Spring 2022

Klipsun Magazine, 2022, Volume 52 Issue 03 - Spring

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Dear Reader,

When I was given the news that I would be the future editor-in-chief for Klipsun, I knew immediately the theme I wanted for the spring edition.

**Passion:** (Noun)
1. a strong and barely controllable emotion.
2. an intense desire or enthusiasm for something.

Passion lies within all of us, waiting like a starving beast ready to pounce. Unexpected, unbidden and sometimes unwanted. It stirs, waiting to open its jaws and howl. It guides us. Passion rules us all, and we obey.

If we could live without passion, maybe we’d know some kind of peace. But we would be hollow. Empty rooms, shuttered and dank. We would be truly dead.

I chose Passion as the theme for this quarter for a plethora of reasons. It means something different for everyone yet carries over similar traits with each interpretation. People relate it to a fire, the heart, a need, a want, a desire. Passion is a spark that you find in a person or in the arts. It is a guide or a friend and sometimes our master, pulling the strings like a puppeteer.

Whatever it means to you, let it be something impactful and strong. This quarter we were lucky to have a collection of great writers to tell stories from different walks of life and capture the essence of what I was looking for.

Stories of love lost or found, a dedication to the arts, overcoming the odds to follow your heart and finding meaning in the connections we make.

As you read this issue, I hope you find yourself inspired by the beauty found in others and how powerful the resolve of the human spirit truly is.

Reading these stories was an experience for me, and I hope it is for you as well.

With warm regards,

Tyler Brown

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To be a Dad.

It’s not that simple, especially when you find out you are going to be a father at 19 years old.

I had two routes in front of me: one was to be a coward and let my child grow up without a father. The other was to man up and accept responsibility.

According to the U.S. census bureau, around 18 million children under the age of 18 grow up without a dad. Without a father in the household, there is a strong possibility of a child developing a sense of loneliness throughout their entire life.

The moment I decided I needed to alter my life for my daughter was frightening, but I did not want her to be a part of those devastating statistics.

One second, I was studying for exams and planning for the next party to go to with my buddies. The next second, my wife and I were building a crib for our daughter. I was no longer a kid with nothing to worry about. I now had a child and a lot on my plate.

I won’t lie, I wasn’t entirely excited to be having a child at first. As a young, dumb ex-college kid, I was selfish and used to prioritizing myself. I was terrified, certain my life was over.

I was so wrong.

The birth of my child was a moment that allowed me to mature into a true adult, while also giving me a lifelong best friend.

Nayalle Marie Baldovinos was born on Nov. 9, 2015. I don’t want to be corny or sound cliche, but she changed my life. As soon as I set my eyes on her, I truly experienced a different type of love. She looked like a doll, with chocolate brown eyes and a smile beaming like a sun.
This was my daughter, and I was so proud to be her dad.

Carrying my daughter for the first time felt like opening a present on Christmas. As the love for my daughter grew, the responsibilities as parents did as well.

Parenting is a team dynamic, so sacrifices like your hobbies, alone time and sleep will be surrendered. Getting up at 3 a.m. to change a diaper when you have work at 6 a.m. is not fun, but waking up to your child hugging you in comfort makes all those sacrifices worth it. It makes you feel on top of the world.

I am devoted to forming this little person into who they will be in the future. The first steps, the first “dada,” the first laugh, the first drool, the first everything is insane.

These moments are priceless, but what brings tears to my eyes is when my child asks to play my favorite song again, or when she asks to play a sport that I have played my whole life.

I was no longer in school because I was pursuing a major my parents wanted for me. I was now going to school to be a sports journalist like I had always dreamed about.

Sports have always been intertwined with my relationship with my dad. Since I can remember, my dad and I have been watching football and baseball together. My dad was there to see me hit my first ball and take my last snap on the football field.

It did not feel right to leave sports as a chapter of my life to be forgotten. My daughter re-sparked my love of being involved in athletics. Sports journalism was how I was going to keep that light glowing.

Today, I am a senior at Western Washington University majoring in journalism. My daughter is six years old and in kindergarten. Without the love and support from my daughter and wife, I do not think I would be where I am today.

That is a position that is not just based on success, but based on being truly happy.

Being a dad allowed me to push myself and question what I wanted for my life. I want a career in journalism. But, more than anything, fatherhood made me realize how passionate I am to simply be there for my daughter and my wife.

Being a dad is an amazing journey that has allowed me to form myself into the best version of myself. My daughter supplied true motivation while allowing me to obtain a sense of clarity that life is not all about money and material things.

Life is about living in the moment and appreciating the now. It’s about creating memories with your loved ones and being genuinely content.

Being a dad is what allowed me to discover these answers.
I Won’t Apologize

It’s time for women to stop apologizing for taking up space.

Story by Kaleigh Carroll
Illustration by Bella Coronado

I hadn’t arrived late, interrupted another person or even committed some long string of social faux pas. I had simply spoken aloud, but to me, that was enough of a reason to repeat “sorry.”

How was I going to express my passions if the act of clicking my unmute button and speaking almost impulsively called forth an apology? I wasn’t. I was trapped in a cycle of reducing myself and my ideas with no one to pull me out.

Zero: that’s the number of times anyone in the all-female meeting told me I had no reason to apologize. My repetitive “sorry’s” didn’t seem out of place as they mingled with the automatic apologies of the other women. Looking back, I realize this is a common scenario.

There seems to be an, ironically, unspoken understanding that women apologize more than men. It’s something I became aware of when I took a psychology of gender class. It was one of our first assignments: track how many times you say “sorry” in a day. At the time, it had seemed simple and a little pointless.

How much did I really apologize in a day? It turns out, a lot.

As I sat in meetings, attended classes and talked with friends, the “sorry’s” piled up quicker than I could count.

Fumbling with my card at the checkout counter: Ding.

Asking another question in class: Ding.

Oddly enough, being interrupted by another person: Ding.

It wasn’t just me. The women around me were equally compelled to throw out apologies as if they were placeholders for the natural “um’s” and “uh’s” that populate conversations. Anecdotally, the evidence of this phenomenon can be found all over the internet (even in shampoo commercials), but the research isn’t as conclusive.

A 2010 study from the University of Waterloo looked at whether women apologize more by having both men and women keep a daily log of offenses they committed and the number of apologies they issued.

Overall, they found that while women offered more apologies, they also reported committing more offenses. Proportionally, the two groups were equal when it came to the ratio of offenses to apologies.

For psychology professor Karina Schumann, who co-wrote the study, these findings highlight the need for civility in the face of conflict.

“I hope that people attribute less malicious intent to each other,” Schumann said. “If you haven’t received an apology from someone — regardless of their gender — it might not reflect a lack of concern on their part, but rather a lack of awareness.”

Why, then, is there a difference in total apologies? According to the study, “men apologize less frequently than women do because they have higher thresholds for what constitutes offensive behavior.”

Does that mean men are to blame for women’s over-apologizing? I don’t think so.

There must be someone to point a finger at, right?

Who’s the common enemy we can all rally against? I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but there isn’t one.

Past research has pointed to everything from early-childhood socialization to the male ego as the reason behind women’s over-apologizing, but the evidence used doesn’t hold up to scrutiny.

If we want things to change, we need to take charge.

To put your habits into perspective, start by counting the number of times you apologize in a day and make a concerted effort to lower that number. Support the women around you by, kindly, calling out their apologies with a simple, “no need to apologize.”

Women have the right to take up space and not soften their ideas for the benefit of others. We deserve to express our passion without apology.

“There’s a lot more work that needs to be done to develop a more complete understanding of the effects of apologizing for men and women,” Schumann said.

“Under what conditions and in what situations are apologies problematic versus helpful for women? Do men reap benefits or face consequences for apologizing in certain contexts?” are among the questions Schumann wants to see explored in future research.

For now, women should apologize for their mistakes, not their existence.

If we want things to change, we need to take charge.

Written out, that sentence seems ridiculous. It spends more time apologizing for some nonexistent offense than it does conveying an idea. Yet, it’s how many women speak in meetings, conversations and nearly everywhere else. It’s almost instinctual, and it’s something I’m not immune to either, but that doesn’t mean that we as women can’t escape it.

Eighteen: the number of times I apologized during one meeting.

Sorry, I don’t want to take up too much of your time but if you could just read this sentence I would really appreciate it. Sorry again for bothering you.

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Eighteen: the number of times I apologized during one meeting.
Everyone I’ve loved has helped build who I am, and sentimental souvenirs prove that pieces of them are always with me.

Story by Ben Bagley
Illustrations by Tyler Brown

I am hoarder.

Not in a physical way like the ones on TV, but rather as an emotional historian. Instead of keeping 37 broken microwave in my attic, I hold on to every single sentiment I have lived through, and exist today as a mosaic of experiences and memories from loved ones in my life.

I am sentimental. I love deeply and am loyal to the ones I love.

I don’t like to be alone, physically or emotionally. I get bored when I have nobody to spend time with, and I feel uneasy when I am emotionally unchaperoned. Now, as a single 22-year-old about to move across the country for the first time in his life, I feel alone. Now, as a single 22-year-old about to move across the country for the first time in his life, I feel alone.

I am not alone.

Pieces of Me

Everyone I’ve loved has helped build who I am, and sentimental souvenirs prove that pieces of them are always with me.

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Then, I look around my room.

I’ve had a few girlfriends before, each one different from the last. Every relationship accentuated a different aspect of my personality, and every partner helped me grow in their own way. The Three Loves Theory by Mark Manson explains that people often fall in love three times in three different ways, each one its own attempt to find what true love really is.

Even though three of my loves have run their course through my life and have moved on, experiencing each of them has molded me emotionally. The person I am today is a conglomeration of lessons I’ve learned from the different people I’ve loved, and I remember these teachings through sentimental trinkets.

My life is filled with lessons learned and the knickknacks to match

The first girl I ever loved was in high school: M. She and I were young and enthusiastic, our romance was passionate like a Spanish serenade on an acoustic gui-
tar. We were juvenile emotional novices; every action we took hurt the other in a series of flashy, painful attempts to figure out what love really meant.

Our story was written over a tumultuous five years – we both saw other people, came back to each other in dramatic ways, shared precious core memories and then fought about nonsense with fiery conviction. We loved with pride and honest passion, but we loved like children.

Despite the challenges we thrust upon each other, I remember our relationship fondly.

I admire the young man I used to be for waging his noble fight of intimate devotion.

When she left for college, which ended up being for good, I gifted her my favorite sweatshirt. It was a sentimental moment, and she promised to keep it safe. Two months later the breakup ensued, and my ninth-grade basketball hoodie wound up back on my doorstep in a busted-up cardboard box. Even though it is too small for me now, it still hangs with pride in my closet.

I fought through years of turmoil for the person that I first loved, and even after it failed, I came out intact.

Now, every time I notice its gray threads peeking out of my collection of t-shirts, I remember that persever-
ance. I remember what I’ve learned, and I am remind-
ed of my strength.

My first love and I broke up two months into my first year of college. I had freshly graduated from high school and was still unripe in my emotional matura-
tion. I was ready to experience a more grown-up kind of passion. And there, just down the hall of my fresh-
man dorm, lived C.

C was the second person I fell truly in love with. She was very similar to my mother; loving, goofy, smiley and pure. She showed me what it felt like to be loved with affection after I experienced a cold relationship in high school. I had grown used to my affection not being reciprocated; C was the first to show me love in the way that I provided others with.

She taught me what pure love can feel like when it goes both ways. I loved her, I worked to show her ev-
evvery day, and she worked just as hard to show me. She listened, she communicated and from her I learned how I deserve to feel. To this day, I value that feeling of being truly loved.

For my 20th birthday, she knitted me a blanket big enough for a queen-size bed. I struggled with self-con-
fidence at that time, after high school left me believ-
ing that I did not deserve to be cared about. However, while anxiety was eating at my self-confidence, C was spending hours weaving her warmth into something that then brought warmth to me.

We’ve since broken up, but every night to this day when I snuggle under that blanket, I feel loved. I feel her love, and I remember what I deserve.

And then there was K.

She was more masculine, a tougher nut to crack. I had often felt misaligned with the masculine role in rela-
tionships, and her with the feminine. We clicked in a different way, letting our true colors bleed into each other in a way neither of us had experienced before.

We were real. We were raw. We helped each other fall into our true identities. And we had fun.

K was adventurous. The pièce de résistance in our time together was a road trip from Seattle to San Fran-
cisco fueled by nearly 2000 miles worth of euphoria.

We camped our way up the coast, and felt truly free in fresh cities where nobody knew our names.

At every new stop we bought souvenir stickers. When the trip concluded, we each decorated a water bot-
tle with memories from our journey together. Every sticker was reminiscent of the story attached to it, each one representative of a moment precious to our hearts, forever frozen in time.

She soon enrolled in school across the country, and we drifted apart after a period of long-distance. The romantic experiences I had endured and learned from had led me to her, where I felt more like myself than I even knew possible.

Suddenly, she was gone. With her she took the person I’d entrusted with my true colors, and it caused my fragile heart to be restless and upset.

But when I see that water bottle sitting on my desk, each of those stickers from a memory locked in genu-
ine joy, I remember everything we learned and how much she believed in me.

Instantly, peace returns.

When I look around my bedroom and when I look around my life, I see mementos of moments that created the person I am today. A poster from Ariana Grande’s Dangerous Woman concert that my child-
hood best friend surprised me with tickets to in 10th grade, a signed program from the final musical in high school my sister and I performed together, a recipe list titled “Kitchen Tips From Mom” that my mother made for me when I first moved away from home and a wall filled with polaroid pictures of friends and memories that I cherish.

The person that I’ve become and the person I am now is a reflection of the people who have built me. Those people, the lessons they’ve provided and the emo-
tions we experienced together, make up who I am. I have met and grown to love many incredible people in my life, and from each of them I’ve taken a piece that helped me grow.

These items that I value prove that sentiment and serve as a constant, a valuable reminder that I have never, and will never, be alone in the universe. Those words ring true for all, and are exactly what this scared 22-year-old about to move across the country by herself needed to hear:

I am not alone.
This isn’t an apology, nor is it a declaration of a happy ending. It’s a story about finding yourself in the passion of others. A feeling I hope that I too can inspire in others around me.

In September of 2020, I was given the keys to the first place I could call my own. A studio apartment nestled above what was at the time the Mt. Baker Media House. Don’t ask me what they did, because even after having a few conversations with them I still didn’t know. From what I could figure after a few nights living there, they professionally drank beer and played ping pong until 3 a.m.

The first few months of living on Holly and Bay street was like the beginning stages of dating someone you know you’re going to fall deeply in love with. It was all the better since I was sharing the experience with the partner who introduced me to that feeling a year prior. For the first time in my life, I was stable, had a job I didn’t hate at JJ’s In and Out, a partner who inspired me, and was going to school for something that I was passionate about.

Two months later, my partner got me an early Christmas gift; a tri-colored corgi named Kaleidoscope, or Kaleid, who quickly built up a reputation around town for hanging out of our window. The three of us shared our first Thanksgiving together as a family in that studio apartment. It was also our last Thanksgiving together as a family.

Shortly after Thanksgiving I got a call from the local small practice that I got my medication from. They told me they would be transitioning away from general practice and exclusively be working with women and that I needed to find a new provider. Deep in the thaws of going to school remotely, working five days-a-week and the healthcare system being overwhelmed by COVID-19, my dream began to feel like a nightmare.

My routines for school and work fell apart. What started with one or two missed deadlines or forgetting about a shift at work snowballed into skipping class and finding the empty end of a bottle of vodka every week. The only thing that kept me going was knowing that I had more time to spend with my partner and puppy.

Not having the medication that I had taken for almost a decade started to take its toll.

I didn’t recognize my own mind. I kept it sedated with whatever I could find. I became angry, bitter and totally lost. Only a few weeks into the quarter I had to drop my classes and pick up a second job to pay the difference that financial aid provided for my rent.

I had lost all interest in the projects I was working on and found every opportunity I could to fight with my partner, who had no idea the depth of the pain I was in.

I couldn’t bring myself to tell her the full truth. How could I when the last major relationship ended with her telling me, “You’re just too much.”

By the end of March, I was living in a fever dream. My partner and I undoubtedly still loved each other, but I could tell my bitterness and anger was hurting her and driving her away. She started spending more time at home, and I started to spend more time resenting her, to no one’s fault but my own.

Around the same time, the Mount Baker Media House was taking down their sign and before I knew it, they were gone. The media house was now replaced by a new business, Black Noise Records. It was Kaleid who welcomed them first from his perch in the window.

Later that first night, while taking Kaleid out, I was able to meet the owner Nico and his girlfriend, both of whom were brimming with excitement and pride.

Upon seeing them for the first time, I felt a tinge of shame, which I internalized and tried to drink away later that night.

I’d like to think of myself as someone who doesn’t compare themselves to others. Seeing Nico, someone who at my age was thriving, building their dreams up and happily sharing it with their partner, a voice in my head shamed me.

“That could be you,” it whispered.
I continued to feel that shame, and it clung on to me as a musk I couldn’t seem to wash away. From then on my interactions with Nico mainly revolved around how Kaleid was doing, which later became a regular crutch when meeting new people.

Black Noise quickly built up a nice reputation around town. I was seeing posts on sites like Reddit, Facebook and Instagram, buzzing with excitement about Black Noise and how great their experiences were so far. In no time at all, I went from telling people I lived above Camber Coffee to Black Noise records, and people knew where I was talking about.

It wasn’t long after that I paid the ultimate price for my actions, and I pushed my partner away for good. With one grand final freak out, I told her she didn’t care about me and I left all of her stuff on her front porch. In turn, she reluctantly left the rest of her feelings for me behind.

Just like that, our short-lived family was no more. I’d like to tell you what those next few weeks were like, but, through the mania and day drinking, the only thing I remember was getting let go from JJ’s for missing too many shifts.

Like I had done for weeks, one morning I woke around noon. Rays of sunshine flickered through the tree branches wavering over my face. And, like most days similar to this day, I found myself paralyzed in bed, too numb to move and overcome with sheer and total sadness. Not angry, not defensive, but vulnerable.

Here I would feel most myself. But, unlike most of those other days, I didn’t spend hours thinking about the cold empty space next to me.

On this day, my mind honed in on another energy for the first time, energy I had blocked out spitefully until that moment. That energy manifested in a soft, unintelligible hum that, if I chose to listen to, could be felt swirling beneath my world.

The more I listened, the more I noticed that the hum of Black Noise wasn’t self-contained. The hum was dancing with the rays that awoke me, and it has been with me the whole time.

A noise I didn’t need to use to fuel my shame, but instead could use to feel inspired.

Nico wasn’t just selling records and tapes, he was selling his own passion.

Through the love of vinyl, Nico was providing the people of Bellingham a space that promotes finding yourself through music.

That day, like most days, I woke up crying. But unlike most days, I was crying because for the first time in a long time, I felt my own passion ignited. I remember sitting up, looking at Kaleid with a smile.

“I think it’s time for us to move.”

Although I was far from having my last remorseful cry for breakfast, I’ve started to have my fair share of good mornings. And although I’ve since moved, I can still hear the Black Noise wherever I go.
“Whenever you take people out they just become little kids again,” Tsukada said. “And it’s quite funny, because their little kids you can trust to not hurt themselves.”

While the glowing anemone are a highlight of tide pooling for Tsukada and anyone she brings with her, one of the main reasons she goes tide pooling is for their food source—phytoplankton. Anemone can re-emit light that they obtain from external sources almost immediately according to the Vancouver Aquarium. Many anemone can use light captured by external sources but can’t create their own, this is called fluorescence. Some creatures are able to create light through an internal chemical reaction which is called bioluminescence.

She strokes an anemone that doesn’t fluoresce with her finger. It sticks like velcro, trying to hold on tight to her finger. This is an attempt to inject venom into what it assumes is food, but humans aren’t in any danger from these anemone according to Tsukada. We’re just too big, and our skin is too thick for these anemone to do any damage.

The anemone sway with the gentle roll of the waves as Tsukada explains the difference between the different types of anemone. “There are moon anemones and then aggregate anemone, but those are my favorite because those are the ones that fluoresce,” Tsukada said. “And the reason why they are able to do that is because they have that symbiotic relationship with the phytoplankton in them.”

Tsukada’s research focus at Western has been on marine phytoplankton which can be used as sensors for climate change. She has always had an interest in biology and ecological systems and how they relate to climate change. “I specialize in diatoms which are a type of phytoplankton that create these silica glass houses around themselves, and they are absolutely stunning,” Tsukada said. “They come in all of these shapes and sizes, and functionalities. And they’re just absolutely everywhere.”

According to an article in Frontiers in Marine Science, “Understanding Diatom Cell Wall Silification— Moving Forward,” the basic essence of diatoms is that they are “mineral utilizing plants.” Studies have found diatoms to be excellent indicator species for warming water and climate change. Researchers study the skeletons of phytoplankton blooms on lake and ocean floors. The phytoplankton are sensitive to temperature changes and their carcasses last indefinitely at the bottom of the ocean making them perfect subjects of research for Tsukada and other students and scientists.

When she returns home from tide pooling, Tsukada will often return with water samples that contain diatoms. She lets the water incubate on the windowsill with the lid popped off so that the phytoplankton can off-gas. Tsukada doesn’t want them to suffocate.

Then she waits—letting the diatoms incubate, bloom and multiply. Tsukada says it takes about a week for a good phytoplankton bloom. “I’ll look at it under the microscope to see like who’s hanging about,” Tsukada said.

By the light of her headlamp, WWU environmental science major Alyssa Tsukada picks her way across the rocky beaches of Bellingham Bay to the ecological treasure laid bare by the pull of the moon—tide pools. The tide is at its lowest point in the past month, making it easy for Tsukada to find anemone.

The fluorescent anemone are a fan favorite of friends who join Tsukada on her tide pooling adventures. There’s actually a bit of a waitlist for the opportunity to go tide pooling with Tsukada. She has found that tide pooling is a great educational opportunity that she loves sharing with others.

“Fluorescent Love

Story & Photos by Linnea Hoover

The fluorescent anemone are a fan favorite of friends who join Tsukada on her tide pooling adventures. There’s actually a bit of a waitlist for the opportunity to go tide pooling with Tsukada. She has found that tide pooling is a great educational opportunity that she loves sharing with others.

Alyssa Tsukada, an environmental science major at Western Washington University, is taking photos of a small crab as it skitters over a piece of kelp at a beach in Bellingham Bay. Tsukada goes tide pooling at least once a month, and always finds something new to be excited about.
The moon and the tides affect Tsukada's ability to look for the nudibranch, which appears seasonally. The Salish Sea is on a mixed diurnal and semidiurnal tidal pattern, meaning that depending on the time of year there is a mix of one to two high and low tides daily. The moon controls when the tide will be low enough for tide pooling.

"It's at the half moon stages when the tides are no good," Tsukada said. "You don't get a low tide, they stay pretty lame… The zero moon are when they're the best."

According to Tsukada it's best to plan to go tide pooling when there is an extremely low tide. This gives tide poolers time to safely make their way back up the beach before they are trapped by the water and tide.

Now Tsukada goes tide pooling at least once a month.

"Tide pooling is one of those things where it started as something that was just really fun to go do," Tsukada said. "I think my work here at Western is just really spurred on by my passion for the environment— and it all starts with just being excited and appreciating what you have around you."

Tsukada keeps a microscope on her kitchen table and will sometimes photograph the results of the incubated phytoplankton. Surprisingly, her roommate doesn’t mind the jars of sea water, or the microscope.

"She doesn’t mind at all," Tsukada said. "I think it’s really funny. She lets me have my microscope out on the table. 24-7."

The phytoplankton that Tsukada captures bioluminesce in the summer months— something regularly witnessed at the end of August and beginning of September at the popular local hangout Teddybear Cove.

While anemone and phytoplankton are common but enjoyable creatures for her to find, one creature Tsukada is on the hunt for is a nudibranch.

"There’s specifically a hooded nudibranchs that is native to this area," Tsukada said. "It is this pale white like slug type of thing that has this billowing appendage that it shoots above its head. It’s like a little astronaut space balloon type of creature. It’s super alien."

The moon and the tides affect Tsukada’s ability to look for the nudibranch, which appears seasonally. The Salish Sea is on a mixed diurnal and semidiurnal tidal pattern, meaning that depending on the time of year there is a mix of one to two high and low tides daily.

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You feel the drive he has for teaching and for the theatre – the same fire he first felt within him when he stepped on the stage as a high schooler. His voice is warm yet strong, striking even, as he is content with the overwhelming life he lives.

From Sports to Drama
Growing up in a small Central Washington town, Mullinnex was never exposed to theater culture. It wasn’t until his sophomore year at Naches Valley High School that he got his first taste of the theater.

During a varsity football practice, Mullinnex tore his ACL, MCL, LCL and Patellar Tendon, which required reconstructive surgery. Not only did this pull him out of his place on the football and baseball teams, it pulled him out of his identity.

Since his accident, Mullinnex had a blank space in his after-school schedule. His English teacher took notice and asked if he would be interested in auditioning for the high school play.

“So, I tried out, and just out of luck or talent, I got the lead in the first show I did,” Mullinnex said as he let out a light laugh.

The play was called “The Foreigner,” a two-act comedy that has been used for professional and amateur theater. This was perfect for a comedic and colorful guy like Mullinnex, who always found a way to make his peers laugh.

As the lead, Mullinnex played multiple character types in his role of “The Foreigner,” and in doing so discovered himself on the stage.

“By starting to become these characters and working through things, it was a way of exploring who I was,” Mullinnex said. “I was separated from the expectations of family and friends. By exploring characters, I could find that out for myself.”

Once Mullinnex finished physical therapy, he got back into basketball and track, but the theater bug remained.

Mullinnex said he would audition for one or two plays each year during his time in high school, and was even given the opportunity through his school to see his first professional Broadway musical performance at the 5th Avenue Theater in Seattle.

Mullinnex said that to this day he still remembers the twinkle he had in his eyes while watching “Miss Saigon.” Seeing a musical with a full-size helicopter descending on stage, picking actors up and flying them out, lit up his eyes. The addition of the two to three-story rotating sets and the talented vocalists really opened him to the world of performing arts outside of his small-town theater.

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Addictive like sweet and sour candy, the taste of being on stage is what many “theater kids” can agree keeps them coming back. Mullinnex craved that a taste for the theater. Continuing to university, he sought out more ways to feed his addiction.

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For most theater kids, the dream is to be a Broadway performer, to become the next Patti LuPone, Lin-Manuel Miranda or Aaron Tveit. But behind every great performer, there is a greater teacher who learned through their own center-stage moment.

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The Academy of Film, Theatre, and Television advises that, as long as you can market yourself accordingly, networking and working hard to get good representation through an agency can help you succeed in acting.

To market himself as an actor, Mullinnex needed to be a well-rounded individual and have a fallback plan. He also has a humanities degree and a history degree that he can rely on if acting were to fall through.

Mullinnex had some friends that choose either the New York or Los Angeles route for acting, but saw that some of them didn’t get their first job until up to 10 years later while waitressing or doing other side jobs to make ends meet.

During this time, Mullinnex met his wife and had to seriously consider his options. Would he follow his love and start a family, or would he pursue his acting career, taking it to the next level?

In the end, he chose his wife, who he loves and was just too good to let go.

“You know, are there regrets? Yeah, I mean, there always is, but I think I made the right choice for me... and I wouldn’t have the family and kids that I have now,” Mullinnex said. “But I never lost that passion.”

Mullinnex soon decided that he was going to teach because he’d had a strong interest in history and teaching. He knew that he needed his degree in history in order to become a teacher. That would enable him to teach what he really wanted, which was theater, because at most schools, the theater teachers were also the English or history teachers.

“I was marketing myself for those history jobs, and the theater would just happen to follow,” Mullinnex said. “That’s how my first teaching jobs were, I taught history and then I started a theater program... to help my passion and to help students that were interested in it too.”

At Cedarcrest High School a theater-only teacher position was available, which Mullinnex jumped at. He made it his duty to serve the students at Cedarcrest and resonate his own joy and love for the performing arts onto the next generation of actors.

A Bond Like No Other

The final bell rings at 2:15 p.m. at Cedarcrest High School. The students race to the double doors and fill the theater with their stacking voices and bottled-up energy, bringing life to the theater until 10 p.m. The students and Mullinnex gather together in their small high school auditorium, breaking down walls and crafting characters, allowing for a personal connection rather than an authoritative relationship.

“Teaching the arts is really different because you can teach methodology,” Mullinnex said. “You can teach some practices and techniques and things like that, but it’s still art.”

In his drama classes and while preparing for a musical or play, the connections he establishes allow him to see the students he has come to care for grow along with their passion for the arts.

“We build relationships. If a student is starting their freshman year, I sometimes see that student again, sadly, more than my own kids,” Mullinnex said. “A lot of times in the high school level, you’re seeing them coming from immaturity, at a middle school, to starting to mature to become an adult.”

Cedarcrest alumni Johnathan Mumford said Mullinnex impacted him as not only an actor, but a person. Mumford said Mullinnex, to this day, is one of his greatest mentors and has helped him a lot throughout his life.

“After one of our performances that year Seth and I stayed at the school and cleaned,” Mumford said. “We stayed at the school until probably 3 a.m. just talking about life, and I loved every second of it.”

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Mullinnex’s students continue to invite him into their lives. The college graduations, weddings and baby showers leave him smiling to himself as he watches his young students go through the same journey he did all those years ago.

“We keep in contact and I’ve either willingly or unwillingly been a part of getting students together that have eventually gotten married,” Mullinnex said. “The theater community in a school is like a family. When you add up the long hours together, the fondness for drama, the emotional moments within acting and the highs and lows that come with putting on a show, you get something more than being peers and teachers.

Former student Marcus Wolf explains this idea of the theater family.

“Over the years I have come to find that sports are a camaraderie, and the arts are family,” Wolf said. “With theater, while we focus on our rehearsal and what needs to get done, when we take breaks and just hang out together there is a bond that is made between all of us, and through that, we all get to grow up together.”

Drama teacher Seth Mullinnex looks at himself as he self-reflects about his journey as a drama teacher and actor in the Cedarcrest High School green room.

Curtain Call

It is 10 p.m. and Mullinnex calls it a day, preparing for his hour-long commute home from school. His fondness for sports has never left him. He plays his sports radio station, ESPN Seattle, to catch up on the news of the Seahawks and Mariners. He tries to escape from his busy life for a bit.

Although the days may bring with them a series of repetition, he finds himself proudful of the long-lasting trust and bonds he builds. Bonds that keep him coming back for more.

“I have former students who are now lifelong friends, and we can now chat and talk to each other,” Mullinnex said. “It’s not about anything that people need, but that it can just be ‘hey, just thinking of you.’”

The shows will come to an end, and Mullinnex will be watching as they take a bow.

Editor’s Note: The author of this story is a past student and peer to the sources, Seth Mullinnex, Jonathan Mumford, Marcus Wolf and Mary Ward.
Falling in Love

One widow’s story of thrilling love, a devastating loss and moving forward with an enthusiastic passion for life.

Story by Rowan Westwood

Kathy Drybread lost her husband to the sky.

Steve Drybread was killed in a plane crash in August of 2002. Everything before that had these two love birds on cloud nine, literally.

Kathy’s story just might convince you that even though life has an expiration date, true love doesn’t. Kathy and “Bread” as his friends liked to call him, spent twelve years creating adventures together.

When asked to characterize Bread in three words, Kathy downright replies with “talented, adventurous, and really, really sexy.” As she describes the twinkly brown eyes that initially caught her attention, it’s clear that her image of him has not faded.

At the time, Kathy was 28 and her career was taking off. In turn, it was beginning to feel as though there wasn’t much left for her in the small farm town of Indianapolis she called home. So, she applied for a transfer to San Diego, California. “We just had quite an adventure-some life together, it was fantastic,” she said.

There was always a bag packed in her car just in case they decided to embark on a weekend adventure, which was often.

“We were the ‘rent the helicopter, get dropped from the top of the mountain and ski down’ kinda couple.”

There was just one adventure the two had yet to embark on, skydiving. “Living the anxiety she felt while driving to the drop zone for the first time Kathy said, “I had waterproof mascara on, it had just become available… I was crying in the car all the way to the drop zone.”

She spent all day training for her skydive. Once Kathy took that leap of faith, the rest was history.

After that, a tradition had been born. The two went skydiving every year for their anniversary. There were no safety laws when they began jumping in 1991, so they would sometimes fall through the sky naked. They would wear their bathing suits in the plane, then right before they were about to jump, when the pilot wasn’t looking, they’d take off their suits, pack them up, and jump.

“‘We would laugh at each other because skin in free-fall looks terrible!’ She added.” They would also kiss while free-falling together, like a scene right from a mission impossible movie, but more romantic.

Kathy went on to be a part of the US women’s skydiving team and jumping out of airplanes continued to be one of her greatest passions. Kathy maintained the practice of skydiving until four years ago.

On a particular skydiving trip one summer, Kathy and Bread went camping in Joshua Tree State Park. They had planned to wake up early to go skydiving the next day, not expecting a 4 a.m. earthquake to be their alarm clock.

Kathy described how incredible it was seeing the desert floor move, how the ground split and sand flooded the crevices of the earth. After enjoying cold coffee due to the power outage, they left for “breakfast run” (first run of the day) at the drop zone.

Then came the aftershock, only this time they weren’t on the ground. As Kathy and Bread were in free-fall, they pulled their parachutes and noticed the movement of Bread’s parachute, as it mirrored the vibrating earth. When he gestured towards the ground, Kathy saw telephone poles moving and heard car horns going off everywhere. They were in another earthquake, witnessing it like birds.

When they reached the ground they just sat there and...
laughed, amused by their morning. “What are the chances we would experience two earthquakes in two different places, one on the ground and one in the air?”

Another favorite adventure Kathy had with Bread was when they were flying to a plane race in New Mexico. Bread had recently built his own plane, and racing planes was a hobby of his.

As they were soaring over the flat red mountains of Nevada, Kathy suddenly felt her stomach drop. Through the microphone she told Bread, “I don’t want to be losing altitude right now.” He looked at her and said, “I don’t either.”

She described the sweat beads coming down his calm face as they were losing altitude.

With the help of their trusty GPS, Kathy found an abandoned prison runway on which they could land. As they were approaching a rocky landing, Kathy put her microphone up. She didn’t want Bread to hear her heavy breathing and prayers. Thankfully, it wasn’t their last day flying and they landed safely.

Kathy said she couldn’t believe how her life was going back in the day. “My life has always consisted of great fun or great adversity, nothing in between.”

When asked about true love, Kathy spoke of the intense emotion that accompanies feeling crazy about someone; infatuation.

“Infatuation is such a powerful feeling. That chemistry, that pull, that crazy about you, can’t sleep, can’t eat kind of thing... that initial infatuation as the relationship matures is what grows into true passion.”

When we spoke of the day Bread died, Kathy said she was driving home and saw cars lined up on the street. She thought she might have been walking into a surprise anniversary party. Instead, she walked into her home to discover that she would never go on another surprise anniversary party. Instead, she walked into her home to discover that she would never go on another ordinary moment.

After emerging from her initial state of denial that her husband was gone, the real pain set in. Kathy would try distracting herself from feeling raw, sober emotion. When she was forced to face her pain head on, it was tiring.

“Grief is exhausting,” she told me.

“If anything could come out of this to help somebody else, I hope they hear that if you choose to numb yourself with whatever it may be, you’re only doing yourself a great disservice.”

The sooner you deal with pain, the sooner you can start recovering. To help cope, Kathy would sometimes attend support groups. She said, “people in the support groups would always ask ‘why me?’ But I never asked ‘why me?’ Because we had a very on-the-edge lifestyle.”

With the help of her faith and perseverance, Kathy found love once more within her habits. She makes the best lemon bars you’ll ever taste, she’s always up for an adventure, and she continues to lead in life with love. Though she’s endured pain, it’s only made her stronger.

Kathy was the last person to talk to Bread. When asked what she would have said to him if she could have said goodbye, she kept her answer sweet and simple.

“I love you.”

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Strungout in a dreamlike limbo unthethered from traditional narrative conventions, the sequences in Joel Coen’s The Tragedy of Macbeth play out in a visually arresting and often frightening series of ethereal transgressions.

The progressive theater-cinema hybrid style impresses in its technique, yet remains elusive in its purpose. Macbeth is the shortest plays. The narrative unfolds at light- ning pace. Coen and crew are up for the ping the play.

The wonderful mix of shadows, sharp angles, fog, stars, clouds and that ever constant knocking that dwells within the mind of Macbeth all make for a deeply sinister tone that permeates nearly every moment.

The piece is pure cinema and theater. Everything is created on a soundstage with pure craftsmanship and technique.

“The middle of brilliant casting with Denzel Washington and Francis McDormand, the visual world Coen created left lasting impressions,” raved Rich Brown after the Pickford showing. “Specifically with the light and shadow play, high vertical columns, and long horizontal staircases. These cinematic images will last in our memories for years”

Denzel Washington began his career playing Othello on the stage in college at 19, and continued to perform in several Shakespeare adaptations on both stage and screen.

His casting echoes a bookend for one of our greatest actors. An opportunity for a master artist to reflect on their career and see what they’ve learned. I waited in anticipation to see what nuances Denzel would bring to the character and story.

This Macbeth is understated, smoldering coals of a once warm and loving fire still burning under his griz- zled expression. The wrinkles in his face perfectly cap-
A man who perhaps was unjustly kept an arms reach away from the life he deserved. His madness, an act of vengeance on a world that robbed him of a son and kept him from royal grace.

This couple could not bear a child, so they shall bear chaos for creation’s sake. They are more aware of their ambition than Macbeth’s of yore, consciously taking a swan dive into the abyss.

Washington is at his best in the first two acts, giving a performance that I was seriously considering to be among the best in any Shakespeare film. The transition to a tyrant in the third act was a mixed bag for me.

No madness was conveyed through his eyes that felt emotionally connected to the previous two acts. Washington chooses to take a humorous approach to this aspect of the character, often playing up Macbeth in a way that made me wonder if I was supposed to be laughing.

As a whole his performance almost lives in isolation from the rest of the film. It’s an understated performance. A good performance but one that vibes unevenly with the other actors, which was perhaps the purpose.

Francis McDormand is a revelation, delivering her lines with great ease and venom.

Her interpretation of the Out Damn Spot soliloquy felt incredibly germane to the realistic tone of the piece. Less a soliloquy and more of a descent into a schizoid episode filmed in real time.

Even with the raw talent of both these leads, the style of their performances are based on contemporary attitudes in foil to the traditional approaches of the other actors. No matter how much technique they put into their craft, their vibe will always seem somewhat out of step with everyone else’s.

The supporting cast does wonders to fill in the gaps of this story about a marriage gone mad. Moses Ingram as Lady Macduff was a particular standout.

Each actor takes the time to relish their lines, flexing their craft in a remarkable way. It’s the mixing of young and old talent that I can say is the biggest draw to this film other than the production.

Giving a diverse cast the opportunity to relish these classic roles breaks apart the idea that Shakespeare can only be done in a purist ethnocentric setting.

Orson Welles’ Harlem Voodoo Macbeth production comes to mind. Shakespeare’s universality begs us to interact with his plays. Not to do them as they were, but reimagine them as re imagine ourselves.

This is why I believe that The Tragedy of Macbeth is a remarkable piece of progressive filmmaking. While it may not reinvent the wheel, it certainly pushes the trajectory of that wheel.

How increasing college costs are driving students to weigh pursuit of passions with financial risks.

Story by Rowan Forsythe

Walter Gregg, a veteran paratrooper, was lucky to have escaped the horrors of World War II alive. The sounds of heavy artillery had faded into memory and the woods behind his South Carolina home echoed with nothing but the happy burbles of children’s laughter. Gregg’s two daughters frolicked in the yard. A quaint playhouse stood a few hundred feet away. It was March 11, 1958.

Moments later, an inert Mark Six nuclear bomb razed the small structure. Its impact and conventional explosion left a 70-foot crater, destroying Gregg’s home and injuring his family.

Terrible as it must have been, the explosion was analogous to the destructive future that 1958 had in store for America. Student debt was soon to be born, and it would destroy more American dreams than Gregg’s flattened home ever contained.

Fidel Castro began his conquest of Cuba in 1958. The South Carolina “broken arrow” incident made national news. But today, Castro is dead and America has forgotten Gregg’s story.

In the end, neither unleashed a monster so terrifying or destructive as the National Defense Act of 1958. As the nuclear bomb became destroyer of worlds, this act birthed the first official student debt in America, a destroyer of dreams for generations of college students to come. It just needed time to rear its ugly head.

Time was on its side.

Today, American students are grappling with the ramifications of the monster’s murderous rampage. They face the same challenging questions: Why does college cost so much? How do you afford to follow a dream? What does one do if society doesn’t value your passions?

A focus on bad financial literacy and poor decision making falsely implies that ignorance was the sole deliverer of America’s $1.7 trillion college debt problem – the stresses of which are discouraging some students from pursuing a degree, let alone their passion.

Between 2001 and 2014, the average value of a dollar – a simple way of understanding inflation – fell by 34%. Though this number seems shocking, the cost of college in a state like Virginia rose an astronomical 106% over the same period.

The answer to the question of basic finance and affordability lies somewhere in the quagmire of college finance. Free Application for Federal Student Aid, College Scholarship Service Profile, Expected Family Contribution, Student Aid Index, Parent Loans for Undergraduate Students – it is no small wonder that American families are daunted by such an alphabet onslaught.

In a society where college bumper stickers are status symbols, Americans buy degrees like the cars they adorn: with a reckless misunderstanding of debt. A critical lack of financial literacy has only abetted the beastly burden of student debt.

“If you have clueless parents, you’ll be clueless too,” Paula Bishop, Certified Public Accountant and expert independent financial aid counselor, said. She explained that most of the families she works with struggle to manage their money effectively, turning to her once they realize the colossal nature of college costs.

“The people that come to me are the ones that are worried because their kids are smart. They’re looking at Pomona, Claremont McKenna, Santa Clara, all of those,” Bishop said. That cadre of colleges boast sticker prices that are north of $80,000 a year.

While 70% of American college students attend public universities with substantially lower tuition than private four-year universities, Bishop’s clients trend towards the upper end of the grade point average bell curve. With this level of academic achievement comes a desire for prestigious schools and maximizing a smart student’s potential.

College counselors do what they can, encouraging families to fill out the FAFSA and explore scholarship
have enabled colleges and universities, increasing in financial aid in recent years, if anything, increases in financial aid in recent years seen pouring inflationary fuel on a fiscal fire. A few hundred thousand in student debt will bring even the loftiest dreams down to earth.

Federally issued Parent PLUS loans and private student loans allow families to borrow the entire cost of attending college. At a four-year private university, this amount could reach as high as $280,000. The repayment numbers on such a sum are enough to induce immediate cardiac arrest.

$3,222.25 per month, for ten years. While an extreme, suffocating circumstance, reality is hot on its heels. The average student debt for a degree at a private college is $54,880. That carries a monthly payment of over $630 for ten years.

In context, such numbers seem absurd. $630 a month is more than enough to fully finance a luxury car purchase. In some American states, it would buy half of a home.

The loaded gun of student debt has shot American dreams in the foot.

Financial literacy is a limiting factor for students seeking a sensible approach to a degree in a lower-paying passion, but the elephant in the room is the cost of college itself. Ever-increasing numbers have grown entangled with student loans, in a punishing duel of student debt and college itself. Ever-increasing numbers have grown, seeing many parents feel obligated to facilitate expensive college tracks once their kids are admitted. Less expensive options exist. In Seattle, graduates of public high school are now entitled to two free years of community college.

“They feel like they have no choice, but to me they didn’t look into […]some way to lower the cost,” Bishop said. These decisions get some families in trouble.

According to the Bennett Hypothesis, student aid is a student’s enemy, not their friend. It encourages more expensive options, but the college conversation in America is often dominated by fit, not finance. “If you can’t afford it, it’s not the right school!” Bishop’s words were stern and adamant.


The results were shocking: For every dollar of additional subsidized loan money, colleges had increased tuition by 65 cents. Subsequent revisions of Bennett's model have yielded a near dollar-for-dollar correlation.

Facts on the ground support this conclusion – but also point a finger at the expectations of students. At Lord, former CEO of student lender Sallie Mae, had an epiphany after joining the board of Penn State. Somehow, somewhere, gasoline was substituted for water. Rather than quenching the thirst of college students chasing their passions, increasing the accessibility of debt set those dreams on fire.

“Colleges were incredibly inefficient businesses, and the student loan program enabled them,” Lord said. Lord joined the board in 2014, and watched Penn State's budget balloon from $5 billion to over $7.7 billion by 2021. Such a monstrous increase shocked the former financial sector CEO.

Amid tuition bloat, college campuses have become more extravagant than ever before, boasting a myriad of dining options, technological resources, recreational opportunities and capital expansion projects – arguably in the name of attracting prospective students. Indeed, campus budgets have risen along with expectations, feeding the fires of rising costs.

Economists call this the “Bennett Hypothesis,” and it holds that financial aid is a student's enemy, not their friend.

According to the economic theory, an increase in available financial aid encourages increases in tuition. In the past, Bennett's argument was relied on a mix of conjecture and extrapolation – after all, a similar phenomenon had occurred when low interest rates and high inflation helped housing prices double between the mid 1960s and 1970s. Today, the Bennett Hypothesis has meat on its beastly bones, especially in regard to private universities and graduate programs.

In the world of 1% earners, our "value" understanding of undergraduate majors is flipped on its head. An art history major is more likely to be in this exclusive club than an accountant. English, economics and political science majors account for 14% of America's top earners. International relations majors outperform molecular biology graduates. It seems nonsensical.

If, as Montesano sees it, freedom to find your passion in college is a myth bought and sold by the middle class, then the middle class may be using practicality to delude itself out of a plan which has historically seen success.

There may be no silver bullet for rising college costs, but bombing your ambitions and family background into the ground in pursuit of perceived payoff isn't even a proper prototype.

"I guess I don’t believe in freedom. I don’t see the freedom," Montesano said, in reference to aimlessly dabbling for a passion in college. "You’re not stuck – that’s your power source, an advantage that other people don’t have. You can do things that other people can’t do without that knowledge, without that experience – that’s where the real freedom lies. You can do things that other people can’t do without it, and you get punished for that. It’s the freedom of being an artist."

Today, American students pit passions against paychecks in a tragic duel to the fiscal death. When Milken Friedman pushed for the creation of student debt, he unwittingly unleashed a $1.7 trillion destroyer of American dreams. Instead of flattening a home, it inadvertently threatened the futures of millions of Americans hoping to find passion in their college pursuits.

1958 is not a year America will soon forget.
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Western student and artist, Nhi Uyen Ngo, recounts how her early years in Vietnam fueled her passion for art.

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VOLUME 52 - ISSUE 03