Beyond Point & Shoot
Taking a closer look at hunting

Banned Blood
Lying to save a life

An Average Day At Work
Western alums risk it all to do what they love
Dear Reader,

Viscous, egg-shaped blood cells encase spiraling strands of DNA, a drop of turquoise paint seeps through the spongy layers of a hand-painted portrait, and hundreds of dents are imprinted with black ink on a piece of paper.

These details, along with others, are missed because of their subtlety, but without these small pieces, the bigger picture wouldn’t exist. Even a simple chore such as typing on a computer involves a series of complex electric currents and muscle memory.

Many people don’t think about the in-depth mechanics of their computers as they rush to type up an essay the night before it is due. As you will see in this issue of Klipsun, looking into the details of even seemingly mundane subjects can reveal fascinating new perspectives.

This issue explores the tiniest fragments of the things we take for granted.

You will read about the lifesaving details that stand between a man’s safety and his lungs filling with flames, as well as the centimeters of thin hair that could earn a competitive beard grower the title of world whisker champion. This issue includes stories about a woman who uses tracks to hunt one of the strongest creatures in North America, and what really happens behind the scenes of a crime investigation.

For these subjects, the fine points are vital. But what happens when someone is constantly bombarded with life’s specifics? As you read through this issue, you will learn how people with Asperger’s cope with mountains of information and how far twin sisters go to claim their own identities.

Taking time to appreciate the intricacies of life with all five senses is fulfilling, but sweating the small stuff can cause a massive headache. As you read the stories here, pause to think about the mechanisms that form what is important to you. Rather than letting life pass you by in a whirlwind of clocks and espresso shots, take a moment to appreciate its complexity. Carpe diem.

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KLIPSUNMAGAZINE.COM
Two three-inch thick wooden tables fill the woodworking workshop beside Kent Chasson’s home. The tabletops are layered with sawdust, wood chips and tools from working on the day’s projects. His recent undertaking is sitting on the table ready to be sent out for paint finishing: a larger-bodied dreadnought guitar with a rosewood top.

On woods like cedar and spruce, the dark grain lines stand out against the honey-colored wood, while the rosewood masks the grains with deep reddish hues. The tone of the wood matches well with the darker color, drawing more “boomy” and low notes when played compared to spruce that is lighter pitched.

The guitar was ordered by a customer in Seattle as a gift to her husband, Chasson says.

Guitarist Samuel Eisen-Meyers, from the Bellingham band Eclecticity, understands how the guitar becomes conducive throughout a musician’s life.

“Playing guitar is a way for the person to express who they are, where they are in life and what they are feeling,” he says. “With any guitar, you build a relationship with it.” he says. “With any musical instrument there’s a relationship that is formed, and can be really powerful.”

Guitar Center, a national guitar distributor, does not have an exact number of how many guitars they sell per year, customer service representative Chris Golen says, but it is in the hundreds of thousands.

Even before Chasson picks up his tools, he already knows what the guitar will look and sound like.

By touching a piece of wood, an experienced guitar build-
er can tell if it has the right sound characteristics for the tone they want in the guitar, Chasson says.

He demonstrates by grabbing a random piece of wood in his shop, light-colored with prominent dark grains. He knocks his knuckles on the wood in the middle, and then raps harder in different spots to hear the wood’s medium to high pitch tone.

For some people it is all about the sound and playability, which factors into the preparation and helps Chasson pick the right style and wood, he says.

Chasson learned how to play guitar in high school, and started building acoustic guitars by teaching himself and reading a book about building. With previous experience in woodworking, Chasson understood how to work with wood and tools to get the desired results.

“The first [guitar] I designed was very ugly,” Chasson says. “[It] got tweaked and re-designed over the course of probably seven or eight years.”

Woodworking was also the cornerstone for Mike Risinger’s career in guitar building. He was in construction for 30 years before working for Ed Roman, a custom guitar shop in Las Vegas, he says.

He builds both electric and acoustic guitars for Ed Roman and does the design for the tops. Like Chasson, Risinger has to work with customers to build the guitar according to what they see in their head.

“I have to take it and comprehend it first, and then do the same thing to the inlay artist or airbrush guy,” Risinger says.

Sound, volume, tone and a well-balanced instrument are things guitar instructor Geeb Johnston looks for when he plays guitars.

The string height from the fretboard, called the “action,” is also important because a player should not have to press down too hard on the strings in order to get sound, Johnston says.

When he started playing his first guitar with strings a half-inch off the neck, it felt like he got a hernia trying to play chords, he says.

Inside each guitar body is a bracing pattern, which gives structure to the guitar but also contributes to the sound, Chasson says. Braces are wood bands latticed together on the inside of the body on the opposite side of the top. “Voicing,” or tuning the sound in the guitar, is altering the pattern to get a specific tone, he says.

Achieving the right tone is an important part of playing in the guitar world, Eisen-Meyers says.

“When you find a tone it’s the best thing in the world,” he says.

To meet the needs for a recent client, Risinger had designed a guitar that had the body of a shark’s head. The wife of Mark Kendall, guitarist from the band Great White, ordered the custom guitar from Ed Roman to replace the guitar Kendall had given away years ago, Risinger says.

When he presented the guitar to Kendall, Risinger says he liked Kendall’s reaction. From the look on Kendall’s face while he made the sounds of the two iconic notes from the movie “Jaws,” he knew Kendall loved it, he says.

“There are not many things you can build from wood like that by hand, and be so detailed and such a work of art by itself,” Risinger says. “Let alone you’ve got the other end where it makes music and is a creative tool.”

Being able to translate the energy from the guitar and having the audience connect with the music is an important aspect of playing, Eisen-Meyers says. Learning to drop the ego, focusing on how to improve as a musician, and to pass that energy on to other people was the biggest learning experience playing guitar, he says.
Walking through life never alone

Story By Rachel Lee | Photos courtesy of Jenny Petrut

Gathered around the warm campfire at Camp Seymour in Gig Harbor, Wash., sixth grader Jenny Petrut sensed something was missing. She turned just in time to see another camper, a young boy, push a girl down. As the girl fell over a bench, Petrut jumped up and approached the boy. “Do not touch my sister,” Petrut says. Petrut then shoved the boy in the face.
A decade after that fateful day at Camp Seymour, Petrut continues to feel protective over her twin sister, Christine — despite being born only 30 minutes earlier.

“I always thought of myself as the bigger sister,” Petrut says. “So I took her under my wing and made sure no one messed with her. We don’t always get along but we’ve always got each other’s backs.”

Twins, two children born from the same womb, can either be identical or fraternal, according to MedicineNet. When they are identical, they develop from the same egg that splits into two and share the same genetic makeup. Fraternal twins develop from two separate eggs and have different sets of DNA. When looking at the details, many fraternal twins are more different than people think despite similar genetics and qualities.

Throughout high school, Petrut and her sister rode horses competitively together on an equestrian drill team in Kent, Wash. The sisters now live in different parts of the state. Although the two 21-year-olds used to butt heads growing up, they have grown to understand each other.

“I’m a firm believer that distance makes the heart grow fonder,” Petrut says. “As soon as I moved away to school, she became my best friend. I talk to her probably once a day.”

Petrut is studying accounting and economics at Western, while her sister attends community college in Kent. While Christine continues to ride horses, Petrut has found a new love in rock climbing. Petrut and her sister grew up with different circles of friends and with different hobbies, but get along well due to their complementary personalities.

“There are still some things that we differ on, but for the most part we’re both fun-loving, easy going kind of people,” Petrut says. “We have really different interests, but as far as our personalities, we’re very similar.”

Growing up, Petrut noticed that her sister had adopted a more feminine persona, while she considers herself a more athletic woman. While Christine loves to wear makeup, do her nails and go tanning, Jenny is content with athletic shorts and a simple ponytail. Despite their differences, the two sisters experienced many life lessons around the same time, and were able to give advice to each other along the way.

“We have a very strange way of communicating with each other,” Petrut says. “We can get mad at each other and have a really rough conversation but when we have little tiffs, they don’t affect our relationship whatsoever. We understand what spurred on that anger. We don’t have to explain to each other, we just kind of get it.”

According the article “Twin Children’s Language Development” in the Early Human Development journal many scientific studies have looked into the secrets of twin language and have found a close bond between twins. Some siblings have even created their own unique language together that only they understand. This is called Cryptophasia. In a simpler sense, most twins share a bond that naturally comes from being with the same sibling since birth.

“Part of me thinks that we do have a special bond because we’ve been in each other’s lives for everything,” Petrut says. “Friends will come and go, and older siblings and younger siblings go through things at different times. We’ve done everything together.”

Even after getting into trouble with her parents and camp counselors for punching the boy at Camp Seymour, Petrut doesn’t regret her decision to stand by her twin. Growing up so closely together may present its challenges, but working through them together can make any pair stronger.

“She’s like a built-in best friend,” Petrut says. “You don’t always get along with them but they’re always going to be there for you. It’s just kind of nice that no matter what happens, they’re still going to be your twin. I am fortunate enough to have someone there to experience life with me, from the beginning to the very end.”

Whether riding horses, chatting about boys or shoving bullies, these twins continue to show a bond that many will never know. Despite their detailed differences, the two women will continue to grow independently in different places, yet they will never be alone.

Did You Know?

- 35% of twins are left-handed, compared to 10% for non-twins.
- Identical twins exhibit almost identical brain wave patterns.
- The term “twin” derives from the German word twine meaning “two together.”
- The scientific study of twins is known as “gemellology.”

—Information from Twin Magazine

Despite going to different schools, Jenny Petrut says distance has brought her and her twin sister closer together.
Internalizing Details

STORY BY Eryn Akers
PHOTOS BY Samantha Heim
Western senior Carl Woloszyn, 25, silences the alert on his cell phone and calmly closes the screen of his laptop, the bright glare diminishing beneath his hands. Flipping through the silky, cold pages of his anthropology textbook, he tries to block out the stream of thoughts bouncing around in the back of his mind and let his eyes settle on the bolded typeface. Once he is focused, he pores over the words, letting them seep into his memory.

“[People’s] minds are like a sponge,” Woloszyn says. “Mine is more like the sponginess of a ten-year-old. People’s brain cells die in their early twenties and onward.”

Woloszyn identifies as having Asperger’s, a high-functioning form of autism. According to the book “Autism Spectrum Disorders,” impairment of social relations, communication and imaginative thought are all signs of the syndrome. A study by “The Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry” found a connection between traits expressed in the autism spectrum and giftedness. This holds true for Woloszyn. Since elementary school, Woloszyn says he has been able to retain much of the information necessary for success in a course by reading the chapter or textbook once- twice if it is difficult material.

Catherine Jorgenson, coordinator for the Associated Students Disability Outreach Center, says it is important to understand that Asperger’s is different in each person who has it; not every person will present these same traits. The Disability Outreach Center maintains a place for students, faculty and community members to engage in positive and informative discussion about disabilities.

“When you’re living with a disability, it’s a part of your life and it’s a part of your experience and identity,” Jorgenson says.

Tara Mazza, 44, has been part of this experience through raising two children with autism. Her daughter Fiona, who is almost 10, was diagnosed with autism at the age of two. Mazza says when Fiona was first diagnosed, she was not high-functioning; she did a lot of hand clapping and rocking back and forth before she began speaking at the age of three.

When Fiona was three, she sat down at the family’s computer and began typing. Mazza says her and her husband Matt watched in awe as Fiona typed, her fingers easily forming each word. Fiona typed a full-fledged letter as a thank you note to her grandmother for sending presents she had recently received. There were only a few spelling errors, which Mazza says was amazing for her age.

“It was incredible,” Mazza says. “Even though these kids can’t verbalize or express themselves, a lot of them are just very intelligent and absorb everything.”

Mazza says her 11-year-old son Finnigan feels disconnected from other children because of all the information his brain absorbs. While many kids say ‘hi’ to introduce themselves, Mazza says Finnigan has a different approach.

“Not ‘hi,’ not ‘hello,’ not ‘how are you,’” Mazza says. “At the age of five, he would say, ‘Do you know that a car engine has 25 pistons?’”

After his introduction, he could go on and on about the engine of a plane. Mazza and her husband felt it was important to teach Finnegans social skills. Now they are teaching him to shake hands. He is doing a great job with it, though sometimes he does not like to make eye contact, she says.

Woloszyn says he once had problems with eye contact when he was younger, but now rarely does. However, Woloszyn often faces the same difficulties in communicating with others, he says. His strong beliefs in the Catholic faith sometimes contributes to the difficulty he faces in social interactions. While other students gloat about parties or dances, he wishes to engage in much deeper spiritual discussion.
Sometimes he feels so disconnected that it is almost like he has time traveled from a distant time and place, perhaps a small Catholic village in the Northwest, he says. Under the hang of the gloomy, grey clouds in the Pacific Northwest, he says he grapples with ways to connect with others.

“[I’m living in] the present day with people who are quite strange to me in my eyes,” he says. “They are familiar, and I’ve interacted with them all my life, but it’s still weird. It’s hard, I want to be more understood.”

Woloszyn also has many distractions filling his mind while trying to complete academic work. Although he says he can easily retain information, studying can be difficult because he is so quickly distracted.

“Having voices in my head, that sounds too much like the pre-text for some kind of movie,” he says. “[When I’m distracted] it’s like [there are] a lot of thoughts bouncing around in a mental room that’s in the back of my mind.”

When the distractions become too overwhelming, Woloszyn escapes to the outdoors and clears his mind by taking a walk or riding his bike. Woloszyn appreciates the calming effect of the outdoors.

Anna Blick, assistant director of Disability Resources for Students at Western, says it is important for people who identify as having Asperger’s to stay on top of these potentially overwhelming emotions. She says people with Asperger’s syndrome are more at risk for developing depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder and anxiety.

Mazza’s children have different approaches to relaxing. She says Finnigan frequently paces back and forth indoors and outdoors to clear his brain. Fiona enjoys drawing, writing books and playing the piano to relieve stress.

Generally, Woloszyn disconnects himself from technology and social media to remain free from anxiety. He says this is one of the best ways to get homework done and not be overwhelmed by detail overload.

He says this act is easier on the outside distractions, but harder on the internal ones because he constantly battles with details that crowd his mind. As he reads through his textbook, the information sits in his mind until it finally settles, absorbing into his memory.

Carl Woloszyn, 25, looks out into the bay from Boulevard Park. Woloszyn, a student of Anthropology and Social Studies, said he enjoys taking walks around the park.
In a room full of people, private investigator Molly Monahan has to figure out how to become invisible to gain the information she seeks. Upon realizing that there is no easy way to blend in, Monahan switches on her loud and obnoxious. “Sometimes being overt is the best way to be covert,” Monahan says. “If I act like that then people couldn’t possibly think I was a P.I.”

Monahan acknowledges there are certificates and tests people must pass to become a P.I. She says the people who are most successful adapt to any situation and get the job done. She credits her worldly experience and travel as what prepared her most for P.I. work. “You have to be able to flow in and out of any situation comfortably,” Monahan says.
Five years ago, Monahan met with her current business partner and fellow private investigator Pamela Beason to discuss a potential business opportunity.

“We had a business idea that just didn’t work out. Then Pamela called and said she was a licensed investigator and we went from there,” Monahan says.

As private investigators, Monahan and Beason must still operate within the law. However, unlike the police, they can pick and choose their clients and, like any other business, most services come at a price, Monahan says.

Monahan found the hardest part of starting a successful P.I. business was building working relationships with people in the region to garner a good reputation, Monahan says.

“The catch-22 of being a P.I. is that it’s hard to sell your services if you don’t have experience and it’s hard to get experience if no one is willing to buy your services,” Monahan says.

**The Case**

After accepting a case Monahan says they first check out their potential client to ensure the work they are doing is legal.

“The greatest misconception about the [P.I.] business is that it is what people see on TV,” Monahan says. “Unfortunately we don’t solve our cases in an hour and most of what they do on TV isn’t legal. I don’t do illegal.”

Monahan then gathers information from the client. If she’s working on a case to locate a lost or estranged relative, she will get all the information she possibly can on the individual, Monahan says. Even details such as childhood hobbies can help her look into whether or not the missing person pursued a similar profession, Monahan says.

“It’s all about finding the gossamer thin threads of information that will yield a lot in the right hands,” Monahan says.

Once she has all the pertinent information to the case, she begins the legwork.

Monahan says she and Beason pride themselves on their use of smart surveillance, which combines the information provided with strategy. This sort of surveillance involves talking to a client and getting as much information as possible about a potential subject before any work begins.

“Anyone can sit in a car and watch a house, but that doesn’t always get the job done,” Monahan says.

If she needs to embed, she will prepare by creating the foundations of a logical temporary identity, Monahan says.

This way if she is backed into a corner or comes across someone who may be able to poke holes in her back-story, she has the knowledge to be consistent and respond logically to avoid blowing her cover.

Since Monahan is a licensed investigator she has access to databases solely for P.I. use, which she also pays a fee to use. These kinds of resources are the backbone of investigations and give private investigators an enormous advantage, Monahan says.

One such resource is the Washington Association of Legal Investigators (WALI) website. WALI was developed to allow investigators to continue to improve their skills and learn from each other, according to the website.

“It’s a great resource for professional networking,” Monahan says, “As a whole, we are better than each individual.”

In order to gain access to WALI and other P.I. resources Monahan says individuals must have the proper credentials and be vetted.

**The Clients**

Monahan says she sees potential clients who do not understand what P.I.s do or think they need a private investigator when they are not necessary.

If a potential client looks for a P.I. to do surveillance work or find needed information on someone, Monahan will make sure she can actually help them before taking the case. On occasion, she will come across a case where a client should seek out a lawyer or the police, and help them through that process, Monahan says.

As time passes, the ways Monahan and her colleagues operate will change. New tools will be developed and new resources will emerge. But the one thing that will remain constant for any P.I. is that the best will always rely on their resourcefulness and their desire to seek out the truth.
Walking in to donate blood, Dylan Matthews’ hands start to shake—as he fills out the questionnaire, wearing a pink shirt under a grey cardigan and carrying a rainbow colored backpack. He walks up to the small makeshift cubicles, where a blood center employee acts as the gatekeeper of a bridge judging who is acceptable to pass through to the tables and reclined chairs and donate a pint of their blood. He gets glares from the blood-center employee as she goes through the questionnaire. Question 34 of the questionnaire asks if male donors have had sexual contact with another man, even once? He answered no, even though he is openly gay and sexually active. If he did not lie, he would be turned away from donating blood, because of a U.S. Food and Drug Administration ban preventing gay men from donating blood.

Matthews asked to be referred to as a false name, since he continues to donate blood, even though he has had sex with other men.

“I just want to donate to them because it doesn’t hurt me,” Matthews says, “It just takes an hour out of my day. I’ve done something good, I feel good for the rest of the day.”

Jim AuBuchon, the CEO of Puget Sound Blood Center, says the requirement was started when there was not much information about how HIV was transmitted.

"Currently the FDA requires that we defer, indefinitely, any man who’s had sex with another man, even once, since 1977," he says.

Gay men who are sexually active have a higher risk for HIV and other blood transferable diseases, according to the FDA’s website.

"Fast forward almost 30 years now, the world is very different," AuBuchon says, "HIV is still with us and is still something to be avoided, but the testing is much better."

Since becoming sexually active, Matthews says he has donated blood six different times, each time lying about his sexual activity to the blood center.

Each donation has 19 tests performed on it before being sent out, AuBuchon says.

Advancements in HIV testing have made the window period, the time between becoming infected to the virus being detectable, 11 days.

The test puts the virus’s DNA or RNA into the blood and searches out for compatible DNA or RNA and then starts to multiply, AuBuchon says.

After the process is done numerous times, the virus will begin to amplify and increase in volume.

As testing becomes more accurate and closes down the window time, AuBuchon thinks bans on certain people donating blood will start to decrease.

"The trend is moving away from the indefinite deferral period," he says.

Matthews says he thinks the lifetime ban on gay men being able to donate is an outdated law and shouldn’t be used to ban an entire portion of the population.

“I’ve been tested, I’m not being promiscuous, I know that I’m negative and I’m just going to lie and go in there,” he says.
He didn’t think they would really do it. When he arrived in Budapest, Hungary for the Hungarian beard and mustache contest, Jon Javor did not think his new friends would really shave his head bald except for a little tuft of hair in the front.

But after throwing the idea around, and maybe a few too many drinks, he said, “Yeah, let’s do it.”

“Then they just whipped out the scissors and razor and did it right there outside the bar,” Javor says. “My one condition was they had to get me a full Hussar outfit to match.”

When the Ottoman Empire tried expanding into Hungary in the 16th century, mustache-laden Hussars protected the country.

The style of mustache is now called the Hungarian mustache and it extends from the center of the mouth and is combed toward the ear. The hair is not allowed to pass more than two centimeters from the end of the mouth and cannot grow below the upper lip.

Along with this style of mustache, the Hussars were also known to shave their heads bald, except for a small tuft, much like the look Javor’s new friends gave him.

Javor now looked like a true “Hussar” and increased his chances of winning the beard and mustache contest held in Budapest later that day.

The Hungarian mustache is one of the many classes of facial hair that people compete against to see who has the best facial hair. Other classes include the full beard, styled beard, garibaldi and the Fu Manchu.

The judges monitor competitors’ facial hair closely to make sure they do not exceed the limitations. For example, judges will lift up the hairs of the mustache of someone competing in the Hungarian mustache classification to make sure they do not grow beyond the two-centimeter mark from the end of the lips.

These competitions range from small towns such as Bremerton, Wash. and cities such as Las Vegas, to the World Beard and Mustache Championships held every other year in different host cities around the world.

The world championships boast around 150 competitors each year in 18 categories.

Javor, a member of the Whisker Club founded by Bruce Roe in 1998 in Bremerton, Wash., competed in the world

Above: Bruce Roe, the Whisker Club founder, poses for a photo at the Airport Diner in Bremerton, Wash. Roe is the 2011 world title holder for the Hungarian mustache style.
championships for the first time in 2011 in Trondheim, Norway.
Part of the competition is not only about having facial hair, but how the hair looks on the person and what that person is wearing.
Roe says although it is primarily a beard and mustache contest and not a costume contest, sometimes the costume plays a part in the subjective judging.
Roe usually dresses as a cowboy. He was one of the few competitors from the United States in the early world championships and wanted to showcase America.
“What’s more American than a cowboy?” Roe says.
Javor says people do not usually dress up too extreme, as it could be seen as making fun of the competition.
Javor decided to compete for two reasons. First, he has always enjoyed Halloween and dressing up, and second, people in beard groups are more accepting of facial hair than others.
“I have personas I try to do, and detail is everything,” Javor says. “Your outfit shouldn't matter that much but you can't dress up like Papa Smurf and expect to win. They are all very distinguished looking.”
Roe has competed in the world championships every year since 1997 and most recently won the Hungarian style mustache competition in 2011, along with multiple second and third place finishes at the world championships.
Roe says he got into the competition when he met someone at a wedding reception who told him he had a great mustache. They sent him the application information in the mail and he decided to go.
Roe and his wife Tommie did not know what to expect when they left.
“It felt like I was at the Olympics,” Tommie says. “They had a parade with all the competitors; they were carrying flags for each country involved. It was a lot bigger than I was expecting.”

Roe does not compete for the money. In fact, the world championships do not offer any prize money.
He spends more on travel expenses, but he says the people he meets and the friendships he has made make it worth it.
For some, it is more than a competition; it is a way of life.
“Since competing I now have friends all over the world that I talk with,” Bruce says. “And before and after the competition we are in the pub having a beer together. Of course we’re competing, but we are all friends.”
Like Roe, what has kept Javor involved are the relationships he has made. He says this underground community with a bond as simple as facial hair allows him to create special connections with people. 

FAMOUS MUSTACHE STYLES

HUNGARIAN  THE BOXCAR  HANDLEBAR  FU MANCHU  GARIBALDI

Members of the Whisker Club, including Andy Hahn, toast in the Airport Diner, where the monthly meetings are held.

Below, from left to right: David Alber, Andy Hahn, Jon Javor and Bruce Roe pose for a photo at the Airport Diner in Bremerton, Wash. The diner is where they have their monthly Whisker Club meetings.
Tianna Schneider, 21, says she gets shaky and nervous before firing off a shot while hunting. When she pulls the trigger and hits her mark, the shaky nervousness turns into excitement.
Tianna Schneider lifted her gun, shaking and nervous, pointing it at a bear about 80 yards in front of her. She aimed her gun, adrenaline pumping through her veins. She shot at the shoulder to be sure to hit it's lung and kill the bear. After her .243 modern rifle sent the sound of a gunshot throughout the forest, she was thrilled to find she had hit her first bear after years of hunting.

“How did that shot feel?” her father asked, like he always does.

“I just remember being so excited,” she says. “You have to give [an animal] a little bit after you shoot it, but I just wanted to run up to it right away.”

After Schneider and her father waited a few minutes for the animal to die, they followed a blood trail leading to the bear’s body. When looking at a blood trail, Schneider says she hopes the blood will be a milky red with a few chunks, which shows she has hit the animal in the lung, killing it rather than injuring it.

When she found her bear, she saw she had hit him directly where she aimed, but had “blown up” the whole right shoulder with her bullet.

Then, Schneider gutted the bear.

“[Gutting] is one of my favorite parts of hunting,” she says. “You usually never get to see the inside of everything.”

She took her razor sharp hunting knife and cut a clear, small slice down the dead bear's abdomen. She then reached into the bear with her hands, hooking certain spots with her fingers to remove the stomach and other organs. If the stomach gets nicked with a knife, it will release a pungent smell, and the acidity of what is inside can contaminate the meat. The inside of a bear is hot and slimy, she says.

Next, she reaches up higher inside the bear with her knife to loosen around the esophagus. After this, everything inside of the bear has been removed, and Schneider leaves a “gut pile” in the woods. She says this can be the messiest part of the hunting process.

“Every year I paint my fingernails pink,” she says. “I figure they’re going to get covered in red stuff anyway.”

After she and her father brought the bear’s body home, they suspended it in the air before they skinned the animal. When skinning, Schneider slowly peels the skin and fur off the carcass, being especially careful around the back, where bears carry much of their fat. What is left hanging in the air is the body of the bear without its skin or fur, which stays there for a few days before they can use its meat.

Schneider, 21, is an avid hunter. When she prepares to go hunting, she says it is important to be ready for anything; she wears camouflage clothing and packs everything from a knife and rope to an extra pair of socks.

“You never know whether you’re going to be out there just for an hour or until dark,” she says.
Doug Sullivan, a hunting equipment expert at Yeager’s Sporting Goods in Bellingham, says it’s essential to keep in mind what is being hunted.

When going on an overnight hunting trip, Sullivan suggests bringing a tent, sleeping gear, cold weather clothing and matches. He also says it’s important that others know where the hunter is going and when to expect them back, and to bring at least one other person.

“If you go out alone, you’re pretty much asking for it,” he says.

Schneider says an important element of hunting is gun safety. Growing up around guns, she says she learned how to handle them at a young age, but she thinks some people have not figured it out yet. She makes sure there are no bullets in her gun and the safety is on when she is out hiking and looking for game.

“When you have a gun, anything can happen,” she says. “It’s kind of a big deal when you’re messing with a firearm.”

Different types of guns and bullets are used for different types of game, Sullivan says. For example, if someone is hunting for deer, a .270-bolt action rifle will work well. This gun, and the bullets used with it, is smaller than one that should be used to shoot a bear. When hunting for a bear or an elk, Sullivan says a .300 bullet would work better. The number refers to the amount of gunpowder, or firing power, the shot will have.

“If you use a .300 on a deer you’re going to blow it right up,” he says. “You want one that will do the job but not overdo it.”

Many of the bullets have a copper tip that peels back when the fire is shot, doubling the size of the bullet.

Sullivan says hunters can purchase something called a “game processing kit,” which comes with several knives with different types of blades and serrated edges, which allow the hunter to fully break down the animal’s body before taking it home.

Hunters can also purchase a game cleaning kit, which comes with a bag to transport the carcass, cleaning wipes and what Sullivan calls a “butt plug,” or a butt out. This tool is used to disconnect the anal alimentary canal from the animal, so it does not contaminate the meat. A butt out is inserted inside the animal and hooks at certain areas, so when the tool is pulled out, nearly all of the digestive system is removed.

When hunters are out on private land, they often opt for wearing camouflage so their game cannot spot them. But if the hunters are out on public land, they are required to wear at least 400 inches of fluorescent orange so other hunters can see them, Yeager’s Sporting Goods employee Kaitlyn Mossington says.

Schneider says there are some signs which show a deer or bear may be around, she says. For example, there are certain types of berries that bears eat, and types of seeds that deer eat, that can be indicators that the animal is nearby.

Despite some of the gruesome details of her sport, Schneider says she looks forward to the adrenaline rush of the hunting season all year. K
Macey Meade did not expect to spend one of her vacation days in an emergency room in Venice with a burning and oozing scalp. The day before going abroad, Meade went to a professional stylist and had her hair dyed. Although the procedure began normally, she started to feel a burning sensation on the side of her head as she sat under the heater with dye and foil on her head, Meade says. She did not realize until later that she was suffering from what she now says was a chemical burn.

“It’s like a forest fire,” Meade says. “Once it starts, it keeps going. It got into my bloodstream, which is really dangerous.”

Chemical hair procedures are a part of various methods for dyeing, straightening and curling hair. Done improperly, it can result in rashes, burns, or even hair falling out.

As a stylist, consulting with customers is important, says Daniela Zarevich, a stylist at Studio Galactica in downtown Bellingham.

“We’re handling a lot of chemicals, a lot of sharp things, lots of dangerous things in the salon, first and foremost, you want to ask people if they have any sensitivities.”

Meade was having her hair dyed using a foiling method. During a foil, the stylist pulls out sections of hair, applies a dye and wraps the pieces of hair in foil, separating the color and adding heat to speed up the chemical process, Zarevich says. When done correctly, this should not put the client at risk, she says.

Now, more than a year after her disastrous foil, Meade says hair will not grow in the burned area, which is now scar tissue. Even a simple hair transplant is not possible because there are no hair follicles in that area, she says.

Even with a thorough consultation, things can go awry, Zarevich says. When she began working with a new line of coloring products at Studio Galactica, she had some “hit-and-miss” results. While she never made a mistake she could not fix, there were scary moments, Zarevich says.

“When I first started here, there was one instance where I turned a lady’s hair blue and gold,” Zarevich says. “It was like a pastel version of my high school football colors.”

Meade still feels the effects of the foiling mishap. She doesn’t tell many people about her bald spot, and she is especially conscious of it while styling her hair.

“I have pretty thick hair, so it usually isn’t visible,” Meade says. “But when I put my hair up, I have to pin it just right and be really careful that it isn’t showing.”

Meade never thought her time at the salon was going to land her in the emergency room. Now, she advises people to build trust with a hair stylist. Finding someone who listens is key, Zarevich says. It could be the difference between gorgeous hair and a hospital visit.
Behind the scenes of a music video shoot

Story by Elyse Tan
Photo by Jenny Hoang

Stories through sound and sight


Filmmakers use imagery and music to capture moments, tell stories and evoke raw emotions where pictures and words are not enough.

After viewers press play, a story is told and the credits roll within the time span of a few minutes. But this time span is by far, a long shot from the real duration of making a music video. The audience overlooks the little details in the pre-production, shooting and editing phases of a short film.

“People think they can just pick up a camera or cell phone and go shoot a video, but there’s more to it than that in film production,” says 27-year-old Wil Drake, founder of Empty Roll productions.

To make something visually stimulating takes planning and organization, Drake says.

“It must have an art; a story line people can follow,” he says.

The headquarters of Empty Roll productions, Drake’s home, doesn’t look like a typical office. It is decorated with old cameras Drake’s father collects, a kitchen, living room, ping-pong table, and in the corner, a Mac computer surrounded by film equipment.

At his computer, Drake and his partner in Empty Roll productions, Michael Dyrland, invest hours into choosing music and editing videos.

The process of selecting audio is one of the most important aspects when setting audio to video, Dyrland says.

Drake says finding the ideal song can take up to two days as he sits and browses through SoundCloud, a music website.

“You can browse everything and anything, remixes and remixes of the remixes,” Drake says.

Audio is 70 percent of videos. If the audio is terrible then the video is terrible, Dyrland says.

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While searching for music to go with a video, Drake and Dyrland take into consideration the emotions it makes them feel.

Music videos are another way a band can connect with its listeners, Western student Robert Bojorquez says. Music tells
In KVIK, Bojorquez, 21, coordinates filmmaking video production for Western’s Associated Students. Currently, Bojorquez is in the pre-production phase of directing his first music video for Western students in the band Cassiopeia.

Storyboards help cinematographers achieve a better idea of what they have to prepare for before the shoot date, Bojorquez says. Generally, it takes him up to two weeks of drawing to create a storyboard. But when Bojorquez feels creative, he can occasionally knock it out in an hour, he says.

Bojorquez plans to shoot Cassiopeia’s music video in one day in the upcoming months with a film crew. “A lot of people don’t realize how many people help with film projects in general,” he says.

Bojorquez says people attribute the work to a director. But the people moving the lighting and operating the camera matter because everyone is creative, he says.

Dyrland and Drake recently helped with lighting and camera placement for Seattle hip-hop artist Macklemore and producer Ryan Lewis on the set of the music video “Same Love” with a small crew of four to eight people, Drake says.

The music video received more than 6 million views on Youtube, and Macklemore is rapidly gaining recognition worldwide with his album “The Heist” after climbing to number one on iTunes.

Working with Macklemore gave them both a chance to see how much time, energy and resources go into putting a big production together, Dyrland says.

Bojorquez says music videos are a great collaborative option for people who only think about music or the picture. “Putting them together is a really powerful way to bring people together,” he says.

In Empty Roll productions, Drake looks for a diagram in storytelling – character development, a build up leading toward a climax, with a slight resolution and conclusion, Drake says.

“That’s what we’re doing in an edit even if it’s 30 seconds,” Drake says.

After selecting music and shooting a video, Drake and Dyrland make edits before a final product is released.

Dyrland and Drake put in three hours of editing for every minute the final video edit is. A three-minute clip requires 12 hours of editing, Dyrland says.

Once a video is finished, Drake rushes to get a product out so it is still relevant, he says. “No one wants to see a video of last night’s concert a week from now,” Drake says.

If the video is no longer relevant when they release it, it won’t have the same impact or weight, he says.

Dyrland and Drake believe each job brings them closer to spreading their voices, names and messages to a broader audience, Dyrland says. “I want to inspire people through films and make people tingle, laugh really hard and cry,” he says.

Filmmakers put a great deal of hard work and energy into making other people experience feelings, Bojorquez says.

Even with the challenges of filmmaking, it is the most enjoyable process, Drake says. Drake sums it up in a phrase someone once told him, “Even the worst days in film production trump the best days in any other jump.”

The collaborative effort in filming turns a vision into life. A music video tells a story, captures emotions, action and conveys many messages within its details.
Gripping her headboard in her Bellingham home, Nicole Champagne growls in pain and gazes outside her bedroom windows. With her husband and two midwives present in the room, she listens to the sound she has waited nine months to hear – her newborn boy’s first cry. The midwife cleans him off and immediately presses him to Champagne’s chest. She whispers to herself with a quiet confidence and relief, “I did it. I had a baby.”

Nicole Champagne and her fifteen-month-old son, Cade, enjoy a walk outside their Bellingham home. Champagne says Cade didn’t leave the house for a week after he was delivered at home.
In an effort to avoid what Champagne refers to as hospital “interventions” such as cesarean sections or having an epidural, women around the US choose homebirth as an alternative way to bring their children into the world. By creating a personal and communicative relationship with the midwife, who delivers the child, and the doula, who gives counseling before, during and after the pregnancy, they are able to avoid these interventions.

After touring the hospital birthing center, Champagne says she felt a homebirth would be less loud, more intimate and just as safe as a hospital birth.

“Hospitals are where you go when something is broken or you’re sick,” Champagne says. “Birth is not an illness; it’s a natural process that sometimes turns into an emergency.”

If the mother has high-risk conditions — such as HIV, high blood pressure, diabetes or is pregnant with more than one child, home births can be unsafe, according to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, which certifies OB-GYNs.

Stepha Lawson, an apprentice midwife and Fairhaven student studying midwifery, says homebirth is mainly about trust in birth and the natural processes a woman’s body needs to take. In hospitals, doctors are more prone to use intervention techniques, such as epidurals, which numb the lower half of the body, or pertussin, a hormone to increase the progression of contractions, she says.

After attending 26 births as a certified doula, Lawson believes the counseling a midwife gives the expecting mother allows her to express her hesitations or fears — which is pertinent to how well the birth will go at home.

“A lot of the things [women] are hesitant about before labor will show themselves in labor,” Lawson says. “Any type of fears about parenthood or frustrations with your partner will pop up. The mind-body connection is so exquisitely portrayed in birth.”

Midwives check the baby’s heart rate, temperature and blood pressure along with prenatal tests such as urine analysis and checking the baby’s height, Lawson says.

During Champagne’s meetings with her midwife before labor, her midwife gave her the option to have a notification when an epidural could be considered. Champagne says she did not want to be given an option to be transferred to the hospital.

“Here’s the thing, if I was in the hospital I would have taken the drugs,” Champagne says. “An epidural doesn’t make you unconscious but it makes you loopy, and even though it was hard, I wanted to experience how hard that was. I didn’t want to feel like I was checked out during the birth of my son.”

Champagne says there were a multitude of positions she could take to help with the progression of her pregnancy and while a birthing tub or a bed is most common for home births, a birth stool or squatting are techniques where gravity helps progress the birth.

“I liked using the birth stool instead of laying on my back, which is a position developed by doctors doing hospital births because it was convenient for them to deliver the baby.”

Champagne’s newborn, Cade, was breastfeeding before his umbilical cord was cut. In her own research, she found the midwife waits until the cord stops pulsating before it is cut, because it takes five minutes for blood to circulate through the baby when it is out of the womb. Cade was still receiving oxygen from the umbilical cord, Champagne says.

“A lot of women have been given the impression that they can’t handle it,” Champagne says. “Nobody likes pain. I complain when I get the littlest cut on my finger and I totally could do natural childbirth.”

Lawson says pregnant women are in a vulnerable state, and the midwife process allows the woman to express her fears, her hopes for the pregnancy and motherhood through counseling sessions that hospital births don’t offer.

Champagne’s son, who is now 15 months old, was born in the home he will be raised in. With a certified birth team cheering her on, Champagne was able to endure the intricate process of childbirth with no medication and stay in the comfort of her own home.
As the chatter of the crowd increases, Skye Schillhammer, 22, quietly sits atop a dirt-clad hill in Colorado as he makes his way to the start-line of the Ranchstyle Mountain Bike Festival. Looking out from the line, the rolling hills of the arid landscape create a picturesque scene fading into the nearby cactuses and small brush lining the edge of the course as each rider's name is called to start.

Riders waiting to be called joke with one another and the sound of laughter fades as they make their way down the course. As the start nears, Schillhammer ignores the noise and quietly runs through the course in his head, waiting for his name to be called, leaving nothing to chance while he drops in to start his run.

"It's almost overwhelming, especially sitting at the top looking down. It almost seems like too much," Schillhammer says. "As soon as you roll in, you kind of have to turn that part of your brain off and go for it."

Since its beginning in the late 1970s, mountain biking has been growing in popularity, especially in the Northwest. As the sport continues to grow, many are unaware of the time and effort put in by riders to make sure that each trip down the mountain is smooth. Riders analyze every aspect of their bike, gear and the tracks they ride in order to be the best. With each new competition, riders encounter tracks filled with difficult jumps, obstacles and hazards. Each trail forces riders to pay careful attention to every part of the course to find the best and fastest route down.

"I try to get as many laps in as I can, then I try to do a run or two where I am barely moving down the hill, making sure to take close detail on every little line," Schillhammer says. "Whether it's taking the inside route on a corner or maybe going way wider than you think, those things can really pay off in the end."

The care people take in maintaining their bikes says a lot about the type of rider they are, Western alumnus Nick Marvik says. Before each ride, Marvik makes sure to check that his shifting system is working properly, tires are inflated,
“Being a biker at this level and doing the kinds of tricks off the different jumps, you get really good at crashing.”

— Skye Schillhammer

suspension is aligned, none of his wheel spokes are damaged and that his chain is greased.

“It definitely goes to show who takes care of and maintains their stuff,” Marvik says. “At the end of the day, you can definitely tell who does what.”

A rider’s gear plays a big role in feeling comfortable while riding, along with staying safe during a run. Riders wear what feels comfortable to them and offers the most protection, but finding the right piece sometimes takes trial and error. Both Marvik and Schillhammer choose to wear a full-face helmet, instead of the half-face helmet, and knee pads. Marvik also wears racing gloves, elbow pads and a padded shirt if he can.

“Being a biker at this level and doing the kinds of tricks off the different jumps, you get really good at crashing,” Schillhammer says. “I would say that I am better at crashing than I am at landing things and I have been really lucky with not getting hurt, which hopefully doesn’t end anytime soon.”

Even when riders carefully analyze their bikes, gear and each new course, things can still go wrong. After building a dirt track behind his house, Marvik fell while practicing and separated his shoulder, preventing him from riding for two months. He has also been knocked out and had a hematoma in his leg, which forced him to be on crutches for weeks. Instances like these are what make checking bikes and having the right gear that much more important, Marvik says.

While competing at the Ranchstyle Mountain Bike Festival, Schillhammer had a close call on the course’s biggest jump. That particular day the wind had picked up, making it hard to judge the speed needed to make the jump.

“I went up off the jump and caught a big gust of wind in the face and wasn’t going to make the gap,” Schillhammer says. “I am probably 25 feet up in the air above a packed dirt landing and I jump off my bike and happen to land right on the edge of the landing and slide down baseball style, pick up my bike and keep riding; and that’s really lucky.”

Schillhammer considers himself a calculated rider, keeping to things he feels comfortable doing and that are within his skill level. Doing so has helped, he says, especially when he makes sure to stick to things that he has practiced.
Eighteen-year-old college freshman Mandy Stavik was home for Thanksgiving break, 1989, when she went for a jog with her dog one afternoon near Acme, Wash. A few hours later the dog returned home, but Stavik did not.

Her naked body was found days later in a shallow area of the Nooksack River, miles from her home. It appeared she had been raped and later drowned. Though investigators were able to gather DNA evidence, nothing was able to break the case open, says Whatcom County Undersheriff Jeff Parks. Stavik’s case remains one of Whatcom County’s highest profile cold cases. More than 20 years later, investigators are still routinely checking the DNA profile created from that evidence against local and federal databases that contain DNA profiles of convicted felons.

Cases like Stavik’s, which can stretch on for decades after available leads have been exhausted, serve as a reminder that solving major crimes is more difficult and time-consuming than popular television shows would have viewers believe, even when DNA evidence is available.

When the Bellingham Police Department responds to a major crime scene, they call in their designated crime scene investigators to assist with the collection of evidence. After putting protective clothing on and covering their shoes to prevent tracking evidence into or out of the scene, the investigators move through the location, keeping track of every detail: lingering odors, lights that are on or off, windows and doors that are unlocked, the temperature of the room, and the location of pieces of furniture and evidence. The investigators then photograph, label and later collect the evidence for processing at a crime lab.

“The first step is controlling that scene,” says Mark Young, Bellingham Police spokesman. “Everyone with access to that scene needs to have a purpose. Everyone who goes in is under the crime scene investigator’s control.”

Young says officers collect evidence working up from the smallest pieces to the largest. In the scenario of a shooting, officers might collect a bullet fragment, then a bullet, photograph a bullet hole, track the trajectory of the shot, then locate the gun and look for other bullets in the chamber.

Whenever investigators and forensic scientists approach a scene, they are looking for anything different or out of place. What may look like a burned pile of ash could contain an impression from a footprint or tool.

Before anything has been touched, if the responding agency has access to a 3-D laser scanner, they use the instrument to make a digital image of the crime scene. The laser works by taking millions of measurements per minute, allowing investigators to upload those points to a computer and create a virtual walkthrough of the crime scene that is accurate to within 2 millimeters.

Kris Kern, a forensic scientist for the Washington State Patrol crime scene response team, says the state patrol CSI team is purchasing one of these lasers in the end of 2012. “Very few agencies have them at this point because they are very expensive,” Kern says. “The one we’re purchasing in the next few weeks costs over $100,000.”

After documenting the scene, taking samples of
fibers, DNA or bodily fluids, and sometimes taking laser measurements, investigators bag and tag the evidence. Evidence is carefully tracked in what is known as the “chain of custody.” Investigators log evidence into their crime lab’s locker room and when items change hands or get tested, each person who accesses them is carefully logged.

BPD and WSCO can handle many tests in their own labs, such as fingerprinting and testing the chemical makeup of unknown substances, such as white powders. For crimes where fibers or bodily fluids need to be tested, the department partners with the Washington State Patrol toxicology and DNA labs.

Kern says a common misconception about crime scene investigation is that a few people do everything from responding to the scene and collecting evidence to carrying guns and arresting and interviewing suspects. As civilians, the team’s forensic scientists cannot participate in securing the scene or making arrests.

“Each forensic scientist plays a very small role in the legal process,” Kern says.

The timeline of high-profile cases is much longer than television shows portray.

“It takes weeks, months, maybe years depending on the case,” Kern says.

Although the actual test to create a DNA profile does not take long, Kern says investigators often gather samples from various cases to run on the genetic analyzer at the same time so the test is more cost-effective. After the criminal trial, which can take years, major evidence may still need to be maintained in case of appeal or advancing technology.

DNA testing is relatively new, and there have been cases where evidence that was kept for years was tested for DNA and aided in solving a cold case, or the acquittal of someone who had been wrongfully charged, Young says.

Lisa Casey, who specializes in testing DNA and bodily fluids, is a forensic scientist at the Marysville Washington State Patrol laboratory.

“I think you’d be surprised how often burglars leave things behind,” Casey says. “They get hungry and take a bite of something but leave the rest behind, or they smoke and leave a cigarette butt on the ground.”

Although blood and semen are likely the first substances that come to mind when people hear the words “bodily fluids,” saliva is also prevalent at many crime scenes.

Saliva is one of the richest sources of DNA, which makes Casey’s job easier. Scientists usually need to leave part of a sample behind, particularly in cases where the defense may want to retest it. With a cigarette butt, Casey says she can accurately test for DNA using only a ½ cm-square, leaving plenty of the sample behind.

In cases where the entire sample will be consumed, scientists notify the defense, which can send an expert to observe the testing if they want.
Analysts often use an “alternative light source” to find evidence.

“We use it to find body fluids and fibers,” Casey says. “It looks like a black light, but it’s actually a different wavelength.”

Wearing protective eyewear, analysts can use the light at varying lengths to make fibers or body fluids glow.

Casey says the most difficult technical aspects of any case are the unknowns. Recently, Casey had to search more than a dozen large blankets to see if there were any traces of semen.

“You’re looking for something colorless on very colorful blankets,” Casey says. “You don’t know if there’s anything there and you never know if you’ve gotten everything.”

Once a case has gone cold, with no new evidence or suspects, investigators must try to work with what they have. Sometimes the contact between an agency and a victim’s family lasts years. In the case of Mandy Stavik, the WCSO is still in touch with Stavik’s mother on a regular basis more than 20 years later, Parks says.

“The one thing we are hopeful about is that we do have evidence that at some point may come up with a hit on someone who is involved and responsible,” Parks says.

Because DNA is collected from every convicted felon and entered into the CODIS database on a continual basis, there is the potential a match could be found someday.

Anyone with information about Stavik’s death is asked to call the Detective Sergeant of the Whatcom County Sheriff’s Office at 360-676-6650.
Five safety experts stood surrounding Donny Nichols, a Western alumnus; two with fire extinguishers, one with a hose, one with a blanket and one calling the shots. It was the middle of summer, but he was freezing. He wore specially designed underwear, soaked in a gel chilled overnight. It covered everything that his cotton jeans and jacket didn’t – it was a good thing too, because they were about to light him on fire.
One of the experts used a brush to paint a mixture of kerosene and rubber cement in a big V on his back, and then the countdown started. The moment he heard “action,” Nichols ignited, but he did not feel a thing. The gel protected him as his clothes became a heatless inferno, his shirt and jacket turning to ash and floating away in the wind. He was instructed not to breathe through his mouth while on fire; if he inhaled he would breathe in toxic smoke, and if he exhaled the heat of the fire would suck all the oxygen out of his lungs. Ten seconds after he was lit, they told him to get on the ground while they put him out. Nichols was a stuntman-in-training, and this is just the first of dozens of controlled burns he has participated in during his career.

For a professional stuntman, an average day at work can present a host of dangers. They can end up burned, crushed, broken and cut if they are not careful, and the difference between coming out of the day unscathed or coming out with one less finger depends on the amount of precision that he and his handlers put into their work. Some stuntmen join powerful unions to ensure that their safety needs are met, while others risk it by going alone.

Nichols had his fiery experience when he was a student at Seattle’s International Stunt School in 2009. Learning how to look good on camera while also on fire is an essential stuntman skill, and every student in the school’s program learns how to do it safely. The gel, a mixture of a lotion base and water chilled in ice, keeps the performer’s exposed skin safe from the flames. When doing a fire stunt, each stuntman wears only cotton or wool clothing over special underwear, as anything synthetic has the potential to melt onto the performer’s skin instead of burning away completely. Each performer also learns how to move while on fire to keep the flames burning bright, using pockets of air in their clothing to direct the burn, Nichols says.

Nichols says he always joked about becoming a stuntman growing up in his hometown of Sequim, Wash. There was not much to do there, so he spent most of his free time running and practicing stunts on his own, he says. While hanging out with parkour groups at Western, he met fellow student and future stuntman Tommy Marshall, with whom he would later go to the International Stunt School.

“I fell in love [with doing stunts],” Nichols says. “I met lot of lifelong friends doing them.”

Marshall’s introduction to stunt work came from his friend Rob Bradstreet, who had gone to the International Stunt School in 2008 and convinced Marshall to give it a shot. Bradstreet is another Western alumnus and stuntman. He graduated from Western in 2005 with a degree in mathematics. He says he first got into martial arts at age 10, and spent years training in Judo and Hapkido. While at Western, Bradstreet says martial arts were a way for him to relax. He made videos of himself performing martial arts for fun, but after graduation he went to work for a bank; a job he says he found profitable but boring.

One day he heard about the International Stunt School while listening to NPR radio, and says it sounded like exactly what he had wanted to do. He went there for the first time in 2008, and says even with his prior martial arts training, he had a lot to learn.

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“If people know you’re physically capable of doing it, they’ll bring you in.”

— Rob Bradstreet
Finding Work

No certifications exist for being a stuntman or graduating from stuntman school, and jobs are found primarily through word of mouth, Bradstreet says.

“If people know you’re physically capable of doing it, they’ll bring you in,” he says.

Bradstreet has done stunts for an episode of the TV show “Leverage” and in the Sci-Fi channel movie “Bigfoot,” he says. Marshall currently works for Amazon’s on-demand video service. In his free time, he works with a group called Last Reel Cinema and coordinated stunts in a promotional video for their Kickstarter project “Wake,” which they hope to turn into an internet-based series, he says.

Some stunt performers decide to move to find work. Nichols moved to the Los Angeles area a few months after graduating from stunt school and now swashbuckles as a pirate in a dinner theatre. At this job he swings on ropes, fights with swords and his fists and performs stunts on huge rotating ladders while guests watch and eat dinner. He has acted in commercials for Bic Razors and Pepsi, and was an evil henchman in a live-action film series called “Castlevania: Hymn of Blood,” which was based on a video game.

Work as a stunt performer has benefits and risks, Bradstreet says. The dangerous nature of the work brings with it good pay and strong union benefits, but the physical toll on the performer can be excruciating. While it does not deter him, the danger is always there, he says.

Fire stunts are just one of the things stuntmen train to do, and they have to be willing to do things most would consider crazy just to earn a living. At the dinner theatre, Nichols says he does dangerous stunts on an almost daily basis. Whether he is sword fighting, swinging from a spinning ladder or just being lit on fire, it is all just an average day for him, a professional stuntman at work.
KLIPSUN
Is a Chinuk Wawa word meaning sunset.

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