Dearest reader,

When I was a child, my father asked me, “How do you eat an elephant?”

“One piece at a time,” I replied.

This quarter, Klipsun delved into the curiosities that compel us all forward in our journey. Within these pages you will find stories about gritty 80-year-old ultra runners, personal growth and the familial connections that bind us all together.

Success of any kind is attained through small, nearly unperceivable steps. We don’t always go forward. Sometimes we must step backwards, sometimes we make mistakes, sometimes we explore unexpected roads. That is the nature of any pursuit. It takes courage to give yourself a moment of rest.

I invite you to pause and find that bold stillness.

One piece at a time.

Stoked,

Trisha Patterson
Editor-In-Chief
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Going the Distance

THIS SEASONED RUNNER PROVES IT PAYS TO STAY CURIOUS

story & photo by ROSE CARR

The moderately warm winter day begins just like any other. She wakes promptly at 7 a.m. and fixes herself the same breakfast she’s been eating for as long as she can remember: Raisin Bran with soy milk, bananas, blueberries and a cup of tea.

The only difference is that in two hours she would be standing at a starting line, waiting to begin a journey of running 100 miles in 48 hours during the Across the Years ultramarathon race, located in Glendale, Arizona.

She dresses herself in clothing left out the night before; black leggings and a gray long sleeve. She tightly threads a time chip through her neon pink shoelaces. She’s not nervous, though. She is never worried about the long races. She has all the time in the world to finish, which is exactly what she has come here to do.

This year, Barb Macklow has challenged herself to keep moving, even at 82.

Barb has been anticipating the Across the Years race since she last attempted to complete the course in 2015. In her first attempt she reached around 75 miles before she couldn’t go any further.

Barb steps up to the starting line among 67 other racers. Her breathing is calm. It’s a beautiful start to the race with blue skies and the sun above that appear to stretch forever.

The race director and spectators begin a countdown. “Five!...Four!...Three!...”

Although she stands tall and confident, Barb isn’t immune to doubts. Going into these races she always feels like she hasn’t had enough training, hasn’t put in enough time or enough mileage. Barb reminds herself that she will just do what she can the best way she can.

“Two!...One!” Cheers erupt from the crowd and runners. Someone is erratically sounding off their blow-horn.

Barb runs across the time mat, glances to see her name display on the time board and begins her 100-mile journey.

The race is a fixed time event. Runners and walkers can register for a 24-hour to six-day race, in which they have that allotted time to run as far as they can.

The participants race on a 1-mile, packed-gravel trail that surrounds seven baseball diamonds. Trees and grass line the gravel pathway, creating a pleasant environment for the runners. They run one direction for four hours, before turning around the other way for another four, switching back and forth.

According to an article published by the U.S Department of Health and Human Services, roughly 35 to 44 percent of adults 75 years and older are physically active.

At 23 miles, Barb takes a break to breathe. It has been almost seven hours since the race has begun. She takes a two-hour rest to nap, eat, drink and get ready for the next round of miles she’s scheduled.

At her last race, she was 18 miles away from completing, with 10 hours to spare. Around 1 a.m. Barb’s body needed to take a rest before finishing her last leg. When she moved to crawl down in her tent and lay inside her sleeping bag, Chuck, her son-in-law, convinced her to sleep at the hotel room.

“Let’s go back to the hotel,” he told her. “You can sleep in a heated room and in a bed. It’s too cold out here, you won’t get any rest anyway. You’re shaking!”

Reluctantly, Barb went and slept seven hours. When she woke, she was disappointed that she had slept for that long. She now only had three hours to finish 18 miles.

After that, Barb decided that she wasn’t going to listen to anyone, but herself.

Barb came out of her first 25 miles unscathed. Aside from one bandage change for a blister on her foot, she wasn’t cramping or aching. Barb was feeling ready to start the next round.

Barb hasn’t always been the athlete everyone knows
Barbara Macklow, 83, has been running the many trails offered in Bellingham, Wash. for more than 30 years.

She and one of her daughters completed a 1,000-mile bike ride from Bellingham to San Francisco, continuing to Los Angeles.

When Barb reaches the 80-mile mark, the whole race is now a mental game. The last 20 miles become the toughest part of the whole race. Up until that point, she was pushing her body as hard as she could. Physically, she’s expelled all her energy and her body was exasperated. Mentally, she has to remind herself to keep going, she might quit.

“People are telling you ‘Good job, you’re doing good!,’ which is all a lie,” Barb jokes. “But it does give you a little boost.”

Karen Bonnett Natraj, who was 60 at the time of the race, had finished all the laps she was going to do and decided to run and walk with Barb for the last 20 miles.

“She actually saved my life, because I had planned to run until I collapsed on the trail and couldn’t go any further,” Barb says.

“She told me, ‘Barb, don’t run. You’ve got a strong walk. If you just walk, you have plenty of time to make it before the cut off. If you keep running you’ll fall and hurt yourself.’ She stayed with me ‘til the end.”

During those final miles she’s having the same conversation with herself, over and over -- a continuous pep talk to keep her body moving.

“You’re going to keep going, so just keep moving. This is it. This is your last chance. You’re not going to do this again. Keep going, keep moving. You’re going to go through another whole year of training? Are you kidding me! You did the training. Now just finish the race.”

Even if Barb feels she has to walk most of it out, it doesn’t matter to her.

“There are a lot of elite runners and other runners better than me that won’t finish 100 miles,” Barb says to herself. “I’ve got nothing to be ashamed of if I don’t make it. I’m 80-some-years-old!”

When she does cross the time-mat for the last time, Barb is relieved, elated, and mostly proud to have finally finished what she set out to do.

“I had tried several times and fallen short,” Barb says. “This meant so much to me. It was not easy, but I managed to persist and make my goal.”

Her family gathers around her and shares her joy. Her final time is 47 hours, 21 minutes and 12 seconds. She places 36 out of 67 in her 48-hour group. Barb makes a new world record with her time for women aged 80 to 84 in the 100 mile distance, as officially noted on USA Track and Field Masters Road Records.

Barb sits and prepares to take a shower by untying her laces with exhausted, cold, wet arms. She delicately peels her socks off to reveal blisters in between and on top of her thin, weathered toes appearing like gnarled tree roots that have been pushing the ground up for years. Some toenails are missing.

Exhausted and ready for a nap, Barb musters the energy to attend the award ceremony. There she is presented with a belt buckle that shows off “100 Miles” squarely imprinted on the front, and a large beer mug.

She had a goal and she conquered it.

“I’m happy that I can train and do them. I just want to finish and I don’t even mind being last,” Barb laughs. “I try to go out and enjoy it.”

Barb no longer runs competitively, but you can find her running the roads and trails of Bellingham, enjoying life, one step at a time.
I n May 2016, he was with his mother and siblings when they were struck by a car. His mother died. With emergency treatment at a hospital, resulting in permanent cognitive impairment and the removal of an eye, he survived. His brothers and sisters did too. He lived his life visiting workshops and schools for educational purposes.

This guy’s name was Rainbow and he was a Virginia opossum. He resided in an outdoor enclosure at the Whatcom Humane Society Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, the hospital and facility he was treated at the day he sustained his injuries. Because Rainbow was deemed unable to live on his own in the wild after his treatment, the Wildlife Center applied for a permit to have him become an education ambassador.

Alysha Evans, manager at the Wildlife Center, says Rainbow’s situation was unusual.

“We don’t normally name any of the animals – they get a case number because we want to make sure that we are keeping them as wild as possible and so we don’t create any kind of bond with them,” Evans says.

Rainbow had the worst injuries among his 12, tiny, look-alike siblings – opossums typically have 13 babies – he got tagged with all the colors to identify him out of the group, producing the name Rainbow Opo. After his eye had to be removed, Evans says Rainbow never really went back to his normal opossum habits. He no longer had a natural response to fear, had cognitive difficulties like breathing and couldn’t eat normally.

Still, Rainbow didn’t seem to mind. In the extra year of life the Wildlife Center helped create for him, this one-eyed, noisy-breathing marsupial enjoyed human interaction. However, those at the Wildlife Center did not treat him like a pet. Rather, he helped educate the public.

“Most people are terrified of opossums and think they
A possum curls up in its pen. A one-eyed barn owl at the Whatcom Humane Society Wildlife Rehabilitation Center. Caretakers use masks when they feed birds to keep human contact as minimal as possible.

Evans says. “They’re nature’s little scavengers and clean-up crew. They’ll eat ticks with Lyme disease, they’ll clean up harmful insects and they’re actually not aggressive.”

Rainbow was just one aspect of the Wildlife Center. Previously operated through Northwest Wildlife, the Wildlife Center became a department of the Whatcom Humane Society in 2014. The Humane Society is the oldest non-profit animal welfare organization in Whatcom County.

The Wildlife Center, however, remains the same as it was before the switch – an older, white house with a cement-floor basement, just off Mount Baker Highway. A large weeping willow tree is rooted in the front lawn and animal enclosures scatter the backyard.

In tune with the Humane Society’s vision that all animals are “sentient beings, have value beyond economic measurements and are entitled to legal, moral, and ethical consideration and protection,” the Wildlife Center also pinpoints how to coexist with wildlife.

They understand that humans are actually the ones merging into the lives of animals.

“Our motto is definitely rescue, rehabilitation, release,” Evans says. “Our ultimate goal is that every single wild animal that needs help in our community will one way or another make it to the Center...so we can then put each one back into the wild.”

Evans is a licensed wildlife rehabilitator and a licensed veterinary technician; her background bursting with experience and a passion for animals. Claiming she’s always been fascinated with wildlife, she also grew up next to a wildlife center.

“I always saw what [the center] was doing in the news and always drove past, and thought, ‘one day I am going to work there,’” Evans says.

Evans’ curiosity of that center soon led to volunteer work, which then revealed another discovery: she wanted to not only be involved with caring for animals but also take part in the medical aspect of wildlife care, prompting her decision to attend veterinary school.

Evans has volunteered and worked at multiple wildlife centers since her official training and becoming manager at her current post.

Beside Evans and a few other experienced staff, the Wildlife Center is fueled by volunteers and interns. For the past 16 years, Laura Clark has worked with the Whatcom Humane Society. Currently, as director, she’s responsible for the overall operations of the organization and its departments and services, such as the Wildlife Center. Last year, Whatcom Humane Society as a whole received over 5,000 domestic, wild and farm animals.

There are roughly 11 positions available – such as a vet clinic assistant and a farm animal friend – for a volunteer to pursue based on certain qualifications. A volunteer must also be able to commit at least two hours a week for a minimum of six months. Internship positions, on the other hand, are offered every year from April 1 to October 31.

“Working at WHS is a very inspiring place,” Clark says. “Each day can bring extreme joy and also sadness, but the good far outweighs the bad and seeing an animal receive care, comfort and a second chance at a great life is the best thing ever.”

They understand that humans are actually the ones merging into the lives of animals.
“Booya!”

I heard this exclamation many times from Shelby Payne on a crisp, fall Sunday in October. She often followed it with the flash of a smile and a genuine laugh alongside the ka-shh, ka-shh of the nail gun.

The vibrant smile, laughter, many “booyas” and insights about life are snippets of Payne’s personality. However, something else has emerged that adds to Payne’s character: her big dream to intentionally live tiny.

For the last few years the Western Washington University alumna has been on a journey to live with less while beginning the process of constructing her own tiny house in Olympia, Washington. Payne has strung up soft twinkling lights on wooden beams and named her half-

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A Journey of Intentional Living

A PROFILE ON SHELBY PAYNE, WHO IS BUILDING A TINY HOME TO LIVE A MORE INTENTIONAL LIFE

story by ERIN MACKIN
photos courtesy of SHELBY PAYNE & OCTOBER YATES
The tiny home movement has grown in recent years. Nationwide, housing prices continue to rise.

built house Cleo, after the Lumineers’ song “Cleopatra.”

Currently all four walls are up and the many windows are installed. A tall ladder stands where a staircase will one day lead to a loft, adjacent to a couch frame that doubles as storage. The light from outside shines through a door frame, a skeleton of wood slowly coming to life.

The tiny home movement has grown in recent years. Nationwide, housing prices continue to rise, according to a Reuters poll, and people are taking notice of the environmental impacts of living large. In 2015, the average American household measured just under 2,800 square feet, according to the American Enterprise Institute. Payne’s finished home will be somewhere around 300 square feet.

Many who choose to live this way are often free from debt and a mortgage, according to The American Tiny Home Association. They have an increased ability to travel and a smaller environmental footprint. These benefits are on Payne’s list of why she wants to live tiny, among many others. She’s not alone. According to the National Association of Home Builders, two out of five tiny home owners are over age 50 and one-fifth are under age 30.

When Teton Gravity Research published an article about a couple who built a tiny home in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, Payne knew it was for her.

Payne is an avid skier and outdoor lover. One of her dreams is to live in a town where she can play and ski every day in the winter. But Jackson Hole’s median home value is $815,700. The only feasible way she would be able to make this work financially would be to live in a tiny home. This idea got Payne thinking.

Aside from her dreams of hitting the slopes, Payne also wanted to live a more sustainable lifestyle.

“I realized that not only was it an economical decision, but also an environmentally friendly decision,” Payne says. “You’re disconnected from a lot of things. You’re using less resources, less water, less electricity.”

Originally, Payne planned to use only repurposed or recycled materials. After many attempts to collect materials, she realized that this wouldn’t necessarily be the best way for her to complete this project. She didn’t have a proper storage place to keep all of the materials, and she didn’t fully know what she needed so she changed directions.
“A way to mitigate my inability to do everything recycled was to do it locally, which is really important,” she says. “Not only is it important just as a concept, but as I’m moving home back to my hometown, one of the things that drew me back here was the sense that everything could be local.”

Payne works as the campaign manager for Max Brown, a candidate running for Olympia City Council. She often shops for groceries at Spuds Produce Market and sources all of her building materials for Cleo from businesses established in Olympia.

She laughs as she points to a horizontal stack of wood studs nailed together next to where her work desk will eventually sit.

“That’s what I like to call my tree because it’s essentially the extent of what a normal-sized tree would be, all of those studs stacked together. I’m like wow, that does not make me feel environmentally friendly,” she jokes.

After returning from a faculty-led service learning trip to Kenya and Rwanda, where she studied community development during winter quarter of 2016, her mind was made up. During these two months away from Bellingham and her house, Payne took the time to learn and contemplate what she really needed to survive.

“We were living in bunk beds in this village, coexisting with all of these people. It allowed me to be disconnected from society back home. That allowed for a lot of time to think about what I needed and what was important to me,” she says. “What it really came down to was a roof over my head, but something that wasn’t extensive. Something that had everything I needed; a bed, running water and something to keep me warm.”
Her last necessity is one she repeated throughout the whole day. “People. I wanted people in my life,” Payne says. The tiny home made more sense to her than ever. “I would be living in a smaller structure, having smaller bills, and would be encouraged to live more intentionally outside -- not only in terms of skiing and biking and hiking, but being in my community,” Payne says.

If there was another thing Payne made clear that afternoon, it is her cognizant appreciation for the process of this project. The original plan called for a finished home in November, just in time for ski season. However with a rainy spring and a full time job, the timeline shifted to a January finishing date.

“You can plan and plan and plan all you want, and life is just not always going to work out that way,” Payne says. “I think it’s incredibly important to remain flexible whether that’s in your career, in your relationships, your goals and dreams and aspirations. The tiny home has taught me that.”

Payne compares this to what she’s learned in post graduate life as well.

“I’m figuring out what do jobs look like? What do friendships looks like? What does my life look like in how I live, how I play and how I interact with the world?” Payne says.

Although her process has been slower than planned, she’s remained intentional in using it as a personal growth experience. Initially she wanted to build the tiny home all by herself.

“I have no doubt that I could [build it solo], but it wouldn’t be nearly as rewarding as it has been if I didn’t ask for the help that I did, and if I didn’t seek out the people that have been blessing me much with their time and their talent,” she says.

With every day comes a new learning experience – each being another “booya” moment. Payne says she is learning how to access and utilize people’s resources; a challenge and a reward. For instance, Payne’s partner Zack Shier works in construction and has provided her with a multitude of knowledge and encouragement.

“It’s been a learning experience in that those people that know what they’re doing can take the time to say, ‘Here, let me take the time to show you and teach you.’ And that’s empowering in and of itself,” she says.

Soon, Cleo will stand fully finished atop a trailer, walls nailed together by Payne and those she cherishes most: her parents, friends and Shier. She has very detail thought out and every inch considered. It may be parked in a mountain town, close to the slopes and nestled between evergreen trees or close to downtown Olympia so Payne can easily ride her bike to work. Wherever it ends up, the house will be a physical representation of one woman’s big dream to live an intentional life.

During these two months away from Bellingham and her house, Payne took the time to learn and contemplate what she really needed to survive.
Grant’s Burgers opened in Ferndale, Washington in 1964. The small town, family-owned burger joint offered each burger with fries and a witty one-liner from the owner Russ. Over half a century later, Grant’s Burgers still hasn’t lost the homestyle humor or the smell of burger grease.

Grant’s sits right off Main Street in rural Ferndale. It looks out over one of the busier intersections in the area and is easily the most colorful. Bright yellows, contrasting reds and splashes of blues act as their own neon signs, spotlights for attention under the greying sky. It’s easy to see why Grant’s has been a neighborhood hangout hotspot since its opening.

Today, Grant’s is hosting a different guest. As the day slows and the time approaches, preparations for the new customer begin. Employees with Grant’s hats and black
shirts shuffle outdoor chairs around, set a table outside and quickly wipe up left behind scraps from the day’s previous eaters.

The guests will be here soon.

The pink sky is cut short by brilliant fluorescent blue headlights slicing through the darkening air as a car pulls into the empty parking lot. It’s a black Audi, the signature four hoops on the front of the car glistening under Grant’s lights. The low burble of exhaust interrupts the scraping of chairs on the ground as employees glance up at the car parking. They’re here.

Two minutes later, a throaty growl announces the arrival of another. A navy blue Volkswagen Golf R pulls off the road and backs into the spot next to the Audi. As the car ticks itself cool in the evening air, it’s joined by two more Volkswagen Golf’s. These are older cars and could be heard long before they were seen. With a loud BRAAP from the tuned exhausts they announce their arrival and parade around the lot for a lap or two before also settling down in parking spots.

As Grant’s employees start preparing food, a low BMW pulls into the lot, followed by another Volkswagen and another Audi. Within 15 minutes, the lot is full of a variety of unique machines, engines still muttering, headlights piercing and doors thudding shut.

The members of Death By Volkswagen have never met at Grant’s, but it already feels like home. The sound of sizzling hamburger meat mingles with the chatter of toddlers climbing out of a Volkswagen Jetta. The owner, Maleah Smith, tries to wrestle the little ones out of the busy parking lot and towards the food. Her boyfriend, Jordan Brandt, lends a hand but the youngest members have set their sights on milkshakes and french fries.

Meanwhile, the driver of the black Audi, Gary Lambert, is chatting with the very tall driver of the blue Golf R, Cody Vanderwerff. Through breaths of steam in the chilly night air hugs and hellos are given and received.

Death By Volkswagen is not so much a car club as it is a family reunion. Members know each other by name and by the car they drive. While some reunions result in arguments over politics, this family discusses intake manifolds and what tires to buy. That’s how this all started in 2011; three guys in a garage, working on Volkswagens, sustained by a love of VW’s, pizza and beer.

As Grant’s serves greasy burgers, corn dogs and shakes, members make their way into the warm indoors. Their cars sit parked outside, cold to the touch in the October evening. The diverse cast of Death By VW is showcased in the cars they drive. A lowered Audi, an old 1980’s Golf that’s been rebuilt twice, a tuned Golf R an old truck with a dying motor and a hole in the exhaust, a brand new VW Jetta leaves Grant’s parking lot bursting at the seams.

While the title hints that only Volkswagens are allowed in the club, anyone can join. One of the administrators of the club drove a Cadillac to Grant’s. All drivers are welcomed too, as proven by the members sharing dinner at Grant’s tonight. Fathers, friends, mothers, mechanics, teenagers, bound together through a shared passion.

The unique name “Death By VW” came about after one of the founding members, Kyler Lee, nearly died in a catastrophic accident. While driving one of his VW’s, Lee lost control of the car and plummeted down the side of an embankment. Punctured lungs and a rib through the heart nearly claimed his life. After crawling his way back up toward the road, he was eventually saved by a passing driver, his car a twisted wreck at the bottom of the hill. What a way to go, members chuckle. Death by a Volkswagen.

The name goes deeper than that, though. It stands as a symbol of camaraderie and family. Dubs, slang for members, know each other by the cars they drive, waving “hello” on highways and posting photos on the club’s Facebook page with captions like “Found you!” or “Spotted!”. If someone can’t make it to an event, members do whatever they can to get it going again.

Car enthusiasts like those in Death By VW see their cars as a form of self-expression. There’s a television in the
These auto enthusiasts know their vehicles inside and out. Ask any member and they can tell you exactly what work has been done on their car and what needs to be done next. How much money spent in the process isn’t as much of a problem as it is an inconvenience. Most owners expect the price to come with the passion.

As the children get antsy and the meals are finished, the family of Death By VW bundle up and make their way outside, graciously thanking Grant’s employees as they begin to close for the night. Tonight boasts a group of about 20 members, a fairly good size but nothing extraordinary. The first Death By VW car meet had a similar turnout six years ago. In the years since its conception, Death by Volkswagen has grown tremendously. Now, after spreading south to Seattle and north into Canada, the tally sits at around 700 members.

Sweatshirt hoodies pop up, winter jackets appear and the shivers return. Death by hypothermia seems more appropriate tonight.

Crashing, cuts and scars are the tattoos of this passionate family. Nick Rinehart laughs about his friend who rolled his VW but called a tow truck and still managed to make it to a Blink-182 concert. And the time piston one lost compression in this Cabriolet and nearly destroyed the engine but he still made it home. And when the suspension had to be rebuilt. And when the differential exploded.

Grant’s lights flicker off as the neighborhood favorite closes for the night. The garbage has been taking out, the counters wiped and floor swept. Finally, time to go home.

But the parking lot stays full. The youngest Death By VW members run in circles, arms raised, singing about flying like eagles. The cold doesn’t seem to bother them and nearby parents pray the little ones will be just tired enough for bed. It’s getting late, anyway.

Two blue haloes silently erupt at the front of the lowered BMW and shine on the small VW truck parked in front of it. A mechanical hum undertones the voices of nearby dubs as the sleek grey car slithers around the truck and out of the parking lot.

Members talk about what Death By VW used to be. In the past, the club hosted charity drives and donated money to other causes, but those days are over. Busy lives and other commitments make Death By VW a family of similarly passionate people. The first Sunday of each month marks their breakfast drive, driving around Lake Whatcom or other Northwest gems before meeting up at a diner to start the day. It’s a similar story on every 13 of the month, like tonight at Grant’s. Anyone with a passion for cars is welcome to join the club for good food and great company.

The VW truck with a bad exhaust and smelly motor bursts to life like a box of fireworks, startling the nearby kids and turning the heads of members. With a cough and a snort, the small beast lunges forward and makes its way to the nearby street. With a bellow, it pulls out of sight into the night.

Fog rolls in, obscuring streetlights and bright red taillights. The sharp contrast of headlights flood the parking lot as each motor revs to life. Heaters are cranked to full and frozen noses are rubbed as the cars shake off their frost.

Within minutes, Grant’s is once again empty. In a month, Death By VW will be looking for another place to settle down and catch up with each other. Grant’s may be a recurring stop, Jordan thinks. The kids loved the food.

Car enthusiasts like those in Death by VW see their cars as a form of self expression.

(above) The Death By VW club is inclusive to other makes and models like this Datsun 240Z.

(left) Maleah Smith and Jordan Brandt have been in Death by Volkswagen for over 4 years.

(previous) Maleah Smith’s silver Jetta is one of two Volkswagens she owns. With a loud exhaust and Radi8 wheels, anyone can hear and see her coming from a mile away.
It’s a crisp, bright fall morning. A troupe of men in neon vests and work boots lug trash bags along the crushed gravel trail that follows Whatcom Creek through downtown Bellingham. One pushes a red shopping cart packed with clothes and soggy cardboard.

This is Tim Morse’s crew for the day. Morse, Bellingham Public Works Department supervisor for homeless camp cleanups, wore muck boots and a high-visibility jacket. He’s wiry, in his mid-50s, short white hair trimmed close around a weathered face, watery bright blue eyes. He has been working for the city for more than a decade, cleaning many of the same campsites over and over again, tracking the ebb and flow of the homeless population in Bellingham by the tattered vestiges of existence packed into trash bags and driven to the dump.

The public works employees’ relationship with the homeless community is intimate, visceral and complex. Morse and Officer Dante Alexander, Bellingham Police Department’s neighborhood police officer for the north side of the city, have the difficult task of asking people to abandon the spot they call their temporary home.

According to the Whatcom County’s annual homeless census for 2017, there has been a 51 percent increase in the number of unsheltered people living in Bellingham since 2008. That increase has the city scrambling to increase the number of beds available.

Earlier this year, the city had identified a property on Roeder Avenue, near the camp under the bridge, as a

A COMMUNITY HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

As Bellingham struggles to address homelessness, a team of Public Works employees pick up the pieces of lives uprooted

story and photos by Andrew Wise

PURSUIT | 15
location to build a new shelter that would add about 200 beds, but the Port of Bellingham purchased the property in May, killing the plan.

As the city and its nonprofit partners continue to work on long term solutions, Morse and his crew focus on the next camp to be cleared and the strangeness of holding in their hands pieces of shattered lives.

The trash bags are stacked in the back of a city-owned flatbed truck. The red shopping cart was laid on its side on top of the pile. They had cleared the first of the 14 to 16 camps throughout the city that are typically covered in a sweep like this. These improvised living spaces are tucked under bridges and in slivers of public space wedged between commercial developments and busy streets.

Alexander’s squad car is parked behind the city truck. His job involves showing up with Morse’s crew when they’re scheduled to clean up camps to ask anyone remaining in the area to leave. Camps are usually tagged a week before they’re cleared with a notice to vacate.

Alexander leaves, and the crew heads to the location: a plot of grass next to the entrance to the Parberry recycling center on D Street. The crew piled material haphazardly onto a tarp next to the sidewalk. A flowery black and pink bra laid against a box containing an old Trivial Pursuit board game, the box dumped open and spilling its cards onto the tarp. Four crew members lift a shopping cart loaded with clothes, pillows and bags, walk it to larger flatbed truck and tip it, nose first, on top of the pile. Morse stands next to the truck, poking through the material with a long metal grabber.

Then, “Sharps! I need a sharps container,” one of the workers yells from the back corner of the camp. Another heads his direction, carrying a water bottle-sized dark orange rubber vessel with a special lid and a medical waste symbol on the outside. Trapped in the jaws of a metal grabber is a small white and orange syringe. It has dropped down the gullet of the orange bottle and the lid is shut.

The presence of needles seems to shift the way workers operate, stepping more gingerly and using the end of the metal grabber more delicately to poke through the remaining boxes.

About five blocks away, inside one of four buildings owned and operated by the Lighthouse Mission Ministries, is Director of Programs Bridget Reeves’ office. The Lighthouse is a faith-based nonprofit that has a total of 230 beds per night for people experiencing homeless. Private entities like Lighthouse and Catholic Community Services have been able to develop new city-sanctioned resources for the growing population. A $10 million Catholic Community Services project to provide 40 studio apartments to homeless youth broke ground in October.

Reeves’ goal is to get as many people as possible through the doors, using Lighthouse’s resources to offer help with everything from employment to health care to substance abuse. She sees camps near the Mission as representing a significant step for a lot of people. Lighthouse staff members reach out directly to people living in camps adjacent to the Mission, and that they have discussed eventually travelling to camps located further away in other parts of the city.

“Some of those folks are people have been on the fringe of services for a long time here in our community. They may have been sleeping outside for 10 to 20 years, and moving this close to the Mission is success for them right now,” she says.

She adds that for a lot of people, entering the Mission means not spending the night with their social circle or significant other.

On this particular day, in late October, the Mission has been at capacity for a week and a half.

“Even if more people wanted to come in, they wouldn’t be able to,” Reeves says. Despite efforts to increase the number of beds available, including converting the drop-in center into a 24-hour emergency shelter last year, the Mission is still forced to turn people away each night, back to the network of camps.
With a cold winter looming, Reeves and her colleagues have reached out to local churches about opening their doors as emergency shelters for women and children through the heart of the winter, housing people continuously for three months. It’s an unprecedented move. Churches have served as intermittent shelters during cold weather in the past, but never continuously through an entire season.

“[Church leaders] felt we really need to make this happen,” Reeves says. “People can freeze to death.”

There has been a 51 percent increase in the number of unsheltered people living in Bellingham.

It’s early and the air stays cold despite the sunshine when Morse and his crew arrive at an empty camp located along a small creek running through a thicket of alder trees. The Home Depot parking lot is only a hundred yards away, but the dense vegetation creates the illusion of deep woods. Tarps are strung between trees and a sleeping bag is twisted among lawn chairs. On the ground are a porcelain vase, two gutted desktop computers and a mass of other seemingly unrelated items. A pair of metal grabbers swings a toy horse, then a pillow with the stuffed animal face and arms of a tiger, as well as a package of diapers, into the open maw of a black trash bag. One of the workers drags a sled loaded with full bags along the trail leading back to the road.

Several weeks later, some of the camps Morse and his team cleared have sprung back up – some in the same locations, others in new crevices of the city that haven’t yet been discovered. The nights get colder, and the risks associated with sleeping outside increase. As Morse and Alexander prepare for the next round of tagging and clearing, they can only hope that the people they come across will make their way to a place like Lighthouse, and that when they get there, they won’t be turned away.

(previous) A city employee inspects a large number of needles discovered during a camp clearing off of Telegraph Road in northeast Bellingham, Wash. on October 23, 2017.
(left) Several blocks from the Lighthouse Mission, the work crew gathers objects left behind at a former camp outside the Parberry Recycling Center.
(top) Public works employee Juan Castillo loads a flatbed truck with material from a cleared camp.
(above) A work crew carries materials removed from a camp discovered along Whatcom Creek near Maritime Heritage Park.
Roberta Kjesrud, director of writing at the Hacherl Research & Writing Studio at Western Washington University, is no novice when it comes to elder care.

When Roberta was 15, her family moved from a small town in Minnesota to Bellingham to be close to her grandparents. She was on the frontline when her grandma suffered a stroke, making medical decisions in her early 20s while simultaneously helping her grandpa cope. She was there, years later, when grandpa wasn’t eating well. He wouldn’t touch his Meals on Wheels if it contained a single ingredient he detested. She was there when her grandpa moved into independent living, then assisted living and finally a nursing home, where he died of pneumonia at 92 years old.

Being there for her own parents was a whole different story.

When Roberta and her older sister were adults, her parents moved into a sprawling, one-story house with a steep drive. Her dad was a carpenter during his working life and continued to putter around, fixing this, tinkering with that. Neighbors could catch him on the roof well into his 80s. Her mom, Katherine Rude, was a schoolteacher in Minnesota for nearly 15 years.

In her 60s, Katherine developed osteoarthritis and spinal stenosis. Osteoarthritis occurs when the cushy cartilage between joints wears down, resulting in pain, stiffness and swelling. Katherine’s spinal stenosis was caused by calcium deposits in her spinal column. The pressure exerted by the deposits compressed her spine and diminished the ability of certain nerves to function.

She underwent surgery in her late 70s for a cervical spine release, designed to remove some of the calcium deposits. As a result, she was unable to feel her feet.
Falling became the norm, but somehow, she managed to dodge injury every time.

“We called her the human Gumby,” Roberta says.

After surgery, Katherine used a Rollator walker around the house; it had four wheels and a built-in seat. She gave up driving voluntarily and relied on her husband to get places. However, he wasn’t always available. So, she sat there.

“She’s always been a homebody, but she was trapped. Literally trapped,” Roberta says.

When Katherine made it clear she was tired of sitting there, Roberta picked out a retirement home. Roberta’s dad didn’t want to move, but he understood it was the right choice for Katherine. The family went on a tour and didn’t leave before Roberta’s parents had signed on the dotted line.

Serge Lindner, section lead of the Center for Senior Health and division chief for primary care at PeaceHealth Medical Group in Bellingham, says assisted living can work well for many people. It can provide meals, friends and activities – all of which may be lacking if someone has become isolated living on their own. Residents may also benefit from help with certain activities of daily living, like medication assistance and house cleaning.

However, assisted living is not for everyone.

“I have a few patients who love it, a few who don’t mind it and quite a few who would rather die than go to [assisted living],” Lindner says.

For patients who want to avoid assisted living altogether, Lindner asks if they have any family members who could move in with them or if they can afford to hire a caregiver.

After moving into the retirement home, Roberta’s mom was still falling regularly and her spine was so fragile that when she did, the fire department had to be called. Roberta became concerned that there was no system in place for checking on her parents, as they lived on a floor only licensed for independent living. If her mom fell, no one would know unless she got her husband’s attention or pulled the alert cord – if she could reach it – to summon help.

As time went on, the number of concerns continued to grow.

When there was a fire in the building, the staff was overwhelmed. Roberta says her mom had to get down four flights of stairs by sliding on her bottom because there weren’t enough people to help her.

To receive additional care, they would have to move to an entirely different floor licensed for assisted living. That would be difficult, partially due to Roberta’s parents’ limited mobility.

Roberta was also concerned about food quality. Her

(above) Establishing limits on caring for aging parents is often the hardest part of elderly care.

(previous) Plants are nestled into a warm window-lit space adjacent to the long hall of residential rooms.
mom said they were served cold meals on more than one occasion.

Roberta says management always gave her the same proactive responses to her complaints, but demonstrated no actual follow-through. She says even after the building’s automatic door knocked her mom on the cement, nothing changed.

“I’ll never get that image out of my mind,” she says.

Two years into her parent’s four-year stay, Roberta helped organize a resident council to bring formal complaints to corporate management. In 2014, the Washington state Department of Social and Health Services inspected the facility and cited them on a number of violations, according to official documents obtained by Klipsun. Five residents were assisted by unapproved caregivers with tasks requiring a nurse. The facility also hired a caregiver who had a disqualifying finding on their background check. That staff member was allowed to work unsupervised with vulnerable adults.

By that time, Roberta had moved her parents into a different retirement home. She says four years was long enough to argue with management and put up with food quality she described as “completely hideous.”

Her dad lived in the second home for about two years, and her mom would have too, if not for a series of health problems.

In August 2016, Roberta’s mom fell, underwent surgery to repair her kneecap and spent time in a nursing home on rehab. Around two weeks after recovering, she developed acute pancreatitis, a painful and potentially deadly inflammation of the pancreas. Following another round of rehab, she returned to assisted living, only to fall for the second time. More surgery. Back to the nursing home. By then, assisted living wouldn’t take her back because she required too much care. She had also used up all her Medicare, so the cost of another nursing home stay before her Medicare reset in 90 days would come out of pocket.

The ordeal lasted eight months. During that time,

For children caring for their aging parents, the lines between their life and the lives of their parents often get blurred.
Roberta would come over everyday after working her full-time job. She came in for the evening shift after her older sister was done with the day shift. Roberta did her mom’s laundry, chased down meals when they didn’t show up, dealt with medications that weren’t delivered on time – the list went on. Over the course of eight months, Roberta took only three days off from caring for her mom.

On top of it all, her dad’s health was also tanking.

For children caring for their aging parents, the lines between their life and the lives of their parents often get blurred.

Roberta is designated as her parents’ agent on their financial power of attorney document. Part of that role includes buying them everything they need.

“You’ll get a call like, ‘I’m out of X and I need it now,’” Roberta says. “How do you respond to that? Do you drop everything and go get that and bring it?”

Not always. To set limits, Roberta had to learn to say no in some cases.

Roberta also meets with her parents’ money manager, tracks all their expenses, does their taxes, balances their books, decides when they need more money in the bank and when to sell their assets.

Her sister is the appointed agent for the health care power of attorney. Some of her responsibilities include making doctor appointments, accompanying her parents and taking notes during the appointments, scheduling follow-ups and handling referrals.

The two make decisions together, but the different roles are a way of dividing some of the labor.

Roberta’s parents now live in their third retirement home.

Katherine sits in her apartment surrounded by colorful wooden birds. Her children and their husbands placed the ones in spots she couldn’t reach from her wheelchair. A birthday balloon hovers above a table. She turned 90 on Nov. 6.

Each day, her husband comes over from his own apartment three doors down. They sit together in her small living room and talk, then make their way to the dining room for supper.

They both wanted a two-bedroom apartment, but none were available upon move in. Separate bedrooms work better because the two have uncoordinated needs and different sleep schedules.

Before the days of senior residences, Katherine and her husband were active members of their church. Even after they stopped being able to attend services, their pastor would visit them and letters would arrive from church friends telling them they were missed. Now that the two are in a retirement home, Katherine says those ties have weakened.

She has to work harder in order to stay busy. If she’s not coloring, painting or fiddling with things in the hallway, she’s likely lost in a book. Or she’s grumbling in frustration because housekeeping put things away in all the wrong places or didn’t dust her apartment properly.

Relying on others isn’t easy.

“You are a person. You know you’re a person. But you’re treated like a lump of nothing,” she says.

After years of receiving care, Katherine knows what she wants.

She wants hot food to stay hot, alert buzzers in reach, non-slip shower floors, non-carpeted apartment floors, plenty of activities, ample help when needed and cheerful caregivers who will respect and listen to her.

When I met Katherine, the first thing I asked her was to tell me about herself.

“‘I’m a little old curmudgeonly woman who speaks her mind.”

Roberta’s dad passed away on Nov. 19, 2017.
When I think of Evan, two images come to mind. The first is of a jovial, heavier-set 22-year-old whose light-brown hair often sprouts in uneven tufts from the sides and back of a ballcap — a testament to his stinginess, since covering one’s hair with a hat is cheaper than paying for regular haircuts — and whose easy smile, accentuated by squinted eyes and one out-of-place canine tooth, never fails to accompany a corny and well-timed joke.

The second is of a stranger being charged with two counts of fourth-degree assault after a night of heavy drinking.

The first image of Evan comes from the four years of love and camaraderie I shared with him here at Western. The second comes from a police report filed after two students accused him of sexual assault.

Evan, like myself, was a journalism major before he graduated in June. When we met in the dorms at the onset of our freshman year, our shared passion for journalism and holding those in power accountable only strengthened the immediate affinity we had for one another. We came up through the department together, and worked side by side as reporters and editors for three quarters on The Western Front — one in which he was a top editor.

When the allegations against Evan came out over the summer, there was a disconnect between what I knew and how I felt. I knew that what Evan was said to have done was wrong, and I grieved for the alleged survivors; but I wanted to pretend the accusations against him had no bearing on our friendship, and that we could continue on as normal despite the circumstances.
Our history complicated things as news of the charges spread. Many of my friends in the department — most of whom are younger, and didn’t know Evan on a professional let alone personal basis — knew that we were close, and looked to me to condemn him. And I did.

But when I saw how my feelings didn’t match the aridity of those in the department who were attempting to erase any memory of him, I knew I couldn’t convince myself I was as mad as they were, so I stopped trying to be. I didn’t condone the action he’s been charged with by any means, but decided I wasn’t going to abandon a person I once called “brother.”

To justify this, I told myself I was being empathetic. I imagined myself in Evan’s place, in what would surely be my darkest hour, and thought about how I wouldn’t want my closest friends to sever ties with me even if I was guilty.

I told myself our history was more important. Surely, I thought, one minor mistake shouldn’t negate four years of friendship.

I told myself that, relatively speaking, groping isn’t very serious. “It’s not like he was accused of rape, groping probably happens all the time,” I said in my head.

But the more I tried to justify my loyalty, the more I began to realize how uncomfortable it made me. A few serious questions had been gnawing at me: What if this isn’t the first time someone has accused him? What if it had been someone I loved that had accused him? What makes these allegations different from ones that come against people I don’t personally know?

Not sure of how to deal with my apprehensions, I decided to reveal them to two female confidants in the journalism department who were familiar with the situation.

The first cried, alarmed by what she perceived as me excusing someone accused of sexual assault. The second, with the darkest expression I’ve seen her wear, said she had no sympathy for Evan and insisted I shouldn’t either.

Coming from two people I loved, their reactions haunted me in the days after. I knew it was time for me to seriously consider the implications of my stance.

While all of this was happening, sexual assault allegations came out daily against several people in the celebrity sphere.

The scope of the scandals was shocking. How, I wondered, could so many well-known people sexually assault and harass dozens of prominent women and men and have it go unreported for decades?

And then it hit me. Me. People like me. That’s how.

It only took seconds to realize my mistake.

When someone you’re close to is accused of doing something unsavory, the easiest and most comfortable thing to do is to look past it. That was my immediate, knee-jerk response.

However, this response is exactly how those celebrities were able to do what they did for so long. Looking the other way creates an insidious culture of leniency that allows perpetrators of sexual assault to prey on victims with a notion that they won’t be held accountable.

As a result of that perceived safety net, those perpetrators are not only more likely to assault someone in the first place, but they’re more likely to reoffend as well. And while Evan’s case and the celebrity cases are far from identical, the lesson is the same: Any form of tolerance, whether active or apathetic, perpetuates that culture and allows sexual assault to happen.

The first half of this piece was difficult for me to write, as I’m sure it was difficult for a lot of you to read. But this story is important to tell because I believe many people,
For the first time in 21 days, Kacie Cleveland lay clothed and in a bed at an environmental research institute in Belize.

Waiting for sleep to overcome her, Cleveland felt the Dermatobia herminis, or human botfly, larvae writhe in exasperation on her right hip as it suffocated beneath the duct tape she had placed over it.

Bot flies are known for their invasive nature and aggressive bite. Kacie wasn’t surprised she had become home to this unwanted souvenir.

The larvae’s desperate squirming under her skin didn’t compare to the past three weeks she spent in the untamed jungle of Belize.
when stepping over logs to avoid interactions with a snake called fer-de-lance, Belize’s most dangerous viper.

Just two weeks before Kacie left for Belize, “Naked and Afraid” producer Steve Rankin was bit through his hiking boot by a fer-de-lance snake during production in Costa Rica.

That single bite resulted in Rankin nearly losing his foot after the venom melted and rotted his flesh where the viper’s fangs penetrated his arch, leaving his bone and muscles exposed.

Kacie and Aaron took no chances. They slowly made their way to a part of the jungle near fresh water they could call home with a full production crew in tow.

“They did not help us, they did not direct us,” Kacie says. “Each night they would leave and drive an hour and half back into town.”

Belize is home to 62 species of snake, with eight of those being venomous.

The first night was hardest for Kacie. They were a spectacle that first night in the jungle.

She lay on a stiff shelter made of branches with a blanket of leaves and foliage next to a man whom she did not know in suffocating darkness.

Noises came from every direction, but nothing could be seen. The dense canopy above did not lend them any starlight, and miles away from civilization there was no hope of light pollution.

Every creature wanted to check out their new neighbors, including the howler monkey that urinated on them every night they were there.

Aaron, a writer and parent, would tell Kacie stories to distract her from the jungle and lull her to sleep.

“He was calm when I was scared,” Kacie says.

The next 19 nights would not be much different than the first: strange noises, darkness and Aaron’s stories.

The pair were able to overcome sleep deprivation, but Kacie and Aaron could not push through the lack of food. A school of minnows provided most of their sustenance.

Through all of the adversaries they faced in the jungle, Kacie and Aaron’s companionship became vital to their sanity.

“[The cast and crew] want to see you break down, you don’t really have friends. Aaron was my best friend out there, he’d tell me these amazing stories, and we’d stay positive,” Kacie says.

“Having Kacie there to talk to was monumental,” Aaron says. “Having someone to laugh with and crack jokes with, we did a lot of that, that was huge.”

Aside from their hunger, they still had one large obstacle to overcome together: fighting their way out of the jungle after 21 days of inadequate food and sleep.

Kacie and Aaron fashioned shoes and snake guards for their shins out of palm frond, bug netting and vines. They hiked several hours through unknown parts of the jungle, delirious from lack of sleep and constantly on edge to avoid fer-de-lance snakes.

After arriving to their extraction point on a river bank late in the day, Aaron collapsed from exhaustion and was put on an oxygen tank. This scene was not included in the final cut of their episode.

Kacie felt a rush of emotion as they stepped into the boat to take them down river and out of the jungle.

“That was probably the most amazing thing, sitting in that boat. I just remember feeling like, ‘It’s done.’ I had pushed pause on my emotions, I pushed pause on everything, and I made it,” Kacie says.

When they arrived at the research institute the crew made Kacie waffles and sausage while she took an hour and half long shower. They were scheduled to fly out the next day.

After only a few bites she made a crew member drive her into town so she could call her husband. When he answered the phone, her eyes filled with tears.

“I remember telling him, ‘I need you to buy mint chocolate chip ice cream, hot fudge and whipped cream,’” Kacie says.

A mint chocolate chip sundae awaited her when she returned home.

WELCOME HOME

Kacie went into the challenge with 12 percent body fat, and by the fifth day she had lost it all. Her body began breaking down muscle for energy, resulting in a kidney infection that took months to heal.

Every day producers called to ensure a helicopter was ready to airlift her out, knowing Kacie would only leave Belize if she completed her challenge, or collapsed.

“The producer told me afterwards that they had never thought anyone was actually going to die on the trip until I was on it, because I never complained and that terrified them,” Kacie says.

“I know I can do anything [now]. If I can sit naked out in the woods for 21 days in the rain with a stranger, then I can skate an inline marathon, I can do a 10k run,” Kacie says.
Surfing is like a metaphor for Boe Trosset's way of living life right. Catch this story about the Nook Collective on klipsunmagazine.com

photo by The Nook Collective
Hannah Bergemann, a pro mountain biker for Kona Bikes, night rides down Evolution trail on Galbraith Mountain in Bellingham, WA. Find this story and more online at klipsunmagazine.com

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COVER PHOTO
Courtesy of Kjell Redal

Winter 2018’s staff photo. Not pictured is Amy Page.
KLIPSUN IS A CHINUK WAWA
WORD MEANING SUNSET

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