invest in more than one because for every Google stock that sky rockets, there are nine million more low-cost stocks that go belly-up.”

A penny stock company is a fairly unknown company whose stock you can purchase at a low rate. Chances are that company will either grow at a massive rate or fizzle out completely.

Use these tips as best you can, hope for some luck, and odds are you can use the money you have already earned to build your bank account.

—Dan Johnson

Delusions of Gamblers: The Toll of the Roll

A pile of poker chips towers precariously, threatening to clutter all over Western senior Seth Hutchins’ kitchen table. The atmosphere is quiet and tense in the kitchen. Only the faint sound of the microwave beeping is heard as the four players of the poker game contemplate their next moves. Huge stakes are at risk for the loser of this game. A whole week’s worth of beer will come out of somebody’s pocket by the end of the round.

“We have poker night every week,” Hutchins says. “Sometimes we bet beer, sometimes food, sometimes money. It keeps a competitive edge around the house.”

College students are notorious for misbehaving. Popular attention traditionally focuses on binge drinking, drug use and risky sexual behavior as the reigning triumvirate of dangerous habits of college students. Gambling may quickly join the list.

According to the Journal of Gambling Studies, an academic journal, prevalence rates of problem and pathological gambling in college students are among the highest of any age demographic in the American population. In 2000, the journal surveyed 184 students at a large northwestern university; 16 students had gambling problems, and six were probable pathological gamblers.

Eight of Washington state’s 80 casinos are in a 60-mile radius of Bellingham. Collectively, they total 4,286 slot machines, 125 table games, and millions of dollars in revenue each year.

Tyler Trask, 23, a former bartender at the Skagit Valley Casino in Bow, says the frequency and the amount of money college-aged patrons wagered shocked him.

“On any given night, I would watch a college kid lose $1,000, easy,” Trask says. “I would always wonder if they would stop after losing the first couple of hundred, but I think the need to win it back overpowers a person.”

According to the Gambler’s Anonymous official Web site, two million adults, or one percent of Americans, meet the criteria for a pathological gambler. Sure signs of a gambling addiction include: borrowing money to finance gambling, missing time from work or school to gamble, hesitating to use gambling money for normal expenditures, and gambling after arguments or disappointments. Like substance abuse victims, gambling addicts can follow a 12-step process toward recovery. Many, however, never make it past the first step, which is admitting to having a problem, because they are not ready to relinquish the high they get from the thrill of wagering.

—Claire Ryman
Dating at expensive restaurants is fine for a splurge, but students who do so regularly will end up subsisting on a straight diet of Top Ramen. Fortunately, creativity turns Bellingham and the Western campus into powerful aphrodisiacs.

“I’ve interviewed hundreds of young ladies and women ... what makes a date most special for them is if there’s any time, effort and thought that goes into it,” Steven Smith said over the phone. Smith is the author of “Cheap Dates: Fun, Creative and Romantic Dates That Won’t Break Your Budget.”

Men also appreciate thought, says Western senior Jerrod Gonzales, who has been in four long-term relationships.

“The fact that a girl would make the effort to set up a date would be a giant, pleasant surprise,” he says.

**FUN FOR NEW FLAMES**

“If you can relate to each other on a childhood level and get kind of silly with each other, it’s just one more thing you have in common,” Whatcom Community College student Camerly Cox says.

Bring back fond memories of that time when life consisted of building forts and flying off swing sets. Cox suggests visiting Barnes and Noble and reading each other children’s books, or packing sandwiches and finger painting the sunset at Boulevard Park.

“The best date I ever had, we just went to Seattle, to Gameworks and played video games for four hours,” Cox says. “You’re just having so much fun.”

Download your date’s favorite childhood cartoons or some old-school Nintendo games and laugh about the
cheesy animation and two-bit dialogue.

If childhood themes seem juvenile, be creative outdoors. Smith says that one time in college he hid two Diet Cokes with ice in the hollow of an oak tree and took a new date on a jog.

"My date was totally surprised and appreciated that I remembered her favorite drink," he says. "It made an ordinary jog through the park a little extraordinary."

Gonzales says one of the best ways to connect to a date is teaching each other something. Some of Gonzales' fondest memories are of teaching a past girlfriend about football and playing with her on a flag football team. She, in turn, introduced him to oldies rock.

"Even now it's something that reminds me of her," Gonzales says.

**A TWIST ON TRADITIONAL ROMANCE**

Put a creative spin on romantic themes, such as picnics or walks at sunset.

"You're trying to impress them and trying to get to know them," Western junior Greg Ward says. "So, learn something about them and use that."

Ward has insight into dating because of his psychology major and because women feel comfortable telling him about their relationships since he is gay, he says.

Ward says he has seen some of the most romantic sunsets while walking with dates through Boulevard Park. The sound of waves against sandstone is all-pervading, and you have a panoramic view of Bellingham Bay.

"I see other couples always walking around, and they just look so happy," he says.

Ward sees ample opportunity for romance indoors, as well.

"Some people underrate the idea of a picnic on your own living room floor," Ward says. "If it's too cold outside, you can lay out a blanket and some candles and cook."

Western's best-kept secret for romantic picnics is next to Parks Hall: a grassy island containing a small clearing surrounded by alder trees. After dark, six floodlights illuminate the leaves overhead. Lay down a blanket and invite your date with a love note.

"There's a thrill in knowing life isn't always planned out, especially for a romantic," Ward says.

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### QUIZ

#### What Kind of Romantic Are You, Anyway?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>1. It's your first-year anniversary. You:</strong></th>
<th><strong>7. Your partner just had a tough day on campus and a rougher day at work. To make him or her feel better:</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Go out to dinner at McDonalds, where you two had your first date.</td>
<td>a. Avoid him or her because bad moods are contagious.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Select a delicious restaurant and go during happy hour to take advantage of the appetizer and drink specials.</td>
<td>b. Give him or her a kiss and a hug and say everything will be OK.</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Make him or her breakfast in bed, complete with freshly squeezed orange juice and real maple syrup.</td>
<td>c. Start whining. If the honey ain't happy, ain't nobody happy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Be an ass and only remember the anniversary after your partner gives you a sweet, romantic card.</td>
<td>d. Make dinner tonight and light some candles. Everything seems better in candlelight.</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>2. When you are meeting with someone for a date during the week, you:</strong></th>
<th><strong>8. When preparing for a big date, you get ready by:</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Do not go out during the week—that's when some of the best parties are going on.</td>
<td>a. Pulling out the nice pants from the hamper and rinsing with mouthwash.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Go to a fancy restaurant because they are always less busy during the week.</td>
<td>b. Taking a shower and putting on some clean clothes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Microwave some popcorn, hop onto the Goodwill salvaged couch and flip on the TV.</td>
<td>c. Trying on various combinations of your clothes the night before because with all the exfoliating and moisturizing there will be no time the night of.</td>
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| d. Order in some quality pizza and watch a romantic movie such as "Garden State."

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<th><strong>3. Your idea of the perfect marriage proposal includes:</strong></th>
<th><strong>9. Your favorite romantic holiday is:</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. A tropical sunset, fruity drinks with tiny umbrellas and two chairs on a white sandy beach.</td>
<td>a. Any date you get to celebrate with your partner—the first kiss; the one-year anniversary; Tuesday...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Hearing your partner introduce you to his or her relatives as the fiancée/fiancé.</td>
<td>b. Super Bowl Sunday—sweaty men and Budweiser. Does it get any better?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Hot dogs, giant foam fingers, a huge TV screen and thousands of your best friends.</td>
<td>c. Valentine's Day because it is so festive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Candlelight, the fanciest restaurant in town and someone dropping down on one knee.</td>
<td>d. New Year's Eve because you have someone to kiss at the stroke of midnight.</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>4. The romantic movie scene that always sends your heart aflutter is:</strong></th>
<th><strong>10. You get into a huge fight with your partner. You:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. The threesome including Neve Campbell and Denise Richards in &quot;Wild Things.&quot;</td>
<td>a. Realize it was entirely your fault and make up by serving your partner's favorite dinner on the rooftop under the stars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. The alley scene in &quot;The Lady and the Tramp&quot; because you have always wanted to do the whole sharing-the-same-noodle thing.</td>
<td>b. Date his or her best friend; after all, you are on a break.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. When Robbie Hart serenades Julia with &quot;I'll even let you hold the remote control&quot; in &quot;The Wedding Singer.&quot;</td>
<td>c. Wait for your partner to apologize; you apologized last time.</td>
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| d. When Tom Hanks reaches out for Meg Ryan's hand at the end of "Sleepless in Seattle."

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<th><strong>5. The most romantic song is:</strong></th>
<th><strong>6. At the end of a first date, you:</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>b. Three little words: &quot;In Your Eyes.&quot;</td>
<td>b. Awkwardly say goodnight and then call him or her the next day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. &quot;My Heart Will Go On,&quot; even though you won't admit it to others.</td>
<td>c. Sneak out the back door of the restaurant—the date was so bad you should at least get a free dinner out of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Anything with a bumping, techno beat.</td>
<td>d. Go in for a hug and if a kiss happens, then it happens.</td>
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<th><strong>30-40 points:</strong></th>
<th><strong>22-29 points:</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>You are a nauseatingly incurable romantic. Your sense of romance is appallingly sweet. You think true intimacy is spooning in bed. You approach romance with the exuberance of a junior high schooler.</td>
<td>You approach romance with the same enthusiasm with which you approach finals. And you wonder why nobody ever returns your calls. Don't worry, though: taking this romance quiz is a good first step to getting help.</td>
</tr>
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**Klipsun**
Jason Hendrickson, 22, is one of those people who had a passion early in life and rode it to a financially successful peak. But Ferraris, jet skis, housemaids and filet mignon have not engulfed his life. Instead, he continues doing what he enjoys: programming computers.

As a software development engineer for Microsoft, Hendrickson makes more than $75,000 a year with full medical and dental benefits. Many people might think such an overnight abundance of wealth would change a person’s attitude and habits, but it hasn’t changed Hendrickson.

“I got the car and the TV, and now I don’t know what to spend money on,” Hendrickson says, as he draws lines and figures on his new laptop.

“Right now, I’m just putting it away. Oh yeah, I got this too,” he says, as he rotates the screen of a laptop.

The shining silver monitor can rotate in any direction, like Linda Blair’s head in “The Exorcist,” only more squarish and better at math. A small digital pencil that snaps into the metal sides navigates the computer.

Hendrickson’s car is a blue, 1989 Ford Mustang. It sits outside his downtown Kirkland apartment, the porch light making its light blue stripe sparkle in the dark. The car is not glamorous or even that fast. He just likes Mustangs, and this car seemed appropriate after he stopped working on his 1988 Mustang, he says.

Hendrickson says he always has been fond of cars, but his love of computers stuck with him and landed him the dream job he has today.

“If you’re interested in something on your own, not just in school, then you can get 99.9 percent of the jobs out there,” Hendrickson says, completely straight-faced and not realizing he sounds like an episode of “Reading Rainbow” from 10 years ago.

But, coming from a guy who lives in a humble, plain white-walled apartment with the same rent he paid for his even humbler place in Bellingham, it sounds genuine.

In all fairness, it should be known that in Hendrickson’s case the seeds of computer love were sown early. Very early, 1988 early.

That year, when Hendrickson was only 5 years old, his dad bought a Texas Instruments computer much different from the computers of today. With no monitor, only a chunky keyboard with a motherboard inside of it, the only way to see what the 12 kilobytes of space held was to display it on a TV screen. Hendrickson wrote his first program with the primitive machine.

“I watched him write that program, and he just sat down and he wrote

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Western alumnus Jason Hendrickson followed his passion to become a computer programmer. Michael Lee catches a glimpse of a man making more than $75,000 a year as a software development engineer for Microsoft. Photo by Michael Lee. Design by Lauren Miller.
it!" Hendrickson’s mother, Trudy, says.

The program was a game of tick-tack-toe that enabled a human player to play against the computer. He sold it, with the help of his parents, to a man impressed with the little guy’s ability.

By the time he was in the third grade, Hendrickson’s programming skills were becoming more advanced.

“My parents wouldn’t let my sister and I play Nintendo, so we built a Mario kind of game to play instead,” he says, without a twinge of neener-neener egotism or conceit. “It wasn’t as good as Mario, you know, the arms just hung at the sides. He was more like a blob that moved, but it worked.”

During his sophomore year at Newport High School, Hendrickson had an epiphany. He was learning about computer chips and realized he could adjust the chip’s microcontrollers to manipulate what it did.

“That’s where it really connected,” he says.

After his “connection,” Hendrickson’s work with computers became a steady hobby. Through his own outside-of-school projects, he got much better at his craft.

“I would go to classes and they would make me think about other things that I could do,” he says. “But it was really the things I did in my free time that got me good. You can learn about something in school and enjoy it, but you don’t really get good at it until you diverge and start your own projects outside of school.”

After being denied admission to the University of Washington because of a low grade-point average and weak admission essay, Hendrickson packed his bags for Bellingham to attend Western.

He quickly joined Western’s computer programming team, vying for a winning spot in the 2004 Association for Computing Machinery’s annual competition.


“[Jason] was the fastest programmer of all of us, so he knocked out the first couple of easier ones while we worked on the others,” says Justin Panian, Western senior and former teammate.

The team earned first place in the local competition and later took 13th out of 79 in the regional battle, beating every UW team and a University of California, Berkeley, team.

“At the local one, they gave us free pizza and soda,” Panian says. “It was awesome. I had like nine Dr Peppers.”

Hendrickson’s role in the team’s respectable placement in the competition was one of the highlights Hendrickson put on his résumé to Microsoft.

Not long after receiving his résumé, Microsoft contacted Hendrickson for a brief 20-minute phone interview.

Microsoft flew him to Sea-Tac Airport and provided him with a rental car to maneuver from his parent’s house to the interview.

Hendrickson arrived for the first of four back-to-back interviews, called a “marathon interview” because of its exhaustive nature, dressed in a pair of khakis, a T-shirt and a leather jacket. Others were dressed in slacks and dress shirts, ironed and clean.

When they asked if I would take a fifth interview, I was like, ‘oh weak.’ I just wanted some food.”

A few days later Microsoft called and offered him a full-time position.

Today, Hendrickson works on the diagnosis team, improving the troubleshooting function for the upcoming Windows Vista operating system. His salary will allow him to get his master’s degree without scholarships or loans, and he will stay financially stable for a while if he chooses not to go back to Microsoft. His job at Microsoft represents, at the very least, a jumping-off point for Hendrickson’s blooming career in computers.

Although the job landed in his hands, none of it happened overnight. These opportunities came after a lifetime filled with dedication through passion; hard work spawned from curiosity. Hendrickson is adamant about the importance of interest in a subject and the rewards one can reap if they pursue that interest.

“And, he’s good to his mother,” Trudy Hendrickson says.

Oh yeah, that can’t hurt either.
Bluegrass music is deeply rooted in Southern traditions, but its following extends to Whatcom County. Caleb Heeringa speaks with local musicians about the passion and heartache behind creating this truly American music. Photos by Caleb Heeringa and Kathryn Brenize. Design by Elana Bean.

With a coy smile and all the sincerity he can muster, 72-year-old Ernest Queen sings a song that has been sung hundreds of times before. But Ernest and other bluegrass musicians and bluegrass fans in the Bellingham area would not have it any other way — an old song is like an old friend.

Rooted deep in the stories and traditions of the people of the Appalachian Mountains, bluegrass is more than music — it is a cultural artifact of an older time in America. Its lyrics recall the stories and lifestyles of the families and communities that have passed it down many generations. Although Bellingham is miles and years departed from the origins of the music, a small but devoted group of fans and musicians are keeping the music and traditions alive in the area.

Queen is the founding member of the local bluegrass band Queen’s Bluegrass and has run a monthly bluegrass jam at Cascade Middle School in Sedro-Woolley since 1983. Open to beginning bluegrass musicians and established bands, the jam meets the first Sunday of the month, from 1 to 5 in the afternoon Queen says he and five of his friends created the jam to entertain the veteran pickers in the area, and to introduce younger people to the joys of bluegrass music.

“It gives them an opportunity to see if they like it,” Queen says with his thick North Carolinian drawl. “If you come to jam with us, we’ll jam with you — don’t matter how good you are. We’ll teach you.”

Musicians such as Bill Monroe, Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs are credited with starting, in the 1940s, what is now known as bluegrass music. Their friends and families throughout the southern Appalachian Mountains had been playing the music for years before that.

To the untrained ear, bluegrass can sound like country music. Though they come from the same musical roots, bluegrass bands’ unique instrumentation sets them apart: acoustic guitar, fiddle, banjo, mandolin and upright bass. A fast tempo and multiple-part harmonies also differentiate bluegrass from country, folk and other “roots” music.

Despite the speed and complexity of some of the melodic lines in bluegrass music, most amateur musicians at least can follow along with the simple chord progressions that many of the songs follow.

“If you know three chords on guitar, you can play most bluegrass songs,” says Sharon Bennett, who emcees Sedro-Woolley jams. “That is how I started out playing.”

Bennett doesn’t play guitar anymore because of arthritis in her hands, but she has stayed connected to the local bluegrass scene and has raised her children on the music.

“Ten and a half years old is a good age to start them at because the extra energy that you’d normally give them Ritalin to stop — you can channel that into an instrument,” Bennett says.

Eleven-year-old Carly Stewart of Mount Vernon is right on schedule. Carly picked up her father’s mandolin a year ago and shared the stage with Queen’s Bluegrass at this summer’s Darrington Bluegrass Festival, which draws 5,000 people every year.

“When I opened the door and stepped onto the stage, the crowd all went ‘Awwww,’” Carly recalls.

The Stewart family met Queen at the Sedro-Woolley jams. To them, the sense of community among the bluegrass crowds was part of what made the experience so important.

“People just really opened up to Carly once they heard her,” Carly’s father, Ken Stewart says. “Ernie was really excited that someone so young was playing.”

Queen was born and raised on bluegrass music on his family’s farm in Sylva, N.C., near the Smokey Mountains. Most of his family played an instrument and got him started playing at a young age.

“I remember being 4 or 5 years old and waiting for my grandpa to come in from the fields,” Queen recalls. “He was never too tired that he wouldn’t play me a tune, and I would just sit there and watch him.”

As a young man, he moved to Lyman, just east of Sedro-Woolley, in 1955, looking for a job in the logging business. At the time, a worker
could make twice as much doing logging in Washington as they could in North Carolina, Queen says.

"Some people say that in order to get that lonesome sound, it has to be born into you," Queen says. "When you listen to the songs, you can understand where they are coming from because you’ve lived it."

Jordan Francisco, 49, grew up in Everson, learning the staples of bluegrass music as a teenager from some of the Appalachian natives who migrated to the area in the early part of the century. Francisco now plays in various bluegrass-themed bands around the area, including the Bucklebusters, who have a weekly gig at Boundary Bay Brewery and Bistro. He gives banjo lessons and repairs instruments from his home in Bellingham.

From his shop, a small extension to his house stuffed full of dozens of string instruments in various states of disrepair, Francisco shares drinks and banjo licks with Barry Mullen, 59, who has been taking banjo lessons from Francisco for a year and a half.

"This guy is the best banjo player from here to Seattle," Mullen says. "You’re talking to one of the best bluegrass people in town."

"That’s because everyone else is dead," Francisco replies. Francisco deflects any compliments that come his way to the bluegrass veterans he has played with and learned from over the years.

"I’ve been humbled by many, many musicians," he says. "You cannot, no matter how gifted you are, become great unless you play with others. You have to have the opportunity to play with people that are better than you. Playing with others helps you develop a sense of timing that you could not get otherwise."

Bluegrass music has seen a revival in recent years, with the 2000 release of the bluegrass-themed soundtrack to the film “O Brother,Where Art Thou?” going multiplatinum, and bands such as Nickel Creek and Allison Krauss and Union Station blurring the line between bluegrass and contemporary country music.

"'I Am A Man Of Constant Sorrow' is our number-one most requested song, even though we’ve never played it,” says Orin Dubrow, bassist for local bluegrass band Feed And Seed.

“It’s like 'Freebird' for bluegrass music,” adds banjo player Mark Blum-Anderson.

While bluegrass music has enjoyed a modest amount of commercial and crossover success in recent years, many veterans of the bluegrass scene have been uneasy about what they see as a potential “watering down” of their music — much like what has happened to country music in recent years.

“If you look at what happened to country music, it’s just pop music with a little bit of pedal steel and a cowboy hat,” says Dave Maguire, Feed And Seed’s mandolin player.

“Country music was originally real honest music, but they haven’t had a chance to screw with bluegrass yet,” adds Jess Duey, lead singer and guitarist.

Part of the fear of widespread success comes from the tight-knit community that surrounds the music. Bluegrass music has never had the advantage of prolonged commercial success, so the only way it has stayed alive through the years was through the friends and families who played and listened to the music — in living rooms, back porches and community centers throughout rural America.

“A lot of bluegrass musicians have a lot of respect for the people who come to the shows because they saw it grow from nothing into something," Bennett says. "That’s why people like to see it stay small. We want [the musicians] to make a living, but we want it to stay quaint."

To many traditionalists, using any electric instruments or drums is a cardinal sin against bluegrass music. At bluegrass festivals and in most live settings, band members generally play around a single microphone, getting closer when it is their turn to take a solo or sing.

“How many bluegrass musicians does it take to screw in a light-bulb,” jokes Mark Blum-Anderson from Feed And Seed. “None. None of them will get near a light bulb because it involves electricity.”

Francisco says although he appreciates the music’s roots, he doesn’t limit himself to the preconceived way of playing bluegrass music that many of the traditionalists do. To Francisco, playing music is more of a personal experience that should not be limited by others’ expectations.

“There’s people who say ‘Earl Scruggs did this,’ Francisco says. "And, there are a lot of people who will say 'You’re not doing it right because you’re not doing it like that.' Well how did [Scruggs] learn that? He learned that by playing right out of his heart. That is how all the bluegrass experts learned how to do the stuff they are considered experts on — they pulled it right out of their hearts."

The Barbed Wire Cutters have been one of the more popular bluegrass bands based in the Bellingham area. Korby Lenker, who has since had some success as a solo act opening for artists such as Amy Grant and Keith Urban, formed the band after seeing local

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**Bluegrass for Beginners**

1) **Nitty Gritty Dirt Band**
   - Will The Circle Be Unbroken

2) **Earl Scruggs & Lester Flatt**
   - Foggy Mountain Banjo

3) **Anything by Bill Monroe before the 1970s**

4) **Steve Earle & Del McCoury**
   - The Mountain

5) **Ricky Skaggs**
   - Ancient Tunes

6) **Tony Rice**
   - Plays & Sings Bluegrass,

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"[Bluegrass] wasn’t about getting famous or getting laid. It wasn’t flashy; it was honest. It was just cool songs."

**Korby Lenker**
Ken Stewart and his daughter Carly play bluegrass music on their family property in Mount Vernon. Carly plays the mandolin and sings, while her father plays the guitar. PHOTO BY KATHRYN BRENIZE

picker Bruce Shaw perform at the 3B Tavern in 1999.

“What I liked about bluegrass music, through my eyes then, was the absence of bullshit,” Lenker says. “It wasn’t about getting famous or getting laid. It wasn’t flashy. It was honest. It was just cool songs.”

Lenker’s recent material has shied away from the bluegrass mold of his earlier work. Though he still plays the occasional show with the Barbed Wire Cutters and David Goliath, an old time gospel music side project, Lenker says he feels differently than he used to about the bluegrass scene.

“Having done it now for five or six years. I’ve come to the conclusion that there is plenty of bullshit in it, just like there is everywhere,” Lenker says. “The petty allegiances, the elbowing to get good spots at festivals, the egos, the people that think they are God’s gift to the world — those people exist in bluegrass just like in every other music business.”

Lenker says that despite his recent success outside of bluegrass, the music itself is something he always will cherish.

“I’m really glad I stumbled upon it in my formative years,” Lenker says. “Even though I’m not actively pursuing a career in bluegrass music, I feel like I’ll be playing it the rest of my life, and I’m glad for that.”

At 72, Queen says he cannot think of anything he would rather be doing than sharing the music he loves so much with other people.

“If it is a love, you don’t want it to die out,” Queen says. “One of these days we won’t be here, and without the younger people, it will die out, like other old things.”

The songs you guys play now — are those the traditional songs that your grandparents and parents used to play?

Yeah, they used to play some of those same songs. A long time ago, when I was real small, Bill Monroe, he started the bluegrass thing when I was, I don’t know 8 or 10 years old. He started calling it “bluegrass music”; it was actually just “mountain music.” The Carter Family, they did that, with auto harp and guitar, no banjo, I don’t think. They wrote that song “Will the Circle Be Unbroken,” which was later done by the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band. Songs like that, they did them and they just called it “mountain” or “folk” music.

That’s still important to traditional bluegrass music, that the harmony is there?

If you got five or six people in the band, there’ll be four of them singing — sometimes even five. They just put in wherever or whatever they can sing, and it turns out good. To me, you can’t have any better music — you got your fiddle and your banjo and your guitar. That’s the thing about bluegrass music, it’s not like country, you can’t cover it up, you gotta be right on. I’ve heard a lot of different music and a lot of different things — but to be true bluegrass, it’s gotta be played like it’s always been played — with those instruments.

Isn’t it just funny how all of a sudden it’s a huge thing?

Yeah, just to me, if I hear a song and I like that song and I get it going around in my head, I gotta learn it. True bluegrass, it’s been around for years and years — other things have come and gone.

So you guys in Queen’s Bluegrass, do you write any of your own stuff sometimes too?

I’ve written a few songs, but I never write them down. When I was doing dairy, sometimes when I’m out there milking the cows, I made lots of songs, but I didn’t have time to write them down. But a lot of times, in bluegrass, a lot of things have been written about anyways. They do come up with new ones all the time, but a true bluegrass song, I think most of them have already been wrote. About love stories and romance... A lot of it’s just about been done.
“It was like the ghosts were saying, ‘Oh yes, we are here!’”
Unsettling Disturbances

Stories of a Haunted Fairhaven

For decades, believers and doubters have witnessed paranormal activity in Fairhaven. By day, Greta Smoke investigates these eerie experiences and ghost stories. By night, Chris Taylor photographs the historical district of Bellingham. Design by Lauren Miller.

Jacci Crandall, owner of Jacci’s Fish and Chips in Fairhaven, says she caught a glimpse of a reflection of a young woman with brown hair and a pink shirt standing behind her in a restroom mirror. Crandall turned to hold the door for the woman, but to her surprise, no one was there.

Crandall says this terrifying experience happened five years ago in the American National Bank building across the street from her restaurant. She believes the reflection she saw in the mirror was one of a ghost.

The Fairhaven district in Bellingham has a history of ghost sightings and strange occurrences that sometimes are passed off as urban myths by skeptics of the paranormal. But, many locals — like Crandall — testify of ghost activity in Fairhaven.

Stranger on the bus

One of Fairhaven’s spirits often haunts Jacci’s Fish and Chips, located in a 57-year-old double-decker bus. Since Crandall opened her restaurant six years ago, odd noises have continued to occur in the morning.

She heard the metal door to the bus open and slam shut before the sound of footsteps made their way up the stairs to the second floor, getting louder as they neared her.

The first time this happened, a nervous Crandall yelled out “Hello,” but received no response. At least, not in human form.

“I’d hear clunk, clunk, clunk and the door would slam,” Crandall says. “I was so freaked out, but pretty soon, I just ignored it.”

Lurking in the dark

Just up the block from Jacci’s is the site of an old brothel dating back to 1929; now the home of Dos Padres Restaurant.

Debbie Hollingsworth, a Dos Padres waitress, says she has witnessed too much to deny the existence of ghosts. Since working there, Hollingsworth has seen and heard of numerous supernatural acts — from water faucets turning on high blast to the safe turning and locking by itself.

Her most recent ghost encounter happened this past Fourth of July as she was closing the restaurant.

She entered the dining room and saw a translucent, black figure of a man standing in front of the salad bar. The ghastly figure disappeared before her eyes, but left her alarmed and shaken, she says.

Hollingsworth often senses she is not alone.

“It’s the feeling like somebody’s touching you, but no one’s there,” she explains.

One evening a customer who claimed to be psychic asked Hollingsworth if she believed in ghosts. She replied, “Yes,” and explained the suspicious activity at Dos Padres. The customer then told Hollingsworth a spirit was following her as she worked.

“I teared up right away because it confirmed my worst fear,” Hollingsworth says.
"I teared up right away because it confirmed my worst fear."

**Spirits of Sycamore Square**

Not everyone in Fairhaven believes in the supernatural. April McAllister, building manager of Sycamore Square on Harris Street, says she doubts the existence of ghosts. She does, however, recognize the peculiar occurrences she has witnessed during her six years at Sycamore Square.

"I'm always hearing noises like people are working in the back office, but no one is there," McAllister says.

One day several people at work asked McAllister if the ghosts had been acting up; she replied they had not. When she went back to her office, she was stunned to see her chair across the room.

"It was like the ghosts were saying, 'Oh yes, we are here!,'" McAllister says.

Earlier this year, the Washington State Ghost Society did an investigation of the building and found evidence suggesting the presence of ghosts. The investigative team found sharp changes in temperature, heard electronic devices — which sounded like microwave timers and a fax machine — going off by themselves throughout the empty building, and recorded supernatural sounds on a tape.

Two members of the team searched the building but heard nothing. The special electronic voice phenomena recorder, though, told a different story. It had captured on tape the eerie sounds of a howl and a woman's voice singing.

**A Daunting Past**

Anna Williams, employee at The Fairhaven Pub and Martini Bar, says she believes rebellious spirits of people who populated the district in the early 1900s haunt Fairhaven.

"It was wild and wicked here — it was all the no-nos," Williams says.

Tami Dunn Gorman, owner of Gorman Publicity and co-founder of the Colophon Café and Doggie Diner, also believes the ghosts are a part of Fairhaven's unruly past.

"Fairhaven, at the turn of the century, was extremely energetic," Gorman says. "When you have a place where a lot of people have lived and died, there's a lot of energy."

Some of this energy could reside in the pub and martini bar. Williams says the ghost of a woman haunts the building, and although she has never seen her, she can sense her.

"We wouldn't be surprised if the ghost was one of the madames who used to work here," Williams says. "She just didn't want to give up all the fun."

The spirits that might have haunted the former Doggie Diner, now Mannino's Italian Restaurant, did not have as much fun as those up the street at the pub and martini bar.

The diner was originally the site of Benton's Bath Parlor and Tonsorial Palace, where people went to get their tonsils removed. Many Doggie Diner employees complained of hearing babies crying upstairs, Gorman says. She imagines children died while having their tonsils removed, and now their spirits haunt the building.

Although the disturbances were unsettling, Gorman says she is at peace with the presence of ghosts. She accepts them as a unique part of the old buildings in Fairhaven.

"If you work in Fairhaven, you just kind of get used to it," Gorman says. "It comes with any Fairhaven building. You've got your lights, your heat and your ghost."
When Renee Devan first walked down the echoing hallway leading to the Rainbow Center, she was a 42-year-old homeless woman with a sixth-grade education. Devan’s long brown hair and silver earrings frame her weathered, smiling face. A rough edge to her voice tells of a hard life as she speaks about her bright future.

For most of her life, Devan suffered from bipolar disease and dissociative disorder without an official diagnosis. She says her struggle with mental illness made daily functioning nearly impossible.

“I was always hiding in closets and under beds,” Devan says. “I just couldn’t relate to society.”

Two years after first walking into the Rainbow Center, Devan is a state-certified counselor and has held a steady job for a year. She is an advocate for her peers and travels to Olympia on occasion to lobby for the homeless and mentally ill.

Devan attributes her recovery and success to the center because it gave her the opportunity to get help from people who also suffered from mental illness — people who knew what she was going through.

“They made me realize I could become a functioning person,” Devan says. “The people there had been through the same experiences I had, and they were functioning.”

The Rainbow Center provides access to necessities such as food and showers. It also helps members obtain clothing and housing. The center’s facilities are not unusual or exceptional. What makes the center work is its peer-to-peer support and counseling policies.

“The people there can walk you through it because they have been through it,” Devan says. “That’s not something I found anywhere else.”

Statuesque but soft-spoken, Lyle Stork exudes an empathetic and fatherly air. He has been the Rainbow Center’s proud director for eight years.

“There is just something unique about people who have mental-health issues working with people who have mental-health issues,” Stork says.

The nondescript brick building on Champion Street, with industrial green doors, hardly deserves a second glance. The façade is deceiving. Inside, the bustle and noise of a vivid community echo off flyer-littered walls.

Unconventional Treatment: Inside the Rainbow Center

The Rainbow Center is an offshoot of the county’s Whatcom Counseling and Psychiatric Clinic. Anyone 18 years old or older who has a mental illness can become a member. Of the 300 active members, approximately 35 percent are homeless.

“Some people use it as a jumping off point, and some people just can’t yet,” Devan says. “But, they still have this community to come to when they need it.”

Helen Lofton is a slight, friendly woman. Classically trained as a French chef, she prepares breakfast and lunch for approximately 85 members each day. She is one of only four paid employees at the center and was once a member herself.

“I get to do something I’m really passionate about,” Lofton says. “It’s all about feeding the people.”

Members contribute to the center’s daily maintenance and operation. The center does not require members to volunteer, but people who come to benefit from the welcoming community often stay and become volunteers.

“We couldn’t do this without the members stepping in and doing the work they do,” Stork says.

The center operates on a $245,000 annual budget. United Way and the County Mental Health Advisory provide the bulk of funding for the center. Private monetary donations also are built into the budget.

The Rainbow Center is much more than a place to get out of the rain and get a wholesome meal. To its members, the center is a home away from home.

“It’s my family,” Devan says. “It has changed my life.”

— Crystal Oberholtzer
A crisp breeze blows a light fog through a farm in Everson as migrant workers finish spraying off the crates that held vegetables earlier in the day. The produce is now sorted, packaged and ready to be sold.

A 1999 biodiesel-powered Volkswagen pulls up alongside the barn and comes to an abrupt halt. A slim woman with short, wavy hair jumps out of the car curiously scanning the leftover crates scattered with lonely carrots and overlooked cauliflower.

Mary Jo Iverson, otherwise known as Tutu, approaches with a smile. Lines appear where many smiles have once formed.

“Nice to meet you. I’m Tutu. It’s Hawaiian for grandmother, but that’s another story,” she says with a firm handshake.

Wasting no time, Tutu grabs a pair of gloves from the back of her car and marches toward the vegetable bins.

“Well, let’s see what we’ve got today,” she says energetically.

Tutu, a volunteer and coordinator for the Small Potatoes Gleaning Project, has been gleaning fields for five seasons. The project provides the nine Whatcom County food banks and seven shelters with surplus produce from farms and gardens in Whatcom County. Most people have never heard of the term “gleaning,” but for Tutu, it has become as routine as breathing and crazy driving.

CLOSE TO HOME More than 11 years ago, Rio Thomas, an Everson resident and avid gardener, was home-schooling her two children and teaching them about hunger issues throughout the world. They started volunteering at the Everson Food Bank with Thomas and realized hunger was not far from home.

“My children saw that there weren’t just hungry people in Africa, but right here, a few miles away from home,” Thomas says, brushing back a piece of her curly hair that fell from her braided hair.

Thomas saw the excess food that farmers could not market as an incredible resource for the food bank’s lack of produce. She started talking to other home-schooling parents and farmers in Everson about taking leftover produce to food banks and shelters in the area.

The idea caught on. Six years ago, Thomas formally started the Small Potatoes Gleaning Project.

Thomas carries an enthusiasm in her tone, and her eyes light up as she remembers the early days of the project. Her humble personality, visible through her sincere caring for the project and the people she helps, invites conversation as she talks about the project’s challenges.

“In this low-income world the most readily available food is cheap, processed, refined and low in nutrition,” Thomas says. “And, food banks don’t have the ability to store fresh produce.”

The gleaners work with more than 12 organic farms in Whatcom County. They gather any excess produce farms are unable to sell. This provides wholesome meals for the hungry people in the community, and it alleviates the farmers with worries of how to rid their fields of unused vegetables.

“They really can’t sell small potatoes or crooked carrots,” Thomas says, explaining the origin of the project name. “The vegetables just aren’t marketable.”

Thomas says many of the vegetables look funny, but that is not a reason to waste them.

Pete Dykstra, an Everson farmer, has more than 20 acres of fresh market vegetables, from carrots to sweet corn. For the past three years, the Small Potatoes Gleaners have been visiting his farm. Talia Johnson, 9, gathers leftover produce at Cornerstone Farm in Everson.
three times a week. Dykstra says he is glad he can help contribute to the greater good.

"Having the gleaners come just seems to make sense," Dykstra says. "If something is going to go to waste, why not give it to someone who needs it?"

Gretchen Hoyt, owner of Alm Hill Gardens in Everson, says she was grateful when Thomas contacted her about the gleaning project.

"There is a lot of imperfect produce I can't sell," Hoyt says. "Nature isn't perfect, but as a grower, I hate to throw away produce that has taken months of preparation."

Thomas and Hoyt created an innovative system that allows gleaners to come and pick up produce twice a week from the farm. Hoyt says knowing her produce is not being wasted feeds her emotionally and spiritually.

LEAN AND GLEAN

"Well, I think we're done," Tutu concludes, scrounging through a bin of cauliflower leaves.

"No, there could still be some more cauliflower heads in here," project volunteer Barbara Montoya says.

"Well, maybe only three more heads!" Tutu says, her voice louder and stronger than her fellow gleaner.

"Three more heads feeds three more people," Montoya says.

The Small Potatoes Gleaning Project has more than 100 volunteers on its list at any given time throughout the various harvesting seasons, with a core group of 20 to 30 who glean regularly. Starting in May, with the peak season from August through October, the gleaners take any kind of produce available.

"We glean anything in season," Tutu says, driving back from Dykstra's farm.

Tutu explains the unique relationship between the gleaners and the community as she speeds past the Immanuel Lutheran Church off the Mount Baker Highway. The church, which grows vegetables for the local food bank, offers part of its cooler to the gleaners to store produce. Another farmer in the area extended the partnership by allowing the gleaners to use part of his cooler for produce as well.

"We utilize anything we can," Tutu continues. "We have a great networking system."

As Tutu rattles off information about the gleaning project, she suddenly realizes she has missed her turn.

LOVE FOR FOOD, PERFECT OR NOT

Thomas has a passion for gardening and a lifetime love for food and nutrition.

"When I was a little girl, I was never a picky eater, and my mother never had to tell me to eat my vegetables," Thomas says.

Thomas knows that today, however, most grocery stores market food that is close to perfect. Because of this desire for perfection and the cost of living, many people are experiencing tighter food budgets and food banks are noticing longer lines.

Gleaning is not totally fixing the hunger problem at food banks in Whatcom County, Thomas explains.

"I'm always struggling between access to providing this great food and looking at the root of the problem," she says, sighing.

She realizes her 40-hour work weeks spent collecting food in the fields will not completely solve the hunger issue in the community.

Mike Cohen, executive director at the Bellingham Food Bank, receives at least one delivery of produce a week from the gleaners. Monday through Friday the food bank collects between 1 and 2 tons of food from local grocery stores, but much of the goods consist of expired imported produce or non-perishable items with low nutritional value.

"There is no comparison in terms of the quality of food that the Small Potatoes Gleaning Project brings into the food bank," Cohen says. "Often, it is food that has been picked that morning."

As Cohen watches hunger rates rise in Washington and through-
Third graders at Whatcom Hills Waldorf School (above, left to right) Alden Roberts, 8, Spencer Marshall-Rodenberg, 8, and Colin Bigelow, 9, helped the Small Potatoes Gleaning Project at the Cornerstone Farm in Everson. Rio Thomas, project coordinator, (right) picks Jonagold apples from trees at Quiet Springs Orchard in Ferndale.

My children saw that there weren’t just hungry people in Africa, but right here.

RIO THOMAS, PROJECT FOUNDER

out the nation, he sees an increase of food requests at the food bank. Between 6,000 to 6,500 households visit the food bank each month, with half of the recipients having an employed household member. Cohen is thankful to have a program that not only provides nutritious food, but also takes action to improving the community’s hunger problems.

“They do a lot more than bring in food,” Cohen says. “They connect people to hunger and a food sustainability idea.”

LEARNING LESSONS Mike Haley, a third-grade teacher at Whatcom Hills Waldorf School, feels educating youth about hunger issues is important. The school has a farming section as part of the curriculum for third grade. They learn about agriculture and farming, and students experience hands-on service by helping the Small Potatoes Gleaning Project.

At the Cornerstone Farm in Everson, children race one another out to the field. A handful of the boys would rather dive into the cornstalks than put the corn in their buckets.

“Come on guys,” Haley says sternly, although amused by the game unfolding before him. “Let’s see who can get the most corn in their bucket in the next five minutes.”

The boys, immediately distracted from their existing activity, charge off into a different direction of the field, leaving Haley to pick up their forgotten bucket of corn.

Thomas knows the importance of incorporating everyone in the project, and invites elementary school groups and Western students to help glean fields. What started as a simple educational undertaking, she says, has developed into a community wide grassroots project.

During the peak season, starting in August, Thomas would hear her phone ringing at 7 a.m., and it would not stop until the evening. She would receive calls from volunteers, farmers, shelters and food banks. Eventually, one of the volunteers offered to start a branch of the project, focusing on urban gleaning. The branch project, titled Home Urban Garden Surplus, sends gleaners out to gardens or small, private orchards in the area who are unable to use all of the produce and would otherwise let it go to waste.

Thomas pauses for a moment, adjusting her fleece sweater, then begins to chuckle, remembering all the sayings and jokes her children and other volunteers have created throughout the years.

“Mom, just say no to vegetables!” her son would say jokingly.

Even through hectic times, Thomas and fellow gleaners passionately work to provide nutritious produce for people in need, and they educate the community on finding a solution for hunger.

“I was telling someone just the other day that gleaning out in the field is just a place of sanity in this crazy world,” Thomas says. “When you’re out there, everything is all right. It’s a sweet place in the chaos of our daily lives.”

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A Bellingham man shares his WWII experiences aboard one of Adolf Hitler’s last U-boats — a submarine speculated to have carried the uranium that was to be the catalyst for a German nuclear bomb. Story and photos by Lindsay Hamsik. Design by Elana Bean.

The dense night acted like a shroud, veiling and protecting 1st Lt. Karl Pfaff’s boat from discovery as it left a shallow harbor in the Baltic Sea more than 50 years ago. Pfaff was an officer on U-234, a German submarine embarking upon a clandestine mission to salvage World War II in the South Pacific.

On March 25, 1945, U-234 sailed from Kiel, Germany, carrying more than sailors. The sub set sail for Tokyo, Japan, to deliver uranium ore, plans to construct a bomb, engineers and a jet rocket ready for assembly. Hitler hoped to collaborate with Japan to create an atomic bomb, says Pfaff, 82.

Aboard U-234, one light suspended the infinite darkness of the interior cabin. At maximum depths of 800 feet, light and warmth were limited, and to conserve power Pfaff and his crewmates maintained speaking and movement to a strict minimum. While off duty, Pfaff confined himself to his bunk, attempted to sleep and struggled to keep warm. The temperature of the interior cabin fell to almost the same degree as the frigid North Atlantic waters — the average temperature is between 40 and 45 degrees.

U-234’s orders were explicit — travel underwater, shielded from the bird’s eye view of Allied bombers. Avoid confrontation.

“When you are underwater, you don’t see anything,” Pfaff says, his voice teetering on an uncontrollable pitch. “And suddenly bang, then bang.”

The crew of U-234 knew then that Allied pilots were bombing nearby, Pfaff says.

“Where are they now? Are they there above you?” Pfaff’s expression contorts with frantic memories of his attackers. “You don’t know. It’s a matter of creating fear.”

The German navy was a volunteer service and the least political wing of the German forces during WWII. Pfaff advanced in rank from ensign to lieutenant. He specialized in navigation. Long months at sea were often arduous and grueling tasks for Pfaff and his fellow sailors, he says.

“It was the highest class of service, discipline and self-discipline that you could imagine,” he says of the navy. “Not like the army.”

Pfaff served tours of duty on U-465 and U-757 before his commission on U-234. After four years on submarines in the Atlantic, Pfaff is a true survivor, Truschel says.

The Allies sank U-757 only two months after Pfaff left to pursue his position on U-234. All hands lost.

During WWII, the German navy experienced two significant periods called the “happy times.” In 1940, Germany conquered France and obtained control of French ports on the Atlantic seaboard. In 1942, German subs sank 1,160 British, Canadian and American merchant ships, Truschel says.

In 1943, however, the tide of the war changed after British and U.S. forces began using sonar to target and track German U-boats, Truschel says.

Long before reaching Japan, U-234 received a message from the German High Command.

“We were in the Atlantic on our way to Japan and the war was over,” Pfaff says. “Hitler had committed suicide.”

In the Kriegs Marine — the German navy — tradition dictates that the captain make all the decisions regarding the boat and her crew, Truschel says.

On May 14, 1945, World War II ended for U-234 and her faithful crew when Captain Fehler decided to surrender to American forces.

Tradition dictated another occurrence hours before U-234 surrendered to U.S. forces. Shoji
Genzo and Tomonaga Hideo, two high-ranking Japanese naval officers traveling as passengers on U-234, took their lives rather than fall into enemy hands, Pfaff says.

Ritual suicide was not an uncommon practice for Japanese soldiers, and Allies took few Japanese prisoners during the war, Truschel says.

After the Japanese men took Luminol, a powerful barbiturate, U-234's crew buried them at sea with full military honors hours before the interception.

"When they were dead, we put them in the typical way you bury someone at sea," Pfaff says in an almost inaudible voice. "You wrap them in a sheet, and you close it."

His voice turns sour with the sound of resentment as he remembers American sailors boarding U-234. They were angry the crew did not save the bodies of the two Japanese officers and instead demanded to know why they were buried at sea, Pfaff says.

"You see, that's not the thing," Pfaff says, motioning to his chest and putting his hand over his heart. "It's here. That was not a show."

After spending more than a year as a prisoner of war, Pfaff made his way home to Germany. In Hamburg, he met his wife, Elisebet, and had a baby girl. They immigrated to Canada in the 1950s and then to Memphis, Tenn., during the 1960s.

"She looked at the newspaper, and it said Seattle 75 degrees and she said 'let's go to Seattle,'" Pfaff says.

He has resided in Bellingham since 1988.

He ferrets out a miniature leather-bound photo album, its hand-stitching worn and frayed.

"There's me," he says, indicating a photograph of a handsome young officer.

There he is, neat and crisp, in his navy mug shot. He could not be more than 18. The smile on his face now mirrors the one on the face of the youth in the photo taken more than 50 years ago.

Pfaff says he joked and laughed his way through the tough times and never recalls being so terrified that he couldn't render a smile.

"It was war-time business to be a soldier," Pfaff says. "We had Hitler and there was very little politics any other way."
Adam Rudnick talks with Western professor Fallou Ngom about growing up in the city of Ziguinchor, a diverse area in Senegal. He discovers how Ngom found himself teaching halfway across the globe with an impressive résumé of 12 languages. Photo by Cheryl Julian. Design by David Wray.

Fallou Ngom crosses his left leg over his right and lifts his right hand to his chin. He sits in his corner office on the second floor of the Humanities Building on Western's campus. His eyes, barely visible under his brown Bailey cowboy hat, shift from right to left, and eventually look straight ahead as he searches for the words to answer a question he likely has heard before.

He finally settles.

"I don't know," he says. "It depends on the situation. It begs the question, what is a mother tongue? I don't know."

Ngom says he is not sure which language he thinks in. He has studied linguistics and the structure of languages in Senegal, in western Africa, and in the United States. During his studying, he has stumbled across literature that suggests one's primary language, or mother tongue, is the language of one's emotions and dreams.

"If that is true, then I have many," he says.

Ngom, a Western French and linguistics professor, speaks 12 languages. Six are native to Senegal. He acquired most of these languages while growing up in the southwestern city of Ziguinchor, one of the most diverse and multilingual areas in Senegal.

"For a kid born and raised in Ziguinchor, it's normal to speak a bunch of languages," Ngom says.

Forty-one different languages exist in Senegal, and many people speak more than one language. As a child, he and his siblings had neighborhood friends from families that spoke a variety of languages. Members of his community did not speak one dominant language. Throughout years of communication with these families, Ngom naturally acquired each family's native tongue, including French, which is Senegal's official language.

"I think the assumption that one has one mother tongue ... is biased because it is based on one-language societies."

Ngom is quick to point out that each language in Senegal is its own specific language. In other words, the languages he speaks are not dialects. Wolof, a Senegalese language, is as much its own language as French.

SPEAKING IS LEARNING

In Senegal, the government provides free education to its citizens. Schools require students to take English courses in elementary school, and once a student moves on to junior school, he or she chooses one additional language to study. Ngom already had extensive knowledge of seven languages, so when he and his friends moved on to junior school, they decided to take Arabic.

"Most boys took Arabic because it was a little strange," he says. "And girls took Spanish or other European languages because it was cool."

After he completed high school, the National Board of Education in Senegal sent him to the English department in the University of Senegal, Saint-Louis. In Senegal, if a student receives high grades in a certain department, he or she is sent to study in that department.

"I didn't like it," Ngom says adamantly. "Nobody liked it. I wanted to be sent to the sociology department or philosophy department. I didn't have much of a choice!"

Once Ngom finished his four-year
degree, he planned to be a high school English teacher in Senegal. He decided to apply for a teaching assistant position at the University of Missoula, Mont., although he did not expect to get it. Two weeks later, he was on an airplane headed to Montana.

**COMING TO AMERICA**

Most people in Montana, Ngom learned, were similar to the people with whom he had grown up. The laid-back attitude toward life and strong family values Montanans cherish mixed well with Ngom's perspective, so he felt immediately welcomed.

After convincing the chair of the university to allow him to complete his master's degree in French linguistics, he moved on to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to obtain a doctorate degree, which he completed in 2002.

"My first culture shock happened not in Montana but in Illinois," he says. "I think that's a big difference than people would expect. People said, 'Wow, you were in Montana, that must have been a big culture shock.' I said, 'No, my culture shock was right here.'"

Ngom says Illinois provided him with the culture shock he expected to find in Montana. He cannot quite explain why, but Ngom says people in Illinois seemed more reserved and introverted than in Montana and Senegal.

**WESTERN' CULTURE**

You probably have seen Ngom walking around Western's campus. He will often be wearing his native Senegalese clothing, which consists of a long, loose-fitting shirt and matching pants, both of which are tan and strong family values Montanans cherish.

Western senior Karl Geisler, who has spent time with Ngom's perspective, so he felt immediately welcomed.

After convincing the chair of the university to allow him to complete his master's degree in French linguistics, he moved on to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to obtain a doctorate degree, which he completed in 2002.

"My first culture shock happened not in Montana but in Illinois," he says. "I think that's a big difference than people would expect. People said, 'Wow, you were in Montana, that must have been a big culture shock.' I said, 'No, my culture shock was right here.'"

Ngom says Illinois provided him with the culture shock he expected to find in Montana. He cannot quite explain why, but Ngom says people in Illinois seemed more reserved and introverted than in Montana and Senegal.

**THE FUTURE OF LANGUAGES**

Back in his office, Ngom interrupts himself, and begins to address his thought process behind what language he thinks in.

"I think the assumption that one has one mother tongue in which he or she is more competent is biased because it is based on one-language societies," he says.

He is worried about the future of his rich multilingual community. Urban children grow up speaking Wolof instead of acquiring Seereer, Mankagne or Mandinka, which were commonly spoken when he was growing up. Now if he speaks Mankagne on the telephone to his mother, his 14 brothers and sisters cannot understand.

Languages are fading, perhaps, but Ngom seeks to find out why. He hopes to begin work on a project that will study the disappearance of Bainyounk-Samik, a language that only 1,600 Senegalese speak. He admits he is not fluent, and his living in the United States does not allow him to improve his skill.

Ngom's work on the project is pending a grant approval from Western. He hopes to provide a multimedia database of Bainyounk-Samik, which has no documented grammar or literature. He says he wants to provide documentation and examine the language, which is on the fringe of becoming extinct, since the population that speaks the language is aging.

Although Ngom might not have had an impact revitalizing an almost-forgotten language, Geisler says Ngom has had a significant impact on his life. He plans to visit Africa in the next five years — something he probably never would have done without Ngom.

"After having classes with Fallou and talking with him about the culture there and learning about the differences in Africa itself from region to region, I'm just enthralled by it," he says.
A

As the sun sinks slowly into the misty haze of the horizon, the sound of crunching gravel escapes from beneath an assembly of anxious feet. The moon is full, straining through the fog to light the soggy path of the travelers as they flock to the rock-ring sculpture on the south end of campus.

The air is cold. As the students talk, puffs of fog appear before their lips like bits of frosted glass. Suddenly, the chatter stops. A tall, young woman with electric blonde hair calls for attention. Her warm, dark eyes dance with excitement in the candlelight reflecting off the puddles from the morning’s rain. In a sweet, sing-song voice she asks the group to form a circle, marking the beginning of the full-moon ritual.

“Oh keeper from the north,” the woman chants, “We call the element earth and its power into our circle. So may it be.”

She calls upon the elements air, fire, and water to join the ceremony in the same manner, as the pungent scent of mulberry incense engulfs the group with its aroma. Finally, the woman invites the god and the goddess into the circle to complete the union of the spirit with the elements.

The pagans huddle together in a circle in the chilly night air, warmed by the purpose for which they have gathered: to connect the earth with the divine.

Western sophomore Riley Sweeney (far right) acts out the calling of the element earth in a pagan full-moon ritual. PHOTO BY CHERRY JULIAN.
outsiders

Paganism is an old religion with more adherents than people might believe. Kadi Matherne immerses herself in the world of some Western witches and attempts to define the meaning of modern-day paganism. Photos by Cheryl Julian and Shannon Barney. Design by David Wray.
If everyone’s beliefs were the same, then the whole world would taste like chocolate ice cream. And I don’t particularly like chocolate ice cream.

BARBARA MARTIN, WESTERN JUNIOR

The leader of this pack of characters is Western senior Jamie Lewis. She is one of the founders of Western’s Associated Students club Pagans and Students Together, also known as PAST, which gathers to celebrate life in the cycles of the earth.

Pagan rituals are about harnessing human energy rather than honoring a supreme being, she says. Lewis always has had trouble with the word worship.

“I don’t like the idea of groveling before the Almighty,” she says matter-of-factly, tossing her light blonde hair over her shoulder. “I like the idea of communing with God.”

Lewis, 22, discovered her mystical awakening in the religion of Wicca, a pagan faith that practices the art of witchcraft. She has been a follower of the faith for five years, though her pursuit for spirituality has been a life-long journey.

“I accepted Jesus into my heart when I was 6 because I was afraid of going to hell,” she says, laughing.

But, years later, she began searching for a more meaningful conviction beyond Christianity. Like many curious teenagers, Lewis’ spiritual quest began in high school.

“I tried all types of religions, from Catholicism to Buddhism to Wicca,” Lewis says. “When I discovered Wicca, I finally felt like I was home,” she murmurs, pulling gently on the pentacle pendant hanging around her neck.

This pagan symbol, the pentacle, is a star surrounded by a circle. Each point on the star represents one of the five elements: earth, fire, air, water and spirit. The circle represents the union of the elements, and the magical power pagans receive from them.

Paganism first intrigued Lewis because it embraces the female counterpart in the divine. Historically, she says, Christianity has involved women in a minimal and demeaning way. The King James Bible, for example, makes the creation of woman secondary to the creation of man. Being a woman, Lewis says she has struggled with this part of Christianity for years.

“The Bible says that we are a fraction of Adam. And that’s crap,” Lewis scoffs. “I’m not a fraction of anybody.”

Pagans believe that women, like men, are whole and complete creations who come directly from the divine. They express this through the incorporation of the female archetype. But, though Paganism embraces the concept of a higher power, in the form of the god and the goddess as equal halves of a whole deity, it focuses more on the world of earthly magic than divine intervention.

Anthropology professor Kathleen Young, who teaches a religion and culture course at Western, says it is a natural social phenomenon for the dominant religious group to oppress anything appearing to be a threat. For most of human history, people have viewed pagan beliefs as Christian opposition rather than a sincere way of life, she says.

“The wonderful thing about paganism is it sees the earth as alive,” Young says. “Humans simply coexist as a part of the living earth.”

The ideological deviation from mainstream religion has haunted pagans for centuries. From these differences, a myriad of stereotypes and stigmas have sprung causing the bulk of society to think bad of pagans. Lewis says pagans deal with these misconceptions on a daily basis.

“People don’t really know what we’re about,” she sighs, recalling that PAST was assigned a special-interest booth, rather than a religious one, next to the Harry Potter Club at the Red Square Information Fair.

Western Junior Barbara Martin looks up from her knitting to nod at Lewis. She sits pensively in her black leather biker cap and boots, which contrast with her flamingo-pink skirt.

“People are so ignorant about things they don’t understand,” Martin says. “We don’t worship Satan, or sacrifice kittens, or dance around naked. It’s like people think we’re freaks just because we don’t believe in Jesus. I have nothing against Jesus, I’m sure he’s a great guy,” she adds with a toothy grin. “I’d love to go surfing with Jesus. But worship him? I don’t think so.”

Lewis says the actual practice of magic is like taking prayer into her own hands. A spell is simply putting an intent out in the universe, she explains, kneeling at the altar in her dimly lit hallway. She carefully braids a multicolored cord of twine to create a healing spell.

“It doesn’t always work,” she laughs, lighting a candle to release the spell. “But, like any other faith, it can get you through things.”

Until recently, paganism has been an extremely secretive and soli-
The Policy of Practicing

New Rules for Religion in Residence Halls

Laura McKenney slides off her bed and throws on her slippers, grabs a cozy sweatshirt and leaves her dorm room on the fourth floor of Nash Hall. Meandering down the hallway, the sophomore and second-year resident of Nash Hall hears laughter and chit-chat coming from the lounge, where 17 women are gathering for their weekly meeting.

She joins her friends. When everyone has arrived they begin their weekly discussion of God, the Bible and life in general.

McKenney is the Associated Students president of the Campus Christian Fellowship, in which approximately 400 students involved. Through CCF, students can join "cores," student-led Bible study groups that meet once a week in some residence halls. Cores are a positive experience and provide a chance to make friends with others who share similar views, McKenney says, but some find that religious activities in public residential areas are unwelcoming.

This is the first year cores and other AS clubs can no longer reserve lounges.

University residence judicial officer Michael Sledge explains how this new policy will help alleviate tension between cores and those who oppose Bible studies in the dorms.

"There were many reasons to change the policy," he says. "Certain groups, not just cores, were requesting space repetitively, which is, in part, why the policy was changed."

As a former resident adviser in Nash Hall, Nichole Pepple says that regardless of whether the cores can reserve the lounge, she has heard complaints from residents that they cannot utilize the public space during Bible studies there. Also, residents occasionally feel uncomfortable with such a strong religious presence in the residence hall, she says.

"There are definitely advantages for those who go: the meetings act as a social bonding time," Pepple says. "For those who enjoy them, it's a great program; not everyone always feels that way."

The new lounge policy, Sledge says, makes the lounges just like any other public area on campus, such as a table at the Viking Union or the fountain in Red Square.

"CCF has been very respectful of the decision," Sledge says. "We needed to craft a policy that made everyone as comfortable as possible."

McKenney has had positive experiences with core, and says since the new policy she has not encountered any negative attitudes toward religious activity in the lounges.

Western freshman Natale Rochlin, a resident of the Ridgeway Omega Residence, says she wonders why the core groups do not just use the religious facilities on campus, such as the Shalom Center, an interfaith center that Hillel, the Lutheran Student Movement and Campus Catholic Ministry, use and maintain.

"People should be free to practice their religion, but they don't have to do it in the residence hall," Rochlin says. "Everyone has to live together, and I wouldn't want to have to spend my time listening to other people's religious beliefs."

Sledge maintains that core meetings are no different from any other religious group that wishes to meet. If other groups choose to do so, they have that right.

Western junior Patrick Hastings, another active core student and former Nash Hall resident adviser, says he feels as long as students are not pressured into attending core meetings, then they are not harming anyone.

The new policy pleases him.

"It's not within the inclusive ideals of Western to limit the expression of someone's identity if it's not harming anyone," he says. "These groups give people the chance to grow with others in a residential setting."

When asked if he thought some people might feel uncomfortable, he responded sincerely.

"Well, that can be an opportunity to grow," he said. "One of the blessings of being in the residence halls is learning to embrace diversity. We learn from other people, too."

—Amanda Raphael

Tary faith. Riley Sweeney, Western sophomore and PAST co-founder, says secrecy is the religion's greatest strength, as well as its greatest weakness. On one hand, he says, the secretiveness and solitary is liberating because no predominant dogma attempts to control people's lives. Each individual is able to determine what the faith means to him or her. On the flip-side, however, Sweeney says being introverted is the religion's downfall as an organized faith.

"Getting pagans together is like herding cats," he muses, adjusting the black rat-pack hat atop his head. "It's entertaining, but not a whole lot of fan."

With a lack of any formal organization, Sweeney says, pagans find it hard to represent themselves to the general public. Since they do not have formal churches, it also is difficult to determine how many pagans exist. They are, however, one of the largest minority religions in North America, similar in population to Unitarianism, Buddhism and Hinduism.

Though Paganism is too complex to be defined with a single slo-
Shellfishing: A Beginner’s Guide

People living in the Northwest appreciate superior seafood because they can get it fresh. But, the freshest seafood comes straight out of the water or sand and to your dinner table. Here is a step-by-step plan that will guide you to the greatest tasting Dungeness crabs and steamer clams you’ve ever eaten (and we know crabs are crustaceans, not shellfish).

STEP 1: Buy a license

In order to shellfish legally, all fishers need a license. For $15, you can purchase a yearly license that will allow you to fish for clam, crab, oysters and shrimp. You can find licenses online at the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Web site, wdfw.wa.gov, at H&H Outdoor on Dupont Street or at Yeager’s Outdoor and Marine on Northwest Avenue. While you are acquiring your license, pick up the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife’s “Fishing in Washington” pamphlet. The pamphlet explains the types of clam and crab to fish for, as well as size requirements and season openings and closures. Shellfish season is open all-year-round. Crab season opens Nov. 16.

STEP 2: Get gear

For clamming, the gear is quite simple. A small trowel, a bucket and a caliper will suffice. A caliper is a small plastic tool shellfishers use to measure the size of the clam. A precut hole in the plastic U-shaped tool shows the legal minimum size for the clam. If the clam you dig up goes through the hole, it is too small to keep. You can use some calipers for crab and clam.

Crab gear is a little more complicated. Two basic types of crab pots exist. You will have to see which style fits your taste. In addition to a crab pot, you will need 30 to 90 feet of rope or more, a caliper for measuring your catch, a buoy, a knife, a bait box, bait and a tide book.

STEP 3: Call the biotoxin hotline

In order to be an informed and safe fisher, you must find out the levels of toxins in the water before you go clamming or crabbing. Call 1-800-532-5632 before going clamming or crabbing.

STEP 4: Find a location

Whatcom County has a few areas where clamming is ideal. Justin Jackson, clammer and employee at H&H Outdoor, says he likes Clayton Beach off Chuckanut Drive.

“You go just past the rocks on low tide, and dig there in the mud,” Jackson says. “If you know the right spot, it doesn’t take a lot of effort.”

Birch Bay is also a popular spot to dig for clams. On a low tide in Birch Bay, clammers may be able to walk out as far as 100 yards or farther to dig for clams. Once you get out there, dig approximately 6 to 10 inches below the surface to find steamer and manila clams.

Non-boat owners have a couple of options. Boulevard Park has a small dock where you can drop your pot, and then wait for the crab to come to you. Crabbers can also drop their pots off the pier behind the Fairhaven Train Station.

STEP 5: Prepare your catch

Cooking crabs and clams is reasonably easy. Steaming is the best way to cook your catch, especially clams. If you do not have a way to steam it, boiling your crab cooks it perfectly. Remember though, clams live in the sand and have sand inside their shells, so soak your clams in fresh water for up to 24 hours, and change the water every couple of hours too. The clams eventually spit out all the sand.

— Sean McCormick

**FLORIDA CRAB CAKES**

**Prep**: 25 min. **Cook**: 6 min.

1 6-ounce package frozen crabmeat or one 6-ounce can crabmeat, drained, flaked and cartilage removed (about 1-1/2 cups)
2 teaspoons snipped fresh thyme or 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme, crushed
2 teaspoons Dijon-style or Creole mustard
1/2 teaspoon white wine Worcestershire sauce
1/8 teaspoon salt
1/4 cup cornmeal
2 tablespoons cooking oil

**Preparation**

Thaw crab, if frozen; set aside. In a medium bowl combine egg, 1/4 cup of the fine dry bread crumbs, the finely chopped green onions, the 2 tablespoons mayonnaise or salad dressing, 1 tablespoon parsley, thyme, mustard, Worcestershire sauce, and salt. Add crab; mix well. Shape crab mixture into four 3/4-inch-thick patties. In a small bowl combine remaining fine dry bread crumbs and cornmeal. Coat patties with cornmeal mixture. In a large skillet heat the cooking oil; add crab cakes. Cook over medium heat about 3 minutes on each side or until crab cakes are golden and heated through, adding additional oil, if necessary.

RECIPE COURTESY OF BETTER HOMES AND GARDENS
Alternative Entertainment

Many couch potatoes sport callused thumbs from playing video games. Countless television addicts stare blankly, hypnotized by constant television viewing. While various forms of electronic media often replace human interaction, a place in Bellingham lets visitors put their hands on something other than just another remote control.

Mindport, on West Holly Street, is a museum that mingles art and science. Mindport's director, Kevin Jones, opened the museum 10 years ago, with co-founders Robin Burnett and Joe Edwards, to offer a place for patrons to become familiar with their own levels of ingenuity.

"I really want to spark people's interest in human creativity, and the wonder of the universe," Jones says.

Walking through Mindport's front doors, a replica of a canyon creek greets visitors with the sound of rushing water. What follows is a collection of interactive exhibits scattered throughout a room lined with photographs and tribal masks.

Jones created a number of the educational toys, including Marvellous, a favorite of staff members and patrons. "Marvellous" is a complex network of clattering mechanisms and wood parts through which marbles travel, taking a different course every time. Jones' daughter, Tallie Jones, 29, finds the intricacies of the piece particularly intriguing.

"It serves no practical purpose, but it inspires so much excitement and thought about pattern possibilities," she says.

Elsewhere in the museum, the gentle tinny melody of what sounds like a harp actually resonates from "Burl Jives," a knobby, fawn-colored chunk of wood that instructs its player to press upon its surface to mimic an autoharp. The top of "Burl Jives" is smooth and polished from frequent use.

Across the room, Bellingham resident Lee Phipps speaks into a phone that records his speech and relays it backward, making it sound like a garbled foreign tongue. Phipps, 45, has visited Mindport on a number of occasions with his 9-year-old daughter Rachel.

"They keep adding just enough stuff to keep it interesting every time," Phipps says. "It's really some amazing stuff and much better than TV."

Although Mindport provides an environment in which children and their parents can interact, Jones says adults also can indulge their creativity and curiosity at the museum.

"People these days are too wrapped up in consumerism and those things that don't really matter," Jones said. "So, whether there are a lot of patrons or not, I really like the idea of getting people away from that."

After passing a kaleidoscope nearly three times larger than the normal size, and a maze of plastic tubes that zigzag across the walls, visitors can stroll on to the art gallery.

The gallery displays artwork from local artist Prentiss Cole's collection. Next to Cole's work is a compilation of human portraits by photographer Don Mitchell titled "Steppin' Out." One photo features an elderly man, his face rutted with wrinkles, looking toward the camera as if it were a mirror. The man's reflection seems to please him as his mouth smirks under a curled mustache.

Mitchell, 58, photographed his subjects during a 35-year period, beginning in the early 1970s. Mitchell says he doesn't like telling viewers the backgrounds behind his subjects.

"People become part of a photograph when they look at it, and if I tell them the background of the photo, it's filling in the space where their own story belongs," Mitchell says.

As Bellingham locals discover what Mindport has to offer, they likely will stretch their hands, cramped from playing too many Nintendo games, and place them on something that actually engages its user.

—Liz McNeil
Western student Brooke Ginn pays for college by working with dead people — doing their makeup and combing their hair. **Trevor Swedberg** tells the story of a young mortician's daily tasks and the cost of the job on her sanity and well-being. Photo illustrations by **Chris Taylor**. Design by **Elana Bean**.

Brooke Ginn is a master at her craft. After three years of styling hair and makeup in and around Bellingham, she has an impeccable record — not a single complaint from any of her numerous clients. She's yet to have a return customer. And she would be surprised and a bit concerned if she did.

Ginn is an independent contractor in the apprenticing funeral director and embalming field. In other words, she dresses and embalms bodies.

The 22-year-old Western senior's duties go beyond the aesthetic side of the industry. "I do anything from picking up a deceased body from wherever they're at, to preparing them for either cremation or burial," Ginn says. "Then, I might embalm them, dress them, put them in their casket, put their makeup on, do their hair..."

Every job is different for Ginn, but the deceased person's family often asks her...
Ginn sometimes drives the body to the crematory, and even works services by ushering, helping with music or coordinating between clergy and family.

THE BENEFITS

"Serving the families," Ginn responds without hesitation when asked what she considers the best part of the job. "The anonymous thank-you letters, seeing the appreciation that families have for even the smallest little things — it really makes your day."

Aside from the sense of personal satisfaction the job provides, the pay isn't too bad either.

Ginn's ample wage has easily covered her car expenses and the monthly payments for her new two-bedroom condo in downtown Bellingham, among other things. Her fee is $35 for hair alone. And dressing the bodies, doing their makeup and placing them in the caskets comes to $150 to $200 an hour. It typically takes two hours for her to complete a job. And, once she is more experienced, the pay will get even better.

"I really haven't lived a college lifestyle," Ginn says. "I've actually been able to invest."

THE TOLL

The personal and financial rewards in the funeral industry certainly are lucrative, but they don't come alone. The field has been known to take its toll on those involved in it for any extended period of time. Ginn says. The high stress level is a likely culprit for the elevated divorce and alcoholism rates within the industry, she says.

"Some people are able to separate themselves from their emotions in dealing with dead bodies all the time," she says. "But it's really hard for me because every body was someone's loved one — their fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters. It hits home quite a bit."

While Ginn's parents were supportive of her decisions, they did not hide their concern for their daughter's emotional well-being.

"I supported it in the beginning, but as it went on, I could see it wearing on her," her dad, Loran Ginn, explains. "We realized that at her age it was probably a lot of pressure for her to deal with."

Ginn's mom, Patty, could see a change, too.

"She wasn't as light-hearted as she should have been," Patty Ginn says. "Dealing with people's sorrows all the time — she probably took on a lot of that emotion. She probably couldn't help but take that on. I know it would wear on me."

In June, Ginn decided she needed to slow down and start working fewer hours at the funeral home. She decided to remain available to the Westford Funeral Home and Cremation Service and other funeral homes in the area, but she is now easing her way out of the business.

"She sounds more light-hearted, more happy-go-lucky now," Patty Ginn says. "It was probably a good learning experience, though."

THE PROCESS

Ginn has thrived in the funeral industry because of her strong character. Steadfast confidence and maturity serves her well in the "prep" room.

If the family of the deceased decides to have a viewing, Ginn starts the process of body preparation by bathing the body, washing the hair, and closing and sealing the eyes and mouth.

Next, she begins the embalming process to preserve the body. This procedure involves simultaneously taking out all of the body fluid and pumping in the embalming fluid.

"It can be pretty gruesome, but I just think of it like a medical procedure," Ginn says.

Embalming is done fairly soon after the person's death. But, if the family is just going to have an immediate cremation or burial with no viewing of the body, then the funeral staff moves the body to the refrigeration unit and places it in a protective sheet material until the cremation or burial takes place.

Sometimes Ginn cremates the deceased with some of their valued personal items, upon the request of their families. "One time, a man who died of lung cancer's daughter had us place the remaining pack of cigarettes that he had, his coffee cup, just the random stuff that he never went without in the casket with him when he was cremated," Ginn recalls.

When a funeral home buys a body, workers remove all possibly combustible items — including pacemakers. Ginn says.

"If somebody has a pacemaker, it has to be removed," she explains. "That's a really simple process, and I have done it myself. It's right near the surface, so we just make two incisions, pull it out and cut the cords that hook it up to the body. And, they are actually recyclable, which is kind of crazy."

THE FUTURE

Last February, Reece Degolier, one of Ginn's best friends, passed away. Upon the request of his mom, Ginn dressed him and did his makeup and hair.

"Once I prepared him, it was hard not to look at any other body and see his face," Ginn says. "I just realized that this was too stressful of a job to be in for the rest of my life — for the next 30 years. I may go back into it, I may not, but right now I need to have a more lighthearted job. I still enjoy serving the families and preparing bodies. I have no regrets about Reece at all. He was a 30-year-old gay man, who if his hair wasn't done just right, people would have raised hell."

The immense challenge of preparing her friend's body may prove to be a defining moment for Ginn in her search for the right career.

"I'm glad that I prepared him and did it like he liked it, but I don't think I would want to do it for another friend like that," Ginn says. "And I'm afraid of being in a town like this where there are people I know. If something happened to someone, their family would come to me. I could be selective, but it's kind of hard to say no when the family asks me. I know it would be a service to them."

Lately, Ginn, a business management major, has been entertaining the idea of opening up her own salon.

"That would be an awesome career. I think, because I would still be doing hair and makeup, but not on dead people," Ginn says. "So I'm hoping it will work out. Then I would be able to make people look beautiful, and they would go on looking beautiful."

NOVEMBER 2005 31
What to do with old Klipsuns
by Jamie Trudel

Look at the massive pile of Klipsun magazines lying next to your coffee table. Before you get up to throw them out or add this issue to the bunch, read on and learn what to do with that out-of-date yet marvelously written magazine.

• Does your beer pong table wobble and throw everything off-kilter at that crucial moment? Utilize an old Klipsun to prop up the table leg that falls a few millimeters short.

• Ever been out camping and needed to start a fire? Imagine all you have is a year-old Klipsun and the latest Cosmo — but you haven’t done the quizzes in Cosmo yet so you, like, totally couldn’t spark a fire with that one! Just shred the Klipsun sunset into three-inch pieces and voila — instant fire starter!

• Uh-oh — you’re out of toilet paper. Before you are a Western Front, a Planet, a Klipsun and a decision. The newsprint of The Western Front would leave an unsightly black streak you’d have difficulty explaining, and The Planet is printed on rough, recycled paper. But look at the glossy pages of your trusty Klipsun. With a gentle wipe, you’ll be off to enjoy the rest of your day!

• Has your roommate stolen your food? Has he borrowed your razor to shave his special place? Have no fear, a Klipsun can help you out of any sticky living situation! With a simple roll of the magazine, you’ve converted a well-written piece of journalism into a pummeling device.

With a tattered Klipsun and this handy guide at your side, you will be ready to take on the world. Go get ‘em!