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DEAR READER,

I invite you to savor these pages and indulge on the flavors of life within these stories.

I invite you to have a large appetite, to bite off more than you can chew, but to finish anyway.

I invite you to always leave room for vulnerability, resilience and change, but with joy as the main course.

Maybe you’re like me, finally graduating after a victory lap, stumbling on the pressure cooker of, “what’s next.”

“Next” is taking risks. Welcoming failure. Knowing when to ask for help. Never settling. Having the courage to try new things. And not ever waiting on luck.

To sustain not only your hunger, but your heart - make it count.

Earn your seat at the table.

On the good days, tip your servers and read the news.

Within these pages I hope you taste a piece of yourself, and that it leaves your belly rumbling for more.

Stay hungry,

Letter from the Editor

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At just 16, I was fishing for salmon in the unforgiving Alaskan waters with my dad and a crew of three.

ANGRY WAVES CRASHED INTO THE 22-FOOT skiff with relentless power, pouring water into the boat. The 115 Yamaha outboard motor was sputtering, making little difference in the churning water. Torrents of rain and gusts of wind made it almost impossible to see against the dark landscape of the ocean. I was furiously bailing water with a half-sliced oil container, clenching my chattering teeth. I wiped the rain from my eyes and looked at our boat crew of three. Peter, a military veteran, Kevin, a kid from Minneapolis and my dad, the captain.

“I can’t get the radio working,” my dad yelled from the helm, which consisted of a steering wheel, several duct-taped wires and emergency equipment for boat malfunctions.

STORY BY MIA STEBEN
Photo Courtesy of Mia Steben / Illustration by Renee Klemmer
All the boats had gone back to shore because of the weather. We were stuck in one of the worst storms of the season with 5,000 pounds of sockeye salmon stowed away in built-in bins between the bow and stern.

“We need to find Donny. I need to go further from shore. Get rid of some fish—,” shouted my dad, muffled by the wind and cut off by a wave crashing onto his face. Donny was our fish buyer.

Gripping the wheel and driving the motor at maximum speed, I saw my dad maneuvering us through the irritated ocean swells, making slow progress. The crew and I worked together, dumping water and throwing some of our salmon back into the sea to lighten our load. I didn’t know if we were going to sink. I was scared. We were covered in fish blood, guts and scales. At 2:00 a.m., we were mentally exhausted and drenched with a combination of slime and rain.

Peter, first mate, jumped to the back of the skiff and exchanged a few words with my dad. Communication was key. Bristol Bay during a storm was not a place to make simple mistakes.

“I’ll check the radio again. Is no one on channel 80?” yelled Peter. I watched his military training overcome any uneasiness as he made decisive movements and jumped over bins. Quick, sharp and alert despite having been on the water for 35 hours.

Kevin, or “Greenie” as I liked calling our first-year deckhands, was unsettled. He was tough for his age but not used to this. He was bailing with our only bucket, peering into the darkness and continuously wiping the rain from his eyes, masking his nerves.

After five years of commercial fishing in Alaska, I knew the returners from those who never wanted to come back. People either hungered for more or left the industry behind them.

“There, there, on the starboard side!” Kevin pointed out a distant shape, almost unrecognizable, bouncing in the waves.

Fighting against the elements, we approached and yelled, stomping our feet against the aluminum bottom of our boat, trying to get Donny’s attention. Our attempts were drowned out by the howling winds and crashing waves against our battered skiff. Donny’s duty as tender captain is to unload catches regardless of the hour. That night, he was one of few tenders who stayed to brave the storm.

We were stuck in one of the worst storms of the season with 5,000 pounds of sockeye salmon stowed away

No lights. He must be catching a few minutes of precious sleep.

“Get up, Donny, we got fish,” I yelled with exhausted determination.

Just getting aligned and properly tied with Donny’s tender took an unusually long time. Carefully jumping between boats, I refused to look down at the rushing current. I never looked. One wrong move was deadly. My dad met someone who lost both legs being crushed between two boats delivering fish.

“Didn’t expect to see you,” said Donny in a sleepy voice, as he gestured for my commercial fishing permit card inside his little cabin. He placed my permit card in the imprint machine to account for the load of salmon. Each time Donny handed back the fish ticket, we made money.

“I wasn’t about to let this fishing opening just pass us. When I see an opportunity, I go for it,” I said shoving my stiff fingers back into soaked gloves.

Donny laughed. He understood.

Commercial fishing was addictive, and I was hungry for more.
LAST ROOM ON THE LEFT

Heroin addiction claims tens of thousands of lives each year in the U.S. This story aims to lend insight into the menacing beast that is addiction.

I REMEMBER THE FEAR NEARLY PARALYZING me. I remember the exact moment when I knew it was more than shaky hands and a sweaty forehead. It was something I’d long ignored, pretended not to believe. It won’t happen to me.

I was heading back from West Seattle. My then-girlfriend’s parents lived there, and we were both home from college for the summer. Just as I turned off Admiral Way onto the West Seattle Bridge, it crept up on me—I’d felt fine all day, and then, in a matter of seconds, a wave of cold sweats and shakes.

It was late August and the sun had just set, but its warmth was still on the pavement, sticky and thick. Dramamine by Modest Mouse was playing through the left speaker of my ‘89 Prelude, the other one was blown. The car still held the day’s heat, but I was shivering. I cranked on the window reel to catch some air.

Tears started to form, the kind you get from yawning. And then a realization crashed into me. It was something I hadn’t known when I kissed my girlfriend goodbye 10 minutes earlier.

Opiate withdrawals.

It turns out if you smoke heroin every night, your body develops a taste for it.

I was disturbed, frantic. I felt the realest fear of my life. But the hunger made me forget all of that. Drug addiction is a codependent relationship -- nothing else matters.

I picked up the phone and dialed. “I’ve got $20 and I’m headed back from Seattle.”

“Cool, roll through,” the voice said.

Three words of relief.

I wish I could say that was all it took -- a realization that my grasp was slipping, that it was starting to win. Sadly, no. My affair was only beginning. I spent the next four years doing the rehab dance, trying to beat it on my own.

I’d string together a few months of clean time, get into a sober-living house, and then just when everything was looking up, I’d trip, right back into its comforting grip.

At the former injection sight of Mitch Farley’s addiction, tattoos are found on Farley’s body as a reminder of his strength and sobriety.
I relapsed on my 21st birthday after my parents threw me a party. My mom was in recovery, but the rest of the family was drinking. I was so angry -- angry at myself for being a drug addict. After the party I dropped my girlfriend off at her sober-living house and made the call, the same one I’d made so many times before.

I had six months clean, a job, a place to live with a sober support system, a new car, a girlfriend, my parents had just started to trust me again. I burned it all up on that Reynolds Wrap, sitting in my car, alone.

Heroin is like a warm bed on a winter morning, when you first get out, all you want to do is crawl back in.

Christmas of 2014 was the pit of my addiction. I was on a hellacious bender; I had been up for three months on crystal meth. My family checked me into a medical detox in Ballard. I snuck drugs in, palming them in my hand when they searched me, they forgot to check my hands. I spent a day pretending to take the meds and shooting up in the bathroom before I ran out. I couldn’t fake it any longer, I needed to get more. So I put on my clothes and walked out.

I called my dad and told him, he begged me to stay. I can’t give it up right now, I just can’t. I went home and packed everything I owned into my forest-green Jetta. I was heading south to California. I can get off it in Cali, I just need one more bag. Delusions of an addicted mind.

I’ll never forget the words my dad said to me before I left.

“We’ve done all we can son, I wish you luck.”

They’d helped me so much, giving me that unconditional love that parents do. But I couldn’t accept it. I was incapable of receiving love. That was the only time I’ve seen my father cry. I turned away. The pull towards the road was stronger than my family’s desperation.

I picked up one last bag and hit the interstate with no intention of turning back.

I had a plan, I was going to wean myself off of the drugs and detox in the woods somewhere in Northern California with my dog. Then it was on to the City of Angels to become a writer.

“Drug addiction is a codependent relationship - nothing else matters”

It was the dead of winter though, and in central Oregon it was damn cold. I was sleeping in my car at rest stops. Three nights of that was all I could take. On the third morning I woke up with blue hands. I knew I was losing the fight. I wasn’t going to drive off into the sunset happily ever after. Maybe I should go back.
I pulled off the interstate in Roseburg, Oregon and found a Starbucks with WiFi. I called home. “Mom, I’m gonna die. I can’t win.” She got me a room at the Motel 6 for three nights to detox. “You better be out of drugs, because this is it.”

I paid and got the key, second floor, last room on the left. I collapsed onto the bed as soon as the weighted door closed behind me. It was New Year’s Eve. What a way to celebrate.

The next two days were a blur -- a state somewhere between a dream, and a bone-busting pain. I paced all day and squirmed all night. Opiate withdrawals feel like every cell in your body swelling with pressure, like a water balloon left on the spigot too long, about to rupture.

I would prop myself up in bed, then immediately fall back, exhausted. My muscles had spent everything they had. I considered urinating in bed, weak and out of dignity. The times when I finally worked up enough strength to make it to the bathroom, I’d stare into the mirror, looking into the holes where my eyes used to be. What have you done to yourself?

I spent two days in that room. The air in there was like a bad fog that wouldn’t lift. I kept the lights off the whole time. Gas station food wrappers littered the navy blue carpet. On the third day I gathered my belongings, scattered in every corner. I opened the door and looked back at the mess -- the one I’d been making since I had my first hit. In that moment, standing in the doorway with my dog, I knew I was ready to live. I was tired of being weighed down. I turned and trudged down the floral-print hallway.

I’ve heard addicts say drugs allowed them to find themselves, that they didn’t know who they were without them. That’s not how I feel. Drugs for me were a nearly-fatal road block that kept me from finding out who I was. Heroin was an obstacle I couldn’t pass.

They say an addict will never quit before they’re ready. That is frighteningly true. I still struggle to figure out how I found the strength to walk away from that room and leave it behind, but what I do know for sure: It’s staying there, with my eye on it through the rearview.

In the years that have grown between myself and that room I’ve come to learn one thing: I never have to go back. It’s been ages since I’ve felt that hunger, but I still remember its appetite. And when I do think about the burdens I’ve had to bear, they’re not as heavy as they used to be.
CLAUDIA ROCHA WAS IN A GRAFFITI-supply store in Guadalajara, Mexico when she finally felt it. The store was small, tucked between a bar and a taqueria, and she had become friends with one of the workers. They talked about wanting to learn how to tattoo and jokingly made a deal to tattoo each other one day.

“I was like, oh, I do fit into this community,” she said.

Rocha spent almost a year in Mexico as a recipient of the Adventure Learning Grant, a program through Fairhaven College that awards $20,000 to about three students a year. Selected students plan and execute their own international trip that must last at least 10 months. The grant offers deep immersion into other cultures and a chance for them to ask profound questions about the world, without the usual limitations of a study-abroad program.

Rocha’s questions centered around how graffiti-art and tattooing create community in Mexico. She lived in three different cities there, getting to know local artists. She also wanted to explore her own Mexican heritage and how her life and work plays into that culture.

She sat in several tattoo chairs there, asking the artists questions about their lives. Rocha left the country with 11 new tattoos. Her favorite is one she got on her shin of the Virgin of Guadalupe with a sugar skull face.

Almost a year after returning to the U.S., she sits on one of the plush couches in the Fairhaven Main Lounge.

“There’s still so much more to learn,” she said. “I came back with more questions, you know?”

According to Kathryn Anderson, a former coordinator of the grant, coming back with more questions is exactly the point. Students aren’t asked to produce anything, like a research paper or project. Instead, they are asked to be curious and maintain that curiosity throughout their travels.

The grant was funded and created in 2002 by David Mason, a man who was famous for his varying involvement at Fairhaven and Western. A former biology professor, he was part of the board that started Fairhaven.

“He had absolute faith in the student’s ability to determine the course of their own education,” Anderson said. “The grant reflects those views.”

Donation money from Mason is still funding the grant today. It was based loosely on another popular program called the Thomas J. Watson Fellowship, which gives up to 50 grants a year to graduating seniors from four-year liberal arts schools. Similar to the Adventure Learning Grant, the Watson Fellowship requires recipients to be extremely independent and does not require a formal project or outcome.

Anderson said the idea of students being awarded money and not having to come back with a tangible product is hard to explain to other academics.
But, grant recipients like Rocha argue that the freedom of the grant allowed her to be more present while abroad.

“I’ve learned so much more from having breakfast with a friend I made in Guadalajara than I do going to classes,” she said.

The Planning
Gus Wimberger found out about the grant during his freshman year at Fairhaven. In one of his early classes, the instructor gave a presentation of all the opportunities available there. It was only briefly mentioned as the discussion moved on to other things, but he couldn’t get it out of his head.

“Every single year since that year, I was like I’m gonna apply, I’m gonna apply,” he said.

So he did. Now, after his fourth year in school, he’ll be going to Bolivia in September. He’s in the same position Rocha was in when she was first awarded the grant—grasping for connections in a foreign country and searching for ways to make this experience the best it can be.

Wimberger will be focusing on non-governmental organizations, or nonprofits that focus on international causes and development projects. He is curious about the ways these organizations work on the ground and how they impact political and social situations.

He chose Bolivia because of the work of a nonprofit in his hometown of Tacoma, Washington called Etta Projects, which works to alleviate poverty in Bolivian communities. While he’s excited about that connection, he’s still looking into other organizations to embed himself with.

Many who receive the grant rely on past recipients for guidance. Wimberger says the only people who can really give useful tips are those who have been in his shoes before.

Luckily, Wimberger and the other students leaving in the fall have had dinner a couple times with last year’s recipients, gathering around a table and asking questions about their experiences. Anderson said this is common among groups and that past recipients often feel a responsibility to pay it forward.

Overall, Wimberger is excited about the challenge ahead. His goal is to think differently when he returns.

“Inevitably it will change how I think about myself with a more transnational, global perspective,” he said.
On the trip
When Rocha first landed in Guadalajara, a family-friend picked her up from the airport. From there she was on her own, staying in a hostel that she had booked for the first few months.

Rocha had never travelled internationally on her own before. She had been to Mexico on a family vacation when she was 16, but was unprepared for the challenges she would face traveling alone and for much longer than a one-week vacation, experiencing culture shock and loneliness. She describes it as a roller coaster.

“The first half of it is really just trying to get on your feet,” Rocha said.

Challenges that accompany the grant may be why only 7-12 students apply each year. Anderson said that while many consider applying, they ultimately decide not to.

One thing Rocha didn’t expect was the feeling of inadequacy. She kept asking herself: “Who am I to get this grant? Who am I to get all this money? Who am I to go to this community that I can leave at any time?” she said.

While navigating her privilege and guilt was difficult, Rocha was reassured that this learning experience was important for herself and her community. She left knowing more about the networking and hardships involved in the artistic communities that she immersed herself in. It was one of the hardest times of her life, but also the most rewarding.

Eventually, she made friends with local artists and stayed with them. One tattoo artist who gave Rocha several tattoos is now one of her closest friends. She still keeps in contact with many people she met while away.

Changing perspective
Rocha is still processing all that she’s learned from her experience. Everytime she talks about it, she has something new to say.

“To be frank, it’s been really difficult coming back,” she said.

Rocha said one consequence of having such an immersive experience in a place she grew to love is that she views her current education as superficial at times. In academica, we talk a lot and theorize, which she thinks can distance us from real issues. Difficulty adjusting to a traditional education system is common for those who have returned, Anderson said. They spend a year going where they want, when they want, but after returning they have to fall back into the rules of school and work. On top of that, they often realize little has changed in Bellingham.

One of the reasons Anderson pushes so hard for international education is that it teaches people new ways to be themselves. When her kids were young, she made it a priority to travel and live in new cities while on sabbatical.

“You go to a different city, a different community, and wow, the rules are completely different,” she said. “That really frees you to realize, oh, maybe those rules are not so important after all.”

Although Anderson is retired, she still conducts interviews with every recipient of the grant. She talks with them right before and after their trip and follows-up one year later. This allows them to reflect on the larger impacts of the grant.

“They talk very specifically about the ways in which the grant informs their choices and the work they do now,” she said.

Rocha has used her new knowledge and passions to shape her final years at Western. She is writing her Fairhaven concentration about how art influences Latinx culture and is pursuing a studio art degree where she uses multimedia and collage to make pop-art style pieces.

She plans to move back to Guadalajara, with friends she made last year, after she graduates.

He had absolute faith in the student’s ability to determine the course of their own education
IT’S 2 A.M. -- THE CLOUDS PAINT A CANVAS
in the sky and the chilled raindrops dance, making
a light tapping sound on my windowsill. A typical
Washington evening.

My hair is tied in a loose bun. An oversized t-shirt
drapes over my body to cover what I do not want to
see. What I do not want to feel.

My stomach growls and rumbles. It’s empty.

My mind is caught up in the thought of a warm
brownie with chocolate fudge, bread, sweets, salt,
citrus, food. Any food.

But, she is louder. More dominant.

She comes in the form of words. Internal thoughts.
She yells in my ear, “don’t you dare eat that.
That will make you fat. That will make you more
unlovable.”

She is strong. Her voice is full of power and
conviction. She comes like a wave. Fast, strong and
unrelenting.

She has a funny way of creeping in when I least
expect it. She is smart that way. She knows how
to feed off of specific insecurities. It’s her favorite
mind game. She knows how to twist and turn the
past to use to her own advantage.

***

The growling in my stomach grows louder and
louder. The dancing of the raindrops seem to be
echoing in my head. The thought of food, any
food becomes the prominent thought in my mind.

Anxiety is a dear friend of hers.

My senses seem to be working against me. I am
hungry, but haven’t had a proper meal in days.
I am tired. My eyes feel heavy, yet they cannot
close. I smell nutrition’s temptation. All I hear is
false accusations of who I am.

My stomach growls and rumbles. It’s empty.

***

Years pass. The perpetuated narrative of worth and
thinness is always at the forefront of my mind.

Don’t you dare eat that.
That will make you fat.
That will make you
more unlovable.
My hair started to fall out. My skin was painted with rashes, blue and red. Empty. Broken. Rock bottom.

***

Time went on and something beautiful came with it: healing.

Support and joy poured out in the form of friends, family, books, music, plane rides, education and laughter. Relearning and reframing how I looked at myself in the mirror, the one I once hated.

The day was so clear. My hair was tied in a loose bun. I looked in that once dreaded mirror image. Saw my curves and flaws staring back and for once, felt a sense of peace, appreciation and confidence. She tried to sneak her way into that moment, but I made a conscious effort to not allow her voice to be louder than this present minute in time. A moment of unwavering, quiet, fulfilled silence. Gradually, very gradually I began to view my body as a home. It was my way to experience and see the world. It was my space for experiencing my senses fully. My body gave me life and breath, so I needed to respect it as such.

Crawling out of that dark hole was nothing short of excruciating. Years of not enough eating, too much exercise, inner battle, clothing that never fit quite right and raw disrespect of my body.

This has been a journey of learning to love again. Reframing my thoughts and reclaiming my body.

My views on my body have drastically changed. My arms, fingers, hands, legs, stomach and curves all work together as a whole.

Above all, my thoughts have shifted from my worth being correlated to outer appearance to my worth being correlated to inner appearance.

Beauty is deeper than how one looks. How you treat and love others is much more of a reflection of your beauty than what any size-two dress would be able to convey.

And eating that piece of cake will, in fact, not kill me.

***

Her voice was loud. Her voice was cruel. Her voice was tempting. Even at moments, her voice was masked as a friend, as comfort, as care. It took a radical moment of raw hunger for change to finally stand up to the bully. She would not be the determining factor in crafting my narrative.

My stomach no longer rumbles, yearning to be fed. Her voice has been subdued by a kinder, more accepting tone. The raindrops have continued to dance, but in a new way.

That's the thing about rain, when looked at with a new perspective, the rain drops shine. **When the sun shines on them, they glitter.**
YOU’VE GOT A PAL IN ME

The Poets and Lyricists Society is a safe space for poets across all majors to find and share their creative voices.

WRITE A LOVE POEM TO SOMEONE YOU HATE.

This prompt is written on the board as students of all different majors trickle into Bond Hall 112 one Thursday evening. After long days of attending classes and working jobs, they have chosen to spend an extra hour and a half on Western’s campus together to write.

They sit in a sea of yellow chairs, no chair quite the same shade of yellow as another, and pull out notebooks, scraps of paper, laptops or their phones to write. Soon the room will be silent except for the clicking of keyboards, the occasional flip of a notebook page and the loud creeks of the old desks as they give into the pressure of the writer’s words.

The room is brimming with the overlapping voices of friends, some who haven’t seen each other since last Thursday.

The officers of the Poets and Lyricist’s Society, or PALS, read the prompts out loud and start a ten-minute timer as everyone begins to write.

Later, when the group circles up to read their work to one another some of the poems shared bare deeply personal and traumatic details. The vulnerability in the room becomes palpable, as does the compassion and support from everyone else in the room.

***

Nathan Shephard, a sophomore who is now the budget coordinator for PALS, was introduced to the club at the very beginning of his time at Western. After seeking out a poetry club at the Red Square Info Fair and finding PALS, he started going to the open-mic nights that the club hosts. One evening, Shephard decided he was not only going to perform at the open-mic, but he was also going to sign up to read first. This would be his first time sharing his work in front of an audience. He read a poem about the end of a long-term relationship with his high school sweetheart. Ever since that performance, Shephard has been hooked. Maybe it was the catharsis of sharing something so personal with the world. Maybe it was the validation he felt from the snaps in the audience, each one a reminder that he is not alone in what he feels.

“I wonder how many apple cores I would have to eat to start foaming at the mouth / and I wonder how many ”you”s I will write to before I realize none of them can hear me”

Written by Ren Santucci

“I find the world very absurd, hard to understand and difficult, and all of my poetry is an attempt at deciphering it. Poetry club has given a space for
me to do that,” Shephard said.

Whatever it is, Shephard hasn’t stopped chasing after what he found that first evening he performed at a PALS open mic. These days, he hosts the open-mic events, sitting front-row as other poets experience the same feelings he had on that stage.

***

The Underground Coffeehouse has a double life, according to freshman PALS member Jocelyn Wiebe. In one life, it is what it appears to be: an on-campus cafe where students gather to drink coffee and work on homework. But on PALS open-mic nights, the Underground Coffeehouse transforms, she said.

Wiebe has been writing about nature a lot lately, with imagery of trees and moss frequenting her work. At the April 29 open-mic night, she read a poem about human composting.

“I have always said I would return to the earth, but I have never mulled over whether she will take me back.” Written by Jocelyn Wiebe

Wiebe had read a version of this poem the Thursday before at the PALS meeting. Some of the lines had changed, but the concept of returning your body little by little to the earth, from fingernail clippings to ground-down teeth, stayed the same.

The idea for the poem came from a conversation Wiebe had with a friend who told her about human composting. When she first started writing the piece, she did not like what she had come up with.

“It’s frustrating when I really want this concept [in my poem], and I hear other people’s poetry and it sounds like it’s so easy for them to write,” she said. “I have had to try and learn that it’s okay not to get it right the first time. Going back and revising is really important.”

PALS gave Wiebe an opportunity to dive deep into poetry. She remembers going to open-mic nights in high school where she loved to listen to the performers, but wasn’t confident enough
to share her own work. Now she performs almost every week.

“Performing still makes me a little bit nervous, but especially with the community for the open-mics we have here, I feel really comfortable and everybody is so supportive that I don’t get super nervous anymore,” Wiebe said.

Getting to see other club members’ revisions is one of Wiebe’s favorite parts of PALS.

“It’s really interesting to see the whole process,” she said. “It’s a totally different poem, but it’s the same concept. Even if it’s just a couple of words that you can think of to make it a little bit better.”

At open-mic nights, sometimes poets will announce that they are reading a poem that they have shared in club before. Charlene Davatos introduced her poem at the April 29 open-mic night by saying, “I’ve read this poem in club, so this is the second time some of you have heard it, so you’re welcome.”

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Symone Camargo, a fourth-year student at Western, said she didn’t come to PALS club on her own. She came with a friend to read a poem they had written together. Camargo went with her, with the intention of showing up, reading the poem and then leaving.

Four years later, Camargo still hasn’t left. She is one of the co-lead officers of the club and is in the process of self-publishing a chapbook of her work. Chapbooks are short, bound collections of poetry or prose, typically no longer than 40 pages. She joked about getting “Bond Hall 112” tattooed on her forehead when she graduates next winter.

Camargo said that she appreciates all the different styles of poetry that get shared in club meetings. Many of the members, including the officers, aren’t even English majors. The variety serves both as inspiration for techniques to incorporate into her own poetry and as a way to lighten the mood.

“It can get really heavy in here sometimes,” she admitted, adding that it can be nice when some poets share more lighthearted pieces between the darker ones.

“leave places better than you found them. / except your body, / because boys do not like, / do not want, / will not love / “a Big Girl” / and a man’s love can fill the gaps left behind / by skipped meals and missed lessons in self love.” Written by Symone Camargo

Vulnerability is an important and respected quality...
at PALS. The walls of Bond Hall 112 have heard a lot of hardships over the years. Club president, senior Wyatt Heimbichner Goebel shared a poem about his experience trying to mend a strained relationship with his mother as she faced severe health complications. Other members have shared poems written about personal struggles with depression, thoughts of suicide and instances of sexual abuse.

But the classroom has also witnessed healing and the forming of friendships. It has heard poems about falling in love and poems about how complicated and beautiful the earth is. It has housed students as they found their voices and grew brave enough to share them.

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Freshman Ren Santucci has been a regular member at PALS since coming to Western in 2018. Santucci had been involved with art clubs in high school, but hadn’t explored poetry until college, where it soon became a vital creative outlet.

“I have always said I would return to the earth, but I have never mulled over whether she will take me back.”

Written by Jocelyn Wiebe

Santucci said that poetry is such a personal platform, and vulnerability can be hard for them. But PALS has been a welcoming and safe space where they can trust their words and feelings to be acknowledged and accepted.

“Having a platform as someone who’s queer, as someone who’s a person of color, as someone who’s disabled, it’s amazing to have people care about my opinion. I want to be somebody that people in my same position can look up to,” they said.

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More people in the U.S. are reading poetry now than in the last 15 years, according to a 2018 National Endowment from the Arts survey. Young adults make up the largest percentage of poetry readers. Women and racial/ethnic subgroups also increased since the previous 2012 survey.

PALS is growing, according to its officers. While the increase in poetry readers in the U.S. could mean good news in the poetry market for PALS members, they aren’t highly concerned with getting published and making money from their poems.

Shephard said an artist’s job is to make someone feel something through their work.

“It doesn’t matter if we make money. It doesn’t matter if we’re famous or anything like that. What matters is if we can get any of those words, or any of that feeling, for anybody else to feel something, that’s it. Even if that’s ourselves. That’s it,” he said.

Camargo believes one of the most important things about sharing your work, whether or not it makes you any money, is to let someone else who might be going through similar things in life know that they are not alone.

Snaps, though, have a bad side too, they said. “Everyone here is so good, so there is definitely this pressure to get snaps,” they said. “You can’t just be taking up this space... and nobody resonates with anything you say and your words are bad.”
MANY OF US HAVE PROBABLY OPENED the fridge and felt like we had nothing to eat, only to return five minutes later hoping for new and delicious food to appear. The only available food does not always sound appealing, but maybe coming back with a fresh mind will spark new ideas for something that can be made with those spare ingredients.

However, some people experience this to the extreme. Like the single mom who can only afford to feed her child, or the college student who can only spare their money on ramen.

Late evening rolls around and Bayley Boecker has two papers due the next day, but the lack of food in their pantry is beginning to take priority. Bayley sits down on their living-room couch decides to apply for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), also referred to as food stamps.

SNAP is a federal program that offers benefits to low-income individuals and families when purchasing groceries. Approximately 40 million individuals in the United States receive SNAP, and 890,000 of them live in Washington, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. All food items except for hot or prepared food can be purchased on an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card, which serves a similar purpose to a debit card. Participants of the program receive a monthly allowance put directly onto the card. The allowance is determined by factors such as income, family size and living expenses.

Bayley is one of many who feel as though they have to choose between significant expenses, such as rent, bills and food.

“I think that food stamps are actually a really good service and resource. I believe that food and shelter and access to healthcare are all basic human rights. It’s a systemic issue and a class issue that people need food stamps in the first place,” they said.

In 2016, nearly 27,000 people in Whatcom County were part of SNAP, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The high cost of living in the area, as well as tuition for college students, makes affording basic needs difficult.

“I believe that a resource like food stamps is really important and really beneficial for a lot of people in the community,” Bayley said. “I think as a country, the wealth gap is increasing and we’re losing our middle class.”

SNAP aims to help individuals who are food insecure, which is characterized by a consistent limited access to food.

It’s no doubt that expenses can quickly add up and suddenly one can find themselves on a miniscule budget. People living
in poverty also appear to be at higher risk for mental illnesses, according to a report written by the University of Cape Town’s Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health. Further budgeting complications tend to arise when factors like mental health come into play.

“I started going to therapy, but I don’t have health insurance. So seeing a therapist raised my cost of living by about $200 a month,” they said. “I applied for food stamps to help out with that stressor in my life.”

A recent study done by Mathematica Policy Research found that there was a 38 percent decrease in psychological distress among those who had participated in SNAP for six months.

“I feel very frustrated that I have to choose between mental health and my physical health,” they said. “I’m just doing my best.”

College students, like Bayley, are some of the least likely recipients of SNAP. Over 59 percent of SNAP recipients are families with children and 33 percent are families with either elderly members or disabled members, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

Stringent requirements to receive funds may be the culprit. Students who are eligible must either be working over 20 hours a week, be part of a work-study program, or have a child dependent in the household.

Courtney Cooper is a college student and mother of two girls. It was while Courtney was pregnant with her first daughter that she qualified for SNAP and received it for approximately four years. During this time, Courtney was both employed and a single mother, who needed to do whatever she could to support herself and her daughter.

“I was working, but not making very much money. I still needed to be able to provide for my daughter,” she said.

Courtney and her husband currently make enough money to not need SNAP, “I think you do what you have to do to take care of your family. People get in situations all the time,” she said. “I think everybody’s a paycheck or two away from being in a bad situation.”

Because SNAP covers most food items, it covers what are considered “luxury items” like organic food, candy and seafood. Though according to the Food Research and Action Center, there’s an ongoing stigma around the program including these items.

“Do people not deserve those things because they’re on food stamps?” Courtney asked.

Zachary Haring is another student who has received SNAP.

“I needed them because even working 40 hours a week, I could not afford rent, bills and everything else on a minimum wage salary while also being in school,” he said.

Zachary struggled to balance full-time work and school and ultimately lost sleep trying to juggle the two.

“Because of food stamps, I was able to cut my hours to 30 hours a week which improved my grades immensely,” he said.

He now works 15 hours a week in order to focus on school. The decrease in hours means he is no longer a recipient of SNAP, as the program requires students to be working at least 20 hours weekly.

“The way I see food stamps is that it’s a helping hand meant to help people rise out of poverty, and not something to rely on forever. So, if I wasn’t making enough money to afford food, then I would go back on it. There is no shame in being on food stamps,” Zachary said.

Like other governmental programs providing assistance to those who need it, there are stigmas surrounding it. However, the program requires individuals to be either currently working, actively searching for a job or engaging in employment and training programs.

“There’s a lot of unnecessary judgement,” Courtney said. “I think the majority of the people that are on it really need it and don’t want to be on it.”

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To those who find themselves, once again, opening the fridge and thinking, “there’s nothing to eat,” take a moment to appreciate the spare ingredients you do have.
DUELING WITH DISEASE

Bellingham High School senior, Britney Butcher, is headed to the University of Washington to compete in the 2A girls tennis state championships. Photo taken on May 17, 2019.
HUNGER DISEASE

Bellingham teen battles mysterious illness for nearly a decade

STORY BY ERIC TRENT
Photos by Molly Workman
A BLACK AND BLUE TENNIS RACKET springs forward, an extension of Britney Butcher’s forearm, as she smacks an opponent’s 70 mph volley and blasts it across the net to the far corner of the court.

Britney lightly taps rackets with her No. 1 doubles partner, Louli Ziels, as the two celebrate the point and exchange subtle grins. Two grueling hours later the Bellingham High School duo are crowned the 2A North Sub-District champions.

Perhaps only two spectators – Britney’s parents Garth and Tanys Butcher – out of the dozens in attendance, are aware that this 19-year-old tennis star spent six months in a wheelchair two years ago during a seven-year bout with a mysterious illness.

SYMPTOMS BEGIN
It starts with intense foot pain that comes out of nowhere for 10-year-old Britney, a youth athlete in Bellingham who finds herself crying after soccer games due to the intense pain.

At 13 years old the pain has spread up to her joints, making them stiff and cold, starting with the ankles and moving to the knees and elbows. It’s like having a jammed finger but in every joint. Some mornings she doesn’t have the strength in her fingers to grip a glass of water.

Britney tapes her elbows, wrists, ankles and knees at the age of 14 – head to toe – so her joints are warm enough to play sports.

In February 2014, Britney is taken to Seattle Children’s Hospital where she’s diagnosed with juvenile idiopathic arthritis, the most common form of arthritis for children under 16.

Five years of daily medications begin.

It starts with Prednisone then moves to Methotrexate injections, anti-inflammatories that make her nauseous. Fourteen-year-old Britney gives herself the injections directly into her stomach and legs, while Tanys injects them into the back of Britney’s arms – only because Britney can’t reach.

Britney Butcher, still 14, sprints down a soccer field in Everett, Washington when suddenly her world starts spinning and she can’t breathe, finally crumpling to the ground gasping for air.

Doctors pump the medication out of her system, and when she’s stabilized she’s put on different medication and sent home in a wheelchair.

“It became very obvious that nobody knew what they were dealing with so they just pushed us out the door,” Tanys said.

REMISSION THEN RELAPSE
After being put on Enbrel injections in August 2015, Britney is feeling well enough to play sports her freshman year – the first bit of reprieve she’s had in nearly five years.

It’s short lived.

Her right leg goes numb, eventually losing total feeling and becomes marred with rug burns as she’s forced to drag it behind her as she walks. Her doctor at the time tells her it’s just a side effect of the medication.

Tanys and Garth ask her to stop playing sports so she can rest and heal. Later that day they find the remnants of a soccer poster that hung in Britney’s room.

“One day I came in and it was just in shreds and ripped up,” Tanys said. “I said, ‘What happened to the soccer poster?’ She goes, ‘Well, I’m never playing that again.’”

Normally an active and athletic teenager, Britney is embarrassed to have her peers see her in this condition, and the illness persists for so long that everyone other than her family and close friends begin to question if she’s actually sick.
“Some of the secretaries [at school] would say, ‘Are you off to go have fun today? Is that why you’re leaving?’” Tanys said. “They thought she was faking it. Doctors started to look at me and not believe [me] because I’d been in so many times. One doctor said, ‘Get up. You can go home. This is for emergencies, not for a person like you.’”

Around Christmas 2017 of her junior year, she is taking Vicodin and other painkillers to cope with the pain, but they aren’t touching any of the torture. By now she has lost nearly 40 pounds, dropping down to 110 pounds.

“My mom would sleep with me at night because she’s like, ‘I don’t know if you’re going to wake up in the morning,’” Britney said. “It got to the point where no one can figure out what’s wrong with me and I’m going to die not knowing anything. It’s a pretty crazy thing to accept when you’re 17.”

**DECODING THE PAIN**

Tanys is feeding and dressing Britney daily when she receives a tip from a friend who says the symptoms are similar to Lyme disease.

Tanys Googles the illness and as she clicks the mouse something clicks in her head – the symp-
toms are eerily synonymous.

She calls a diagnostician who refers the Butcher’s to Dr. Susan L. Marra, a Lyme-literate doctor in Seattle.

At this point Britney has been in a wheelchair and hasn’t walked in six months. Dr. Marra takes one look at the sickly 17-year-old and validates what her and the family already knew: something was seriously wrong.

“She was like, ‘This is the worst I’ve ever seen. I cannot promise a full recovery,’” Britney said.

After a gauntlet of tests, in which 30 vials of blood are taken, the Butchers get the answer they’ve been waiting seven years for: Dr. Marra diagnoses Britney with chronic Lyme disease and Bartenolossis, also known as cat scratch fever. The two forms of bacteria have been invading the lining of her blood vessels for seven years.

“I just remember feeling so free,” Britney said. “A huge weight is off your shoulders. The past hour I was accepting ‘What if I don’t make it home on this ride?”

Britney finally begins treatment for her true ailment in January 2017.

THE DISEASE
No one knows exactly how Britney contracted it, but as a rambunctious kid who was constantly climbing trees and exploring the nearby woods – one can only guess.

Lyme disease is a bacteria that’s transmitted from a tick bite, parasites that are normally found east of the Rocky Mountains but can also live in the forested areas of Washington.

Britney didn’t develop the tell-tale sign of the disease, a bullseye rash that forms on 70 to 80 percent of those affected, which helped the misdiagnosing. The Centers for Disease Control and
Prevention estimate around 300,000 Americans contract Lyme disease each year. Cases are rare in Washington state with zero to three cases reported each year.

“My mom’s like, ‘If you had a tick, you’d rip it off in five seconds,’” Britney said. “I was just one of those kids.”

THE REBOUND

Britney wastes no time recuperating. One month after starting treatment, she regains feeling in her legs. Her boyfriend at the time lifts her from the bed and places her front of a walker. Britney takes her first steps in seven months.

A year later, Britney is playing sports competitively again for the first time in two years. She isn’t chosen as one of the top-3 tennis players on the team and can’t compete in sub-districts.

“I was pretty butthurt about it,” Britney said. “Not gonna lie. It stuck with me.”

She applied for and was granted an extra year of athletic eligibility through the WIAA under its hardship rule because of her illness.

Now she’s gone from being temporarily disabled to bolting back and forth across a tennis court and delivering powerhouse serves for three-straight hours.

“We laugh when we see people upset because maybe their kid didn’t play good,” Garth said. “We’re just so thankful that she’s even playing. The success is secondary to us, but certainly not to her.”

Even more remarkable is that Britney, now 5-foot-9 and 140 pounds, is only 50 percent healed with an estimated one to two years of recovery left. Her hunger to compete has fueled her meteoric rise to success with the tennis racket.

Sometimes that fighter thing isn’t always good for you. She probably did too much, but it was so important to her to be a part of a team,” Garth said. “What we’re most proud of is her perseverance and strength. We’re happy she’s walking around and living a normal life, let alone playing tennis how she is now. If you told us she was going to do that six or eight months ago, we would have been hopeful for her but definitely doubtful.”

80 PILLS A DAY

Dr. Marra still treats Britney, who takes a daily regimen of 80 pills consisting of supplements, vitamins and probiotics.

“My whole life has revolved around a schedule of medications,” Britney said. “It’s hard because I’m a teenager and I want to have fun, but I have to put this first. Always.”

She enrolled at Whatcom Community College in 2018 to finish her high school degree and will walk on June 14 with Bellingham’s 2019 graduating class. She also finished her CNA course and is now a certified nursing assistant.

“Being a nurse is very important to me because of what I’ve been through,” Britney said. “It’s something I always wanted, but once I got sick I needed to do it. I feel the need to help people who are in my situation. I’ve had certain nurses who have made my life a lot harder, and nurses who made me feel so much better about everything. I just want to be able to do that for people.”

Things are starting to look positive for the 19-year-old sub-district champion. Her and teammate Louli Ziels placed second at bi-districts on May 13, losing to the defending state champions.

The runner-up finish punched Britney’s ticket to the 2A girls tennis state championships where she competed on May 24 and 25. For once in her teenage life she battled something other than a disease.

“It feels pretty good,” Britney said. “The past three months have been amazing. It feels crazy to me that I’m playing tennis now. I made it and I’m killing it. All the hard work is finally paying off.”
This initially began as a question of why a person would choose to eat a strict vegan diet, but became something so much more. I realized how doable this whole vegan thing is and my eating habits changed drastically because of it.

Sure, it takes some willpower to not eat a slice of pizza when offered to you at 1 a.m. on a drunken night, but over the course of just three weeks, my responses to such situations have changed from “I can’t” to “No, thank you.”

I worried being vegan would prevent me from enjoying everything I wanted to, but it has actually opened me up to new foods, experiences and people. Opening ourselves up to the unknown is how we grow as individuals. And sometimes the best way to find something new, is to get rid of something old.

My Vegan Voyage Sets Sail
Perusing the shelves of Trader Joe’s, I’m realizing how little attention I’ve paid to the ingredients of the products I buy. It’s frustrating to find that the milk and eggs duo love to sneak their way into damn near everything.

Unpacking my bags at home, I take inventory of my herbivorous haul. Coconut creamer to impersonate my dearly missed half-and-half, bagels, rice, pita bread and lots of fruits and
veggies. A bit intimidated by the products I have no experience with: vegan butter and soy chorizo. They seem sacrilegious, like they shouldn’t exist.

For dinner I decide on a collegiate classic, a bowl of cereal. Gluten-free Cocoa Crunch and vanilla soy milk, which tastes earthy and eerily similar to psychedelic mushrooms, not very much like the Cocoa Puffs I’m cuckoo for. I opt for banana chips instead and find that I am a big fan.

Feeling a bit entitled, but only because this vegan thing takes some effort. I haven’t spent this much time reading in a grocery store since I used to try to get through as much of MAD as I could before my mom finished shopping and undoubtedly refused to buy a $7 magazine for me.

Already planning my return meal.

**Harsh Reality Check**
The coconut creamer is a nice addition to my morning coffee, but definitely lacks a certain pizzazz only dairy cream can provide. The Cocoa Crunch tastes way more like Cocoa Puffs today, and I wonder if my tastebuds are evolving. Probably just getting desperate.

My first true test of will is work in a kitchen filled with animal products. As a part-time prep cook in a retirement home I usually just eat what the old folks do.

I sustain myself through lunch with my trusty banana chips and a plate of rice which the chef assured me is free of anything that would taint my temporary purity.

Dinner is patty melts, which requires the cooking of bacon. Being trapped in that kitchen is torture. The smell is more like a pheromone than a scent. There is no god, and if there is, they’ve got a sick sense of humor. I’m curious if my meat tolerance break will decrease my intake in the future. I just hope I don’t overdo it when I relapse.

A buddy tells me that beans are the lifeblood of the vegan people, I guess they are a flatulent bunch. He is a non-vegan, so I suppose I should verify that sentiment, although I think he is sleeping with a vegan.

I wonder how being vegan will affect my dating life. All my usual spots have been barred to my new form. Maybe Russian dumplings? What are those made out of? Probably eggs. Shit.

**The Rye-teous One**
I also work for a catering company, another position not tailored to the vegan-inclined, and find myself serving some of my most treasured old friends. Not the guests; breakfast for dinner. An enticing spread of bacon, french toast, biscuits and gravy. Or as I prefer to refer to them, “The Temptations.” Not to be confused with the ‘60s Motown vocal group, but equally as seductive.

My will is tested further the following day, as the old folks home presents me with my biggest challenge yet. The dreaded Reuben. Perhaps, no, undoubtedly the greatest combination of meats and cheeses to ever find it’s way situated between two pieces of bread.

And of course there is a tray of leftover sandwiches. A small army of dangerous enticements that I just can’t resist. I load up three sandwiches to take, and stare longingly into the grease soaked styrofoam treasure chest when I get home.

And then, by something that can only be explained as divine intervention, I offer them to my roommates.

How does one apply for sainthood? Because I feel as though that act of pure selflessness should automatically qualify me.

**Settling In**
Seven days free of sustaining myself on animal

"There is no god, and if there is, they’ve got a sick sense of humor."

Motown vocal group, but equally as seductive.
torture and environmental tragedy, I am happy to report that all systems are functioning normally.

Going to class without a shower today, as I lost track of time cramming my homework into the morning of the day it is due. I can’t help but snicker at the Western stereotype I am becoming, vegan and unbathed.

I’m feeling good, possibly better than usual. Maybe it’s placebo. Maybe it’s the serene blissfulness one feels right before they succumb to death by meat deprivation.

This whole experience is definitely making me more skeptical. Did you know that Worcestershire sauce has anchovies in it? Gelatin is in practically everything and is made from bone collagen, whatever the hell that is.

I’m not mad, but I think a bit more transparency would be nice. I suppose it wouldn’t be great for the marshmallow industry if people were sitting around a campfire thinking about all the animal collagen stuffed into their golden-brown sugar globs.

My roommate tries some of my vegan cheddar. Tastes like wet Doritos but with a more pungent cheese essence; a unique product that I cannot say that I’m a fan of. My roommate does not like it either.

Dietary Dating
I’m using this whole thing to my advantage by playing the clueless transitioning vegan card. Swindling a girl into making me pancakes free of their usual milk and egg additions.

We walk to the Community Co-op together for blueberries and once there I feel right at home. These are my people now. A tribe of plant-based animal-alternative individuals all in a common pursuit to eat healthy food that doesn’t taste like dog shit. This place has everything. Dozens of milk, but-not-milk, milks and aisles upon aisles of products all sporting the coveted “V,” signifying a product is vegan and authorized to enter my mouth.

I will return to this promised land once my bank account doesn’t resemble my GPA, which admittedly isn’t too impressive either. It seems the best approach to veganism, as with most things, is to go into it with a lot of money. I’m not saying you can’t do it easily for cheap, I’m just saying the good stuff costs more. The rich suffer less for their sacrifices I suppose.

She invites me back to try her veggie fajitas in the near future. Hopefully it happens before I conclude my vegan venture and she sees me for the meat-eating maniac I really am. What if we hit it off and I just kept up this schtick forever? God what a terrible thought.

The Helpful Herbivore
My most informative conquest since infiltrating the plant-based regime is a meal with Simon, a real-deal vegan. Simon has been off the animal-products for six months, and I figure his insights may be helpful in combating my cluelessness.

I enjoy a dinner of vegan manicotti with him and his girlfriend, Amanda, and everything I thought I knew about Italian food is turned upside-down.

I’m initially skeptical. I mean, vegan ricotta? Come on now. If the vegan cheddar I had tried was any indication, the vegans had some work to do in the cheese sector. But an emulsified blend of tofu, cauliflower and soy milk transforms into a pasta stuffing that could convert even the most fundamental Italian grandmother. This ricotta doesn’t just taste like it’s dairy-based counterpart, it’s better. Maybe it’s just the copious amounts of
boxed wine we prefaced the meal with, but hey, when in Rome.
Simon has always been an adventurous eater. I recall a specific instance in which he dehydrated pickle slices in an attempt to make pickle chips, turning our kitchen into a chemical war zone punishable by the Geneva Convention. But I am happy to see that his creative culinary endeavors are not stifled by his abandonment of animal products. He does not feel that his vegan diet requires sacrificing good food. Quite the opposite in fact, as he has become a fanatic about foods he would never have tried otherwise. It’s kind of adorable to watch him get so excited about all these foreign fares.

A contagious excitement that I’m not sure I’ve ever felt.

Bee-trayed
My vegan oath has been violated. I broke it, or rather, had it broken for me.

My roommate was surprised at how tasty his discount mead tasted and insisted I try it. I thought people hadn’t drank that stuff since before we figured out washing our hands was a good idea, but being a lover of all things inebriating, I gave it a sip. I asked him what mead is and as I was swallowing the antiquated elixir, he uttered a word I’d never been so offended by: honey. I guess those dark age drunkards had created mead by fermenting bee vomit in water, and now my vegan excellence is spoiled.

Now I’ve heard all the controversy over vegans and honey, the emergence of beegans and the environmental implications of alternatives like agave nectar, but you can’t fool me. I know bees are animals and I know their product is honey and that makes me a non-vegan monster.

At least I feel bad about it and didn’t use it to justify a burger bender.

Vegains
Something strange happened. I reached the two week mark, the day I had been looking forward to for two weeks and I stayed vegan.

I drank my morning coffee with cashew milk, my new go to not-from-an-udder creamer and prepared a bagel for breakfast. Maybe I was just subconsciously trying to make up for the mead
COLE’S CURRY

This spicy veggie-filled concoction proves going vegan doesn’t have to be a bland miserable experience. A magical masala masterpiece sure to please anyone, vegan or not.

I begin by bringing a pot of water, salted to the salinity of the sea, to a nice rolling boil. The potatoes then enter their salty bath, which I cover and cook over medium heat for about 15 minutes.

While the potatoes become tender, I heat vegetable oil over medium heat in my trusty cast-iron skillet. I add a diced onion and three cloves of minced garlic, cooking until the onion becomes translucent. Seasoning generously with two tablespoons of cumin, salt and cayenne pepper, and four tablespoons of curry powder and garam masala -- the aroma is tantalizing.

At this point the recipe calls for the cooked potatoes, peeled and cubed, and a can of each: garbanzo beans (drained and rinsed), peas (drained), diced tomatoes and coconut milk. My can opener decides that it is no longer opening cans, reminding me that tool construction is the basis for most modern forms of anger.

My onions are browning at this point and I desperately need to get the contents of these cans into my pan. I’m able to create two small slits on either side of the lid by repeatedly punching it with the can opener and then bending it up world’s strongest man style. It is quite the event, but undeniably worth it.

I let the curry simmer for at least 20 minutes, and serve over rice. By pressing the rice into a measuring cup, it comes out looking like I give a shit and tastes like I actually know what I’m doing.

I was never really one to give a hoot about animal rights, at least not at the expense of cheeseburgers. So why was I now avoiding all cheeses and burgers? Initially I think I was fearful I would get sick when I went back to eating normally, like how one turd can ruin everyone’s day at the local pool. But I realized that I simply don’t need to eat animal products and honestly don’t want to.

It’s a joy cooking for myself and watching my friends enjoy something that I’ve made while I remind them for the hundredth time that, “It’s totally vegan!” Why eat food with so much of a stigma behind it, when I can just whip up a skillet of potato curry and not feel like garbage for the two hours that follow a fast food feeding frenzy.

There is something about eating a vegan diet that makes me feel better. Maybe it’s the self-assurance that I’m living ethically and consciously, but more likely I think it’s just the fact that I’ve made a decision, and I’m sticking with it.
DURING THE 1930S, MY GREAT-
grandmother Hedwig Haeberle immigrated to the United States from Germany, following my great-grandfather Heinrich Blank who had made the move in 1928. As one can imagine, being German in America during World War II was difficult. Hedwig and Heinrich were required to register as enemy aliens, and all communication with their families was cut off.

This is their story.

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It was 1924 when Hedy Haeberle met Heinrich Blank while out dancing. He was a 20-year-old accounting apprentice from Emmendingen, Germany, and Hedy had recently completed a three-year seamstress program.

It was quickly apparent to everyone that Hedy and Heinrich were a good match, everyone except their parents.

Heinrich and his family were staunch Catholics while Hedy’s parents were self-proclaimed good Lutherans. Her parents referred to her and Heinrich as a mixed relationship that would never work. Similarly, Heinrich’s parents made their position clear: If he didn’t obey them, they would kick him out of the house.

Regardless, they continued to see each other for the next four years.

It’s unclear why Heinrich didn’t tell Hedy about his plan to move to America but it wasn’t long before she discovered his intentions from a friend. When he came by her house, she demanded to know if it was true. Was he really trying to leave Germany for the United States?

He had a friend in America who he wanted to join to escape the devastated economy that had infected all of Europe back in the early ’20s. Not to mention a chance to get away from his overbearing parents.
She couldn’t believe it.

As it does today, obtaining a passport and a visa takes time. While they waited to hear back from the American Consulate, Hedy and Heinrich continued to see each other. Heinrich’s parents were delighted at the prospect of their son venturing to the United States because he would be away from Hedy and hopefully make a better living.

Heinrich finally received word from the American Consulate. He had been granted passage.

He found Hedy and asked for her hand in marriage before he left, but she refused. Hedy said she would not promise him anything. If he found someone else, she told him to go ahead with it because he was no longer bound to her.

He was a free man in America. It was 1928.

True to their word, they didn’t wait for each other. Hedy went on dates and Heinrich began the long process of acclimating to the new culture of America.

Then the letters started to come. Heinrich sent them once a week, sometimes twice. He hardly ever wrote to his parents but Hedy was special. Hedy recalled the letters always sounding hopeful, Heinrich didn’t elaborate on his struggles in Chicago.

In the thralls of America’s Great Depression, Heinrich went from working in a bank in Germany to a dishwasher in a small restaurant in Chicago. After learning some English, he got a job at the Bismarck Hotel as a busboy. He started sending $2 - $3 in each letter to Hedy, keeping only a little for himself. He told her to do with it as she wished, but she didn’t touch it – and she wouldn’t until 1930.

“Regardless, they continued to see each other for the next four years”

Hedy didn’t want to go to America. Frankly, she had no desire to leave her homeland where her family and friends were. Hedy would be giving up her inheritance to pursue a relationship that was heavily criticized. Then she went to a dance – one held in the same venue where she had met Heinrich – and began to consider leaving her homeland for a life with Heinrich.

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It was 1930 when she arrived in New York from Hamburg on the ocean liner SS Columbus. Heinrich’s cousin Max, who lived in New York at the time, helped her get a train to Chicago. On November 17, the train pulled into the station and when Heinrich saw her, he came running.

The next day they were married at the courthouse.

In 1934, Heinrich and Hedy welcomed their first child, Rudolph, into the world. Two years later, Hedy and Rudy traveled to Germany for a wedding and gave their families an opportunity to meet Rudy. While visiting Heinrich’s family, his brother Fritz told Hedy he was glad they moved to America.

Fritz was a “Hauptmann” or captain in the German army. For historical context, by 1936 during this visit, Hitler had been Führer for two years. Hedy knew that Fritz was busy training soldiers but didn’t understand the significance at the time. All he told her was that it looked like war.

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Hedy and Heinrich welcomed their second son, Henry Fred Blank, in June 1939. Three months later Hitler invaded Poland, inciting WWII.

Although the U.S. wasn’t involved right away, Hedy and Heinrich knew they could no longer contact their families or friends in Germany for fear of association with the aggressor. Their situation was further complicated because while Heinrich had already become a citizen and their sons were born in the States, Hedy was not an American citizen.

After Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt put Presidential Proclamation 2526 into action which allowed non-American citizens from Axis countries such as Germany to potentially “be apprehended, restrained, secured and removed as alien enemies.” The government fingerprinted and photographed Hedy. People asked Hedy and Heinrich where they were from because of their accents. They stopped talking to their kids in German. Some of their neighbors stopped talking to them.

There were shopkeepers who refused service to Germans. Rudy’s classmates called him a Nazi. Heinrich’s hometown was bombed out. They learned that Fritz had died in Russia but weren’t able to get the status on the rest of their families until much later. During and after the war, the German people were faced with dire food shortages. As soon as they were able, Hedy and Heinrich sent care packages with food to the Blanks and the Haeberles.

In 1948, Hedy became a citizen of the United States.

In the following years, the family became further integrated. Hedy was a secretary at Trinity Lutheran Church and Heinrich continued to work in the restaurant industry. Both boys were able to attend college. Afterward, Rudy pursued his doctorate and seminary to become a missionary in Venezuela, while Henry, my grandfather, was drafted in 1962 and worked in a medical laboratory in Fort Baker, California for the U.S. Army.

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In 1959, at 55 years old, Heinrich had his first heart attack. Although he recovered well, he had another heart attack in 1968. The doctors weren’t as sure about his recovery this time. They told Hedy he would survive it if nothing else happened.

But he had a stroke a few days later and died. He was 64 years old.

Hedy went on to survive breast cancer, throat cancer and a stroke which left her in a wheelchair in 2000. Their marriage was not perfect by any means, but Hedy and Heinrich remained committed to each other until the end.

Her sacrifices laid the foundation for a strong family: two sons, six grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren. I have benefited immensely from growing up in the States and it wouldn’t have been possible if my great-grandmother hadn’t been so stubborn and courageous.

She was reunited with Heinrich in 2006 at 100 years old.
RAISING THE BAR

A female perspective on strength-based sports

WALKING UP TO THE SPANAWAY FITNESS center in Tacoma, shouts echo from the open doors to the gym. The Northwest Regional Powerlifting Championships started at 9 a.m. and it is now almost two hours into the meet.

The gym is transformed for the competition. Black curtains split the gym in half to separate the warm-up zone from the audience. Vibrant graffiti murals cover the walls. Children in the audience run around the seating area while competitors come and go from the stands. As the weight increases and competitors struggle with their lifts, shouts of encouragement erupt from the audience.

Lena Hemmer smiles from the sidelines. Today she isn’t here to compete, but to support her friends, Sara Holey and Lizzie Bronder.

Hemmer herself began lifting in 2016 as a sophomore in college and is now a senior at Western preparing to graduate.

(9:05) “I have met so many strong, badass girls doing this,” she said. (9:57) “It’s great to be empowered by other girls that all have this common goal which is just to get better.”

Prior to lifting, she ran -- up to 70 miles a week in high school.

It wasn’t until she experienced a stress fracture in her left foot during her senior varsity track season that her running career came to a sudden close. Up to that point, Hemmer was deciding between running for a D1 school and choosing a school with her desired major at the time: marine ecology. This injury decided for her.

In her first couple of years at Western, Hemmer still ran but faced with the returning injury, had to let go of long-distance running. That’s when she started experimenting with weights.

Despite not knowing anyone in the weight room or what she was doing, Hemmer was determined to learn. Starting with bodybuilding movements, then on to powerlifting and more recently, Olympic lifting. Different from powerlifting, Olympic-style is more technical, focusing on the movements of two lifts: the snatch and the clean and jerk.

Hemmer said Olympic lifting is a mental game. She finds gratification in lifting the weights from the ground to her shoulders and then pushing it up over her head -- lifting is her new runner’s high.

“As someone who has dealt with issues, with body image and with eating disorders... [lifting] has changed the way that I view what my body can do. I look at what my body can do and not just what it looks like,” Hemmer said.

You have to put yourself in an uncomfortable position to then learn and grow.

There’s the tell-tale look of an athlete in Hemmer’s eyes, an intense determination and hunger to push herself to be the best she can be.

“I no longer focused on what the number is when I step down on the scale,” Hemmer said. “Rather it’s what’s the number I can throw over my head --
what’s the number I can pick up?”

Hemmer recognizes that it takes a lot of discipline to go to the weight room and do things you may have never done before, and it can be scary.

“You can be intimidated, but every single girl that I have met through this has been so sweet, so nice, so willing to take time out of their day – out of their workout – to help me and to include me,” Hemmer said.

Hemmer continues to grin while she talks about the people she has met through this sport.

“[We’re not] competing with each other as much as we are competing with ourselves,” she said.

Today’s powerlifting competition is a shining example of the lifting community. At its core, powerlifting tests how strong you are with three lifts: squat, bench press and deadlift. As a weight-classed strength sport, athletes are categorized by bodyweight. For each of the lifts, competitors have three attempts to lift their best weight. The highest weight of each lift is added together for a total score.

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“Now we have Sara, with Julia up next and Harlie in the hole!” The female announcer jumps as she speaks, keeping up with the energy of the lifters.

Officials tend to the bar quickly and efficiently to change out the weights for each lifter. They give a thumbs up to the announcer who then shouts, “the bar is loaded!”

Western junior Sara Holey pushes the curtain aside and moves toward the bench without hesitation. She slips under the bar and gets ready for her lift. Competitively powerlifting since the seventh grade, Sara is all too familiar with the scene.

“It’s really cool to go to these competitions and see other people pushing their limits,” she said.

On either side of her sits a judge, as well as one directly in front. They hold two flags, one red and one white to indicate whether the lift is good or not. At least two white flags means the competitor is in
the clear, more than one red flag and the lift is not counted due to improper form.
Growing up, Holey was always active, taking after her three brothers and wanting to do everything they did. After seeing them participate and compete in powerlifting, Holey decided to take a weight training class. She instantly fell in love.

From eighth grade through her junior year of high school, Holey continuously qualified for state every year in powerlifting. Holey would try to strategically switch between two weight classes so that she had the opportunity to compete in both, depending on the meet.

Holey moved from Michigan to Washington right before her senior year and after a year-long lifting hiatus, began competing again during her freshman year at Bellevue College. In 2017, she transferred to Western to major in kinesiology with a specialization in physical therapy.

She continued to lift and started working at the Wade King Student Recreation Center. She’s currently co-teaching Women on Weights, a class open to all who identify as women. She uses this opportunity to share her knowledge and help others learn their way around the weight room.

“Try not to be afraid of the weight room and what goes on in there. Being out here and looking in, it can be kind of scary, I get that,” Holey said. “You have to put yourself in an uncomfortable position to then learn and grow.”

Three white flags go up as Holey completes a successful bench.

Holey sits up and moves to the sidelines so that the next competitor can lift. After a minute, she disappears to the back again to keep warm.

“The bar is loaded!”

Western senior Lizzie Bronder steps out from behind the curtain and takes a moment to look at the bench before slipping under the bar. Hemmer
Lifting was the first time where I didn’t feel like I was having to fight my body to be good at the sport.

steps in front of the bench to help lift the bar into position as she begins the lift, then moves to the sidelines.

Broder has always been athletic: dance, cheer, cross-country, CrossFit and track and field. She said that being in dance when she was younger was what compounded her struggle with body image.

“I was strong and could do the movements, [but] I never really had the ‘look’ that was wanted by our teacher,” Broder said. “I struggled with body image a lot because my natural body type is athletic and muscular and no matter how hard I tried I couldn’t force my body to look the way I envisioned.”

Running was something that helped her in all of her other athletic activities. Broder was running upwards of 25 miles a week during her cross-country days, but had to stop running after her first quarter at Western due to unhealed shin splints. Without running she said she felt lost, having tied her identity to it for the past 10 years.

Then Broder found powerlifting through the Viking Fit classes at the Rec Center. The class teaches progressive strength training and helped push her to do heavier weights.

“Lifting was the first time where I didn’t feel like I was having to fight my body to be good at the sport,” Broder said.

Reflecting on the atmosphere of the weightroom, Broder said people love to see others lift heavy.

“It doesn’t matter what your gender identity is, if they see you putting in the work and improving your lifts, they’re going to respect you,” Broder said. “And even if you are just starting out, most lifters I know would jump at the chance to help you with form and technique.”

The bar goes down and up. Three white flags go up. It’s a good lift and a new personal record on the bench press for Broder at roughly 138 pounds.

Holey and Broder end the day with personal records in each of their lifts. Holey earns second place in the junior class overall and Broder earns second in the open women’s 132-148 weight class. Hemmer cheers from the sidelines -- today she isn’t here to compete, but to support her friends.
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