



Western Washington University
Western CEDAR

Klipsun Magazine

Western Student Publications

Fall 2021

Klipsun Magazine, 2021, Volume 52 Issue 1 - Fall

Sadie Fick

Follow this and additional works at: https://cedar.wwu.edu/klipsun_magazine



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Journalism Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Fick, Sadie, "Klipsun Magazine, 2021, Volume 52 Issue 1 - Fall" (2021). *Klipsun Magazine*. 278.
https://cedar.wwu.edu/klipsun_magazine/278

This Issue is brought to you for free and open access by the Western Student Publications at Western CEDAR. It has been accepted for inclusion in Klipsun Magazine by an authorized administrator of Western CEDAR. For more information, please contact westerncedar@wwu.edu.

KLIPSUN



Letter from the Editor

FOR THE READER

These past years have been characterized by uncertainty. If it's taught me anything, it's this: We can never really know what's coming next.

I was hired as a designer for this edition of Klipsun. I didn't choose the theme or work with reporters to shape their stories. Now I'm Editor-in-Chief.

Sometimes we (knowingly but ungracefully) stumble into new things, as I did. Other times, we take a confident step forward only for the ground shift under us. Through the uncertainty, all we can do is look at where we are and ask ourselves what we're going to do next. Now What?

Many are still processing past events, like a mother's Alzheimers during isolation. Others have refocused on personal interests, like the meaning of tattoos for the queer community. Still others are looking toward that uncertain future, where life after the end of a friendship awaits.

Now what are you going to do?



Sadie Fick
Editor-in-Chief



PHOTO BY SADIE FICK

ORANIENBAUM HEADLINES

CENTABEL BOOK BODY COPY

TOPKOTE DULL 78# COVER

KLIPSUNMAGAZINE.COM

COVER PHOTO BY LINNEA HOOVER

KLIPSUN IS AN INDEPENDENT STUDENT PUBLICATION

STAFF

Sadie Fick
editor-in-chief, design, photography

Luisa Loi
story editor, copy editing

Anna Thomas
story editor

Linnea Hoover
photo editor, photography, copy editing

Ellora Jacobia
design

Benjamin Leung
copy editing

Peggy Watt
advisor

writers

Macy Adkinson, Mallory Biggar, Henrik Butz, Cierra Coppock, Adela Cruz, Thomas Hughes, Joslin Keim, Silvia Leija, Benjamin Leung, Izzie Lund, Brianna Poulos, Kyle Tubbs

CONTENTS

02

Losing Precious Time

How isolation and my mother's illness shaped my experience in quarantine.

05

Finding Light in a Dark Room

Seeking academic validation while struggling with mental health.

08

A Year After the Strikes

How mass walkouts rekindled the labor movement in the Yakima Valley.

10

Bellingham, Blood and B-Movies

Looking at ten years of Bleedingham and to the film festival's future.

15

Heart on Your Sleeve

The significance of tattoos in queer spaces.

19

It's Time to Go

How the end of a 9-year friendship taught me to feel more comfortable in my own skin.

ONLINE EXCLUSIVES

Friendship, Celebration and Pride * We Need to Talk About Collective Grieving * Not the Meat Hook!

And more.



A family portrait of Henrik, Simon and Christoph Butz and their mom. Courtesy of Henrik Butz.

Losing Precious Time

HOW ISOLATION AND MY MOTHER'S ILLNESS SHAPED MY EXPERIENCE IN QUARANTINE.

Story by Henrik Butz

“**N**obody told you?” My twin brother Simon asked, a look of concern on his face. “Told me what?” I replied nervously.

“Mom has Alzheimer’s. I thought you knew,” he said.

My whole world suddenly came to a halt. My body started quivering with fear. I tried to find a response but all I could stammer out was “No, that’s not possible.”

I doubled over on a nearby bench, tears flowing down my face as Simon explained to me she had hidden the diagnosis, fearful that she would interfere with our plans to move away for our freshman year of college.

In 2016, my mother was diagnosed with early-onset

Alzheimer’s. This progressive disease destroys memory, motor function and other important mental abilities.

She covered up her diagnosis for several months because she believed she could handle it. She believed she had to for Simon and me, who were leaving for college in only a few months, and for her students, who saw her classroom as a second home, and saw her as a person they could confide in.

The diagnosis of Alzheimer’s is usually associated with aging, and those diagnosed are almost always 65 or older, according to the Alzheimer’s Association. My mother discovered she was affected when she was 50.

Washington's lockdown meant not only the freedom I once enjoyed was swiftly taken away, but so was my mom's.

Early-onset Alzheimer's is a rare form of Alzheimer's that affects only 5% to 6% of those diagnosed with the disease, developing in individuals aged 30-60 years old, according to the Mayo Clinic.

After learning about her diagnosis in the spring of 2016, I dropped out of college and returned home to spend what precious time I had with her before her symptoms no longer allowed her to live independently. Simon followed shortly after, dropping out of Western in 2017 to return home, joining me and our brother Christoph, who was in his sophomore year of high school.

By the end of 2018, her symptoms had worsened to the point where we could no longer be her primary caregivers, leading to the inevitable move into an assisted living facility — something my brothers and I were dreading.

"It was just like, so [sudden] that we didn't live with her anymore. It was extremely hard," Christoph said. "I missed out on most of the environment that kept me happy."

Despite her move into assisted living, my brothers and I visited her daily as she adjusted to her new living situation. Her doctor reassured us that her symptoms were relatively stable. She still remembered who we were and could partake in daily activities independently.

In December 2019, I left Seattle to move to Bellingham so I could finish school. The move was encouraged by all members of my family, including my mother.

Before the lockdown, I thought I had a handle on the progression of my mother's diagnosis and what it meant moving forward. I was living on my own in a new city for the first time, and I was ready to begin a new chapter of my life.

All of that changed on March 23, 2020.

Washington's lockdown meant not only the freedom I once enjoyed was swiftly taken away, but so was my mom's.

The risk of contracting COVID-19 is twice as high for people with dementia compared to members of the general public. Furthermore, these individuals are much more at risk of dying from the virus, according to research conducted by Case Western Reserve University.

In light of these findings, the assisted living facility my mother lived at implemented strict lockdown policies, which prohibited any visits from family members and friends, and barred residents from leaving their rooms. For her, this meant almost total isolation.

We could no longer find her wandering the halls of her assisted living facility, trying to help other residents despite the staff's friendly but firm warnings, or joining

her dad for a brisk walk every morning. The halls of her facility were barren and she was confined to her room. Her extroverted nature and the closeness she sought with friends and family had been hampered by the lockdown.

During the next couple of months, the weekly trips, dinners and visits we used to share were replaced by a phone screen like so many others. Our conversations became limited. She was scared, alone and unsure of what was going to happen next.

"I miss you," she would say. "When are you coming home? I'm lonely and want to leave."

"It's not safe," I would reply, choking back hot tears, not wanting her to see me falter. "This will all be over soon, and then we can see you."

As the months progressed, our calls became shorter and shorter. She would repeat herself about every 30 seconds whenever she initiated conversations — a behavior known as looping.

"I can't be here, I have to go," she'd say during many of our talks, standing up and frantically walking away from the camera.

My brothers and I began to use short sentences to tell her the stories of our week, how school was going, memories of her friends we had growing up, and long-term memories of events from our childhood.

Her rapid deterioration was sudden and came with no explanation, until later research by the Alzheimer's Society revealed that isolation causes a rapid level of decline for people with dementia.

"It went so fast once COVID-19 happened," Simon said. "I just thought it was so brutally unfair, like the timing, and so that really got to me."

Watching the person who raised you slowly crumble before your eyes, forgetting the core memories you share, and slowly forgetting who you are as each day passes is an agonizing feeling.

It was a feeling I thought those around me could not even begin to comprehend. I felt isolated and disconnected and shut myself away from the world.

I wasn't the only one struggling. My brothers were forced to watch as her symptoms got progressively worse.

"Just to see the mental decline happen so fast, be shut out and [watch] from the sidelines, [while] not being able to do anything about it or even be by her side through it was just extremely hard," Christoph said.

By the time winter quarter 2021 started, I was a wreck. Almost a year had passed and I was depressed and anxious. My emotions were numb, and I was totally separated from my support system. My previous coping



Henrik's mom in her room at the assisted living facility. Photo courtesy of Henrik Butz.

mechanisms seemed to have no effect, and therapy was out of the question due to the rise of demand caused by the pandemic. I stuffed my emotions as far down as I could, but they consumed me.

All I could think about was my mom. Guilt and anger were overwhelming: I felt guilty for not being able to be there, guilty for not visiting more often when I had the chance and angry that I was spending precious months alone while she withered away.

After a while, I realized I was missing out on the present by dwelling on the future. My mind was filled with thoughts of what I was going to do and how I would react when my mom eventually passed.

It caused me to cut myself off from the world. Now, I try to live every day in the moment, cherishing every second of time I still have with my mom as she enters the final stages of Alzheimer's.

The progression of Alzheimer's is broken into seven stages on the Functional Assessment Staging Test (FAST). Her behavior indicates she has reached the bottom of Stage Six, which is Moderately Severe Dementia. Currently, her mental age is two to three years old. In a few months she will enter the final stage of Alzheimer's, Severe Dementia. She will lose the ability to speak, walk, sit up, smile and hold her head up. The last stage only lasts 12 to 18 months.

I learned to do something for myself every day. Cleaning my room, going on a walk, and reaching out to my brothers helped me escape the fog every day.

I learned to forgive myself for things I could not control. I was angry at myself for not being there when I needed to be. I was angry about being in school. I felt guilty about sharing my academic successes with her. I constantly felt like I was failing to be there for her when she needed me most.

Looking back, I came to realize it is what she would have wanted if she could have understood the situation.

Lastly, I learned the coping mechanisms I had were insufficient. The sudden closure of gyms provided a rude awakening that exercise doesn't fill the emptiness

or cure negative self-talk, and that left me struggling with some of the lowest lows in my life.

In the winter of 2021, I moved back home to complete winter and spring quarters remotely, joining Simon and Christoph. The move home meant I was once again reconnected with my brothers and support system I desperately needed, but most importantly, as pandemic restrictions were loosened, we had limited in-person visitation with our mom after more than a year of video calls.

As Seattle entered stage 2 of its reopening phase, her assisted living facility began allowing distanced visits. We were confined behind a plexiglass divider, but just seeing her was something to look forward to every day. Her face would light up as she saw my brothers and me approaching while she struggled to remember our names.

The results of extended isolation were playing out in front of our eyes. We could see her, but not touch her or spend time with her as core memories of us faded further and further away.

"You're finally able to see her in person again. That's when it kind of really set in how bad it was getting," Simon said.

In the summer, her assisted living facility fully opened its doors to visitors for the first time in over a year, a moment my brothers and I had been looking forward to since the start of the pandemic. But the visits are not the ones we had hoped for: she no longer remembers us, nor is eager to see us.

Our visits consist of the time we spend together on walks, which provide a safe place away from assisted living. On her walks, she is not constantly denied or corrected by staff enforcing safety rules. She is not alone, anxious, scared or confused.

Our walks still make me feel lonely. I inquire about her day and share old memories, but it does not reach her. I have become an observer.

Despite this, I have learned to embrace this feeling and cherish every moment in the present with her, especially moving forward.

Finding Light in a Dark Room



Seeking academic validation while struggling with mental health

STORY by Macy Adkinson

PHOTOS by Sadie Fick

OPENING YOUR EYELIDS IN THE MORNING

seems a little bit harder each day. The bright light is a piercing reminder it's time to get up and go through the motions once again. Roll out of bed, skip breakfast, open your laptop to find a stream of emails. Notifications clutter your inbox, and another dreaded "late submission" flashes red near the upper right corner of Canvas.

But it shouldn't be late. Because you have accommodations. Extended turn-in dates for assignments. Double time for tests.

The professor knows that, right?

Of course they know – you just talked about it.

With the transition to remote courses, students and instructors alike have struggled. Before, tests that required accommodations could be taken at the Disability Access Center with instructor permission. Navigating the online world of Canvas to allow or acquire these accommodations can be difficult for professors and students.

For a Western transfer student — for the sake of anonymity we'll call them Aspen — who has depression, OCD and a multitude of other diagnoses, another complication was the last thing they needed on their plate.

Coming to college was an easy decision for them. With a plethora of passions, and an associate's degree from their Running Start program, Aspen decided to continue down their education path. They were especially interested in pursuing their love of physics.

Aspen's interest in this science sparked from light. It wasn't an epiphany they had during high school physics that piqued their curiosity; it was observing the sun rays bouncing around their room.

The study of light, known as optics, is an important research area in modern physics. This branch of physics describes how light behaves and interacts with matter. We rely on it every day. Using knowledge of how light behaves under different conditions, scientists and engineers can create different types of technology, explore the universe, monitor the environment and even solve crimes.



With depression, tasks like hygiene and eating can take all of one's mental energy. Finding something that sparks light and passion can be rare, and holding onto it can keep one from drowning.

But the feelings of happiness and peacefulness that followed Aspen's decision to pursue physics were short-lived.

One of Aspen's physics professors began giving them grief about late turn-ins and extensions for labs. The professor even informed Aspen they wouldn't grade a test because it came in too late.

Aspen had documentation and accommodations through the Disability Access Center. Yet, the professor ignored their double test time and said they wouldn't accept Aspen's submissions anymore. Communication with this professor was rough. Aspen said they sent multiple emails addressing the test situation but those and others went without reply or acknowledgment. Thankfully, Aspen's test was eventually graded without comment from the instructor.

Still, after years of struggling with mental health issues that affected them in school, Aspen felt like this was

piling onto those experiences, causing more anxiety and stress about their grades.

"My professor made me think, 'Well, this is my favorite thing to do and I'm going to fail at it, so what's the point?'" Aspen said.

Feeling desperate and distraught, they sought advice about their predicament on the r/WWU subreddit — the Reddit forum dedicated to Western. Aspen wrote, "I don't have the drive to fight for myself any more than I already have."

They didn't expect the response that came their way. Resources and support flooded the post.

Thirty-three comments sat fresh in the reply section within 24 hours, each sharing anecdotes about their own experiences with school and mental health struggles.

One user wrote: "Success isn't linear, neither is life. Some finish college, some don't, some (like me and I imagine you) have had a few speed bumps, crises, or any other number of unique circumstances that prevent us from achieving the preconceived notion of success in the western world. Our society has pushed the notion that money, status, or success is required and if you can't achieve this you are outed. It isn't required, your mental health is and always will be more important than a college degree, a job, a relationship, etc."

Aspen was surprised by the outpouring of community and support.

"I was going to delete the post within a few minutes, but the responses genuinely stopped me from harming myself," they said, adding that their partner's support also helped.

In 2019, the National Center for College Students with Disabilities found that many students were unaware of the services their schools provided, and struggled to understand the process to receive those services.

The students also reported inadequate accommodations and scarce support in disclosing their disabilities.

Furthermore, the investigation revealed that some instructors were uninformed about campus procedures, unresponsive to students or even opposed accommodation requests.

Aspen is certainly not alone in this struggle, which has only been intensified by the ongoing pandemic.

Research on the challenges of remote learning during

the pandemic found that students with pre-pandemic disparities had difficulties getting accommodations according to the study “The Experiences of Undergraduate Students with Physical, Learning, Neurodevelopmental, and Cognitive Disabilities During the COVID-19 Pandemic.”

“Students with physical, learning, neurodevelopmental, or cognitive disabilities reported experiencing significantly more challenges and hardships during the COVID-19 pandemic than students without disabilities,” researchers wrote. “Specifically, students with disabilities experienced more financial hardships, food insecurity, housing insecurity, and symptoms of anxiety and depression.”

Kathleen DeNicola, an accommodation manager at the WWU Disability Access Center, joined the team two weeks before the pandemic hit in March 2020. Remote communication was all she had known while working at Western — which remained closed until this fall — since students couldn’t just drop by the office anymore.

“If the main line of communication to professors is through email, that’s difficult because you may not always get a response back right away,” DeNicola said. “It’s hard to discern the tone in an email.”

Limited access to internet, phones and reliable housing can also interfere with students getting the help they need.

DeNicola noted that unfortunately, issues with professors with respect to academic accommodations are pretty common. She said students in that situation should contact the center as early as possible so the center can

step in to make sure accommodations are being honored.

“There’s definitely a power dynamic that I think is felt by students,” DeNicola said. “College students are just starting to learn self-advocacy, and if they’ve grown up in a situation where they’ve experienced a lot of ableism, they might not have the confidence to realize that their experience and rights need to be respected.”

Like the wise Redditor wrote, success isn’t linear. But there are ways that the academic environment can evolve.

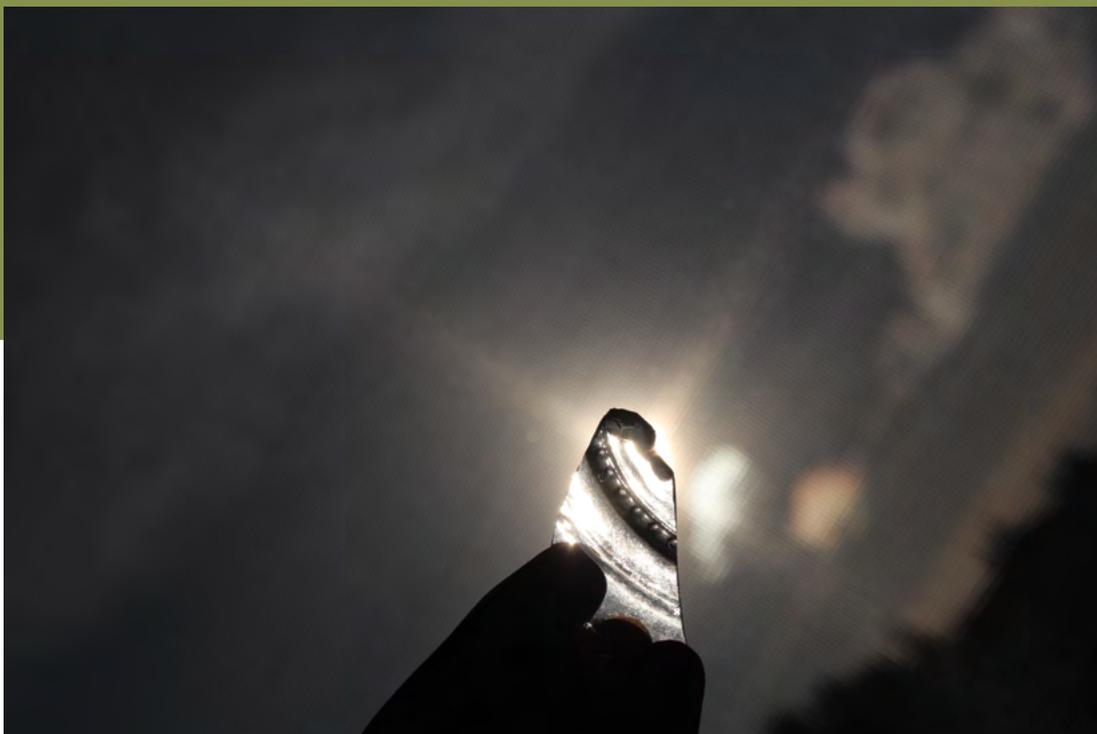
“The biggest change I’d like to see is flexibility,” Aspen said. “We’ve obviously learned throughout the pandemic that being flexible is important.”

Despite the turmoil, Aspen said they’re going to be okay. With the help of new treatments and face-to-face communication resuming in the fall – when resources are more accessible – life will continue to move forward.

“Seeing the beauty in things is important to me, which can be very difficult nowadays,” they said. “It makes me feel the meaning in my suffering and in all suffering.”

As we enter a new chapter, we must remain hopeful like Aspen. Light makes its way into a dark room when the sun rises again.

It’s simple physics.



HOW MASS WALKOUTS RE-KINDLED THE LABOR MOVEMENT IN THE YAKIMA VALLEY.

Story and photos by Silvia Leija

On April 6, 1986, Mexican American labor leader and civil rights activist Cesar Chavez spoke to over 2,000 farmworkers at Miller Park in Yakima, Wash., urging them to demand better health care and working conditions. This was part of a larger labor movement, led by the United Farm Workers union, that was sweeping the West Coast, as Filipino and Mexican agricultural laborers joined strikes for better treatment.

Thirty-five years later, the labor movement in the Yakima Valley was rekindled in May 2020 through a series of strikes stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic.

On May 7, 2020, a group of workers left Allan Bros., a Naches-based fruit packing company. This walkout inspired several other Yakima Valley packing warehouses to follow suit.

The strikes lasted a little over a month and resulted in several agreements between companies and workers. Companies promised bonuses, raises and better COVID-19 protections, as well as the creation of the first agricultural union in the area, *Trabajadores Unidos por La Justicia* (TUJ) — Workers United for Justice in English.

A year later, with COVID-19 restrictions being lifted and workers facing extreme weather conditions such as the looming fire season, TUJ is considering its next steps to ensure the safety of the workers they have sworn to protect.

A LABOR MOVEMENT IS REBORN

On May 7, 2020, 49-year-old Angelina Lara received a positive result on a COVID-19 test taken four days prior. By then, the more critical symptoms of a sore throat and breathing difficulties had decreased to a muscle ache. Lara said it felt as if someone had beaten her up.

That same day, Lara received a call from a co-worker at Allan Bros.: It was going to be a different sort of workday.

Lara was one of more than 50 Allan Bros. employees that walked out early that morning in response to the company's inaction to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We didn't have the proper equipment to keep us safe from getting COVID-19," Lara explained. "We didn't follow the six feet distance, didn't receive hazard pay, we had nothing. We weren't even being provided with face masks, because that was something that wasn't a requirement at the time."

After warning her co-workers about her positive result and ensuring that she stayed far from the rest of the crowd, Lara joined the ranks of strikers.

Among the demands, workers asked for more masks, gloves, disinfectant, plastic dividers to separate workers

on the production line, and hazard pay. Workers also asked to be informed about who tested positive so they could know if they had been exposed.

As more strikers joined the lines at Allan Bros., other workers across the Yakima Valley took note. Workers from Monson Fruit, Matson, Hansen, Columbia Reach, Roche Fruit, Brandt and Sons and Jack Frost also walked out in the days following the initial Allan Bros. strike.

Victor Hernandez, 23, worked at Jack Frost and was among the 400 strikers across the valley. At first Hernandez didn't think the strikes would last long, and was surprised when he and his co-workers were protesting for more than two weeks.

"Seeing how many people actually cared about the strikes is what inspired me to walk out," Hernandez said. "When people started organizing, they started with like, two or three people, but then that same morning, the whole warehouse got together and decided to walk out. I was like, 'OK, we're going to do this as one.'"

A COMMUNITY COMES TOGETHER

Workers weren't the only ones out during the weeks of protests. Much like Lara, Noemi Sanchez, 25, received a call from a friend. The friend told her Allan Bros. workers had walked out of the warehouse and were sitting outside in the park across the street from the cinder-block style building.

Sanchez, an activist since high school, quickly organized herself and began buying much needed supplies for the workers sitting in the late spring sun.

"Someone said, 'Hey, we need water, it's hot,'" Sanchez said. "So I took an ice chest full of water. Then they told me they needed food so I went and bought tamales."

Sanchez felt excited and scared for the workers when she began joining them out on the picket line. "We haven't had large strikes happening in the Valley since Cesar Chavez was here," Sanchez said. "So it was really energizing. But at the same time I was scared. When workers try to stand up for their rights, we have seen historically that they get fired or they get threatened."

The fear of threats was justified. According to Lara, the sheriff's department confronted the Allan Bros. workers multiple times. The park where the strikers first began their walkout was later closed despite it being public property, and workers were no longer allowed to park or meet there.

On May 14, 2020, striking Allan Bros. workers were standing along the side of the road across the street from the company's warehouse when a man, later identified

A Year After the Strikes



American flag waving at strike location outside Monson Fruit Co. in Selah, Wash. on May 30, 2020.

by police as 58-year-old Stacey Sedge, stopped on the road and yelled, “I am going to get my 50-caliber gun and come back and shoot you all!”

According to court documents, Yakima County Sheriff’s Office deputies were called to the property and were there when Sedge returned. He admitted to driving through the area and making the threat but told deputies he hadn’t meant it, and that he didn’t have any guns. Sedge was arrested and reportedly was charged with felony harassment and malicious harassment.

Despite the danger and pushback, the strikers saw a lot of community support.

“There was never a day where workers were out there by themselves,” Sanchez said. “Community showed up every single day. And there weren’t just people from the area. People from Bellingham and Skagit County came down to support the workers, even if it was just for a day.”

The community that drove down from the Skagit area was spearheaded by Familias Unidas por La Justicia, an independent farmworker union based in Burlington, and Community to Community Development, a Bellingham-based ecofeminist organization dedicated to immigrant and farm labor advocacy.

These two organizations were instrumental in assisting the workers at Allan Bros. and every other warehouse with their demands, messaging and signage. With their guidance and support, Allan Bros. workers organized the first agricultural union in the Yakima Valley.

WORKERS UNITED FOR JUSTICE

A month after the picket line, the owners of the Allan Bros. warehouse and a committee of its

striking employees finally came to an agreement. The committee, which would later turn into Trabajadores Unidos por la Justicia accepted the company’s offer of a \$1 hourly wage increase, mandatory masks and better protection within the warehouse.

Now, after a year of negotiations and a lawsuit against Allan Bros. for unfair labor practices and interfering with the union’s organizing efforts, TUJ is focusing on meaningfully engaging with the community.

“The only thing that we can do is show the community that we are here for them,” Angelina Lara, now a member of TUJ, said. “We are doing events and have had a couple of vaccine clinics. That was a good way of having a community to get to know TUJ and see what we’re all about.”

Lara believes that will be especially important as the Yakima Valley faces historic heatwaves and fire seasons. TUJ has been working to provide as much information as possible about the rights of the employees working in such conditions.

Lara described this new era of workers’ movement as a women’s movement. “In these warehouses, we have more women than men and many of them come from places where they’re supposed to be quiet and a little more conservative,” Lara said. “For them to speak their mind, to speak their voice, is hard. It’s a big step.”

It was a big step for the Yakima Valley as well, according to Lara.

“Yakima woke up and we are trying our best and working our best for it not to go back to sleep,” Lara said.

“We are trying to be out there so workers know they have a voice through us. And we want to inspire them as well, to voice their opinions and whatever they need.”

Bellingham, Blood and

Ten years of Bleedingham and
the film festival's future

STORY by Benjamin Leung



B-Movies



Attendees fill the reception of the Pickford.

HALLOWEEN WEEEND, OCTOBER 2018

Filmmakers and visitors crowd the reception of the Pickford Film Center, a local movie theater set in the streets of downtown Bellingham. Attendees dress in a wide range of attire — formalwear to streetwear — socializing and enjoying free appetizers and desserts stacked atop tables. Vendors sell artwork — paintings of cats dressed as iconic slasher killers like Jason Voorhees, clothing, animal bone sculptures, paintings, books and more. At the entrance, photographers flash pictures of the arriving filmmakers.

“Even though it's not like Hollywood red carpet, it feels that,” said Crystal Connor, one of Bleedingham’s nine competitive film judges and professional horror novelist.

As the main event starts, attendees stream into one of two auditoriums at shoulder-to-shoulder capacity. Co-hosts Langley West and Jackie Kersten step out to entertain the audience and introduce the films.

Silence settles as projectors light the screens with the year’s submissions.

THE BEGINNING

His last year at Western, Gary Washington attended a film festival at the Pickford celebrating hip-hop.

“They had a live performer. They're rapping, and he was the most audacious rapper with terrible lyrics,” Washington said. “And he was humping [a few people including me, nonconsensually].”

Uncomfortable, Washington and his friends decided to leave and have drinks at the Grand Avenue Ale House instead.

“Man, I wouldn’t disrespect the Pickford like that, you know,” Washington said to his friends at The Grand. “I’d have my own festival. We’d call it... Bleedingham!”

“Well Gary, that actually sounds like a cool idea,” said one of Washington’s friends.

Having moved from Las Vegas to Washington state, filmmaker Langley West buzzed local filmmakers for help on a personal project. Gary Washington responded.

Working together, Washington and West realized they both loved the horror genre, exchanging references to The Night Gallery, the Alien franchise, Tom Savini — general film geek stuff and the beginning of a friendship, according to West.

“The Night Gallery was a TV show in the early 70s hosted by Rod Serling and we both were huge fans of that,” West said. “That was one of those things, at least back then, whenever you’d tell somebody, ‘remember The Night Gallery?’ and they said, ‘yeah,’ it's like, okay, secret code. Boom!”

Washington and West maintained a working partnership on a number of paid jobs and in a monthly competition at The Pickford called Trailer Wars.

“One of the things that I really enjoyed when I first moved to Bellingham was the thriving film community, but there wasn't a lot of fun, and everybody was very involved in social justice things and things like that,” West said.

“We were like, let's do something [where] people can just ... let their hair down and have a good time, at the same time developing their skills.”

The two men teamed with Casey Schmidt, founder of Northwest Grip, to make Bleedingham a reality, eyeing the Pickford as the venue.

Bleedingham received 13 submissions of short horror films in its first year and tickets sold out.

“We were scared to death. We had no idea if we could pull it off,” West said. “I remember I was making trophies and things literally outside of the theater as the show was going on, trying to get things finished.”

A majority of Bleedingham’s earliest entries looked amateurish due to the equipment and resources available to the micro-budget filmmakers, according to West.

“We were making Bleedingham with a DSLR Camera ... whatever blood you could find from the local store, ketchup or something you found online with chocolate syrup ... and that was the first couple of years,” Washington said.



Gary Washington socializes in the reception area of the Pickford. Courtesy of Gary Washington.

TEN YEARS LATER

After seven years as a judge, Crystal Connor continues to dedicate months of her life to watching and critiquing the hundreds of submissions Bleedingham receives annually. And the number increases every year.

A published author of 13 novels and film critic for HorrorAddicts.net, Connor was at her booth at Crypticon Seattle — a horror genre convention — when Washington approached and asked her to judge submissions for Bleedingham.

“He gave me his card and then I looked him up online and I was like, ‘Oh, my God, this guy is a big deal,’” Connor said. “My first year working with Bleedingham was like, ‘I need to impress him so I can stay part of this project.”

In her time serving the event, she’s watched the film festival expand its scope from a focus on filmmakers in the Pacific Northwest, to international submissions, including films from Iran, Egypt and China.

As a competition, Bleedingham’s core systems — film categories, ranking and rubrics — have undergone significant development and tuning.

“The first one ... we were trying to build the system. We didn’t know what the system needed to be,” West said. “Now, in comparison we have our cadre of judges, ... we use an online system for them to see the films and vote. It’s much easier because we just have to plug in the new [films] every year.”

Back in the day, West remembers having to assemble all of the judges at a house to screen the submissions in the living room and afterwards, sorting through stacks of judges’ notes written on paper.

Though Bleedingham is competitive in structure, its founders have maintained that it’s all about helping the filmmakers improve as filmmakers. West and Washington emphasized the importance of choosing judges involved in the creative industry, whether as filmmakers, writers or film composers to provide participants with feedback from industry veterans.

“It didn’t matter if you were a professional or if you were a rank amateur, if you were a kid and all you had access to was ... the video function on your cell phone. Everybody could compete,” West said. “But that also meant, you know, giving feedback that said, ‘Hey, you know, I like your story, but ... your lighting is really bad.’ And as that feedback ... came in, people listened to it, and they started upping their game.”

Connor says she sees Bleedingham’s film submissions improve every year.

“Every year, the film quality and depth and storylines and plots [gets] better and better.”



Crystal Connor takes a selfie with Pennywise at Bleedingham. Courtesy of Crystal Connor.

“Some of these short films look like [they] were produced with like a million dollar budget,” Connor said.

West and Connor attributed the improvements in visual quality partially to advancements in filmmaking technology and accessibility to equipment.

“When we first started, it was a big deal if you shot something on a digital red camera,” West said. “Well now, that’s not that big of a deal, and so consequently, the films look fantastic.”

Film professor and author of “The Revolting Child in Horror Cinema: Youth Rebellion and Queer Spectatorship,” Andrew Scahill said advancements in technology have historically shifted and continue to change the filmmaking landscape.

“We think that shifts in art happen just out of like ... brilliant ideas or people being avant garde,” Scahill said. “A lot of it happens because of technology.”

According to Scahill, technological innovators like handheld footage that push the envelope of filmmaking have a democratizing effect on the artform. He pointed to “Host,” a horror film recorded entirely on Zoom in the midst of the pandemic.



Langley West handmakes Bleedingham's trophies, painting casts of the event's mascot, Bloody. West settled on the design for the trophies in Bleedingham's fourth year. The scariest and overall best film receives a red Bloody. Courtesy of Gary Washington.

Washington says Bleedingham has also seen more and more films addressing social justice, culture and new types of fears. "Last year, there was a film ... about a fabric that was cursed because it was picked under inhumane conditions. The way that they translated that, ... they literally had you, with sound design, feeling like your skin was getting stitched," Washington said. "What we're seeing is a lot more use of metaphors, ... intangible type concepts."

According to Scahill, the modern slashers have traded physical threats like Jason Voorhees for intangible forces like fate in *Final Destination* or the puppeteers of the *Saw* franchise — speaking to a generation of millennials feeling demoralized about creating systemic change.

As for the slower-burn horror of recent times, according to Scahill, genres naturally cycle as new films innovate and others imitate, until the next innovation shifts the genres gears again.

"As we go along, when we're getting films like *Hereditary* and *Midsommar* from A24, ... we have seen the films start to change as they're coming in and be a little more thoughtful and ... thought provoking," West said.

International horror provides reflections of foreign social turmoils and new approaches to the genre, Scahill said, using the Japanese concept of a haunting as a sickness as an example.

"It's interesting now that we're judging films from all over the world to see how horror affects different people from different cultures," Connor said.

Washington sees independent filmmaking continuing to become more prevalent as technology improves and becomes more accessible to marginalized communities.

"In the age of YouTube and stuff, I think that [the] independent filmmaking [model] is going to be the entire vessel in which content is created," Washington said. "You already seen it now, ... Hollywood films [are] losing

out to like streamers ... and web shows. It's like, ... how long before the blockbuster summer film model goes?"

According to Scahill, the studio model in Hollywood behaves as a loan shark system, creating a risk-averse environment for filmmakers that discourages innovation like diversity in casting, unless proven successful in the market. Independent films, especially short films, have less money on screen, enabling the filmmakers to more willingly take creative risks.

"They're not put in boxes by ... producers or big-time directors," Connor said of independent filmmakers. "They're able to stay completely true to their story and tell it the way they envision it."

"Short films ... because of the sort of low money involved, can be the most intimate," Scahill said. "You're not putting \$200 million of someone else's money on the line, you are doing a passion project, funded by yourself and ... your crew."

In 2020, Rose Jones, a lifelong horror enthusiast purchased tickets for Bleedingham's virtual screening, having never attended the in-person event because she lives in Tacoma. At her leisure, she watched every film on her desktop, at home, fixing dinner and completing chores in-between films.

"I don't know if these are all professional or amateur ... directors and producers and stuff, but they all did a good job," Jones said. "They really did."

BLEEDINGHAM'S FUTURE

"I [see] this festival getting as big as ... maybe South by Southwest or like ... Sundance festival, because of the amazing amount of talent that's being submitted ... and just the way its been growing ... that other small film festivals haven't," Connor said. "I'm just happy to be a part of Bleedingham. This is like a family."

Right now, Washington plans to turn Bleedingham into a nonprofit organization in order to bring in new people to help chart the course of the festival for the next 10 years, as well as recognize the work of those helping run the festival.

At the end of the day, as Bleedingham continues to evolve and expand, Washington says they remain focused on maintaining and developing its relationships with the Bellingham community and the film community at large.

"We don't ever want to lose sight that this is an exercise, an opportunity for our local community to do storytelling on their own and present it," Washington said.

"Now that we have this much time invested in it and we are trying to do bigger things like the nonprofit, it feels more... I don't want to say it feels like a business, but it feels more important than just play," West said. "So yes, it's fun, but it's also a lot of work, and we want to ... present our best face and we want to be taken seriously."

Heart on Your Sleeve

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TATTOOS IN QUEER SPACES

Story and photos by Cierra Coppock

Tesla Kawakami and Emma Bjornsrud sat together in Tesla's apartment on the evening of Emma's 20th birthday. Golden light spilled through the windows as Tesla carefully poked an ink covered needle into a tender patch of skin, right under Emma's armpit. Each painful stick of the needle left behind a dot, and soon an image of a tiny sprout came into fruition as Kasey Musgraves played in the background.

Stick-and-pokes are a method of tattooing that uses only a single needle rather than a whole machine. While some professionals opt for this method, many stick-and-poke tattoos are done in people's houses between close friends, like Tesla and Emma.

It's not a unique experience for two young, queer friends to give each other tattoos. Tesla's first tattoo was done at their ex-girlfriend's house at age 17. CJ Malone, a self-proclaimed "dyke tattooer" in Bellingham, boasts a thigh full of monthiversary stick-and-poke tattoos she shares with a high school sweetheart. Western student and stick-and-poke artist Gale Steck poked "OK" into their thigh at the age of 16. Seattle-based, queer tattoo artist Silver Fawkes gave their first tattoo while on a first date, sipping a late-night whiskey.

Tattoos for queer folks are often relational contracts, permanently bonding the tattooer and the tattooed in a way that is more than just visual. The DIY nature of these experiences heavily evokes the ideals and values of the punk subculture of the 1970s; a means of circumnavigating the mainstream and asserting independence over one's actions.

Chris Vargas, a queer visual artist, professor and founder of the Museum of Trans Hirstory and Art views his tattoos as symbol of his own bodily autonomy. **"It becomes a way to signify, externally, commitment to this self-determination and self-actualization,"** he said. **"It's a physical relationship to your body and identity."**

Tattoos are often significant in terms of their owners' queerness, Silver said, "I think growing up, never fitting in, you're never just accepted as you are. So, it's really ownership of one's body."

TATTOOS AS EMBRACING QUEERNESS

The term queer is an intentionally vague umbrella term encompassing a multitude of nonconforming ways of living. The nebulous nature of this word allows for each individual to prescribe meaning according to



"To me, stepping into my queerness was about finding people who had already found happiness, and were just happy being themselves. I felt happiest around queer people, meeting new people, and experiencing new things."

~ Tesla Kawakami



"We're already vulnerable. We don't have the option to fit in, so we might as well wear our hearts on our sleeves, to put what we love on our bodies for the world to see."

~ Gale Steck

their own personal identity. Chris — the visual artist and Western professor — explained the term as an opposition to normal. "[It's an] expansive identity term that can encompass so many non-normative ways of sexuality and living," he said.

To CJ, "queer" is an all-encompassing umbrella term people use to articulate their sexual identity and gender expression.

"It's also super vague on purpose, because sometimes people want to be vague in their identity. I identify as a butch lesbian," CJ explained. "Butch" is a term used to identify non-straight females with masculine appearance and manners. "I love it. I love that people can choose to not be super perceived by using that word. To me, my butchness and my masculinity is that. That's my version of queerness."

For others, like Gale, their queerness governs the entire lens through which they view their life.

"Queer is challenging the human notion of trying to divide things into neat, logical categories," they said. "[It's] saying, 'No, there's a spectrum on everything and that is how I'm choosing to exist — outside of your logical, binomial nomenclature and inside my own

fluid way of living.'"

Queerness is not finite. While some people see it as a way to articulate their identity, others see it more as a way of living, like Silver. **"Queer isn't really about who you fuck. It's about how we love people,"** they said.

TATTOOS AS HISTORY

Both tattoos and queerness have become more readily accepted by mainstream culture, especially in liberal areas like Bellingham. However, this wasn't always the case, and still isn't in many parts of the world.

According to Samuel M. Steward, English teacher, writer and tattoo artist born in 1909, there were only few openly gay people with tattoos before the 1950s. During this time, members of the LGBTQ+ community were fired from their jobs or even arrested as a result of the public villainization of queer relationships, which lead to many covert ways of signaling sexual orientation.

At the same time, tattoo trends among queer people drastically shifted in 1954 after the release of the movie "A Wild One."

"["A Wild One"] is the original motorcycle film,"

"My tattoos are about remembering a moment, even if that moment passes. They're a reverie on a feeling that I was experiencing when I was getting it stabbed into my body. It's a very violent process, but we don't recoil. We endure it. It's a mix of pain and pleasure, beauty and pain."

~ Keaton Bruce



"My first and most recent tattoo are wildly different from each other and makes me recognize that I have really grown to have a better grasp on who I identify myself as. A big part of that is having a relationship with my queerness. I can grasp what my identity is and who I am as an individual. I can mark my body and express myself visually to the world in a way that is much more in line with who I am."

~ Kylee Smith



Steward said in his book "Bad Boys & Tough Tattoos: A Social History of the Tattoo with Gangs, Sailors, and Street-Corner Punks." "It seemed to crystallize, or release, the obscure and long-hidden feelings of many homosexuals." While not overtly queer, many gay men identified with this film, as it was unintentionally very homoerotic.

Suddenly, tattoo shops were filled with motorcyclists and an excessive amount of leather. With it came a newfound queer clientele that utilized tattoos as a means of symbolizing masculinity.

"These leather guys began to get symbolically violent tattoos — black panthers crawling up the arms, or daggers or snakes or skulls or combinations of all the symbols of death, violence, sexuality and masculinity," Steward recalled in his book.

As a direct result of this collective shift in the queer community, butch lesbians of the 50s and 60s began adorning their wrists with nautical stars, drawing from the traditional, masculine, Sailor Jerry aesthetic. Not only could these tattoos be hidden under a watch, but they acted as a signal to other lesbians. This notion of identification remained pervasive in the queer community, a secret lexicon to others who seek out kindred spirits.

On the other hand, some people choose a much more conspicuous route with their tattoos, boldly adorning their bodies as an act of ownership over one's identity. Many queer men get a pink triangle tattoo to pay homage to those who came before them who could not openly and proudly express their identity. Originally used in Nazi Germany to mark gay prisoners, the pink triangle was later adopted by gay men and the 1980 ACT-UP AIDS awareness campaign, powerfully reclaiming the symbol as their own.

During the countercultural movements in the second half of the 20th century, queerness became more widely recognized and accepted by many subculture groups. These communities embraced queerness,

shaping subcultures into what we know them as today.

As a teenager in the mid 90s, Chris recalls, "I was really always drawn to misfits and outcasts, punks and weirdos. These are my people. This is how I love. Alternative communities ... always used tattoos as a marker, or affinity, to a certain subculture or community."

TATTOOS AS MESSAGES

While the use of tattoos as covert signals is becoming less and less important, tattoos still function as a means of communication in the queer community. The physical altering of appearance is an extension of pride felt towards identity, and an external representation of the othering experienced internally. Silver explained that, to them, "It's about having choices and having autonomy. But it's definitely wanting to be perceived as 'other.'"

Gale takes this point even further. "We're already vulnerable," they said. "We don't have the option to fit in, so we might as well wear our hearts on our sleeves, to put what we love on our bodies for the world to see."

Heavily tattooed in bold, traditional styles CJ said, "The way that people treat me when I go to other places that aren't as accepting of tattoos is, I don't know, just bad. They think I'm weird. And to me, it's funny, because I don't care. I love myself. I live for my own identity."

This rejection of normality is inherently queer, explained Silver. "Being a heavily tattooed person is saying, 'I reject! I'm not part of your system,'" Silver said. "I'm not trying to fit in. I reject normality and heteronormativity. My tattoos are pretty masculine, you know? And the placement is masculine and being a heavily tattooed person makes men less interested in me, for sure. So, it's definitely queering."

TATTOOS AS GENDER EXPRESSION

For CJ, adorning her body with masculine, traditional tattoos was stepping into her butch identity and

“Having tattoos on my arms, but also having a lot of feminine characteristics offsets the expectation of the male gaze. This grounds me in my gender expression... that place between masculinity and femininity.”

~ Skylar Tibbetts



embracing the masculine side of herself.

“I think that butchness is inherently gender nonconforming, not on the binary,” she said.

Similarly, recent Western graduate Skylar Tibbetts sees her tattoos as a means of separating herself from the male gaze.

“Having tattoos in masculine places, but also having a lot of feminine characteristics really grounds me in my gender expression,” Skylar explained. “A lot of my frustration with gender comes out of being perceived as a woman. Which is painful because I really love that part of myself. So, there’s this cognitive dissonance of wanting to be a woman, but not in the way that men perceive me as a woman.”

TATTOOS AS RITUAL

Tesla and Emma’s stick-and-poke experience reflects a core aspect of queer tattooing. The ritual of queer tattooing provides safety and intimacy within an act that is inherently painful.

“I think queer tattooing and younger people in general have made tattooing a much more ritualistic and intimate thing,” CJ explained. “You’re trusting someone

with your body. And I think that should be sacred. That’s why I picked opening a private studio rather than trying to work at a shop, because I wanted to offer a safe space for people to feel like they can be vulnerable and have that intimate setting.”

In his youth, Chris was tattooed twice by friends. It was about sharing the experience.

“I liked their art, and also I want to spend some time with them in that process,” he said. “It’s such a queer way to approach it because I could have just been friends with them. But I wanted to support their work and pay them. I wanted that experience.”

Almost two years after Tesla poked a small plant into Emma’s side, the two friends booked an appointment with CJ to get matching tattoos of Frog and Toad from the beloved children’s books. The three of them sat together in CJ’s small, yet inviting studio in downtown Bellingham, supporting each other through the inevitable pain that comes with tattoos. When talking to Emma and Tesla about their appointment with CJ, their eyes glow as they reminisce on the experience. It’s clear how much each of them cherishes the art that physically bonds their friendship.



“Tattoos are kind of like a special connection to make with people. I comment on other people’s tattoos all the time, and I love when I get comments on mine. It’s fun to talk to people about their tattoos, and I feel like I can almost get more of a sense of who they are.”

~ Emma Bjornrud

Sept. 12, 2020

"Nostalgia is a liar.
Grieve.
Reflect.
Move on."

It's Time To Go

STORY and PHOTOS by Izzie Lund

How the end of a 9-year friendship taught me to feel more comfortable in my own skin

EDITOR'S NOTE: Names have been changed to protect the privacy of those involved

SEPT. 12, 2021

"It's been three weeks, and I haven't cried yet," I said. "Is that bad?"

My hands shook as I stared at my phone in my hands. My counselor smiled at me encouragingly through the screen.

"Well, are you sad?"

"I'm relieved, but also devastated — it's like the sadness is so intense, it won't release," I said. I closed my eyes and gripped my phone even harder.

"I just want to cry."

Let's back up.

I was talking about the end of a friendship — specifically with my ex-best friend, Rachel*, whom I had cut off. Our friendship had been going downhill for months, but it came to a head when she posted a "best friends forever" photo with Emily*. Emily was Rachel's friend for almost a decade — and also my on-and-off high school tormentor. To me, Emily was someone who had spent much of our adolescence tearing me down

and humiliating me.

Rachel started to see Emily's true colors about two years before this incident and distanced herself from her. Now, they were miraculously best friends again.

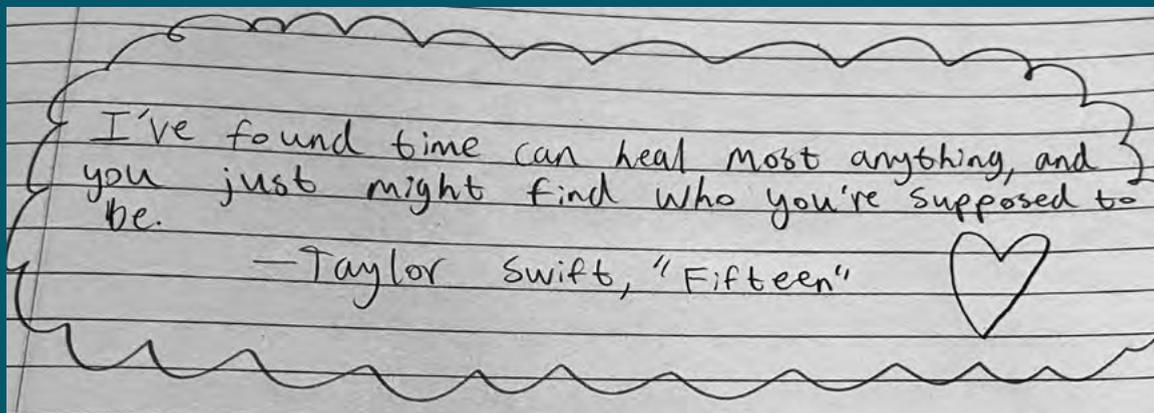
As soon as I saw that post, I knew right then and there my nine-year friendship with Rachel had to die. I sent her a text the next day saying it was over and blocked her on all platforms without looking back. Now I was trying to pick up the pieces, and it started with trying to find the words to articulate why I left. All I knew was that it went so much deeper than an Instagram post.

"I got it! I feel used."

I sighed, both out of frustration and relief at finally having the words to describe the deep anger and hurt that had simmered for weeks.

"Great, let's explore that feeling! Why do you feel used?"

"It's not because she's friends with someone I don't like," I said. "It's because as soon as she and



Emily started having problems, she came to me and reopened a bunch of old wounds. Then, when they were good again, she didn't care, and left me here to deal with the pain she dug up. I feel betrayed, manipulated, led on and used." My counselor nodded understandingly.

I felt my stomach twist into knots, feeling the full impact of the betrayal for the first time. It stung.

"She can't just spend hours and hours validating me for the years of shit I endured from Emily, then pull a 180 on me and expect me to be OK with it," I said.

"That's fantastic! We're getting somewhere," my counselor said. "That was rude of her to do. She shouldn't have validated you if she wasn't 100% done with that friendship. But let's dig into this trauma for a bit. I don't think your reason for leaving ends here."

Rachel and I met when we were 11 years old.

She was higher on the social ladder than I was. I was the clumsy, friendless one she took under her wing. Our relationship never changed.

When we were 20, the underlying assumption was still that I was the disastrous one, and Rachel was the one who needed to keep me in check. But of course, it wasn't until that counseling session that I came to realize it.

I vented and vented about Emily and Rachel, describing in detail the various things they said and did to me when we were all younger. I vented until my throat was sore. I took a sip of water, eager to hear what my counselor would make of all of it.

"It sounds like it boils down to them putting you down and making you feel bad about yourself — is that accurate?"

I nodded.

"Why do you think it's still fresh after all these years? Do you think it's because they never really stopped? Especially Rachel?"

I immediately tensed up, feeling the lightbulb go off in my head.

"Holy shit, that's exactly it."

A 2015 study from Florida Atlantic University showed that only 1% of friendships formed in middle school lasted more than five years. It was truly a miracle that our friendship survived as long as it did.

"[Cutting me down] was our entire dynamic," I said to my counselor in a later session. "I don't think our friendship would have existed without it. I couldn't ask her to stop, because then there wouldn't be anything left."

I knew that I wasn't faultless. I also played into the dynamic by making self-deprecating jokes. But that didn't change the effect our relationship had on me — trapping me in a perpetual cycle of self loathing and self doubt for almost a decade.

Dec. 11, 2020

Taylor Swift surprised everyone by announcing her ninth album, "Evermore." Giddy with anticipation, I counted down the minutes until midnight and dove right in, filled to the brim with the kind of joy that only a new album can bring.

An hour later, I listened intently to one of the last songs, "Closure," drawn in as Swift sang about a friendship long gone. Then, a little over one minute in, she said in a scathing voice, "Don't treat me like some situation that needs to be handled."

I froze. Then I played the words over. And over. And over. And then, after three months, I finally burst into tears.

I buried my face in my hands and sat in the darkness for several minutes. Memories and images swirled in my brain as I remembered that twisted, decade-old dynamic that destroyed my self-esteem and froze me in time.

Rachel “joking” about throwing away my phone. A “joke” about putting an ankle bracelet on me when we got to college and reporting my movements back to my mother. A humiliating four-word nickname that she called me for years, even though she knew that it made me want to crawl out of my skin. Many condescending moments, where she would subtly pick apart everything about me. Me, talking about various things that I loved, only to have to listen to her talk about how much she dislikes them. The countless times she brought up embarrassing moments from our childhood, hanging them over my head instead of allowing them to be forgotten.

I didn't want to be 11 years old anymore.

The first step towards growth was admitting to myself that I had to do it without Rachel. Any lingering doubts I had about ending the friendship, or small hopes of possibly reconciling in a few years, went up in flames.

Rachel had to stay on my blocked list. Forever. I also had to address the things that I didn't like about myself. I had to either change them, or accept them.

I knew it was going to be a long and difficult road. I had a lot of growing up to do, just catching up to 21.

It took a lot of time, counseling sessions, journaling and honest conversations for me to get into a mature, confident and healthy space.

In counseling, we dealt with conflict resolution, communication skills, self care and many other things that I needed to work on before I could fully embrace myself.

New passions and personality traits emerged after nine years of being smothered. It felt like stepping out of a dress five sizes too small, and into one tailor-made. I learned very quickly that I'm not actually chaotic, or soft-spoken, or ditzy. That was an act that I subconsciously put on for Rachel's benefit.

I stopped saying self-deprecating things. Even if it was a joke. Even if it was to reblog something funny on Tumblr.

I learned how to be funny around my friends without also being disloyal to myself.

However, the most important part of healing had to do with the people I surrounded myself with.

A month after I ended the friendship, I was hired

as the campus news editor of The Front, Western's independent student newspaper. After that quarter, I stayed on as the editor-in-chief. I had fallen in love with working on the paper even before cutting Rachel off, but I had no idea how therapeutic it would end up being.

I was enthralled with The Front because the environment was one of growth. Mistakes were not death tolls; they were learning opportunities. Everyone respected one another and saw potential in the people around them.

For the first time in a very long time, I was surrounded by people who didn't see me as a bundle of flaws and 7-year-old embarrassing moments for them to unravel whenever they needed an ego boost. They saw me as a strong, intelligent, talented, imperfect-but-wonderful person.

On my last day at The Front, our faculty adviser told us, “No one succeeds or fails alone.”

I cried that day, not just because it was the end, but because I could sense that something had healed along the way.

I went out of my way, every morning, to read 10 positive, self-affirming quotes before starting my day. I would get my journal and write down the one that resonated with me the most, or come up with one on my own.

One fateful day in March, I was in a rush. I drove to an end-of-the-quarter celebration with the editorial team, where we took pictures, reflected and laughed.

When I got home, I skipped the quotes and went straight for my journal. I picked up the pen, and wrote: “I am done being your ditzy, chaotic, fat, dumb ‘friend.’”

I leaned back in my chair and looked in the mirror.

The woman staring back at me was almost unrecognizable. She seemed healthy, confident and self-assured in her own truth.

She was 21.

April 28, 2021

On my way home from Boulevard Park, I finally finished “Evermore” all the way through.

Swift sang in a soft, peaceful voice: “Sometimes giving up is the strong thing, sometimes to run is the brave thing, sometimes walking out is the one thing that will find you the right thing.”

I smiled. I knew.

As the last note rang, I peered out my car's open window, the wind in my face and closure in my heart.

The world felt brighter.



KLIPSUN IS A
CHINUK WAWA
WORD FOR
SUNSET