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Winter 2016

## Klipsun Magazine, 2016 - Winter

Halee Hastad

*Western Washington University*

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# KLIPSUN

The background is an abstract composition of overlapping geometric planes in various shades of gray. A prominent dark, curved shape, resembling a shadow or a folded piece of paper, is located in the lower-left corner. The overall aesthetic is minimalist and architectural.

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PURPOSE  
WINTER 2016



# DEAR READER,

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Hello and welcome.

There exists a value intrinsic to the decisions and actions that we make. A force to promote change and move us forward, into the future.

Decisions lead to acts lead to events and events shape our views of the world. Our frame of reference expands and we are within the human experience.

Please, take a moment and a deep breath.  
May you be delivered, now and always, to a sense of purpose.

Truly,  
Halee Hastad

Editor-in-Chief

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# A W A K E N E D

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*Living life in the present*

A full-page background image of a dense forest of evergreen trees, likely pines or firs, shrouded in a thick mist or fog. The trees are dark green and their forms are softened by the atmospheric haze, creating a serene and somewhat ethereal mood. The lighting is diffused, with no strong shadows or highlights, emphasizing the texture of the mist.

Story by **Daniel Roth** - Photography by **Daniella Beccaria & Ivy Ferguson**

**M**indfulness: maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of thoughts, feelings and surrounding environments.

Simply being present is at the core of mindfulness, a new name for a very old practice and way of thinking that has taken hold among many therapists, counselors and psychologists in the past few decades. It's been the subject of countless studies where it has shown to help people cope with chronic pain, slow the aging process and prevent relapse from depression.

Mindfulness as a practice increased over the past couple of decades largely thanks to a man named Jon Kabat-Zinn, a doctor whose studies in Buddhist meditation led him to apply those concepts to modern medicine.

Kabat-Zinn teaches that mindfulness is paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally.

Many seem to agree. Since its start in 1979, Kabat-Zinn's mindfulness program, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), has become a widely used tool for treating a variety of different conditions.

Swedish Medical Center in Seattle, for instance, offers a MSBR program to help individuals with chronic pain, anxiety, fatigue, cancer and more. Evidence suggests mindfulness can be as helpful in preventing relapse into depression as medication.

Philip Burns is a counselor at Western's counseling center. He often uses mindfulness to help students with anxiety and depression, and he holds a six-week introductory course in mindfulness for students every quarter. When explaining mindfulness to new patients, he favors Kabat-Zinn's definition.





He notices most people find that definition straightforward, up until the non-judgmental part. We learn to be automatic judges of experience, Burns says, associating certain experiences with the feelings we get from them: the enjoyment of eating chocolate, say, or the feelings of love from a significant other.

“Most of the time I think it’s pretty helpful for us to do that. We decide what’s working and what’s not working based on what feels right and seems to help us perform well,” Burns says. “But there are times when being so automatically judgmental, we tell this story about something and it cuts off our ability to actually show up and be present for something.”

**“What happens if we just stop trying to get away from the feelings we’re having and just let ourselves feel them in the present moment?”**

**-Philip Burns**

Since we’re so used to our emotions guiding our responses to experiences, it can feel sort of counterintuitive to not do it. What mindfulness asks of a person is to step back from the way they are feeling and try to observe their situation, in order to get a more full picture of what’s going on. It’s so easy to not be present. The world we live in today can feel fraught with ways to remove us from the current moment; the great crowded swirling mass of content that is the Internet, all vying for our attention.

▲  
*Philip Burns, a counselor at Western’s health center, meditates in the Sehome Hill Arboretum. Burns tries to use mindfulness in his everyday life and meditates by paying attention to how he is feeling and what he is thinking.*

“Distraction is there at a moment’s notice, and I think over time we get good at distracting ourselves and we don’t want to be very mindful and pay attention to our thoughts and bodies,” Burns says. “So in some ways with mindfulness, we’re asking people to just stop and pay attention and tolerate the uncomfortable experiences or even the pleasant experiences”

There are a million different ways to practice mindfulness and apply it to your life, Burns says.

“Meditation is the way to practice it so it comes more easy to you in the rest of your life. If you practice it, then you’ll find that you more easily remember to slip into a mindful attitude,” he says.

Many people Burns sees in his profession are apprehensive about meditating, seeing it as intimidating, but in reality, it’s a simple practice.

All of this does require a certain degree of commitment and work on the part of the practitioner. Though it’s not instantaneous, the practice can be greatly rewarding. Burns, for instance, finds mindfulness to be really freeing.

Pay attention to the breath, inhale cool air in and exhale warm air out. As the mind starts to wander, bring it back to the breath.

# THE BIG ONE

## Cascadia Fault

Story by Courtney O'Keefe

She's been lying dormant for hundreds of years beneath the earth's foundation. She rests quietly, but she's far overdue for a visit. If she wakes up, every single soul in the Pacific Northwest will be aware.

A similar friend, one she knows all too well, shook the people of Japan four years ago.

The 2011 magnitude-nine earthquake that shook Japan's Northeastern corner, and caused a tsunami that reached heights up to 128 feet, left more than 15,000 people dead and 230,000 people without homes.

The most frightening part behind this is strong scientific evidence from Pacific Northwest geologists who have found that a large magnitude earthquake, potentially identical to Japan's, could happen here at any time.

Recent national news throughout the United States has been focusing on the Cascadia subduction zone, reporting that it is due for an earthquake, known as "The Big One". The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has predicted that this earthquake and tsunami will cause nearly 13,000 fatalities, another 27,000 injuries, leaving a million people displaced from their homes and another 2.5 million without food and water.

If she wakes up, floors will rumble, hanging photos will free-fall off the wall, chimneys will break and buildings may collapse. She has potential to be the worst natural disaster to ever occur in North America.

***The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has predicted that this earthquake and tsunami will cause nearly 13,000 fatalities, another 27,000 injuries, leaving a million people displaced from their homes and another 2.5 million without food and water.***

One of the biggest concerns is how unprepared the PNW is for a large-magnitude earthquake. In Japan there is an earthquake early-warning system in place, which has helped prevent many fatalities. In 2011, residents in Tokyo received a warning a minute before the earthquake occurred. This allowed for enough time to stop trains, factories, power plants, elevators and alert hospitals to stop surgeries. It seems simple enough,



▲  
*The surface of the earth is made of plates. These plates are always on the move, shifting over or under each other. When plates move suddenly, an earthquake occurs.*

but the PNW has no early-warning systems in place.

"It worries me that Seattle doesn't have an early earthquake warning system," says Kristin Stoffel, a senior at Seattle University. An early warning system is vital for the protection and safety of Seattlites. It is also necessary in order to preserve as much infrastructure as possible, and to minimize the recovery process afterwards.

The city of Seattle has simply not done enough to educate and prepare everyone about the potential earthquake, Stoffel says. She has lived in the heart of Seattle for four years and is disappointed in the city's public outreach relating to this topic. Stoffel says she has not heard of any public awareness campaigns or been informed of any precautionary safety measures she should be taking.

Stoffel's biggest concern, aside from the potential lives that could be lost, is thinking about a permanent residency in the city of Seattle. The scientific data regarding this earthquake has made Stoffel second-guess if she wants Seattle to be the place she calls home forever.

### THE UNDENIABLE FACTS

The Cascadia subduction zone runs along the coast of California, Oregon and Washington before ending near Vancouver Island, B.C. A subduction zone is the largest crash on Earth caused by a collision between two of the planet's tectonic plates. The plates are pieces of the Earth's crust that move slowly across the surface over millions of years. When two tectonic plates meet, one is forced to bend and slide underneath the other, curving downwards into the Earth's mantle layer causing earthquakes.



The Cascadia zone is very similar to other subduction zones globally, says Bernard Housen, Western geology professor. "The recent magnitude-nine earthquakes and tsunamis, in Indonesia and in Japan, are good models for what will happen here in the future and what has happened here in the past."

The question is whether the whole fault, or just a portion of the fault, will slip and generate an earthquake.

There are past geological indicators that both types of event have occurred. If the whole fault slips it will generate a very large, magnitude 8.5 to 9.3, earthquake. The last time this happened was on January 26, 1700, according to the Pacific Northwest Seismic Network.

For earthquakes this large, the duration of the ground shaking is quite long, approximately five minutes or more, says Housen. The time and magnitude of the event will be the deciding factors on the severity of the damage caused. In some cases, the shaking will be amplified based on local geology; places with softer sediment will feel the quake much stronger.

## WHATCOM COUNTY

Dr. Rebekah Paci-Green, a Western assistant professor of geology, has been working with FEMA and other colleagues to try and predict what a Cascadia subduction zone earthquake would look like today and how it would impact the Whatcom County community.

In the North Puget Sound, the Lummi and Swinomish reservations will have obvious damages and fatalities, Paci-Green predicts. The tsunami coming after the quake will not just be waves of water, they will be waves filled with marine environments and building debris.

"A year after Japan's magnitude-nine quake, farmers were still picking up pottery and pieces of debris in their fields. They still couldn't work," she says. "They would get volunteers to sleep in tents on the field and they would pick up debris all day long, day after day."

As for impacts to our population on the Puget Sound, timing really matters. The commuter hour would be the worst case scenario for this earthquake to strike, says Paci-Green. People will be out shopping, picking up kids from school and driving on all the highways, this would result in the most casualties. But on the other side, a middle of the night event would be particularly bad in terms of a tsunami, she says. It would be pitch black and thousands of people would be trying to evacuate in the dark.

As for roads and bridges, Paci-Green and her colleagues have predicted that the I-5 corridor, Highway 20 and most bridges in Whatcom County will be damaged. They predict at least 20

percent of these roads will be highly damaged, meaning it will take years until they are all repaired.

But again, timing really matters, she says. If the earthquake were to occur during a wetter time of the year, the landslides would be much worse; therefore, getting food, fuel and medical supplies could be much more difficult.

For hospitals in Whatcom County, certainly the ones closest to the coast, they will see an influx in patients, says Paci-Green, but they will also be damaged and trying to evacuate patients.

"For those hospitals who aren't as damaged, they will still suffer from a loss of beds because something as small as a fire sprinkler shutting down in a room makes it unusable," she says. "About half of the hospitals and schools throughout Whatcom County could suffer moderate to severe damages."

For electricity purposes, Paci-Green predicts there will be a wide-spread blackout, and full power restorations could potentially take up to a year.

There is also potential for substantial water and waste pipes cracks. This will lead to contaminated water and a loss of pressure creating no direct access to clean water through household taps.

***If the whole fault slips it will generate a very large, magnitude 8.5 to 9.3 earthquake. The last time this happened was on January 26, 1700, according to the Pacific Northwest Seismic Network***

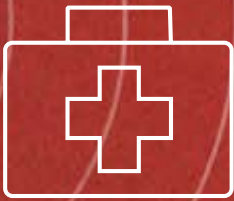
Some of the older houses in Whatcom County will slide right off their foundation, she says. And this is not something you can repair, it becomes a total loss. Their predictions for Whatcom County estimate that 20,000 houses will need repairs, and 380,000 houses will have minor interior damage.

"But these are all predictions based on our community right now," Paci-Green says. "Over decades we can lower those impacts significantly through our government's retrofitting program. We can retrofit schools, bridges, do infrastructure upgrades, bolt homes, secure home contents and do evacuation drilling, which will all help reduce the amount of damage and fatalities that could occur."

So for now, let's just hope she stays peacefully resting under the earth's crust.

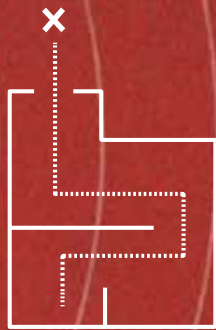
Just think, it could be worse. You could live on the seafloor.

*FEMA predicts the Cascadia earthquake will cause nearly \$80 billion in damages, including freeway bridges collapsing and entire coastal communities being submerged. While these disasters are hard to foresee or prevent, there are some ways that everyone should be preparing for **The Big One**.*



#### **MAKE A KIT**

that contains emergency supplies and is easy to carry.



#### **MAKE A PLAN**

to make sure you can reconnect with family and remain safe.



#### **BE INFORMED**


of your local risk and emergency authority notifications.



#### **BE PREPARED**

by organizing important documents, strengthening property and considering insurance.





POLITICS & ACTIVISM

# SWAT

A LOOK INSIDE WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A MEMBER OF BELLINGHAM SWAT





Story and photography by **Dylan Nelson**

**T**he Bellingham SWAT team has been active in Bellingham since the 1970s. The presence of a SWAT team allows “the agency flexibility to have a core group of people who train specifically to solve different problems” without having to pull from patrol resources, Bellingham Police Sergeant Don Almer says. “These are a bunch of officers who are dedicated to our community and helping solve those problems,” Sgt. Almer says.

When people think of SWAT teams, they usually think of guns, explosions, tanks and firefights. However, there is a meticulous physical and psychological process that team members go through to be on the team. In addition to regular police training,

SWAT members train an extra 120 hours per year, maintain proficiencies with certain weapons, attend special trainings and maintain certifications for their roles. Twice a year team members are required to take and pass a physical fitness test. If they fail any of this, they are subject to removal from the team. In Bellingham, the team is divided into two groups: Blue team and Gold team. They train separately and one team is always on call.

Despite their intimidating looks, Bellingham SWAT is very friendly. “We’re here for our community, to solve certain issues. We’re not looking for fights and we’re not looking to be mean or anything like that. We go out of our way to maintain our training and certifications,” Sgt. Almer says.





▲ Blue Team members practice pushing through the threshold and prepare to clear the threat. In Almer's experience, suspects are more likely to give up the fight when several officers enter the room. "Then they don't get hurt, officers don't get hurt and members of the public don't get hurt," he says.

Blue Team members start all training days with high-intensity weight exercises so that later in the day, they'll be tired during training practice. "We train in such a way that you're fatigued when you shoot. It helps replicate the stress of a mission," Officer Chris Kaiser says.







*Officer Luke Haas fires a Remington 870 at a target. This shotgun can be loaded with special rounds that disintegrate on impact, so if used to breach a door, people on the inside are less likely to be injured.*



*Team members set up shooting targets before they start their rifle drills. They practice firing at targets and covering each other while they reload.*



*Officer Haas performs a fire-line drill in full gear including a helmet and gas mask. “If we introduce a chemical to a house and need to go in, you need to be able to know what that’s going to look like through a gas mask,” Sgt. Almer says. Though the gas masks are necessary, the officers say that they make it difficult to breathe – sometimes fogging up – and can make one feel claustrophobic.*



*The team loads up their gear after a long day of training before driving back to the station to break for dinner. An hour later they regroup and go over theoretical scenarios that could happen locally, wrapping up the day’s nine-hour training.*







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# IN A BIG COUNTRY

*An Idaho nonprofit helps refugees maintain their cultures while surrounded by new ones*

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Story by Stephanie Roloff - Photography courtesy Jo Karr

Jo Karr was 15-years-old getting on the city bus one day after school to go home. After hours of note-taking in class, she put headphones on to get lost in the music. There were seats available, but after sitting all day in school she wanted to stand. A Caucasian woman got on the bus a few stops later and approached Jo.

"Excuse me," the woman said. She heard the woman over the music, but took a second taking off her headphones to hear her better.

In that second Jo took to reply, the woman became furious. "Damn refugees!," she said to Jo. If you can't speak English why are you here?"

Parts of Jo wanted yell back at the woman, but a bigger part, a stronger part, wanted to prove her wrong. In a polite and calm manner Jo responded, "Excuse me ma'am, would you like to sit here?"

The look of deep regret on that woman's face will be one Jo never forgets, she says.



*Living in Boise, Idaho has not always been the American Dream the Carr family has hoped for. Catch! Life took her family in when they thought they had no one to turn to. Now, Carr is studying at the College of Western Idaho and pursuing a degree in teaching English as a second language.*

Jo came from West Africa to Boise, Idaho in 2003 as a refugee with her family. Jo was 10-years-old when her mother decided to bring their family to U.S. She wanted her children to have a better future, one without fear of disease or war and with the hope of an education.

Upon arriving their vision of a glorious America began to fade. As Jo and her family settled into this new land and new culture, they realized America wasn't what they expected.

A refugee, as defined by the U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security, is a person who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of nationality because of persecution or fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, social group or political opinion. The Idaho Office for Refugees reported that Idaho was designated a Refugee Resettlement Community by the U.S. State Department in 1975. The numbers of refugees there have increased annually for

the past two decades. President Obama has authorized a ceiling of allowing 70,000 refugees each year nationwide. Refugee influx numbers have stayed consistently close to this for the last three years, according to a proposed refugee admissions report to Congress.

Jo and her family have lived in the United States for 12 years now. Single with five children, Jo's mother now owns her own house and two cars. Jo is attending the College of Western Idaho and is pursuing a degree to teach English as a second language.

Jo sits with her laptop in the hallway of her school, doing a video interview for this article in between her classes. It's almost 9 p.m. and this is the only free time she has between working, tutoring and classes. As people walk by, she fights back the tears swelling up in her eyes as she talks about the struggles her family has overcome.

"Growing up with my siblings and no dad, my mom had to be all of it for us. She was everything," Jo says.

When she was in eighth grade, her mom was in a car accident. She was pregnant with Jo's little brother and had to be in the hospital for a month. Karr has to catch her breath and wipe away watery eyes as these memories take her back to dark times.

With just the four kids in the house, and their mom now gone, Jo says they had no idea where to turn to.

**“ At that point, I thought that was it. I thought it was over for us...”**

**- Jo Karr**

Catch! Life took Jo and her family in when they thought they had no one else. They took care of them, brought them to school and became another family until their mom recovered.

Catch! Life is a nonprofit organization aimed toward helping refugee families become successful in the United States while maintaining their culture.

Debbie Weisel and her husband, Robert, started the organization in Boise 21 years ago.

"At Catch! Life we believe in the old saying – 'Give a man to fish and you give him food for a day. Teach a man to fish and you give him food for a lifetime,'" Debbie Weisel says. The bulk of what Catch! Life does is provide support and build stronger long-term communities for refugee families.

This means having home-cooked meals with them, taking kids to sports practices and going to parent-teacher meetings to make sure that the teacher and refugee's family understand each other. One of Jo's best friends to this day is Debbie's daughter, Joy Weisel, who continues to help her family run Catch! Life.

They wanted to create a healthy outlet for kids that was reliable and constant in the neighborhoods and communities of refugees, Debbie Weisel says.

Through Catch! Life's summer reading programs alone they bring up to 20 volunteers to sometimes as many as 13 different neighborhoods in Boise. The volunteers must meet with each neighborhood at least once a week for an hour. Many volunteers go beyond this minimum and stay with the kids to play soccer, have pizza parties or keep reading until they fall asleep, Joy Weisel says.

Some of Joy's friends see how much of a workload she has to bear to take on the responsibilities of Catch! Life. They ask her why she doesn't just take a break from it all and enjoy being a college student.

In Joy's eyes, leaving Catch! Life means leaving all her closest friends behind and that isn't an option. The stories and journeys she's heard from people she now calls family are ingrained in her heart forever.

*Wearing a traditional West African dress, Jo Carr poses for a picture. Carr came to the U.S. with her mother and siblings in 2003, in search of a better future without fear of disease and war.*







# BEST BUDS

*Hugh Newmark stands behind medical marijuana in a time of change for the cannabis community*

Story by Nick Yerger - Photography by Beatrice Harper

Without marijuana, Hugh Newmark is on edge and struggles to stay on task, to the point where his brain feels like it will explode. For years, Newmark, 25, has been using marijuana to keep focused and alleviate health issues. Now, fueled by personal experience along with the potential of cannabis as medicine, he runs Best Buds Collective Garden, an access point for medical marijuana patients in Bellingham.

It was in 2006 in his hometown of St. Petersburg, Florida that Newmark really discovered how cannabis could be used as medicine. His mother was in a car accident that led her to becoming strung out on prescription opiates. Newmark was in a band at the time, when the vocalist's girlfriend gave him a joint, telling him to have his mom try it out to ease her pain.

It helped her immensely.

"It just started this huge transition to cannabis as medicine," Newmark says. "It opened my eyes. She'd smoke a joint and be totally functional."

In 2013, Newmark personally lobbied for the legalization of medical marijuana in Florida, gathering more than 2,000 signatures to get Amendment 2 on the ballot. It made the ballot; however, the people did not vote to legalize it.

Newmark had originally planned to open a glass shop and dispensary in St. Petersburg if Amendment 2 passed, so when a friend in

▲

*Zilla bud, a 60/40 percent indica and sativa strain, is a favorite at Best Buds Fairhaven. Zilla can help alleviate symptoms of insomnia, depression and anxiety.*

Bellingham called offering employment at a dispensary, Natural Remedies, he jumped at the opportunity to pursue his dreams. Natural Remedies went well at first, but management conflicts led to its closure. Shortly after, Newmark opened Best Buds in the same location on Meridian Street.

In October 2015, Best Buds celebrated one year of business at its first location, and a second Fairhaven access point opened in July. It has seen enormous growth since opening, with 1,521 members at its Meridian location, and another 431 in Fairhaven, with some overlap between the two.

Newmark is very laid back, but is also very business-minded, doing everything by the book.

He cares deeply for his patients and takes pride in having only the best medicine possible. Not codeine. Not oxycodone. Nothing made in a lab. Just cannabis.

Under Washington's current medical marijuana law, Best Buds is a collective garden, a group of medical marijuana patients who work together to produce, process and deliver medicinal marijuana to other patients. It's the best law that will ever exist, Newmark says.

Unfortunately for patients and members of the collective, as of

July 1, 2016, Best Buds, along with every other collective garden and dispensary in Washington State will have to shut down due to Senate Bill 5022.

Newmark wishes things could stay the same, but in order to continue doing business, he has applied for a retail license under Initiative 502, which legalized recreational marijuana in Washington.

Applying for a recreational license means going under the scrutiny of the Washington State Liquor Control Board, but Newmark isn't worried and thinks that Best Buds will receive one.

While Newmark will most likely acquire a few college students and Canadian buyers if he is issued the license, he is confident many current patients will become customers.



▲  
*Medicinal marijuana infused sodas are an alternative for patients at Best Buds, who have the ability to self-medicate using an abundance of different medical products including sodas, teas and baked goods.*

"They'll stand by me and I'll stand by them as well," Newmark says. "It goes both ways, they'll keep supporting me and the way I run my business and I'll continue to offer the best product I can at the lowest price."

Best Buds provides medicine to a wide range of people, from individuals with epilepsy to cancer patients and everyone in-between.

Most patients are regulars, allowing Newmark and his staff to build relationships with them.

He loves his patients. Sometimes they will come in without enough money to afford what they need, so Newmark will give them a discount, or even free medicine.

One of those patients is Caitlyn Irene, 26, who has been a medical patient for about five years, using medical cannabis to relieve migraines, cramps and insomnia. Irene is also one of Newmark's employees who has worked at Best Buds since the beginning.

Her whole life, Irene was prescribed drugs such as Adderall to keep her focused for her attention deficit disorder but with the help of cannabis she has been able to completely eliminate pharmaceuticals and feels more attentive and healthier than ever.

Irene wants to stick with Best Buds and says that Newmark's intention is to make Best Buds a great place, both to access medicine and work at. She says she has always been amazed by Newmark's positivity, through both ups and downs.

***“They’ll stand by me and I’ll stand by them as well. It goes both ways, they’ll keep supporting me and the way I run my business, and I’ll continue to offer the best product I can at the lowest price.”***

**- Hugh Newmark**

"It's so much fun to do what we do and it's so rewarding to genuinely be helping people," Newmark says with a grin. "You're part of these people's lives. This is the third night in a row that someone has brought me dinner!"

He's the happiest he's ever been.

*Marijuana smoke is exhaled and remains suspended in midair.*









# INLINE

**8 STATES - 3,000 MILES - 47 DAYS**

*The untold stories of a woman's world record-breaking rollerblade journey across the U.S.*







Story and photography by Madeline Takata - Additional photos courtesy of Kacie Cleveland

It's June 4, 2012, day 41 and Kacie Cleveland's inline skates are submerged in water on a Louisiana highway.

Every stride is met with ankle-deep resistance and she has 700 miles to go. It has been raining for six days straight, but quitting is not an option.

In 47 days, 23 hours and 37 minutes, 27 year-old Kacie will have inline skated from California to Florida, setting a new world record and triumphantly conquering a promised future of never being able to run again.

Had Kacie been told she would skate across the United States seven years prior to this moment, she would have laughed in disbelief. She had been athletic her whole life, but everything changed in 2005 when she experienced her first account with heart failure. Out for a run, Kacie, 21 at the time, was three miles away from home and collapsed on the side of the road.

"Doctors didn't know why my heart would stop and start again," Kacie says. "They encouraged that I go into therapy because they were certain I would die. I was in complete denial."

Several specialists who were unable to solve the mystery behind



*Kacie Cleveland poses for a portrait at Kulshan CrossFit, the gym she owns with her husband. Cleveland spends everyday at Kulshan CrossFit teaching classes and training. She has centered her profession around creating healthy lifestyles for herself and others.*

her sudden heart failures dismissed Kacie, and after months of unanswered questions, they finally narrowed it down to her birth control. The hormonal dosage caused the heart failure, an extremely rare side effect.

"I felt like my life restarted," Kacie says. "It was a wake-up call. It made me realize I needed to take advantage of my health while I have it."

Two years after her heart failure, Kacie was diagnosed with compartmental leg syndrome, also known as athletic exertion. This diagnosis ceased all athletic involvement, and caused her to quit track at California Polytechnic State University where she was attending.

"I just remember thinking why me? They said I wouldn't be able to walk or run again. I couldn't even pick my feet up off the ground," she says. "When my legs weren't inflamed, I wore special shoes because I had to drag my feet."

Kacie's determined nature motivated her to find alternatives to staying active without creating too much impact for her legs. She turned to the pool where she would place a floatation device in-between her legs and swim solely relying on her arms. From the pool she went onto biking, and from biking she discovered CrossFit in 2008. It served as an alternative to training and she now teaches at and owns Kulshan CrossFit Gym.

**“ I felt like my life restarted. It was a wake-up call. It made me realize I needed to take advantage of my health while I have it.”**

**- Kacie Cleveland**

Through CrossFit, Kacie started stair climbing and slowly began to run again. She teamed up with three others to set the world record for climbing a 42-story building for an entire day. In 2009, she conquered another goal - running the Boston Marathon.

Kacie yearned for the runners high, but the condition of her legs kept her from running as frequently as she hoped. This led her to inline skating.

*Kacie Cleveland blades along an expansive highway en route to her physical and emotional finish line.*



“I would have never stopped running if I didn't have to,” Kacie says. “Yet going through what I had to made me a better athlete. Skating gave me the same sensation as running.”

A journey across the United States was never the original goal, but was created over two years.

Her original plan was to bicycle the East Coast Greenway, a route running from Maine to Florida. When doing research on the route, she saw that it was accessible for bikers, runners and inline skaters. This caught her eye.

Kacie was mapping out her inline journey when a call from Danny Dannels changed her plan yet again. Dannels set the world record in 2002 for skating across the United States in 67 days, and challenged Kacie to beat him. He told Kacie his route; California to Florida, and she accepted the challenge.

Kacie, with her fiancé Adam and best friend Kevin, packed up a school bus they bought for storage and a place to sleep. Kacie jumped in the Pacific Ocean at Solana Beach, California on April 28, 2012 and was off.

## CALIFORNIA

She began the trek surrounded by 50 other athletes who traveled from around the country to skate and bike beside her. Kacie's first challenge of the journey was crossing a mountain pass. The first day of skating consisted of 48 miles and 4,500



feet of elevation. The second day was an additional 1,200 feet.

"Day one was the only time I thought 'Crap, I don't know if I'm in shape for this,'" Kacie says. "I was puking, my hamstrings were so tight and I just questioned 'What am I doing?'"

Kacie recalls those first few days being extremely emotional. Her family and fiancé were convinced she would die. From the intensive uphill route to the dangerous way down the pass, her journey was becoming more daring than imagined.

"Everyone was concerned for our safety," Kevin says. "The roads were so narrow there was barely any shoulder for us."

The first two days were behind her and the accompanying athletes quit, but Kacie and her best friend Kevin, who biked beside her the whole time, were determined to keep going.

## ARIZONA

Arizona consisted of another pass to skate through, a 27th birthday and a lot of police.

"I remember day 12 was the only day I didn't skate because the police and state patrol were following us threatening to arrest me even though I wasn't doing anything illegal," she says.

Concerned for her safety, Kacie's uncle, who was originally driving the bus, called the police secretly and begged them to stop her. Once the team realized it was Kacie's uncle who had attempted to stop them, they decided to push forward and dropped him off in the next town. In effort to get through Arizona as quickly as possible, Kacie skated through the night on day 14 with Adam at a vantage point telling her when it was clear of police.

## NEW MEXICO

"It was a whole lot of nothing. It was dry, hot, exposed and without shade."

## TEXAS

It took her 15 days to skate through Texas. Heat, dogs chasing her, poor conditions of the roads and headwinds slowed her speed down from 18 mph to 3 mph. Kacie's compartmental syndrome flared up because of the rocky terrain, which forced her to change her skating pattern throughout the state to create minimal vibration on her legs.

"I would skate in tears and end the day in tears," Kacie says. "Texas felt so defeating because we would skate for 12 hours and only get 38 miles. It felt like it was never going to end."

Despite her legs flaring up, and their bus breaking down three times, Kacie's friend Anna flew down and bicycled beside her. Kacie's sister also flew down for two weeks and drove a rental car behind them while the bus was in the shop.

"When Anna came it was as if the roads smoothed and the sun came out. The support of my team is what got me through those 800 miles," Kacie says.

## LOUISIANA/MISSISSIPPI/ALABAMA

On day 38, the team crossed over state lines into Louisiana. A change of scenery lifted the team's spirit as they realized they were getting closer to the end.

"Kevin and I would just sing the whole time and were laughing constantly," Kacie says. "We set mini goals for ourselves each day, and we even went 200 miles out of our way so we could go to Bourbon Street."

It rained every day since Louisiana, but the team skated 500 miles along Highway 10 despite aggressive, unfriendly drivers.

Skating through towns that had been completely devastated by Katrina made Kacie want to absorb everything they saw. They made efforts to enjoy what they were seeing, who they were meeting and where they were, Kacie recalls.

***"Anything is possible. We had so many odds stacked against us, but our spirits never doubted the goal. For such a crazy dream, and what seems to be an impossible thing, you can do it."***

- Kacie Cleveland

## FLORIDA

Florida was experiencing record breaking floods.

"The rain showers were so intense, Kevin and I would find shelter on random people's porches, watch lightning strike, and then start skating as fast as we could," Kacie says.

The last five days of the trek, Kacie skated 350 miles. Waking up at 3 a.m. in the pitch dark on June 15, 2012, Kacie and Kevin powered through in silence determined to finish under 48 days.

The clock struck noon and Kacie and Kevin saw Jacksonville Beach in the horizon and powered through with everything left their bodies had to give. They saw their family and friends waiting for them at the waters line, and with only 23 minutes to spare, Kacie touched the Atlantic Ocean and was done.

Tears were shed, celebration was had and Kacie felt surrounded with a level of love and support she will forever be thankful for.

"Anything is possible. We had so many odds stacked against us, but our spirits never doubted the goal. For such a crazy dream, and what seems to be an impossible thing, you can do it."





# SHIFTING GEARS

*Bellingham bike mechanic pairs his passion for biking with his career*

Story by Nick Yerger - Photography by Beatrice Harper

As a kid in Bozeman, Montana, Josh Poulsen could be found wrenching away on his BMX bike, trying, and not always succeeding, to fix parts he had broken that day. Now the 30-year-old father with a well-groomed moustache is one of Bellingham's best bike mechanics.

Poulsen discovered his passion for bikes in his formative years and with the help of a supportive mother was able to keep ripping around on two wheels, hitting every bump on the ground and breaking parts along the way.

After high school, Poulsen attended Montana State University to study cell biology and neuroscience. He bought his first mountain bike not long before, a 24-inch-wheeled Rocky Mountain Flow. He soon realized that a future as a lab technician in a white coat wasn't for him.



*Poulsen originally began fixing bikes because it made him happy, helping others — today he still gets the same satisfaction he did when he first began, which is what really matters, he says.*

"I changed my mind. I was paying cash for college," Poulsen says. "It was like, I'm getting nowhere with this, I'm gonna do what I wanna do. So I started working at a bike shop and that made all the difference."

Owenhouse Bicycling Co. in Bozeman was his first shop job. There, Poulsen dove deep into bike repair.

At 22, he made a trip to Bellingham to visit a friend going to Western. Poulsen was unaware of the bike trail access in the area but saw the potential while hiking Oyster Dome.



"I went back to Bozeman and realized I wanted to move to Bellingham. I wanted to ride my bike all the time. It's close to Whistler, it's close to Squamish, closer to Black Rock and other places I wanted to ride," Poulsen says.

In 2008 he made the move and got involved in the bike community, going to trail days and meeting a multitude of others on his wavelength.

At first he washed dishes to pay the bills. He then transitioned back into the familiar bike shop groove, working a two-week stint at Jack's Cycle Center, then took on the position of head mechanic at Fanatik Bike Co. where he worked for three years.

In 2012, Poulsen left Fanatik to pursue his love for bikes in his own way, opening his own repair shop, Brown Dog Bike, named after his longtime canine companion KDA (Kay-Da) Brown.

Between his departure from Fanatik and starting Brown Dog,

**“The reason I started Brown Dog Bike was to create that customer service based of one-on-one contact with the mechanic and just focus on the bread and butter of bike repair.”**

- Josh Poulsen



*A Transition bike sits waiting to be fixed in the back of Poulsen's workshop in north Bellingham.*

Poulsen had worked in the Transition Bikes shipping department, an international bike manufacturer headquartered in Ferndale at

the time. He kept close ties to the company as he ran Brown Dog, acting as a demo center and a dealer of Transition bikes.

Brown Dog was situated in Whatcom Falls Park, fittingly surrounded by greenery and a quick pedal to Galbraith Mountain. Meticulously organized, the shop had beautiful hardwood work benches crafted by Poulsen, as well as a two-level, 30-bike rack that was more often full than not.

Having his own shop allowed Poulsen to be the best he could be, providing one-on-one customer service, without the sometimes hindering communication dynamic of having to talk to sales people and mechanics at a regular shop.

Being the owner, salesperson, head mechanic and do-it-all guy behind Brown Dog, Poulsen was able to control 100 percent of the customer experience and his relationships with them.

"The reason I started Brown Dog Bike was to create that customer service base of one-on-one contact with the mechanic and just focus on the bread and butter of bike repair," Poulsen says. The customers won't argue that.

Zoë Taylor, a customer of Brown Dog, opted to go to Poulsen's shop over any other in town. Taylor met Poulsen when Brown Dog was just in its infant stages.

Taylor could tell immediately that Poulsen wasn't just in the bike industry for himself and personal gain, and really cares about his customers.

"He's just intuitive and is attentive to what people have going on, their energy, their presence," Taylor says. "He reads and adapts, and I feel like he applies the same thing to bicycles. His heart's in it for sure."

At Brown Dog, Poulsen built a strong customer base of people like Taylor that would keep coming back because of his attention to detail, reasonable prices, fast turnaround and knack for helping people understand their bikes.

"I want to help explain what's going on in what they think is a complicated suspension, and all of the pixie dust and unicorns they think live inside," he says. "When these in fact don't live there. It's just a horse, there's no unicorn, or pixie dust, just suspension oil."

Running a small business is hard, and something that Poulsen knows intimately. He was constantly on the phone, answering texts, responding to emails. Brown Dog was closed three days a week but there wasn't ever a time when he wasn't working.

Also a part-time firefighter, Poulsen was left with little time for his wife, Shala, and their now one-year-old daughter, Lyra, let alone time to ride his bike or build trails.

While running Brown Dog, he worked at least 60 hours per week.

"I just want to spend time with the family," he says. "But there's a balance, I need my personal time to keep myself sane, and that involves building trail and riding bikes. Being part of the family, being there as much as I can, especially at these critical growing stages of a one year old, that's very important to me, and to her as a growing little human."

Transition Bikes offered him the position of service manager at the company's new Bellingham headquarters, it was a dream come true for Poulsen and he was more than happy to say yes. The job is salaried, comes with benefits for his family, and Poulsen keeps getting to do what he loves without the stress of running his own business. The hours are nine to five, often shorter, giving Poulsen plenty of family and fun time.

When Transition moved to Bellingham with plans to have its own full-fledged demo center and showroom, Brown Dog would not be able to continue its demo and sales role, so Transition's founders, Kevin Menard and Kyle Young reached out to Poulsen and offered him the job.

"He's got a great, approachable personality, and that's kind of a core part of our brand, being approachable and easy to talk to," Menard says. "We love that about Josh, cause he's super good with customers, face-to-face, that one-on-one kind of connection." Menard explained that at Transition, Poulsen is responsible for keeping the demo fleet in order, setting customers up with demo bikes and working on personal bikes that Transition customers bring in.

"He's always bled the brand a bit, he really believes in the brand, beyond just as our employee," Menard says "That's kind of what we look for in an employee. That makes him want to go the extra mile, the extra step to take care of people. You're always going to get a better experience from someone who takes their job more personally."

Menard's right, Poulsen goes the extra mile and has no intention of changing his top notch customer service habits that are engrained in him and were his number one priority at Brown Dog.

***"I want to help explain what's going on in what they think is a complicated suspension, and all of the pixie dust and unicorns they think live inside. When these in fact don't live there. It's just a horse, there's no unicorn or pixie dust, just suspension oil."***

**- Josh Poulsen**

"If you want to go take it for a test ride and confirm that it is in fact shifting better, that'd make me feel better," Poulsen says to a customer picking up a bike from the Transition headquarters. He then goes outside, carrying extra parts for the customer, and helps him load the bike into his truck once it's confirmed that the bike is shifting better than before.

At Transition, Poulsen will keep doing what he knows best, helping people to the best of his ability and loving it.

Though Brown Dog no longer has a storefront and regular hours, it will live on as Poulsen continues to maintain bikes of loyal customers on the side, taking on new ones as time allows.

"I'm an old man, I just turned 30," Poulsen says. "I have a wife and a kid and a real job. Well, I work for Transition, so it looks like a real job, but it's more of getting to do what you love and getting paid for it. It's definitely an ideal job for my lifestyle."





# IS THERE ANYBODY OUT THERE?

*An exploration of faith*

Story by **John Boone** - Photography by **Beatrice Harper**

It's 7:03 p.m. on a Thursday and I'm late for church. Expecting gothic architecture, gray dripping stones, tall arching doorways or stained windows, I drive past the building where Ekklesia is housed.

Ekklesia, a Greek word, is roughly translated as an "assembly of citizens." It is a weekly prayer service for young adults and college students, hosted by Bellingham's Christ the King Church.

My GPS – powered by another divinity – silently curses at me as I screech by the typed-in destination. Doors are thrown wide-open and loud music plays from within the dark room. Crowds of people mingle, laughing and shouting.

Ekklesia reminds me more of a popular bar than a religious gathering. I steel myself and walk into the room - this is the first time in five years I've been inside a church.

Two billion people call themselves Christians, according to a 2010 study conducted by the Pew Research Center. Tonight I'm surrounded by around 200 of them. Several times, as I'm looking for a seat, I'm approached by complete strangers who smile at me and tell me how glad they are to see me.

After a few minutes of relentless positivity, I can't help myself: I smile back.

I've never had the best relationship with God, and I've often thought of believers as ignorant at best and bigoted at worst. It occurs to me, as I take in the sea of smiling faces, that maybe I've been the ignorant one.

And that is the reason for this article, an itching sensation I've felt lately, that maybe, just maybe, I've been wrong to dismiss so quickly the beliefs of billions.

Seats are filling up tonight, and smiling volunteers unfold another row of chairs. The band takes the stage just as I help myself to

the free coffee. They launch into a rendition of "Amazing Grace," everyone stands, many sing along.

Tonight's pastor is Garret Shelsta, a 30-something man dressed in slacks and a blue argyle sweater. As soon as he speaks I can tell his voice is professionally trained. His words reverberate through the crowd like a salsa dancer, whirring, dipping and building until he stops. Silence fills the room as his words die in the still air, tension stretches between the crowd like a taught wire.

But Shelsta's sermon contains no fire or brimstone, no dripping vitriol or condemnation. Instead, he jokes about his daughters, "My kids are cuter than yours," he says, flashing a smile. Much of his sermon flies over my head like a troop of mischievous angels. He flashes a bible verse I've never seen before up on the screen and goes through it line by line. One point of his hour-long message does resonate; "You can't find God through fear," he says. Rather, God is found through love and mutual understanding.

## MINDFULNESS THROUGH MEDITATION

Meditation sounds rather simple. All I need to gain enlightenment is sit with my back straight, jaw unclenched and keep my mind on my breathing. Follow your breath as it leaves your body. Easy enough, after 23 years and some months of living, I think I've got this breathing thing down. Wrong.

The first thing you notice when you meditate is the silence. After we begin I'm plunged into a most un-Buddhist terror. What if my phone rings? Or my stomach grumbles? Frantically I realize I haven't been focusing on my breathing, how does that work again? Air comes through the nose, or the mouth? Am I breathing too fast? Too slow? How do I swallow again? My neuroticism is completely at odds with the sect of Buddhism.



I'm practicing tonight. I'm at the Shambhala Buddhist Center on Meridian Street in Bellingham. As I attempt to meditate I can hear cars rush by as the rest of America goes on with their evenings.

About 500 million people identify as Buddhists globally. The vast majority – close to 99 percent – live in Asia and the Pacific. Roughly 4 million live in North America.

Beginning in the sixth century B.C. in northern India, Buddhism has its roots in Hinduism, much like Christianity and Islam have roots in Judaism.

By the time I figure out how to breathe again the 15-minute meditation session is over. Feeling like a failure I turn to the man who invited me here tonight, Robin Rieck. Rieck has practiced Buddhism for much of Buddhist Center.

I confess to Rieck that my attempts at meditation had crashed and burned.

"Buddhism is very flexible, you need to become your own teacher," Rieck says.

Basically you can't fail at being a Buddhist, what matters is the effort. The goal of Buddhism is to gain enlightenment, which Rieck describes as becoming completely realized in our human potential. My western-oriented mind struggles to grasp this concept. To me, realizing human potential is LeBron James dunking a basketball, or Russell Wilson dancing his way into the end zone.

Rieck gives me the example of learning to ride a bike. Any beginning bike rider is going to spend much of their time off balance, lurching dangerously to one side or the other. So it is with any first time Buddhist, no one becomes mindful without hard work and practice.

I leave feeling confused. Much of my life has been dictated by clear standards – drive 20 in a school zone, go to college, excel in school. My performance has been graded for as long as I can remember.

Buddhism is more ambiguous, it's like receiving a smiley face instead of a letter grade. I find the religion difficult to identify with, yet I'm fascinated by what Rieck has told me. I feel certain I will return to Buddhism.

## A MUSLIM IN AMERICA

Ryan Lloyd Holdridge has been a practicing Muslim for two years and today he is more comfortable in his faith than ever before. Holdridge has lived in the Seattle area all his life and didn't grow up practicing any religion.

"I'm about as American as you can get," he says.

He wears a white circular hat with a flat top called the Kufi. This is traditional headgear among Muslim men, worn to honor the Prophet Muhammad.

Islam is the world's fastest growing religion and in 2010 1.6 billion people identified as Muslims. By 2050 that number is expected to grow to 2.8 billion.

Holdridge first found Islam in a bookstore. The book he picked up wasn't even religious, it was an account of the Prophet Muhammad's life, written by a secular anthropologist.

But that was the spark that lit the fires of his faith. His conversion was a simple process, the more he came to understand Islam the more he identified with the religion. Though his evolving beliefs seemed natural to him, his family became concerned.

"My family had worries about terrorism," he says. "They thought [Islam] would lead me into extremism."

Easing his parent's fears wasn't a simple process, but Holdridge managed it by educating himself in Islam and then sharing what he learned with his parents. After learning to understand Islam his family began to accept Holdridge's conversion.

Holdridge converted to Islam during his first quarter at college and is currently a junior studying economics and environmental science at Western.

Holdridge was shy about his faith at first. He remembers leaving his dorm room every night and finding empty classrooms to pray in, so he wouldn't seem strange in front of his roommate. Now president of Western's Muslim Student Association, he's become much more comfortable with his religion.

**“I’m about as American as you can get.”**

**-Ryan Holdridge**

As a Muslim, Holdridge prays five times a day, avoids drugs or alcohol and tries to model himself in the Prophet Muhammad example.

Islam originated on the Arabian Peninsula around the year 622 AD, and shares many similar beliefs and practices with Christianity and Judaism.

Today Islam is a global religion with adherents in nearly every country on the globe.

It is also the belief that inspires the most fear and anger in the United States. The United States has been at war with Muslim-majority countries and Islamic extremists for as long as I've been a politically aware citizen.

"Terrorists want to isolate Muslims and make us feel as if we don't belong in the West," Holdridge says.

When people in the United States equate Islam with terrorism, Holdridge believes they are acting out of fear and ignorance; much as his parents did when he first told them about his conversion.

He believes the best way to defeat hate is to know people on a personal level.

"Once you get to know a Muslim on a personal level you realize they're much different than the Muslims you see depicted on Fox News," Holdridge says.

## SON OF A PREACHER MAN

Joe Lotze grew up the son of a pastor but was never preordained a Christian.

“My dad always told me you can’t inherit your faith,” Lotze says.

We meet at the New York Pizza in Burlington, a half-hour south of Bellingham. Bonding over our mutual love of Indian Pale Ales (IPAs), Lotze explains to me his religious beliefs.

“A lot of Christians believe whatever their pastor says; people don’t fact check,” Lotze says. “You have to formulate your own opinions.”

I order the fish tacos, which are incredibly spicy, so I sweat profusely as Lotze explains to me the difference between an active and passive Christian.

An active Christian is one who researches and interrogates his or her faith. Lotze tells me he has spent days at a time researching a single passage out of the bible. He also spent a month in Thailand, where he researched Buddhism.

A passive Christian is one you see on Western’s campus calmly, or not so calmly, telling you to repent or you’ll be sent to hell. The Westboro Baptist Church – a congregation infamous for protesting outside of military funerals – is mentioned. Lotze, who has a brother in the military, is furious even talking about them.

A 2010 poll conducted by the Pew Research Center stated that 70 percent of U.S. citizens believe they follow Jesus’s teachings. According to Lotze’s, very unscientific estimates, about 70 percent of these are passive Christians.

“Christians who say they’re Christian but don’t act like one are the reason for atheists,” he says.

Lotze’s God isn’t judgmental, and no sin is unforgivable. In his mind, judging others sins limits God – but God is limitless. Lotze says it’s a fallacy for fallible mortals to cast judgement on fallible mortals.

“My Christianity isn’t about me being better than anyone else,” he says, graciously offering me a piece of his quesadilla to cool my burning mouth. “It’s all about making a conscious choice to love God. God doesn’t want to scare you into liking him.”

This active choice is essential to Lotze’s worldview. The Bible doesn’t answer every question. He believes many facets of our lives we have to figure things out for ourselves.

Religion is a choice. Today atheism is accepted more than ever before. But Lotze believes too many faithful people practice their religion not as a choice, but more as a blind habit. Attending church on Sunday, then getting on with their lives for the rest of the week.

“A good Christian, a good student, or a good Buddhist question what they believe,” Lotze says.

## RELIGION, NOT DIVISION

Few things divide us like faith. Religion seems to fuel many conflicts, and is too often an excuse for violence. I grew up thinking of religion as an anachronism, a useless leftover from a more superstitious time.

Yet what struck me in my search for God wasn’t the difference between different religions, it was the similarity. At their heart all religions preach a relatively simple sermon: be kind to your fellow human, be compassionate to those less fortunate than yourself. Peace, not war, humility, not pride.

In our distracted world, when everyone has a super-computer in their pocket and a never-ending list of omnipresent stressors, perhaps religion is an excuse to take a break and breath.

Perhaps religion is a moment of cold contemplation in an overheated world of constant stimuli, perhaps religion is taking a moment to stand outside and listen to the wind howl. And maybe, if you listen close enough, you’ll hear God whispered in the wind.

I’m not sure but I think I’ll go and try.

*This piece adorns the wall above the prayer shrine in the central meditation room at the Shambhala meditation center of Bellingham.*





# “B‘AYDAN ‘AN AL-WATAN” (FAR FROM HOME)

*Saudi students navigate a new country and culture*

Story and photography by Stephanie Villiers

The bus comes to a stop a few blocks from Western’s campus, opening its doors to pick up students heading to class. The chatter filling the vehicle is predominantly in English until a few Arabic words enter the lexicon as Fahad Mukhtar steps on the bus with his friends from Saudi Arabia. The group of men are all international students at Western in various stages of learning English, so as they take their seats they mostly speak in their native language with one another.

One of Mukhtar’s friends sits next to an American woman and strikes up a conversation with her, wanting to practice his English skills. She asks him where he’s from, and he tells her he calls Saudi Arabia home.

“It must be dangerous to live in Saudi Arabia,” the woman remarks.

While listening in on this conversation, Mukhtar is taken aback by her statement, but this misconception by Americans about his home country is something he has grown familiar with during his two years of studying in the United States. Before getting off the bus, Mukhtar’s friend insists that Saudi Arabia is not dangerous, though it’s unclear if the woman is convinced of that or not.

## DIFFERENT CULTURE, DIFFERENT CUSTOMS

Mahmoud al-Saif felt like he already visited Western when he first arrived in Bellingham from his hometown of Qatif in eastern Saudi Arabia. In a way, he had, via the Internet. When he first decided



*Fahad Mukhtar, left, glances over at his friend Anas al-Sabri, right, on Western Washington University’s campus. Mukhtar and al-Sabri are international students from Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in Western’s Intensive English Program.*

where he wanted to study in Western’s Intensive English Program (IEP), he used the street view setting on Google Maps to virtually explore campus and the surrounding roads in town.

Since he was able to navigate the area without getting lost, this made his transition to the United States a little smoother than he expected. He was able to show his sister, Fatimah al-Saif, around when she arrived at Western to study in IEP two years later. However, both of the siblings quickly had to learn to adapt to cultural differences they encountered in the United States, especially regarding interactions between men and women.

“For my first quarter in IEP, it was hard for me to adapt to being with mixed classmates,” Fatimah al-Saif says. “In Saudi Arabia, we don’t have mixed classes. Girls have different schools than boys, and they have only female teachers. I studied for 12 years in this system.”

Fatimah al-Saif is in the Bridge Program at Western, which is for students who are in their first quarter of classes as international students after graduating from the IEP sequence. Every weekday morning, she wakes up, gets dressed and prepares herself for a long day of sitting through classes and tackling homework.

Like some Muslim women, she wears a hijab that veils her hair as prescribed by modesty standards in the Quran. She says she does this to ensure her head and body are covered from men who are not close relatives. She also declines to have her photo taken to dissuade males from viewing her specific features. She adds that Muslim women interpret the concept of hijab differently and do not all follow the same practices.

Fatimah al-Saif smiles and laughs often when discussing her experiences in the United States, having now lived here for more than two years since December 2013. She says she is an inherently social and outgoing person, but runs into difficulties when meeting and interacting with people who are unfamiliar with her customs and culture.

"When I meet other people from different cultures, especially the United States, they don't know a lot about what they should do when they meet me. For example, in greeting, I don't shake hands with males," she says, adding that in Saudi culture opposite genders refrain from doing so with each other.

Mahmoud al-Saif, who is more quiet and reserved than his sister, says he also encounters this same predicament when greeting people. For him, an awkward dilemma occurs when one of his female professors extends her hand to him.

بعيدا عن الوطن



*"Far from home" written in Arabic script.*

"Shaking hands with the opposite sex is prohibited in Islam and I always fall in these embarrassing situations where I have to shake hands with females, just to make them not feel embarrassed, especially in front of other people," he says. "I've encountered that so many times and I really want American people to understand it because it's important."

## PRAYING AND PRACTICING RELIGION

Some practicing Muslims follow dietary restrictions prescribed by the Quran. Food they eat must be certified halal, an Arabic word meaning lawful or permissible. Halal food refers to poultry and meat that is slaughtered according to Islamic practices. Seafood is permissible, but pork, blood and alcoholic beverages are not, according to the Quran.

Due to these restrictions, Fatimah and Mahmoud al-Saif cook their meals together and rarely go out to eat. The siblings order halal meat from companies around the United States and have it shipped to their apartment.

"When I first came here, I spent six months eating only salmon, pizza and vegetarian things because there was no way for me to find halal meat," Mahmoud al-Saif says. "After we found those companies that we're dealing with now for halal meat, we started learning how to cook the traditional dishes we usually make at home. We do sometimes make Chinese food, or Indian. As long as we are using halal meat, it is ok for us to make anything."

According to Mahmoud al-Saif, religion and culture in Saudi Arabia cannot be separated, and Islam intertwines with all aspects of life.

He and his sister still are able to practice their religion while living here but sometimes need to be creative with their practices.

Once, while traveling in the United States, the al-Saif siblings had to pray in an airport in front of many other travelers. Muslims pray five times a day and face the direction of Mecca, Saudi Arabia, while doing so. In addition to reciting prayers and Islamic verses, Muslims bow, kneel and touch their foreheads to the ground while praying.

As Mahmoud prayed in the middle of the airport terminal, he could feel the eyes of passersby peering at his ritualistic movements that must have appeared out of sorts in a place where authorities are often on the lookout for suspicious behavior. He knew that people were puzzled by the actions of him and his sister, but they continued with their prayers nonetheless. He says they have had to pray in public more than once, such as when they are on campus.

"Sometimes, I think, I can see how people look at us while we're praying and they feel like that's a strange thing. They have never seen people who do that before," Mahmoud al-Saif says. "I would understand how strange it looks from the outside, but I also haven't encountered anytime in our experience where I have been disturbed."

## MISCONCEPTIONS

Money, camels, oil.

That's what Mukhtar says Americans think of when he tells them he's from Saudi Arabia. Contrary to those perceptions, not all Saudis are wealthy. Fatimah al-Saif says she's encountered a similar reaction from people who learn she's from a major oil-producing country.

"When I tell someone I am from Saudi Arabia, the person always says, 'Oh, rich country.' I'm not a rich person!" she exclaims while laughing, adding that people should not stereotype Saudis.

Saudi international students at Western usually travel back home during the summer and winter breaks, so they spend a fair amount of time in the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport waiting to catch 20-hour flights. During one school break, Anas al-Sabri was standing in the security line at SeaTac, passport in hand and preparing for the long trip ahead of him.

An airport security official marched over to him and asked to see his passport. Al-Sabri handed him the green booklet embellished with Arabic script, and the official flipped through its pages. He then told al-Sabri to step out of the line and follow him to the front of the security area where the official closely examined his passport. He eventually let him continue through security to his flight, but the experienced left al-Sabri feeling embarrassed and singled out.

"There is a correlation that some Americans tend to do where they make connections between terrorism and Islam and I would say that's really a misunderstanding," he says.

Mahmoud al-Saif says he encourages Americans to not judge other cultures by how the media portrays them and to search beyond common misconceptions to learn about individuals of different backgrounds and belief systems. After living in the United States, he says he has realized he cannot judge Americans by his own misconceptions either.







A man with a beard and a headband is painting a mural on a wall. He is wearing a light blue t-shirt, black shorts, and a watch. He is holding a paintbrush in his right hand and a can of paint in his left hand. The wall is covered in graffiti and has a large mural of a face. The scene is outdoors with green foliage in the background.

# "A HALF-FORMED THOUGHT"

How a Seattle-based artist finds inspiration in life's duality

*Elliott Klein, 23, working on his mural "A Half-Formed Thought"*

W ispy vegetation brushes against his eyes as he treks further into the woods. Fronds beneath him are bent, not broken, forming a trail deeper into the vegetation. The path is fresh with footsteps. Four feet are on the trail today. Two belong to the artist, Elliott Klein, and two to his friend and photographer, Khoa Ngo.

“No one would hardly see it in the middle of the woods,” Klein explains. That’s why the cameras are there; to preserve something beautiful that nobody can see unless they trek deep down the trail like the two artists.

Klein’s gunmetal gray backpack scrapes against blackberry vines as he ducks under branches. He has found a perfect spot, deep in one of Washington’s lush forests. Often, he would spend one or two weeks on a piece but this one has been months in the making.

“Lynnwood,” Klein says, identifying their location in the mass of green. This wooded area is near Lynnwood, Wash., where he grew up. “I’ve been here before,” he says. “I’m not worried about someone kicking us out.”

Klein and Khoa reach a clearing where the cement facade of an abandoned home lives. Two rectangular gaps where windows once stood are empty. Branches from the area have reclaimed the structure as part of the environment. This is the perfect place for Klein’s next piece, a 5-by-5 foot graffiti/stencil mural titled “A Half-Formed Thought.”

Klein’s own style of stenciled spray paint graffiti art has been five years in the making. He resides in Seattle, working as an assistant account executive at a marketing firm. Outside of the office he ditches the tie for a respirator.

“Paying attention to people and how they act is something that I think affects both my work and art,” Klein says. “I try to understand motives and why people do what they do or don’t do.”

Klein’s work relies on a minimal palate; two or three strong colors along with black or white. “A Half-Formed Thought” will be no different. He has chosen a dark maroon and a shade of pink you’d find on eggshells in April. Ngo brings with him a 50mm and a 28-135mm camera lens, a tripod and a stabilizer.

Klein builds his pieces from the stencil up, using graphic design skills to make elaborate, multi-layered blue prints of each piece. This stencil took more than a month to make using Photoshop. He started with a reference image he refers to as a girl in a beanie.

“A Half-Formed Thought” was hardly that when it came to preparation. After finishing the design he cut out the shapes with

meticulous care. Multiple pieces of paper are decorated with tiny holes, big swoops and exact slashes.

“After years of changing styles and refining, my paintings are made from sharp lines and broken images,” Klein says.

Stencils are exact and mathematical in design, but Klein’s affinity for adding fractured pieces comes from learning that things in life can maintain purpose even when they don’t equate perfectly. Commitment in every cut of the stencil, premeditated brilliance that only comes together once the piece is fully finished.

“It’s not broken enough to be unrecognizable,” Klein says. “But enough to be noticeable.”

Klein dons his respirator and plastic gloves. Ngo settles in and starts to record b-roll with his DSLR camera.

**“Paying attention to people and how they act is something that I think affects both my work and art.”**

**-Elliott Klein**

“I thought I brought two fully charged batteries but it turns out they weren’t,” Ngo says. They will have to be very calculated with their shots on a partial charge if they wished to record the full process.

The first layer of the piece is taped to the wall. Everything becomes red. Aerosol propels color out of his can in a mist. His hands move with precision. He pauses, then sprays in slashes until the stencil is saturated in maroon.



▲  
*“A Half-Formed Thought” is a 5-by-5 foot spray paint stencil mural. Klein spent more than two months designing the piece on Photoshop before finally painting it in July.*

The first stencil comes down and the second layer goes up. The rusty dark red wall is covered by another stencil then pink paint. The hissing of the metallic can stops.





The stencil is removed. Klein detaches his respirator, discards his gloves and takes a step back. Ngo snaps a few still shots of the finished piece. Klein collects his spent stencils, cans, respirator and trash. Ngo packs up his camera equipment. Klein takes his gray backpack and throws it over his shoulder, leaving “A Half-Formed Thought” in its new home.

“As far as the painting goes, if I mess up, it becomes very difficult to fix,” Klein says. “Everyone wants something and everyone approaches it a little differently and everyone has their failures trying to achieve it.”

**“Everyone wants something and everyone approaches it a little differently and everyone has their failures trying to achieve it.”**

-Elliott Klein



*Elliott Klein, 23, A.K.A “NES” crouches down to apply finishing touches on his 5-by-5 foot “A Half-Formed Thought.”*

Klein hasn’t gone back in the months since. He assumes that the piece has perished. Painted over by another artist.

But he does not dwell on the chance of its demise, for it lives on in stills from the day and in the months of work he invested in the short life of the piece.

“It was a large undertaking,” Klein would later tell me, “But it was immensely satisfying.”





# ART OF DYING

## *"The Web We Weave": A Bellingham Exhibit Starts the Conversation*

Story by Rachel Loofburrow - Photography by Beatrice Harper and Daniella Beccaria

**D**rums beat rhythmically in the background. A woman is told she has cancer. The fates come into play.

A walker is presented to the woman, some coffee, a quilt, an oxygen mask, teddy bear, a paper urn and more. The more she is given, the more overwhelmed she becomes.

More choices, more decisions to be made.

The fates wrap her with tissue paper; her entire body is covered. She is drowning in stress.

This storytelling dance, "The Web We Weave", is one of many different events at the Art of Death Exhibition, organized by Ashley Benem. 2015 was the second year the exhibition has taken place. She wants people to be able to have discussions about death and explore the topic through art and creative presentations.



*Candles surround the piece "Letting Go" by Cheri Hepker on a crisp night at Bellingham's Bayview cemetery. Hepker's artwork is inspired by the impermanence and transformation evident in life.*

Benem believes the stigma surrounding discussions of death traces to our media, marketing, television and movies.

"It's all about being young and healthy and loaded, everything is geared for that," Benem says. "We think we're immortal in this country."

"When somebody comes to you with a topic that is taboo or might be a little touchy we just go, 'oh no, no, I don't want to talk about that,'" she says.

If we do look to an elderly person we are praising how young they look, Benem says.

Benem is a death midwife. Her role is to comfort and support patients who are given a terminal diagnosis and their families.

She spent many years in the medical field as an EMT and a paramedic. When she had her son, she felt the need to make a change in her career. She went back to school and became a massage therapist. From there she became a birth doula to help moms and families.

**“When somebody comes to you with a topic that is taboo or might be a little touchy we just go, ‘Oh no, no, I don’t want to talk about that.’”**

**-Ashley Benem**

In the last five years, Benem found herself being called upon by friends and family to comfort those who were dying. Her friends knew her to be a supportive person, someone they could rely on in times of need.

Benem had a realization from being called on by several of her friends and family.

Benem tried to ignore the subject of death for about a year and focused on doing other things. In the end, she kept finding herself working with people who were dying.

“It just really struck me that this is actually what I really needed to be doing at this time in my life,” Benem says. “When you get tapped out to work with the dying, there’s sort of no going back.”

She wanted to learn more about the subject. She searched out training sessions, retreats, anything she could find to help fill in the blanks about the dying process to properly support and guide families.

At a gallery in Anacortes she found a multimedia piece that struck her. The piece was by Scott Kolbo entitled, “Sonic Jeremiah.”

There was white butcher paper nailed to the wall. It ran down to the floor. There was a charcoal and ink sketch. A projection was setup and an elderly man appears on the butcher paper.

**“It just really struck me that this is actually what I really needed to be doing at this time in my life,” Benem says. “When you get tapped out to work with the dying, there’s sort of no going back.”**

**-Ashley Benem**

He walks out to a field and he begins to wobble. He goes down to his knees. The man dies and then crows appear and start trying to lift him up.

First one or two crows show up and then over time there are a hundred. Eventually the man disappears and then slowly the crows disappear.

Benem watched this cycle over and over again for 20 minutes. She thought to herself, art can educate people about death and dying; it can open up their awareness.

Benem’s goal is for people to find their own personal truth about what they believe in when it comes to death. This isn’t about what happens after death, she doesn’t want to go there because that’s a more personal subject.

As “The Web We Weave” comes to an end, the mythological figure, grandmother spider, intervenes. She cuts away the tissue paper around the woman with cancer. The woman can now go to the items presented to her earlier and inspect them individually.

This dance represents how the process of dying should not be overwhelming says Benem.

All the services are available to the dying woman, but she only needs to choose the ones that she wishes for her care. In the end, the woman dies. A man speaks in the background. He asks if you will walk upon the web or become entangled in it.

*A cross is lit up by candlelight at Bayview Cemetery on an evening just before El Dia De Los Muertos, or the Day of the Dead, a holiday which has significance for many of Hepker’s art pieces.*






# MULTIMEDIA

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## POP ART FROM NATIVE ROOTS – EVAN YAMADA

Cheyenne Randall, 37, is a mixed media artist more commonly known as Indian Giver. Randall give himself the name Indian Giver to make people think more about the meanings behind these terms. Indian Giver is typically seen with negative connotation, but Randall uses it to give back to his Native people. He has worked closely with Honor the Treaty and done other work representing different tribes around the United States. With over 100,000 followers on Instagram, Indian Giver is breaking in to the world of Pop Art.



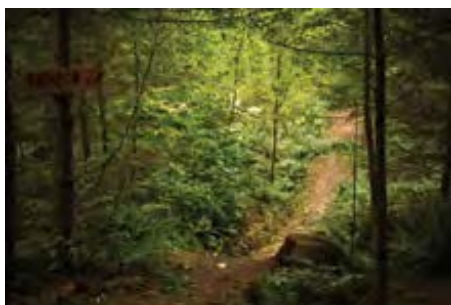
## A LASTING IMPRESSION – MADELINE TAKATA

Carly James and Kevin Nelson, co-owners of Bison Bookbinding and Letterpress, open up their store to give a look into the art of letterpress printing. The wife and husband duo have been in the craft since 2004 and are passionate about preserving the printing technique. With the recent opening of their store front, the two are eager to share their products and provide an insight into their creative world.



## LIVING ON PURPOSE – CHANEL RETASKET AND STEPHANIE VILLIERS

Whatcom County residents Lu Dotinga, Bahram Sadighi and Sandy Stork – all in their seventies – reflect on life from varying perspectives. Each of these vibrant senior citizens has a story to tell about how they found their purpose in life and their reasons for continuing to live to the fullest everyday.



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