Klipsun Magazine, 1987, Volume 18, Issue 02 - January

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Holy Nads, Batman! It's the new Klipsun!
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January 1987 Volume 18, no.2

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Special thanks to Robert Embrey, Kurt Wells for extra cheese, Talking Heads for inspiration, Western Print Plant, Bob Guettler, Pete Kendall, Ric Selene.

Klipsun is a Lummi Indian word meaning beautiful sunset.

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Front cover photo by Donna Simon-Cockerham
Back cover art by Bob Guettler

Klipsun magazine is printed by the WWU Print Plant, published twice quarterly out of College Hall 137, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA 98225, (206) 676-3737. Klipsun is supported by student fees and is distributed free.
Popping the top on
Over the years, many sightings of an elusive creature native to the Northwest have been reported. The two-legged beast also has thwarted numerous “safaris” and other campaigns to capture it. In recent years, it has been spotted in Colorado, Utah and the Dakotas.

The creature is the wild Rainier, one of the pillars of the Rainier Brewing Company’s advertising campaign since 1974. That year, Jim Foster, the company’s advertising manager since 1970, hired Heckler Associates, a local agency owned and run by Terry Heckler.

Heckler, working with Foster and Rainier’s in-house, or staff, agency, has been the creative force behind well over 100 television, as well as numerous radio advertisements, or “spots” in advertising lingo.

Prior to 1974, Rainier relied on national advertising agencies, and churned out typical beer commercials. Instead of herds of thundering wild Rainiers, or families with big red “Rs” growing from their heads (the “R-heads,” as opposed to the cone-heads), viewers saw stylish easterners sipping Rainier in posh settings and extolling the virtues of its full flavor.

Humor was not an element, nor was any of the zany irreverence that trademarks the Heckler spots.

Terry Heckler described the campaigns before his as “hops-and-grains type of stuff. The 1972 campaign had some slogan like “Rainier’s got the flavor.”"
In 1974, the brewery formed its own in-house agency, with Foster as president. An Aberdeen, Wash., native and University of Washington business graduate, Foster said the previous agencies, which were East Coast-based, "didn't understand the Northwest. They showed a total lack of sensitivity to what went on out here."

Rainier was using conventional advertising in an attempt to compete with national brands, such as Anheuser-Busch and Schlitz, which were beginning to dominate the market. "The Northwest was one of the last strongholds in regional brand loyalty," Foster explained. In the early 1970s, Olympia, Rainier, Lucky Lager and Heidelberg shared about 70 percent of the market. To penetrate the area, the national brands began targeting it for heavy advertising. "Rainier realized at that time that its competition was with the national brands," Foster said.

When working with these agencies proved too expensive, in addition to being relatively unsuccessful, Rainier established the in-house agency, Marketing Communications.

One of the first things Foster did was hire Heckler, whose graphic design work for K-2, the Vashon Island ski company, had impressed him. "We liked their approach and thought it could help Rainier establish a rather unique identity for itself," he said. "Heckler's rather unusual approach to communications seemed to fit our objectives."

The relationship has continued successfully for 12 years. Since 1978, Rainier has been owned by G. Heilemann, a Wisconsin-based corporation that oversees operations while the brewery continues with little interference.

Located just off the freeway south of downtown Seattle, the brewery produces the equivalent of 31 million cases of Rainier each year, along with smaller quantities of Rainier Ale and Rainier Light.

Foster is a professional-looking, warmly receptive man in his mid-40s. In his office are framed pictures of an early Heckler-era ad with Mickey Rooney and Boone Kirkman, an ex-heavyweight fighter from Renton. The two are shown in the Cascades, hunting wild Rainiers with just "a net and a bottle opener." Another picture shows Foster posing with Rooney. "I really liked the spots we did with Mickey Rooney," Foster said.

The spot with Kirkman showed he and Rooney tracking the wild Rainiers. After three days, they finally spotted one of the seven-foot-tall, 85- to 90-gallon creatures. It evaded the net, and Kirkman, armed with a "specially constructed giant bottle opener," was unable to pop its top. They did, however, manage to get a plaster cast of a fresh footprint out of the adventure.

The Rooney spots ran in 1976, the same year Rainier took over the top market share in Washington from a lagging Olympia beer. While other Northwest brands faded, Rainier became the best-selling beer in the region. During this time, it also expanded its market from primarily western Washington, and to a lesser degree other parts of the Northwest, to a number of other western states such as Colorado, Utah, Alaska and Hawaii.

In the "Mountain Room" at the brewery is a commemorative beer barrel, with a plaque beneath it commending Rainier's doubled production. Through a door at the end of the Mountain Room is "Beeraphernalia," Rainier's gift shop, where visitors can buy everything from T-shirts to a Rainier golf bag, cribbage board or skis.

Most of the designs and concepts are creations of Heckler and Foster. Heckler Associates also does the graphic design for Rainier, much of which appears in "Beeraphernalia."
Uptown from the brewery, Heckler Associates operates out of an unassuming, squat gray building near Seattle's Pier 70. Others of the company's large accounts have included New Balance shoes, Jansport sportswear, and Ivar's seafood.

Heckler, 44, founded the agency in 1969. In college, he studied graphic design at Carnegie-Mellon in Pittsburgh and attended graduate school at the University of Waterloo in Ontario, where he received a Masters in Applied Science.

Tall and balding, Heckler has a quiet, rather deadpan demeanor that gives little hint of the zany creativity lurking just below the surface.

Heckler's workspace is formed by high shelves on two sides, and the corner of the building on two others, and commands a charmingly urban industrial view of Pier 70 and the Alaskan Way Viaduct. In 1973, Foster asked the agency to work on some special Rainier Ale projects. Based on the results, Heckler Associates was given the full account.

After 13 years, the ads have risen to what is nearly a cult status in the Northwest, and people know to expect the bizarre from Rainier. Foster noted that it took viewers a while to get used to the commercials.

"People initially were puzzled; they didn't know what to think. Some thought it was totally insane. 'What had become of Rainier, had they taken leave of their senses?' Others liked them, were amused by them, started talking about them."

Surveys conducted in 1974, to learn which company's advertising viewers were most aware of, indicated Rainier had gone from being very low-profile to having the most presence of any beer commercials on the air.

Heckler knows the importance of making viewers sit up and take notice. He believes many commercials operate from a premise that anything too far out will estrange much of their audience.

"All that stuff is the result of major agencies working extremely hard to neutralize their stimuli so as not to alienate. So everybody else says, 'if the big guys do that, we should too.'"

One reason many ads seem aimed at a low level of intelligence, he said, is to make the viewer feel superior, and that in feeling so, they remember the product.

"I think there's better ways to do that that are a lot more direct," Heckler said. "Often we do things on a more editorial basis, instead of patronizing the viewers with low-level material."

Foster agreed this philosophy has been a key to Rainier's success. "I think the humor is different than the typical kind of humor," he said. "I think they recognize that the consumer is an intelligent person, and doesn't have to be hit over the head with a repetitive, redundant slogan or corny joke."

Heckler explained that advertising has its own vernacular, but that he tries to stay away from it when possible, because he thinks it is stale. He said ad copywriters are steeped in this language, which is why "I'd rather hire a journalist than ad copywriters."

Heckler Associates brought a fresh outlook to the advertising scene, and Heckler said apparently it caught on, because "sales took off about a half-year after we started."

Foster agreed. "Most people seemed to like the ads, and sales began to respond, too, so it appeared that it was working."

Sales indicated it was. The company experienced what Foster described as "rapid growth" (10-15 percent annual gains) until the early 1980s, when that growth levelled off in tandem with the recession. The rest of the beer industry has been flat during these years, and even experienced declines, he added.
Rainier Advertising Manager Jim Foster.

Heckler's creative genius has undoubtedly helped Rainier maintain its strong showing.

The first television commercials were shot as a group, and included the beer crossing spots, which debuted the wild Rainiers. These showed a view from a car, which passes a "Beer Crossing" sign, while wild Rainiers amble across the highway, and a voice in the car says, "Hey, look at the beers.

"All the bottles you see running around are usually University of Washington frat guys, or crew or football players. We'd like to issue them all ID cards saying, 'I was a wild Rainier,'" Heckler said.

Another commercial in this early group was the frog spot, with frogs, crickets and other night-time noisemakers chirping the words "Rainier," and "beer."

Another early effort Heckler called the "Horizontal Pour." Set in a restaurant, it shows a man pouring a beer, which flows horizontally across the screen to a glass held sideways by a woman about three feet away.

"Actually," Heckler said, "her back is on the floor, his is on the ceiling, and the camera rotates to create the illusion that the beer is flowing sideways.

A take-off from "Casablanca" was also among the early spots, showing a Bogart impersonator ordering a Rainier, and requesting another with the famous "Play it again, Sam" line.

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The budget for these early efforts was relatively low, Heckler said, with comparative bids from a Los Angeles company running about three times as much. That budget hasn't changed a lot in the 13 years since the first spots, other than with inflation.

"I'd venture to say we're working with one-third of what Bud spends on their spots," Heckler said. He estimated the average production cost of a conventional beer commercial to be $100,000, while Rainier's typically run around $30,000.

Nonetheless, Foster said Rainier spends about $5 million a year on advertising.

Over the course of each year, Marketing Communications staff accumulates ideas for spots from a number of sources. They listen to and read many ideas submitted by the public, and respond to each.

Around mid-summer, Heckler and his staff begin generating ideas "based on the input I give them, which they sort of assimilate, and come up with ideas of their own," Foster said. He and Heckler meet around early fall and decide which ideas fit together best to achieve their specific goals for that season.

After the ideas are chosen, Heckler makes "story boards" for the spots, which explain what will actually happen when the ad is shot, and writers on his staff create scripts for the spots.

One of Heckler's favorite spots showed a guy in a garage, wearing a lab coat. He points to different areas of the garage, Heckler said, showing all the things that can go wrong. "This is a leaky ceiling," the actor tells the viewer. "If you don't fix it, it can lead to dry rot."

Pointing to another area of the ceiling, he continues, "This is dry rot." He turns his back to the camera, and the viewer sees a Rainier trademark on his jacket. He faces the camera, points his finger at the viewer, and asks, "What can you do about it? Ah, you'll think of something." Finally, a voice says, "Rainier has confidence in its customers. Rainier has confidence in its product."

"I liked that one because it totally caught the viewer off guard," Heckler said. "This guy talks about all the terrible things that can happen, and then we say we have confidence in our product."

After the scripts are written for the spots, they go to G. Heilemann for further refinement, and early the next year are put up for production and filming bids.

Kaye-Smith Productions, a Seattle studio, has produced many of the TV spots, including all during the last two years. Gary Noren, a 1974 Western visual communications education graduate, is part owner of the studio, and films the spots.

One of Noren's favorite spots he called "Get It Yourself, Bob." Ed Liembacher, a long-term Heckler cohort, conceived the idea, in which a fat, middle-aged couch potato yells at his wife to get him a Rainier Light, and she yells back, "Get it yourself, Bob!"

"We used an actress we found down in L.A. It was a terrific concept, and poked fun at the macho bullshit most light commercials were using at the time," Noren said. "It also poked fun at the macho image of males, and made the woman look great."

Noren enjoys filming the Rainier commercials, and said a primary reason is "the people I work with. Working with Heckler, Jim Foster, and people like Ed Liembacher putting together the spots is an enjoyable group experience, and I think we all get a lot out of it."

Other than sales, Heckler's main goal for the TV spots is "to generate talk after viewing, as positive talk as possible."

"If you don't set out to make that one of your goals, very rarely do you reach that," he said.

The commercials don't attempt to cultivate a single image for Rainier drinkers, but instead try to appeal to everyone.

"We want to get people who realize that beer is an enjoyable act of refreshment," Heckler said.

Because of their nature (sometimes poking fun at things some of us take seriously), the Rainier commercials draw their share of criticism, but Heckler sees this positively.
"If you don't get that with some of your spots, you're not advertising with authority," he said. "That's what we're in the business for, to get emotional response."

Sometimes the response is too negative. A spoof on the Lawrence Welk show, with people playing Rainier bottles instead of horns, was taken off the air in Spokane after too many viewers complained it was offensive.

"People really like Lawrence Welk over there," he wryly noted.

A few other spots have received more criticism than the company felt comfortable with. One, causing some alarm among parents who worried kids might be encouraged to get into refrigerators, was taken off the air in Spokane after too many viewers complained it was offensive.

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"You gotta rub up against some of the edges, and you don't know if you're rubbing up against the right edges unless you're hearing that stuff; so we get a little nervous if we don't hear people complaining."

Heckler and crew have come up with a number of ideas they know can't go on the air. A demolition derby commercial, with giant beer cans on wheels slamming into each other — "It's a total foamer!" — bellows the announcer — originally was planned to use beer trucks rather than cans, but worries about drinking-and-driving implications changed the plan. "That's the way it should have been shot (with beer trucks)," Heckler said.

Foster also recalled a take-off on "The Waltons" that received a lot of criticism.

"We found that we don't take on wholesome family shows, even if they deserve it," he laughed. "It wasn't really offensive, I didn't think, but some people chose to."

Foster couldn't pinpoint a particular spot as his favorite, but has been impressed with the technical expertise in a few. "The one where the bottle caps fell like dominoes and formed a giant 'R' to the song 'You're the Tops'," was an example of this.

"Most of the wild Rainier spots I liked," Foster added.

One spot that surprised Foster with its success showed a large motorcycle roaring down the highway toward the camera. After it whizzes by, the engine whines out "Raaaaaaiiiil-neeeneeeen-Beeeeeeer."

"I never thought the commercial would become what it did. It seemed to appeal to everyone from infants to grandparents," Foster said. "You hear kids repeating it today, and it hasn't been on the air in years."

The cycle spot was shot on a highway south of Auburn, and most other spots are shot on location in the Northwest or in area studios. A few have been shot in California because of inclement local weather.

"With a name like Rainier," Foster said, "it's inescapably linked to the Northwest, and so we've tried to emphasize that, and it does have some positive imagery and appeal. It's still the cleanest, purest region in the country."

Heckler is happy that "Bud is pumping enormous amounts of dollars into this state because of Rainier, probably 10 times the amount they would normally spend.

"What makes me feel good is the sales results, and the fact that Bud is really held to a second position in this state is an important factor," he added. When people support Rainier, it causes Budweiser to pump more money into the state, creating what Heckler termed "a double positive whammy."

Heckler's Rainier commercials have won many awards, but he is unconcerned with them. "We never put them up for awards, because you have to pay to enter them. I don't put much credence in awards."

The success of the spots has spawned imitators, a vivid example being the Olympia Artesian spots a few years back.

Foster said beer ads didn't use much humor back in the mid-70s, but "now, if you stop and think about it, almost everyone is into some form of humor."

"Any time anyone does anything humorous, they compare it to the Rainier spots," Heckler noted. He denied the spots being created exclusively for humor, however.

"We don't use 'let's be funny' as an operating premise. What happens is that, hopefully, they're novel, and the human response to novelty is a smile."

The Rainier spots have created many smiles over the years, and Heckler has a fairly simple philosophy for creating new ideas. Ideas come from information, he said, so he and his staff pack themselves with information, then brainstorm, coming up with "a combination of group and individual ideas."

Heckler identified two different modes of thinking among his staff. "One throws out information, the other puts it together into ideas."

However, judgment must be deferred until after brainstorming, he said. The staff slowly develops a list of ideas and eliminates some until they come up with something that works.

"A lot of people think we're a bunch of wigged-out dudes, but the truth is you gotta come up with the ideas when you gotta come up with the ideas," Heckler said.

He had one final message for area readers. "If you're old enough to drink beer, drink Rainier."

As long as the wild Rainiers exist in their native habitat, quests to capture them will likely continue, though Noren said "you'll have to wait until next year to find out." He added none have been captured, though "I have some hidden in a warehouse, where no one can find them."
It is a typical, wet, gray, winter afternoon on the shores of Lake Samish. A chill wind whips over the water, bending it into ripples. It numbs the hands of eight struggling figures carrying a slim-hulled boat on their shoulders to a dock that juts out into the lake. The Western women’s crew team is preparing for another three-hour practice.

"Wain up!"
At the leader’s command to stop, the grunting procession comes to a halt where the dock begins.

"Okay, up and over your heads. Ready, UP!"
A balancing routine occurs as the women raise the 300-pound vessel over their heads and proceed slowly onto the slick dock.

Suddenly, torrents of rain drench them, but there is little time for complaint. All concentration is centered on putting the boat safely into the water.

The coxswain shouts a command. The leader of this crew of eight, responsible for steering the boat and directing the pace to be rowed, shouts a command. Each rower grabs wooden handles inside the hull, and they swing the vessel down to their waists. Cautionously, they shuffle to the edge of the dock and gently place the boat, or “shell,” into the water.

Seemingly indifferent to the rain, the rowers scamper back up the trail to outfit their boat with oars.

"Swing it!"
Another wooden shell is turned

By
Laura Towey
out of the boathouse and slowly trundled down the trail. Looking like pall bearers, some of the novice (first-year) members suck in their breaths as the weight causes their shoulders to sag.

"This thing weighs a ton," someone grunts. Nobody replies to this statement of the obvious as the procession shuffles to the dock.

Thus begins a typical turnout for the crew team. While most other collegiate sports are seasonal, Western crew is a year-long commitment. Five-day-a-week turnouts start in October and continue through winter. Spring heralds the racing season, and turnouts are increased to six days a week to fine-tune rowers' techniques.

Turnouts are demanding. Members put in an average of three hours a day, alternating rowing, running, weight lifting, aerobic exercising, and practicing techniques on an indoor rowing machine, or ergometer.

One of the more painful outdoor rituals practiced by the women's team is a five-minute, fully clothed "float" scheduled for October in frigid Lake Samish. In addition to serving as a swim test, the float is also a sort of initiation rite that makes novices full-fledged members of the team.

Crew members will row in rain, snow, ice, darkness—about anything except lightning.

This year, more novices tried out for the team than ever before, and although the ranks have thinned since the first day, 50 rowers still show up. In spite of the strenuousness, members claim the rewards are many.

"You learn to push yourself so hard," says Heather Jenkel, driving to the lake. Jenkel, a sophomore, is a novice on this year's team.

"Sometimes you find yourself wondering, 'How much more can I give?' If you stop rowing, or slow down, you let (your teammates) down. I love it, though."

"I turned out last year for three days, but I knew I didn't have the time to make the commitment. This year I just decided to go for it and do it. If I didn't, I knew I'd regret it for the rest of my life."

Jenkel rows the "stroke" position on a novice eight-person shell (called a "novice eight"). The stroke oar is the rower sitting nearest the stern (the rear of the boat) who, with guidance from the coxswain, sets the rhythm and cadence of the strokes.

"You have the really bad days and really good ones," she continues. "There's just that feeling when everything goes just right, and you're flying over the water, feelin' good . . . There's a really good fellowship on the team and there's no room to be lazy."

Varsity coach Barry Galls agreed.

"It's not a hardship, it's pleasant. We like it; it's fun, it's enjoyable. They wouldn't be doing it if they didn't like it."

Jenkel arrives at Camp Lutherwood, a Christian campground where Western's boat house is located. She parks her car on the gravel driveway, pulls out her raingear and follows the small crowd of sweat suit-clad women making their way to the boathouse.

Inside, organized chaos reigns as coxswains shout for help in lifting the boats off the storage racks and carrying them to the water. Other rowers grab the 11-foot oars and lean them against a fence near the docks. Once the shells are in the water, rowers slide the oars into oar locks, and the boats are ready for another day on the lake.

Novice coach Allison Dey is deciding which novices will row in each boat. Varsity, those rowers returning from the year before, are already on the lake. Once Dey finishes designating rowers, she and Galls have time for a short team meeting.

Outside, there is an ominous sound of rainfall, and rowers zip up their raingear. Everyone walks down to the lake.
Dey, clad in rubber pants and jacket, follows the women to the dock and climbs into her own engine-equipped boat. For three hours, she will follow the fleet of human-powered boats, shouting instructions and encouragement. Now, a senior, Dey is a non-paid volunteer coach. She competed as a varsity member for four years until her athletic eligibility expired. Now, she puts in more than 20 hours a week turning out with the team and designing workouts. She had to drop half her classes to find time for the job.

Like many other rowers who devoted a large portion of their college careers to crew, she found she couldn’t cut away that part of her life after her eligibility expired. Coaching offered a way of remaining a part of the team, and with the large group of new rowers this year, a novice coach was badly needed.

“I really do feel like I majored in crew,” she says, smiling. As a first-year coach, she has some ideas on how she would like to organize the turnouts.

“There’s a lot of different coaching styles. I do want to be a demanding coach, but I also want a personal relationship with other women on the team. I feel like I haven’t been as tough as I’m going to be, though,” she says with a chuckle.

“Some of them need to get their timing down—my God,” she says, watching a novice eight’s rowers struggling to get their oars in the water at the same time.

“These boats need some help,” she observes. “Watch the speed of their hands coming off their bodies and their knees coming up the slide.”

Rowers sit on seats that slide forward and backwards on grooved tracks. When stroking with the oar, the rower can put more power into each stroke by pushing explosively down with the legs and pulling the oar back. When the oar is pushed forward, the rower slides back up the tracks.

“Wain up!”

At Dey’s command, the fleet of four shells slows and stops. Dey brings her boat into their midst, shouting instructions. They have to learn to roll their hands more effectively, she says, so she wants them to row with their inside hand only.

The rowers nod, but no one seems to have the energy to respond. Shoulders sag and hands stiffen in the cold evening air.

Dey gives the command to start, and watches their progress across the rippling lake. The rain has stopped, and a beam of sunlight cuts through the scudding clouds.

“Bring it up, Kirsten!” she yells at a rower who’s slowing down. “Things should be getting more efficient,” she says to herself. “Wain up!”

The boats stop again, and Dey shouts the next command to the crew. Today they will row the length of the lake, which they have never done before.

Rowers must sprint at intervals, rowing more than 20 strokes per minute. Dey will time them. Thirty to 34 strokes per minute is the pace required to be competitive in a race, she says.

“You’re still at 20!” she yells at a lagging boat. “Let’s bring it up! Faster!”

The vessels glide over the water, which is now smooth as a sheet of glass. Sometimes the muted voice of a coxswain can be heard urging her rowers on, but the only constant sounds are that of oars cutting through water and hulls hissing as they plane over the lake’s surface. The women row in unison, their fluid movements propelling the needle-like boats forward.

Times like these, when the shells speed over the water and the rowers move together in a shared rhythm, crew members claim are the most rewarding moments of their sport.

“It’s just a feeling. Your boat is perfectly set (balanced), and you can hear bubbles flowing under your boat and you’re feeling good. It only happens two or three times a year, but you live for that. You just remember those really good feelings,” says Betsy Bower, a varsity member.

Bower, a senior, has been rowing since her sophomore year. She finished that season rowing in the national championships in the varsity lightweight division. Since then, she has rowed on a regional team that competed internationally in Canada. She is considering competing nationally after graduating.

She describes the differences between crew and other team sports.

“In high school, I always made the team, (basketball, softball and cross country), but I never contributed to the team,” she said.
“Crew is totally different. The best thing about it is there’s no stars. You all have to work together. I really felt like I was part of the team.”

Most of Western’s rowers begin their careers with no previous rowing experience. “You’re all starting off at the same level. You always have a chance,” she says.

Bower describes the beginnings of her own crew career. Upon making the varsity team in the spring of her sophomore year, she rowed the “two seat” (the second seat in the bow, or front, of the boat) and had to get to know the eight other women in her boat. When a varsity boat is established, those eight rowers and coxswain must work together for the rest of the season, fine-tuning their racing technique while learning to cope with each other.

“You have the best times with the people in your boat. And your worst times,” she said. “You never know when it will happen.”

Some of the worst times she remembers came during races.

“Races never feel good. During the past two years, I’ve been the stroke. I feel very responsible if we don’t do well . . . If I didn’t give 100 percent, I felt like I let the team down. Before a race, I just try and calm myself down. With crew, that pressure is exaggerated that much more. I don’t even remember the races. I don’t even know who we rowed next to sometimes.”

Of her teammates, she says, “We’re friends off the water, too. We have road trips (to races) and there’s lot’s of teasing back and forth.”

She added that many crew members, after spending so much time together in practice, room together as well. That is why it is very difficult for everyone when a member of an established boat has to quit the team.

“It’s really hard,” Bower says quietly. “(Your teammates) are hurting just as much as you.”

Once the long daily turnouts are gone from the crew member’s life, “you lose a big part of your social circle.”

However, once the racing season begins and the lineups in the boats have been established, most rowers stay on, says Coach Galls.

“Most people, if they’ve gotten that far into the season, plan on rowing in the spring. Quitting doesn’t happen that often by then,” he says.

If Galls finds there are some rowers who aren’t enjoying themselves, he often tells them to stay on a while longer, and if they still are unhappy, to quit.

But “by the time racing season starts, I wouldn’t discourage people then. You don’t really want to lose them.”

Galls stresses that most women who are on the varsity team usually return.

“It’s just like anything else. You get really attached to it. For most people, the most important aspect is being on a team, having those friendships. Also being competitive and fit.

“If you’re working well together, it doesn’t matter if you win or lose.”
LIFE IN THE
fast-food LANE

By Andy Perdue

It isn't as though cooking is a problem, but whenever I walk into my kitchen intending to create a meal, I begin thinking of the Domino's Pizza telephone number.

After my three-plus years at Western, I should be a famous — at least a household — name at that establishment. For all the times I've dialed those seven magic digits and opened my wallet for that instant dinner in a box, Domino's could finance a new wing for its downtown location.

Cory, my roommate of two years, usually just shakes his head and mutters something about barbarism whenever he sees the pizza delivery person at the door. Of course, Cory rarely calls for pizza. He enjoys cooking so much that sometimes I really believe he would like nothing more than to spend his afternoons over the proverbial hot stove.

Once, in high school, Cory and I went camping. It was out in the trees and stuff, and once the dozen or so McDonald's cheeseburgers I brought were gone, I was struggling for food. Cory, being the Eagle Scout he is, made a lemon meringue pie.

He doesn't fit the cook stereotype, though. He's pretty lean and doesn't look like he eats much of what he fixes. I, however, am built like a cook, or at least somebody who enjoys huge amounts of edibles.

We're talking Body by Burger King.

My idea of cooking is a can of My-Te-Fine tomato soup during commercials interrupting M*A*S*H or The Odd Couple. I've set speed records for heating the stuff. Usually, the only problem I have at times like this is deciding whether to use water or milk to make the soup. And that depends on how close the milk is to its expiration date.

Aside from simple items like the aforementioned soup, a piece of toast, or maybe a Skipper's all-you-can-eat blitzkrieg, my version of cooking is a bit like a battle zone: a search-and-destroy mission that finishes as an all-consuming war of attrition.

However, such a battle can be rather limited, depending upon the ammunition available.

For example, last spring when I was low on funds and trying to rid myself of canned food, I often had cream of mushroom soup and a diet Shasta cola for breakfast. Once, however, I warmed a chicken pot pie for breakfast, only to find it was too hot to eat when I brought it out of the oven. So, I put it in the freezer to cool, and fell asleep.

It's amazing what a freezer can do to a hot chicken pot pie in an hour.

By the second warming, the glop inside the foil dish had little texture and no taste.

Another time, I decided to attempt my own version of Campbell's Chunky Soup. You know, the tough decision between a fork and a spoon.

It was near the end of spring quarter and I had a shelf full of canned soup. I arrived home hungry early one morning, so I got out three cans of soup — split pea, chicken noodle and cream of shrimp — and mixed them together. Heck, I figured that was all they did to make the chunky soup.

My version of cooking is a bit like a battle zone: a search-and-destroy mission that finishes as an all-consuming war of attrition.

However, this assumption proved incorrect. My stomach rebelled — something it doesn't often do — and I had to make a quick sacrifice to the porcelain god.

But my first and greatest step toward domestication came and went a couple of years ago while I was working in Port Townsend. The experience wasn't anything college had prepared me for, since, for two years, I'd been weaned on SAGA food. Upon moving to Port Townsend, I soon discovered it was missing the friendly Golden Arches, and didn't even have a Kentucky Fried Chicken.
In fact, the closest thing to fast food was a Thriftway.

So I went grocery shopping. I had a cart, a list and coupons. I was ready for battle. Then I started having flashbacks from the movie "Mr. Mom," and suddenly realized just how frightening the women's lib movement really is.

Suddenly, turning a corner, I found Nirvana in the form of Western Family macaroni and cheese. The staple crop of the American college student. The beautifully generic, red-white-and-blue box leapt toward me, and only 29 cents apiece. I purchased six, rushed home and began. Opening a box, I read the instructions.

"Put macaroni into six cups of boiling water. After 10 minutes, drain the macaroni."

Cooking the macaroni went O.K., but when I tipped the pot over the sink to drain the water, I dumped half of the macaroni with it. As I picked the pasta out from around the drain, I wondered if it wouldn't be less trouble to drive the 50 miles to Port Angeles in search of a Pizza Haven.

Then it began getting rather . . . uh . . . sticky. "Add a half cup of milk and a quarter cup of butter or margarine."

I had to return to the grocery store, as I had failed to realize I would need ingredients other than what came in the box.

Upon returning, I discovered the macaroni had molded itself into a lump. I soaked it a while longer, but that didn't help. So, smashing it down into another pan, I added the other ingredients: the milk, margarine and "flavor packet."

I squashed and pummeled the mixture until it formed a yellowish-orange, globulated mess that smelled like macaroni and cheese but appeared to have been napalmmed. I didn't care that it looked like something a dog wouldn't sniff, figuring it all gets mixed up when being digested anyway.

I dumped a bunch of salt on it, sat down with a Diet Coke and dug in.

Suddenly I remembered something from my childhood: I hate macaroni and cheese.
More than 60,000 Seattle Seahawks fans spring from their seats and throw their hands in the air, cheering. The wave of applause echoing from the cement roof and walls of the Kingdome expresses their affection and admiration as another pass is caught by Seattle's blue-eyed boy, All-Pro wide receiver Steve Largent.

Largent hustles back to the Seahawk huddle, seemingly oblivious of the eruption from the stands. He is a compact 5-foot 11-inch, 190 pounds. Short-cropped blond hair frames the intense expression of concentration that never leaves his face during a game.

That concentration, combined with his elusive way of darting around the field—first leaning one way then spinning the other—deceives even the most experienced defense.

"I have good football instincts from having played so long," Largent says. "I try to stay in shape, and play with a lot of confidence."

Largent pushes himself, refining those instincts during daily practices with Seahawks in the Bubble, the covered practice field. He is more consistent than anyone in the National Football League at outfoxing the defense and catching the ball.

Dressed casually in a gray T-shirt and blue cotton pants, his hair still wet from his shower, Largent stops by the administration building after practice for mandatory viewing of game films.

Largent has caught hundreds of footballs in his 10-plus years with the Seahawks. He stands second to San Diego's Charlie Joiner on the NFL's all-time pass reception list.

This prolific record has earned Largent a dominant share of the Seahawks' "Marcus Nalley Most Valuable Player" award.

A silver helmet, emblazoned with the blue-and-green Seahawk logo, sits atop the four-foot-high trophy as a salute to the players named on its brass honor roll. The trophy, donated by Nalley Fine Foods, a Seahawk sponsor, has been awarded annually by a team member vote since 1976.

STEVE LARGENT 1977.
STEVE LARGENT 1979.
STEVE LARGENT 1981.
STEVE LARGENT 1985.

Ten years later, on Oct. 6, 1986, in the Kingdome, Largent broke the NFL record for consecutive games with at least one reception. Game number
128 for Largent, against the San Diego Chargers, retired the mark set by Harold Carmichael of the Philadelphia Eagles during his career from 1972-1980.

He says he didn’t feel much pressure about the record.

“[H]ere’s a greater pressure just playing football, being in the season and trying to win while being successful at your position,” he drawls, his soft southern accent still discernible.

Largent graduated from Tulsa University in 1976 with a degree in biology. During both his junior and senior years, he led the nation in touchdown catches, with 14 each season. But because of his small size and lack of speed (then 4.65 seconds in

the 40-yard dash) he was not selected until the fourth round of the NFL draft by the Houston Oilers.

Released on waivers after the final exhibition game, Largent was picked up by the Seahawks in a pre-season trade. Houston, showing a lack of foresight, swapped Largent for a 1977 eighth-round draft pick.

Since then, Largent has missed only three games. He has played more games and scored more points than any other Seahawk player in history.

Stuffing a cookie in his mouth, he says he has been fortunate to stay so healthy. “I don’t have a special diet. I eat whatever I want. My wife hates me for that,” he laughs.

His schedule during the season, which begins with training camp in mid-July and “ends hopefully after the Superbowl,” is so hectic that he has only one day off—Tuesday.

He devotes Tuesdays and evenings to his family. “Tuesday mornings I go to an aerobics class with my wife, Terry. Then usually we go out to lunch, shop, and do errands that we don’t have time to do the rest of the week.

“Tuesday nights my son has been playing flag football, so we go to his games.” Kyle, Largent’s seven-year-old, plays for a team at the parochial school where he attends second grade.

“It’s a neat deal because they don’t keep score,” Largent says. “It’s just a fun, free-for-all, backyard type of football game. I really had not intended to let him play any type of organized sports until he was older, but this is pretty loosely structured and just a lot of fun for him.”

Is Kyle following in Dad’s long strides as a wide receiver? Largent laughs and shrugs. “He plays all the positions all over the field.”

Victory dinners after Kyle’s games are celebrated at “some place you can get in and out of quickly with four kids.” If the kids choose the place, “It’s McDonald’s every time,” Largent says, grimacing. “I don’t like McDonald’s at all.”

He reserves Friday nights for “dates” with his high-school sweetheart and bride of nearly 12 years. “Usually, we just go out to dinner,” he says. “Then maybe we’ll go get dessert somewhere. Maybe go for a walk, or shop together—that’s a lot of fun.”

Largent says it’s hard for them to be anonymous in Seattle, but not bothersome enough to make them want to stay home all the time.

“People for the most part are real sensitive. They’re not overbearing or rude. They do bother us a little bit, sometimes.”

With an occupation that takes him away from home nearly every Sunday during football season, Largent often misses one of the staples of his life—church services.

“We are really involved in our church back in Tulsa where we live during the off-season, but out here I don’t get to attend. Terry goes, and then comes to the game later if I’m playing in Seattle.”
They do attend the team Bible study at Seahawk Dave Brown's house on Thursdays with six or seven other couples.

Largent says being a Christian doesn't affect the way he plays. "Being a Christian is not just a lifestyle, but your life. It's not like you separate your life into different categories and have them overlap in certain areas.

"You have to look at the whole sphere of your life as being a Christian. Involved in that sphere is also football, being a husband and being a father."

Being a father is a responsibility Largent enjoys. "We go feed the ducks down in the park in Kirkland, we go for bike rides and walks.

"A lot of time is spent just going to the different activities they are involved in. Kyle just finished his football season last week. Casie (his five-year-old daughter) is in gymnastics. So we're always going in one direction or another."

The Largents don't watch TV unless dad is playing. "We kind of feel that TV is a negative influence," Largent says. "Not only by what is coming out at you, but also what you lose in wasted time by watching TV in relationship to what you could accomplish.

"We've always limited the amount of TV our kids watch, and we watch." Largent does enjoy listening to the radio, "but with four kids you don't need too much more noise."

During the off-season, when the family is in Tulsa, Largent fishes for bass and plays a lot of tennis with Terry.

"I really enjoy playing tennis with Terry. She is getting back into the kind of shape she likes to be in. Having four kids takes its toll on a woman."

Terry majored in zoology at Tulsa. Now she manages the Largent Zoo in Kirkland that's hopping with four active kids-Kyle, Casie, two-year-old Kelly, and Kramer, 11 months.

Kramer was born in November 1985, with spina bifida, or an open spine. "He'll have some complications on down the road. At this point he's just a normal baby," Largent says. "We don't take any special precautions with him. He's just like all our other babies."

After the kids are put to bed, Largent says he and Terry collapse. "After practice, and she's been with the kids all day, carpooling, and fixing lunches, we sit down and maybe read the paper together, or talk.

"We pay the bills, balance the budget, wash the clothes—all those normal kinds of things."
Wayne Miller, the owner of Rumors Tavern, is a large, husky man who smiles often when he speaks. He leaned over the bar and grinned. “It’s my birthday,” he said, before recounting the history of Rumors and local female impersonator shows.

“The tavern changed from a straight to gay clientele in 1974. First it was The Hut, then Toyon, and now Rumors.”

Miller said The Hut hosted drag shows infrequently after the bar became gay, but Rumors averages three shows every couple of months.

Rumors doesn’t formally present itself as a dive, but a joint. It’s the kind of place you might get caught dead drunk in and not realize it was gay until you saw the pictures of half-nude men on the ceiling.

The tavern boasts a small dance floor that also serves as a stage for impersonator shows.

Miss Gay Bellingham was drinking a beer in the tavern. He prefers being called by his drag name, “Ophelia,” because most people, including his family, don’t assume he’s gay.

Miss Gay Bellingham is chosen at Rumors once every year to represent Bellingham’s gay community at other functions across the state.

Ophelia wore a denim jacket, jeans and a gray-and-yellow sweatshirt. He languidly held a Marlboro cigarette.

He’s lived in Bellingham for 13 years. A year ago, he started impersonating women at Rumors. He flashed a toothy smile as he recalled his first show. “Other than butterflies, it felt good. It was definitely fun.”

“I performed, ‘Every Time I See Your Picture I Cry,’ by Luba, a Canadian recording artist. Why? Because I’d broken up with a lover.”

Ophelia said he hadn’t always wanted to impersonate women because “people look down upon female impersonators as not being total men.” However, he’s comfortable in his role. “I still see myself in make up, just because I know what I look like. I’ve been told I look natural (as a woman). “Actually, (impersonation) is an art form, gutsy,” he emphasized. “If someone can perform as a woman, they’ve got to be insane. As long as they keep to reality above the shows they do, they’ll be OK.”

Keeping to reality for Ophelia means not letting the character take over. “I try not to immerse in Ophelia, because the tendency is for female impersonators to become bitches or cranky. I’m not that way normally, and I cannot see why Ophelia has to follow a stereotype.”

Shopping is often difficult for impersonators, so Ophelia makes most of his own costumes. When he does decide to go shopping, however, he follows a few self-set guidelines.

“If it’s pre-made, you buy it. You say it’s for a sister or a girlfriend. (Or) you just don’t say anything and hope to God they don’t ask.”

He leaned back in his chair and grinned as he recalled the site of his first shopping trip. “It was the most unglamorous place around: Salvation Army. Their outfits aren’t too ancient, and can be very easily fixed to suit today’s style.”
Remembering another shopping experience, Ophelia burst into laughter.

"I was looking for pantyhose at Woolworth's, digging through the stacks while the salesperson was trying to get by. I said, 'God, I wish they had my size.' Granted, the people I was with thought it was funny. The salesperson walked through the store and followed us until we left. I still didn’t find my size."

Even though pantyhose presented a problem then, Ophelia never has had trouble filling out a bra.

"I wear straps and fill the cups with rice. It works well; makes very heavy boobs." He pantomimed holding breasts, shaking imaginary mammary glands up and down in his cupped palms. He said none has ever slipped out of his bra during a performance.

"I try to buy costumes according to song. The song will mean nothing if the audio doesn’t match the video. If you don’t dress to the song, people will tune you out."

Songs are as varied as costumes. "Ophelia can sing country, rock, and jazz. I dress differently for different kinds of music. For heavy metal, Ophelia would wear leather, chains, and wild hair."

He laughed. "The hair would have to look like it hasn’t been combed for weeks. I’d work it so people would get mad at me. I go and have fun, and be totally wild. Totally wild! The music and words of a song take over how I move."

It’s obvious Ophelia enjoys impersonation. He said some favorable aspects are performing, entertaining people without showing your real self, and making new friends.

He holds other female impersonators in high regard, especially "when I see them on TV, in front of people, making money and keeping their personality. If they can live with it, so can I."

"Right now it’s just for fun. I’m not ruling a professional life out. I have to consider possibilities; how would it affect my life, my relationships with family and friends."

Another impersonator who isn’t ruling out a professional life is Mark Palsson.

Palsson, or "Seneca," as he calls himself in costume, is a thin man with blond, shoulder-length hair. His Fu Manchu moustache rises with his cheekbones when he grins, which is often. "I’m growing the moustache—until tonight."

Out of costume, the 25-year-old Palsson is a soft-spoken man who attends Skagit Valley Community College in Mt. Vernon. He plans to transfer to Western to major in business administration and computer science.

At home in his modestly furnished Mt. Vernon apartment, Palsson said he never dresses as a woman on a daily basis, but only for shows.

"I don’t do it during the day. It’s the two worlds of Seneca Jones, like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde!" he laughed.

The guest room of his apartment, which also serves as his dressing room, is decorated with pictures of Marilyn Monroe. Two prom photos from his years at Seattle’s Franklin High School sit on a dresser.
Palsson fidgeted as he spoke. He said he began impersonating women five years ago in Seattle "at the 611 Club on Second Avenue."

"I didn't perform professionally until I was 21. I performed at parties and underage clubs."

Palsson walked from the guest room to the bathroom, filled a sink with water, lathered his face and began to shave.

"I like to sing," he said. "I have a fairly decent voice, in the range of Billie Holliday. I love singing the blues. It's easy to sing Billie because she has a heavy and raspy voice."

Although Palsson likes Holliday, he impersonates Joan Rivers. "I will perform professionally as soon as I hear from Joan Rivers about going on her show. I love Joan. She's bitchy."

Palsson finished shaving. Less inhibited than Ophelia, he has no qualms about shopping.

"When I'm buying clothes, people think I'm buying them as a gift. If people ask, I say I'm buying it for me. I like to see people's facial expressions. Once I went shopping in drag, I tried a dress on, and yes, I went into the ladies room."

As Palsson plugged in a curling iron, he continued, chuckling, "I've always been dressing up. I played mother when playing house. If my sisters didn't let me, I'd beat them up."

He applied make-up base to his face, then powdered it. He picked up the curling iron and went to work on his blond tresses.

Palsson curls his hair because Seneca doesn't wear wigs while performing.

"I don't like wigs. Wigs don't look real; they're hot and expensive. My hair looks real on stage. People compliment me. When they know it's my own hair, they like it even more."

Palsson compared himself to Seneca while he molded his curls. "Stage is a new world. Mark is not a performer. He's real shy; he gets embarrassed. Seneca has no feelings. To Seneca, if you want to make it in this world, tell it like it is. She's not scared of nobody, nothing. She's totally opposite; I guess she knows if she acts like me, she'll never make it as a star."

"Seneca is classy and elegant, but she's been in fights. Yes, virtual fist-fights. There was this pimp in Seattle. I was out dressed with a girlfriend in Seattle, and we were driving. This pimp pulled up and followed, thinking we were two more for his herd."

"We took detours and he kept following. We stopped the car, and I got out and told him he better quit. Well, my long nails were ripped off and I bruised my fingers. A week later I went to the hospital and had a sprained finger and a hairline fracture in the rib. I don't take no shit. If I have to defend myself, I will."

Palsson completed his hair and pouted. "Cute curls," he grinned, as he applied half a can of Aqua Net hair spray to the finished product. He penciled on eyeliner and examined the result in the mirror.

"A female impersonator gives the illusion of a real woman. You don't have to be gay to pull off the illusion."

He brushed on pink eyeshadow, then added white sparkle powder over it.

"Life as a woman would be a real bitch if you had to do this every day. Ask a real woman. I'm thankful I'm a man."

Palsson said the makeup is only for performing under bright stage lights. He batted his eyes, buckled his knees, and pulled back his hair, then laughed the motions away.

His face finished, Palsson returned to his dressing room, where he slipped into a black skirt and put on a bra. Unlike Ophelia, he uses "falsies."

"Sometimes I use a bra, sometimes I glue them on. If it's low cut, I want to glue them. I use spirit gum. You glue on your foam-rubber falsies with nipples. You have a more real appearance with something tight."

Palsson, now in full costume, wore long, dangly earrings that accented his features, a woman's black, formal coat, and an ivory ruffled shirt. Now Seneca, he mocked a Marilyn pose and stuck out his tongue.

At the Hideaway Tavern's Halloween Drag Show, Ophelia sat demurely on a stool, smiling through red lipstick. He wore a ratty blond wig that had been thrashed by a comb. A green dress hugged his figure and an imitation diamond and ruby brooch sparkled between his breasts. "They're big boobs," he said, chuckling.

Costume putty had been attached to his nose, giving the illusion it had been broken but never healed. His make-up was unflattering and made him look like he had been beaten.

"I'm having fun with drag," he explained. "The heavy make-up is like wearing racing stripes. I'm a little old lady who wants to be 25 again."

Ophelia's legs were encased in red fishnet stockings. He smiled, raised his eyebrows and hiked his hemline, revealing a lavender garter on his thigh. Seneca pranced in, wearing a silver lame' dress with green beaded trim. A feather boa wrapped his head and dangled past his knees, and three-inch-long, imitation nails protruded from his fingers. A sequined purse was tucked in the crook of his arm.

A large, older drag queen was announcing performers loudly into a microphone that buzzed with static, and he made no effort to hide his drunkenness.

"Look at those legs!" he hollered as Seneca took the stage.

The sound of Aretha Franklin's "Who's Zoomin' Who" filled the tavern as Seneca strutted through his number.

People raised dollar bills in their hands, and a few approached the stage with their cash and received a peck from the performer. Just as the song was drawing to a finish, his costume came apart. Deflated, he left the stage, and then it was Ophelia's turn.

Ophelia's musical choice was Dolly Parton's "Me And Little Andy." Less flamboyant than Seneca, he stood in one spot and performed the song like a storyteller interpreting a children's novel. Halfway through it, he raised his dress and exposed his lavender garter.

Meanwhile, Seneca was picking up the nails that had fallen from his fingers. It was time, he said, to put himself back together, run up to Rumors and slug a few beers through his exhausted body.
Western President G. Robert Ross sent all of us his drug warning letter. Western’s athletic department is instituting drug education for student athletes. Ronald and “Just-say-no” Nancy Reagan appeared jointly on TV in a pseudo-parental plea for us to avoid illegal drug use, while our lawmakers in Washington, D.C. have suggested death to pushers, military involvement in civilian drug enforcement, and admiss­tance of illegal evidence in trials as steps to “crack” down on drug abuse.

Like our government’s wars on poverty and communism, the war on drugs has a slim chance of succeeding. Politicians have not, and probably never will, pay much attention to eliminating the deep-rooted causes of drug abuse. These causes have grown into our culture, and indeed may be impossible to eliminate by political means. But politicians will try to curb drug abuse in America, and their recent narrow-minded attempts to do so have cast a fascist shadow over our democracy. What nobody claiming to be concerned about the “drug problem” seems to be considering is that millions of us use illegal drugs because we ought to. Life in America has at once become so boring and overstimulating, so fragmented and paradoxical, that few of us with any awareness broader than Jerry Falwell don’t want to reach for a joint or a line now and then—or perhaps regularly—in an at least brief attempt to literally get out of our minds.

It becomes clear to us growing up that if we don’t alter our own consciousnesses, our culture will do it for us. Pressures, not pushers, may be underlying younger and younger kids’ initia­tions into drug use. Coming of age in the 1980s means never knowing a time without the stiff expectations of career-oriented education; time accelerated by the everyday use of lightning-fast computers; anxiety kindled by seductive advertising; comprehension blocked into TV segments; the irony of an old, inept actor as President of the United States and the looming spectre of nuclear annihilation.

If mommy and daddy down a bourbon at the end of the day, why shouldn’t junior and sis? And if pills are pushed as an Rx for most modern ills, why should it surprise us to find that other drugs help kids loosen up before the high school dance?

The common impulse to reject these cultural pressures is person­ified in the kid walking silently down a city street, decked out in sunglasses and a Walkman any day—or night. See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil. And we walk by in our own silence, as if to say, “Hey, it’s okay, buddy. We understand.”

The ’80s have been hard on the psyche. Before some of us knew what hit us, the host of “Death Valley Days” was our president. Reagan’s image-making and oversimplified answers to complex problems made him a popular president for six years.

Some of us elected him and some of us have loved him. He has propped up the economy, but on the backs of our children, who will carry the burden of history’s largest domestic debt into the coming decades. He told us to feel good about America by res-
cuing jingoism from the pejorative and making it a cornerstone of his patriotic fantasy—witness Grenada, Libya, Iran and Nicaragua. And he encouraged us to feel good about ourselves by ignoring the plights of the less fortunate, and reinstating racism, sexism and rule by the financially powerful.

“Ain’t that America…”

Most of the population has enjoyed a psychic reprieve and thrived in this “wonderland.” Others, however, have been quaking at the reality they see waiting to pounce.

The debt will have to be repaid when Reagan leaves office or it will break us. Minorities will not remain passive as we approach a police state. Somehow, we will have to live cooperatively with competing international ideologies and the tension of global nuclear threat. And Reagan’s international belligerence finally has begun to backfire in the Iranian scandal.

Ironically, some who have chosen to face these complex realities that Reagan can’t—or won’t—may be the ones resorting to drugs to numb their greater sensibilities until the inevitable becomes obvious. Yet others, including some of our nation’s most influential men, will continue to defend this status quo against clear thinking and common sense—with military strength and attacks on personal freedoms.

The latter, though, yachting comfortably in 1987 mainstream America, have their own escapes. And while some of these do involve illegal drugs, they also include a variety of culturally sanctioned that, if they don’t reinforce, at least ignore our culture’s deeper problems.

One popular escape from reality is the belief that Reagan and his ideas simply are beyond criticism. Criticism makes you the enemy, not part of the democratic process. Since Reagan took office, Americans have been encouraged to think in black and white.

You’re either for the contras or you’re soft on communism. You’re either for Star Wars or you support Soviet superiority in the arms race. You’re either for random mandatory drug testing or you’re a drug abuser.

Blind faith in capitalism, as both an economic system and an ideology, has become so central to the American way of life that considering other systems is thought to be the work of treasonous fruitcakes. Again, you’re either for big business or you’re a Marxist-Leninist commie pinko fag.

Choose.

Capitalism has kept many Americans materially comfortable, and in that comfort inured to the flaws inherent in a system that promises the world our standard of living. That’s a tough promise to cash in on when we use up the vast majority of the world’s resources that are the very “capital” of our capitalism.

So, in the ’80s, whether we choose to face the complexities and ambiguities of life and need to get stoned once in a while to forget all that shit; or whether we choose as a way of life to ignore all that shit, and punish drug users as a threat to the culture that thrives on such ignorance, I guess, still, we’re lucky to live in a land where just about everybody’s almost free to choose their own poison.
While still a naive high school senior, I decided to undergo the epic transition from a civilized existence to the confused world of Tolstoy and cheap beer known as "the college experience."

All my friends were going to college because their parents had told them to, and I realized that, unless I joined these academic lemmings in their quest for knowledge, I would be working part time at 7-11 until well into middle age.

Having jumped on the scholastic bandwagon, I first had to decide which school to attend. With this task in mind, I sent away to a few of the state universities for the lowdown on what each school offered. After a few weeks, the brochures started arriving. At last, I figured, I had the information with which to make a decision.

But soon I discovered the various pamphlets read like the literary equivalent of generic groceries. Every school provided a "unique educational opportunity, ensuring personal as well as academic development of the individual." No help there.

Another feature shared by the brochures was the photo of the school's single ivy-covered building. Every state university has such a token building, and they want every prospective student to see it, as if ivy-covered buildings are a sure sign of academic excellence.

Sifting through this worthless pile of guides, I noticed another similarity. Every photo seemed to portray the same happy students, smiling and chatting as they strolled to class in their new argyle sweaters. One school's herd of pimple-free preppies was virtually indistinguishable from the next school's herd of pimple-free preppies.

These photos were practically the only exposure my inexperienced mind had to "the college experience." So, for my last six months of high school, and throughout the following summer, my image of college was that of a place where the sun constantly shines, guys always have great-looking girls to walk to class with, and every student looks as though they wind-surf, snow ski and spend numerous weekends per year in Tahiti.

Finally, after careful assessment of each school's merits, based on my calculations of average class sizes, ratios of students to professors, and projected ratio of single females to eligible males, I decisively resolved to go where most of my friends were going.

After a long summer of working to help with finances, I was primed and ready for "the college experience." What excitement, I thought as I headed north, expecting to be a brochure star myself in no time.

Once on campus, however, I was immediately suspicious. Facing me was a scene of rain-drenched chaos: frightened students having flashbacks of parents abandoning them at summer camp, dorm administrators on the verge of nervous breakdowns, and rumpled parents fleeing the madness in their new "I love University" sweatshirts.

Could this be the same relaxed haven of sunshine and ivy portrayed in the brochure?

Whatever romantic illusions I still might have entertained after this were completely shattered the moment I saw my dorm room. Concrete and tile—everywhere. Not pretty tile, either. The kind of tile your grandparents have in their kitchen. A severely depressed interior decorator of hospital rooms and mental wards might have designed a space like this.
Not a happy scene.
The so-called "comfortable living conditions" described in the brochure were actually a confined cubicle only slightly larger than the entry hall of my parents' home.

This initial shock wore off as I moved my junk in, realizing things were not quite as bad as I had first imagined. With some decent posters and a good stereo, even a Turkish prison could be made "homey." But one worry still plagued me.

I was going to have to share this rat's nest with another guy.

As I waited for him to show up, I grew increasingly anxious. I began to speculate on the character of my future competitor for space.

Maybe it'll be a Sid Vicious clone who'll plaster the walls with anarchist propaganda and have all his head-shaven buddies over to slam dance the night away.

Or a born-again Jerry Falwell supporter, who'll continually lecture me on how to avoid the sinful evils of dance and drink, and the ultimate damnation of all who participate in such pagan rituals.

Then, I began to speculate on why this person couldn't find a friend or acquaintance who would agree to room with him. Why does he have to victimize me by taking half of my meager allotted space? There must be at least a few people from his high school here; why did none of them want to room with him?

Does he have a mildly contagious case of leprosy? An uncontrollable habit of drooling on everybody's books and albums? What is it with this friendless loner?

When my new roomy finally shows up, however, I'm relieved to find he's neither an anarchist nor a Bible thumper, but just another perplexed levelling who had been enticed by images of ivy, sun decks and beautiful women.

After settling into this unsettling environment, I was ready to face the next obstacle in "the college experience": classes.

Realizing victory in this area was vital to completing collegiate rites of passage, I took special precautions to ensure my success. I decided if I restricted the partying to weekends and happy hours, I would be able to breeze by with little trouble.

Right.

This illusion was immediately shattered on the first day of classes. Unsuspecting, I walked into a room the size of The Paramount Theater, better suited for a rock concert than a college lecture. And it wasn't long before I began to wish I was at a rock concert, or even a jazz concert.

Hell, I'd rather be at an opera than here, listening to this insufferable monologue on the history of existentialism, or existentialism, or whatever it is.

Instead of a blackboard and chalk, the instructor had a microphone and a podium. Is this what was meant by "a personal touch in the classroom?"

And worst of all, these verbose, overgrown-word-wielders who call themselves "profs" expected me to do more work in the next 10 weeks than I had in my entire high school career.

Eventually, I learned to keep up with my rugged class work by eliminating from my daily routine such nonessentials as sleep and relaxation. So what if I had more baggage under my eyes than would be allowed on a TWA flight? I was keeping a respectable grade-point average.

Just as I was beginning to think I had successfully adjusted to college life, along came another obstacle: the collegiate bureaucracy.

I encountered it when I received a $3 parking ticket while dropping some supplies off at a building. I thought I could simply explain my circumstances to the parking office, and they, realizing their mistake, would tear up the ticket and apologize for the inconvenience.

I soon discovered, however, that trying to explain a special case to those bureaucratic clones was like trying to explain the Golden Rule to a mercenary soldier.

After several minutes of frantic explanation, I finally gave in to the nine-to-fiver behind the desk and her repetitive monotone of "the signs are clearly posted," and paid the fine.

Seemingly I had lost this battle, but actually I had gained something. For the first time, I felt as if I was living "the college experience." Only after withstanding the abuse of collegiate bureaucracy can one really feel they have come close to the true essence of this experience.

I now had successfully weathered the logistics of deciding on and entering a college, learned to handle stresses of dorm living, designed a no-sleep routine to ensure a respectable GPA, and been exposed to the invaluable lesson of not messing with the bureaucracy.

I was living "the college experience," just like the self-assured students in the brochures.

Feeling rather satisfied with my progress, I triumphantly strolled to the financial aid office, thinking nothing could trip me up at this point.

"What do you mean, my check is gonna be a little late?"
'80s Superheroes:

By John G. Purcell

★
★
★

"I am loyal to nothing, General—except the dream."
— Captain America


"J" oker, there's nothing wrong with you that I can't fix with my hands."

With these words, Batman has returned, '80s style. Not the G-rated, idealistic Batman of the '40s and '50s, nor the slapstick Batman of the '60s television show, but a gritty, tough, middle-aged Batman of the new mini-series comic, "The Dark Knight Returns."

And with the Caped Crusader pushing 55, the medium that spawned him and his kind also has matured: the comic book.

"The stories, the characters are more adult," says Michael Goodson, proprietor of The Comics Place in Bellingham's Bay Street Mall. Goodson is surrounded by his wares, many of them covered in cellophane envelopes to keep them in mint condition.

He estimates that 70 percent of comic buyers and readers are over 18. These readers are devouring titles such as "X-Men," "Swamp Thing," "Man of Steel," "The Dark Knight," and "American Flagg," all in numbers large enough to impress a mass market paperback publisher.

The new Batman series is selling more than 400,000 copies per issue, and the best-selling "X-Men" is selling close to 500,000 per monthly issue, Goodson says. Limited-edition series are topping the list—the new Superman, "Man of Steel," a six-part epic, is selling more than 800,000 copies.
All of these sales are infusing the industry with new blood. Goodson says 17 new publishers have arrived on the scene to join the old standbys such as Marvel and DC.

Hubert Dolan, 22, is a comic enthusiast, having collected comics as long as he can remember. He is proud of a collection he estimates is worth between $1,500 and $2,000. Many of these are mint-condition “X-Men” and “Daredevil” comics from the mid-’70s, which Goodson says are extremely collectable right now, due to comic-buying trends.

“As people are wholeheartedly addicted to soap operas,” Dolan says, “comics are that to me.”

New themes, writers, artists and marketing approaches are changing the comic book. The reigning kings of the industry are American writer/artist Frank Miller and Canadian writer/artist John Byrne. While not newcomers to the industry, they are responsible for the revivals of the two big heroes, Superman and Batman.

For example, “The Dark Knight” hardly resembles the typical comic book. The back is gummed, not stapled, and the cover and pages are of much thicker, higher-quality stock than usual. Also, at $2.95, the price of “The Dark Knight” is nearly four times that of an average release like “X-Men.”

“‘The stories, the characters are more adult.’”
— Michael Goodson

The art is bold and dramatic, with the Caped Crusader appearing more like a winged demon than the familiar crime-fighting friend, not because of a costume change, but the artist’s perspective, which often shows him silhouetted.

Comics differ greatly depending on who draws them, Dolan says. The character changes greatly with the artist.”

The narrative style is vivid and suspenseful. In one sequence, a flashback, empty cartridges being ejected from a gun are juxtaposed with close-ups of grimacing and terrified faces during a street-corner killing. The shells take several frames to leave the gun as each bullet is fired, and the effect is more frightening than it would have been were the scene shown in gory detail.

Meanwhile, back in Gotham City, it’s been 10 years since Batman has been heard from, and the town is shuddering under a wave of heat and crime.

Miller has aged Batman into his 50s, (he has gray hair) and given him a new, bitter outlook on crime-fighting. He plays rougher, hits harder, and constantly is under attack by the news media for being a dangerous vigilante.

Miller puts touches of our information-age, issue-oriented society into his stories. Batman...
seems to be part Bernhard Goetz, New York's "Subway Vigilante," as he is discussed by the news media on a show very much like ABC's "Nightline." The mayor is politically feeble, and the old police commissioner, Gordon, is retiring at age 70.

Batman himself must deal with his own failing health, his old archenemies, such as the Joker, and new opponents: a group of well-organized teenage killers who call themselves the Mutants, who appear to be part punk rockers and reptile.

Politics, too, have permeated the comic world. "The Dark Knight" caricatures President Reagan in the same manner as the controversial comic strip "Doonesbury," and patrons enter Goodson's shop asking for titles such as "Reagan's Raiders." Many books are bringing current world hotspots into their storylines, adding a Cold War element to the tales.

As revolutionary as the new books are, the older books, especially "X-Men," remain popular with collectors. Steve Mauser, 22, collects "X-Men," along with more than 200 other first issues. He collects primarily for value and less for reading. "I read them once and usually put them away.

"The condition is the whole key," he says, adding that he tries to keep most of his comics in mint shape. One aspect of comic book collecting, which sets it apart from other types of collecting, is that rarity does not determine value as much as popularity does.

"The more they sell, the more they're worth," Mauser says. That is why "X-Men" issues from 1977, which sold plenty then, are now worth at least $20 to $25 each. First issues are sought by collectors, because if a series becomes popular, that issue may someday be valuable. However, "a lot of series take off for a while and then die out," Goodson says.

Dolan estimates that a mint-condition copy of the first "Superman" issue (from 1938) is worth more than $30,000. The earliest "Batman" comics, issued a couple of years later, are priced at $10,000. Originally, they sold for pennies.

The artists and writer, the main impetus behind any comic series, certainly aren't working for pennies. A well-known writer such as Byrne can pull in $250,000 a year illustrating comic books. The usual salaries are $70 to $130 per page, which still is great money, considering an average comic is 36 pages and appears monthly.

The rest of the team for a series includes inkers, colorists, editors and letterists. Often, Goodson says, artists and writers will assume multiple roles, especially on independents, such as "Cerebus," the story of a barbarian aardvark who becomes a pope, and "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles."
To a great extent, Goodson says, the comic book is comparable to the movie as a form of entertainment. His own business is thriving, and publicity has come from such varied sources as the Today show, Today, Cable News Network, Gannett News Service, the Seattle Post-Intelligencer and Gentleman’s Quarterly magazine. The latter featured an article on the new "GQ" Superman of "Man of Steel." No longer is Clark Kent a "wimp," but a "hunk," and fashion threatens to outdo the action.

Comics have something for everyone.

Dolan sees a great educational potential for comics. He says publishers often have used their books to promote a cause or an idea.

For example, Marvel put out a comic called "Heroes’ Aid," the proceeds of which were donated to Ethiopian famine relief funds. Spiderman has talked about being an abused child in hopes that other abused youngsters will identify with his character and realize success can come from travail. Anti-drug issues also have been relatively common. The Green Arrow’s sidekick was "hooked on the whole spectrum of drugs," Dolan says. The purpose of his addiction was to get readers to see the dangers of drugs.

Meanwhile, back in Gotham City, the mutants are declaring a war of crime on the city, and the thermometer is topping off at 112 degrees. Batman is preparing to battle the mutant leader, a huge, vicious man who has filed down his teeth to needle points...

Dolan divides comic readers into three categories. Goodson, an example of the first kind, is a comic entrepreneur. He makes his living buying and selling comic books and has detailed and expansive knowledge of his trade. It has gone beyond a hobby.

Mauser is the second kind, a comic collector. He buys comics primarily for collector’s and resale value. He reads them, but not fanatically, and often collects other items besides comic books.

Dolan considers himself the third kind, a comic enthusiast. He reads comics avidly, often over and over, and buys them for the sheer enjoyment of reading them.

The enthusiast remembers favorite parts of his favorite series. In "Daredevil" #233, the kingpin of crime in a particular city tries to ruin the Daredevil's life after discovering his secret identity, that of Matt Murdock, the widely respected blind lawyer. The superhero has a nervous breakdown after he is disbarred from the law, the profession he loves.

This issue brought Captain America back from suspended animation. The Captain was a character in comic books from the '40s, a veteran of World War II. He has conflicts with his old perceptions of America compared to today. A corrupt general commends Captain America, telling him, "We've always valued your commitment and your loyalty."

The Captain resounds, gripping the General's office flag, "I am loyal to nothing. General—except the dream."

Meanwhile, back at the Bat-cave, Batman lies wounded and beaten, tended by his sardonic but faithful butler, Alfred. And his nemesis has plans to blow up Gotham City's Twin Towers...

Michael Goodson, proprietor of The Comics Place, amidst his wares.