6-1999

Klipsun Magazine, 1999 - June

Tina Potterf

Western Washington University

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fireworks

breakdancing

hip-hop
1. Kari Benny is a journalism/public relations major at Western and graduates in the fall of 1999. Benny has also been published in The Planet and The Western Front.

2. Elisha Joseph is a journalism major and dance minor. She participates in campus dance concerts and hopes to obtain a position in public relations for the arts.

3. R. Andy Faubion is a journalism major/business minor. Faubion raises mules and horses on a farm south of Puyallup and is a firefighter.

4. Klaus Gosma is a communications major/journalism minor and will graduate this quarter from Western. Gosma's goal with his Klipsun article was to write a piece that was interesting to people exposed to hip-hop and those naive to it. Gosma has also been published in The Western Front.

5. Heather Gould's interest in journalism began with photography. While working as an intern in the photojournalism department at the Anchorage Daily News in '95, Gould determined she did not want to be a writer after concluding she couldn't handle the pressure of the deadlines.

6. Cindy Nunley graduates from Western this summer with a journalism degree. This is Nunley's first story published in Klipsun.

7. Fred Sheffield has been published twice before in Klipsun magazine. He is a senior majoring in journalism with aspirations of working in website design. His work has also been published in the Edmonds-based Enterprise newspaper group, and Seattle Opera Magazine.

8. Samantha Tretheway is studying the subjective voice and its influence on writing. She will graduate from Western in the fall of 1999, with degrees from Fairhaven College and the journalism department.

Staff: Kari Benny, Katy Calbreath, Cole Cosgrove, Rachel Dooley, R. Andy Faubion, Kelly Ferguson, Klaus Gosma, Heather Gould, Holly Hinterberger, Maggie Huffer, Elisha Joseph, Corey Lewis, Dan Miller, Melissa Miller, Sarah Miller, Heather Mills, Chris Muellenbach, Cindy Nunley, Michelle Rennie, Christine Ross, Fred Sheffield, Dave Shepherd, Robin Skillings, Darcy Spann, Samantha Tretheway, Carrie Crystal Van Driel, Tiffany White, Matt Williams and Carrie Wood

back cover
Abduction, torture, rape and murder were among Ken Bianchi's hobbies when he killed two Western students in 1979.
breaking through Heather Gould ventured to Mount Vernon to spend time with Fresh Force, a group of Mexican-American breakdancers

seeds of discontent Samantha Trehewey weighs imbalances between farm workers and owners

not yo' mama's llama Kari Benny discovers the allure of alpacas

hip-hop Klaus Gosma dissects the urban rhythms of Bellingham's hip-hop scene

satin, lace and kashmir Elisha Joseph examines a partnership of stripping and commerce

some like it hot R. Andy Faubion dispatches the firefighters at Marietta's Fire Stations

eyes wide open Cindy Nunley reveals one detective's ideas about an increase in sexual crimes

pyros' playground Fred Sheffield gets close to the fire with pyrotechnicians
Teenagers, immersed in a world of hip-hop music and intricate body moves, are driven by the thrill of competition. Heather Gould infiltrates a ‘breakers’ circle in Skagit County and explores the roots and the might of a movement.

"Can you rock it like this?" ask old-school rap masters Run-DMC in their lyrics that blare through the intercom. "I think I can rock it like that!" the crowd explodes back, their energetic voices bouncing off the walls.

"But can you rock it like this?"

"Homeboy, I rock it like that," the mass of voices respond, barely resonating over the vibrating bass.

A circle of 24 Hispanic teens bounce and pulsate in sync with the rhythms of the lyrics and bass. Anxiety and deep concentration covers each face, accented by the dim fluorescent lights that expose the beads of sweat forming on the brows of the boys who are about to enter a battle.

One of the teens, his small frame buried in his oversize white windbreaking suit, enters the circle in the gym at La Venture Middle School. His body soaks in the music, letting it out first through his hands. The breaker starts popping — his hands move, as if separated from the rest of his body, in short, gyrating motions, matching the quickening beat of the music. The rhythm travels up his elbows, to his shoulders, until his entire upper body joins in the robotic motion. Moving down to the floor, he spins on his back and shoulders, legs sprawled and twisting above him like a finely tuned gymnast.

The young breaker, a member of Fresh Force, of Sedro-Woolley, spins faster and faster like a top. Alfonso "Buddy" Melendrez finishes with a pose on the floor — head cocked to one side, resting casually in his right hand, his left hand propped on his hip and left leg crossed over the right, completed with a daunting, "Try to beat that" look. Melendrez returns to his feet, challenging a member of the opposite crew.

Chants of "Go Buddy, Go Buddy" escape from the lips of onlookers.

The crowd — a mix of teenage girls, friends of both rival crews, some parents and brothers and sisters — are dedicated followers of Fresh Force, one of two break dancing troupes in Skagit Valley.

His rival breaker, from the Mount Vernon crew Reckless, begins his routine, cutting through the circle with wide strides. The breaker throws his feet above his head and arches his back to shape a handstand and then holds the position in a display of strength and agility. Falling to one elbow, he holds a second position, then lowers himself down for a headspin. The young, mostly Junior high students show promise as skilled breakers.

The two crews duel until each member has danced at least once. There is no set way to judge the winning crew, say the members of Fresh Force. A code exists among breakers, however. Each one knows the hierarchy of moves, with the hardest ones earning the victory. A headspin is harder than a handspin, so the breaker who challenges a handspin with a headspin wins. The crowd announces the winning crew by the loudest whistles and cheers.
Buddy Melendrez, 13, performs a windmill on top of a ping-pong table in the gym at Cascade Middle School in Sedro-Woolley. Melendrez is one of 12 members in the Fresh Force breakdancing crew.
In their last arranged battle against Reckless, which took place in December, the crowd cheered Fresh Force into victory. The victory was the culmination of countless hours of practice.

The members of Fresh Force began breakdancing together about two years ago. Members Jose, Sergio, Buddy, Daniel, Julio and Juan met through cousins and brothers. They also all share Mexican roots. Some of them moved here only a few years ago, and others were born after their parents moved to Washington to find jobs as farmworkers.

Members of Fresh Force say they started breakdancing as an alternative to joining gangs. Although most of the members of Fresh Force haven't experienced any gang involvement, they say they have grown up with brothers, cousins or older friends that were involved in gangs. They say they figured that life they would have ended up with.

"We decided we didn't want to get in gangs for the most part," explains Julio De La Torre, 15. "We just made a group and started breakdancing."

His crew member, Juan Gonzalez, 13, adds, "We have a lot of cousins that are in gangs. We see them, a lot of time, in trouble, and I don't want to be like that. We decided to do something positive."

Not every member of Fresh Force resisted the pull of gangs. Fernando Villegas, 17, recounts a brush with death while involved in a gang.

"One of my gang members got shot by his own gang. It was an accident," Villegas explains. "One of the guys came over to our friend's house [where] we were at to get a gun. He said he was going to, 'Take care of some business.' And the guy who had the gun, he was just joking around, saying, 'I'm going to shoot you. I'm going to shoot you,' just pretending because he was drunk. And he would pull the trigger, but nothing would come out ... ."

"And he didn't know a bullet had come down and got stuck in [the chamber], and he shot the guy who walked in the door," he continues. "He shot him in the chest. I didn't see it, but I was in the room next door. I heard he died at the hospital."

Villegas says he quit the gang after this incident and started breakdancing.

Villegas had been shot at during drive-bys, yet his round, young face would never reveal his encounters with death.

A possible way out of gangs presented itself to Villegas and some of his peers a few years ago, when they saw old pictures and videos of their fathers and uncles breaking. Seeing rappers, such as Run-D.M.C., break in their videos also encouraged them. They say they thought it looked cool and fun, so they tried it. Fresh Force members ended up getting a lot of their initial moves from old rap music videos and by persuading their fathers to share their moves.

Fresh Force and Reckless are not the first to use breakdancing as a form of expression and a means of channeling physical anger into something productive and positive.

The roots of breakdancing trace back to the late '60s and early '70s, when kids started dancing to rap music in New York's Harlem and South Bronx neighborhoods. The dancers adjusted their dance style to match the rhythms of the music, and the first breakdancing moves were born.

At the same time, kids started forming groups to dance together. Afrika Bambaataa, a DJ at the time, saw the dancing as a competitive tool that could be used to funnel the fighting between gangs into something positive. Bambaataa organized one of the first groups of dancers and called them the Zulu Kings. The Zulu Kings were challenged by another gang, and Bambaataa arranged for them to fight with dance rather than weapons. Within months, the Zulu Kings had expanded into the 5,000 member Zulu Nation.

Although not a Zulu Nation, the breakdancing scene in Skagit County is becoming well known, even among those who don't dance.

"You see, it's all about respecting the dance and the other dancers, other crews," says Jose Fuerte, as he throws his tan, roughly-shaven face back, smooths his dark hair under his Sonic hat and continues. "We try not to put people down and act better than them. It's just a battle between who has the best moves. If somebody goes out there and does a hand spin for six or seven rounds, then we'll have some-one go out there and do it longer. It's all about mixing too. Mixing your moves and doing combinations."

Both Fresh Force and Reckless have their own version of Bambaata in Tony Sosa. Sosa moved to Sedro-Woolley in 1986 from Sinoloa, Mexico.

"I came here and saw the Hispanics were separate, separate in every way. We were looked at differently, you know, just walking down the street you could get bad looks," Sosa explains. "And the kids, they thought they had to use violence to get their frustrations out. I saw that and I wanted to make things better; I wanted to change things — show the community we can be one."

A student in the Human Services program at Skagit Valley College for the past few years, Sosa seeks to help students overcome chemical dependencies. He also helps organize and promote the battles between the breakdancing crews in Skagit County. The battles Sosa organizes usually take place during community celebrations, such as Sedro-Woolley's Loggerrodeo festival and Mexican Fiestas.
The battles are not typically prearranged. They may occur at school dances or functions, or whenever any of the Skagit Valley crews cross each other, say the members of Fresh Force.

"It's, like they say, you know, after 2 o'clock, from 2:30 p.m. to 5 p.m., what is outside for these kids after school?" Sosa asks.

"Sometimes their parents are working, and these kids, they have nothing to do. So the idea is they get together, and it is time to do something different, something positive, which is best. These are such good kids."

The kids practice after school, almost every day, at some of the breakers' houses or at an area middle school.

"I think what keeps us doing it is thinking about other crews getting better," De La Torre says. "We have to keep practicing."

"Practice makes you better," Sergio Hernandez adds.

The conversation turns to the boys' role models, the Rock-Steady Crew. The Rock-Steady Crew started with some of the original members of the Zulu Nation, Crazy Legs and Frosty Freeze. The members have come and gone, but the team has been alive since 1969.

"I want to be just like them, like Crazy Legs," De La Torre says. "Touring the world, winning tournaments and breaking for everyone."

Julio then stops to ponder the possibilities of breakdancing.

"It never dies, breakdancing."

"It's coming back," Jose smiles.

Sergio laughs and replies, "It never left."

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SEEDS OF DISCONTENT
Samantha Tretheway takes a step back to reconcile the treatment of farm workers with consumers' desires for inexpensive produce and farmers' need for a continuous labor supply.

“Cheap labor — I guess that’s what it’s all about,” Daniel Reyes says quietly. Reyes’ 42-year-old body is halfway in and halfway out of his ’47 Chevy. The truck runs sometimes, and sometimes it doesn’t, he says, straightening his lean body.

“Will you tell me if the lights are on?” he asks.

He hopes to get the truck running in time for the Farm Worker Solidarity March. But no lights mean an electrical problem, and that’s something Reyes doesn’t know how to fix.

“Guess I’ll have to pay someone to fix it,” he says. “Mechanics are worse than doctors. But you gotta do what you gotta do.”

During his tenure at Western, Reyes spearheaded CESAR, an Associated Students club, so he could focus on farm worker issues. He now serves as co-chair of the Farm Worker Solidarity Committee of Skagit Valley; the committee organizes the annual Farm Worker Solidarity March.

Growers aren’t the enemy, Reyes says, but they could give a little.

“If people made a living wage, then maybe they could feel proud of being farm workers,” Reyes says, pausing before he remembers Cesar Chavez, the founder of the United Farm Workers of America, the first union to demand rights for farm workers. “Cesar Chavez said that farm work is a noble profession.”

Jean Youngquist couldn’t agree more. “If we’re unable to harvest food ... A country without food is set up for failure — it has no self-defense.

“Without a labor force working in the fields, there wouldn’t be food to feed the nation,” she says.

Just 12 miles from Reyes’ Anacortes home, Mike and Jean Youngquist own and operate Mike & Jean’s Berry Farm, a 600-acre farm in Skagit Valley. The Youngquists hire as many as 150 workers to harvest raspberries, cauliflower, cucumbers and strawberries during their peak season.

“We got a mechanized picker for the raspberries a couple of years back, but the rest have to be picked by hand,” Mike says.

The mechanized picker slaps the bushes with its plastic fingers and the ripe fruit plops onto a conveyer belt where workers wait to sort the plump berries.

“Last year, we were 20 percent short of our crew and lost 20 percent of our crop,” Jean says. High-maintenance crops such as cucumbers, which must be harvested within a four-day period, are especially vulnerable. “They just rot if you don’t pick them.”

“We pay them enough,” Mike says. “I know my best workers have to earn at least eight dollars per hour [or they’ll go work for someone else], but my worst workers aren’t going to earn any more than three to four dollars per hour. They can live for six months in Mexico off the wages they earn while they’re here.”

Not all farm workers go back to Mexico during the off-season, though. Many are U.S. citizens and live in Washington state. Three or four dollars per hour is not a living — or even the minimum — wage for them.

If farmers paid farm workers a higher wage, the farmers’ overhead would be higher, as would the cost of produce.

Like many farmers in Skagit Valley, the Youngquists support an amendment to immigration law. Hza, commonly known as the guest worker program, would provide a continuous supply of labor. If the law passes, farmers could request temporary visas for Mexican citizens willing to work in the fields. The workers could be
A typical day in the fields for farm workers picking cucumbers on a Skagit Valley farm. 

photo courtesy of Jessie Cavazos

sent back to Mexico when the season is over — a program similar to the Bracero Program that was in place from 1942 to 1964.

The government funded the Bracero Program with the objective of helping the struggling American farmer find cheap labor. Unemployed Mexican workers could legally work in the U.S. without applying for their green card or citizenship. The program brought more than five million Mexican workers to 24 states during its 22 years in existence.

The growing population of workers made it easier for illegal immigrants to blend in with the legal population. American farm workers and their unions expressed concern that farmers would no longer hire American citizens — preferring the cheaper labor of illegal immigrants. The government disbanded the program under pressure from anti-immigration lobbyists and unions.

Farmers who support the guest worker program say enrollees will receive benefits such as adequate housing, health care and a living wage. When the season ends and no work remains, the farm workers will go back to Mexico and return when their services are again needed.

Opponents of the guest worker program say it will guarantee imported workers while denying work to American citizens.

Veronica Garibay, 21, came legally to the U.S. in 1989, when she was 12. She, with her family of three brothers, two sisters, father and mother, worked in the fields of Skagit Valley — a valley they now call home.

The Garibays left farm work for jobs that require less physical labor and offer higher pay.

Veronica now holds two jobs. She works with the special education program at Mount Vernon High School, and she volunteers at the Washington Migrant Council, an organization dedicated to educating farm workers in everything from English to studying for the Washington State Commercial Drivers License test.

Veronica’s mother and father went into business for themselves. They own Tacos Guadalajara, a trailer-bound taco stand that travels to the fields they once worked in.

Maria and Samuel Garibay, with their 19-year-old son, Samuel, operate Tacos Guadalajara.

On a typical day, they leave their house at 8:30 a.m., and head north toward the Washington Bulb Company, a 2500-acre farm that employs more than 300 workers during its peak season. Tacos Guadalajara arrives three miles outside the Mount Vernon city limits, bringing with it the deep-fried smells of hot Mexican food.

Two minutes after the truck stops — just enough time for the Garibay’s to set up shop — workers run for the taco stand’s open metal awning.

“They have been working since 5 a.m., and this is their break,” the younger Samuel says.

Men and women dressed in hardy, yet comfortable, Levi’s and sweatshirts wait their turn to be served the mouthwatering food.

White paint splotches the metal siding protecting this kitchen-on-
wheels where the Garibays cook tacos, burritos and special tortas — Mexican-style hamburgers. Hungry workers can order chicken, beef or pork and top it off with Sangria, Jarritos or Jumex — drinks from Mexico. 

"The name [Tacos Guadalajara] lets people know how the food is cooked," Veronica says. There's no way to explain how Guadalajaran food differs from the food of other regions of Mexico, she says. 

"It's like trying to explain the difference between McDonald's and Burger King. You can't. It's just different."

"We got the business in 1994, from the money we saved from the fields," Veronica continues. "We didn't want to work in the fields anymore. Now our family is selling to the people in the fields."

The Garibays left both farm work and their destiny of poverty behind. "Where's the nobility in poverty?" Reyes asks. "There's no way for the farmer and the farm worker to work together if there's a guest worker program," he says. "The guest worker program isn't good for farm workers who live here."

If the farmer can legally obtain inexpensive labor from Mexico, the farm workers here won't legally be able to unionize for better wages — they won't have jobs. It's easier, he says, for farmers to get the labor from Mexico at the low prices they want than to work with the unions and the labor pool already in the United States.

"If farmers say there's a work shortage, they're lying," Reyes says. "There's plenty of people up here working; (farmers) just want cheap labor."

"We need the labor," Jean Youngquist says. 

Farmers won't find it among the rising middle-class of the U.S. "They'd have to pay me $20 per hour [to work in the fields]," says Kelly Whetstone, a Western junior. She quickly adds, "I was just kidding — I would never, ever pick berries."

She stands near a mosaic of neatly stacked green apples, complemented by bright naval oranges and deep-red California strawberries. Her eyes squinch shut at the mere thought of working in the fields. When she graduates, she'll work a steady, well-paying job — they could never pay her enough to do physical labor.

"We think about how much it costs and that we're always paying too much," she says, as she looks down at the fruit in her basket.

"As consumers, they have a voice," he says. "They could demand that the farm worker gets paid more by paying more themselves."

Samuel Garibay prepares his taco stand for the farm workers' lunch break.

"If farmers say there is a work shortage, they're lying. There's plenty of people up here working; (farmers) just want cheap labor."

— Daniel Reyes

photographs by Sarah Evenson
Not Yo' Mama's Llama

Cute, cuddly and oh, so irresistible, alpacas are increasingly a favorite among animal lovers. Kari Benny examines the appeal behind these diminutive darlings.

"They're too short to be llamas," says John Sherrodd of the peculiar animals that catch his eye as he drives south on Interstate 5.

Sherrodd, of Bellingham, is paying a visit to his family in Tacoma. His usually mundane trip has just taken on a fascinating dimension.

"They have too long of necks to be sheep and they have way too much hair to be goats," Sherrodd says.

The animals in question are alpacas — a domesticated animal that originates in South America, high in the plains of the Andes Mountains. Members of the camelid family and cousins to llamas, alpacas are bred for their coats and play a central role in the Incan culture.

Taking the next freeway exit, with time to spare, Sherrodd meanders the windy, country
roads until coming to an 8-foot-high, black wrought-iron gate, which poses the only obstacle to his hunt for these mysterious animals. Surveying the gate, Sherrodd's eyes land on the steel sign that reads "Alpacas of America" and dangles above the gate. Sherrodd hesitantly opens the gate and drives his sedan down the hilly, gravel road.

A sprawling house rests at the end of the road on the right, and a sterile, white office-type building with blue trim resides directly across from it. Sherrodd pulls his car into a parking spot in front of the building.

From his car he sees a reddish-brown fence just a little taller than the more than 1,500 animals with symmetrical spear-shaped ears peering out from the enclosed pasture. Their large, brown eyes, framed by a few straggling hairs, gaze toward Sherrodd as though they are welcoming him into their home. Their thin, delicate legs are covered with dense coats of black, white, brown or cream hair. Their small but sturdy frames support their 150-pound weight.

"They are so cute," Sherrodd says.

Tucking his light brown hair under his khaki hat, Sherrodd opens his car door and makes his way to the building. Casually grasping the doorknob with his large hand, Sherrodd pushes the wood door open. A large desk in the main foyer of the carpeted building dominates the woman sitting behind it. Voices are heard from the rooms. Magazines with "Alpaca" in their titles, are conveniently overlapping each other on a coffee table. A slight, young woman with tightly curled dark hair emerges from one of the back rooms and overflows with excitement when Sherrodd asks about the animals that he tracked down so diligently.

Allyson Werre, an employee of Alpacas of America, is anxious to show him the ranch, its investment opportunities — the alpaca — and the animal's history.

Sherrodd finds out that South America has the greatest alpaca population, but in the past two decades, the North American herd has experienced an increase. He also learns they've been around for more than 5,000 years, even before the Incan Empire was established.

"The first import of alpacas was brought to North America in 1984," Werre informs Sherrodd.

Today, less than 20,000 are registered in North America.

Why the growing interest in alpacas?

Some people enjoy alpacas as pets and some keep them for investment purposes, Werre says. Most enjoy them for both reasons.

Alpacas are the ideal pets, she explains. They are friendly, making them safe for children to play with, unlike large-hoofed animals such as cows and horses. They are also clean animals — most owners say they spend only 15 minutes a day taking care of their alpacas. That's much less time than it takes to care for a dog.

"Alpacas are less expensive to feed than a dog," Werre says.

The cost to take care of an alpaca is fairly low. Most owners pay $50 to feed an animal for one year, and other costs such as shearing their coats and other grooming costs are not high. Werre says alpacas can even go for a short trip in the backseat of a sedan. Their domesticated nature gives them the capability to be trained much like a dog.

"People find that alpacas are very conducive to their lifestyles," she says.

Brad and Barb Hageman, owners of Stanwood Alpacas, did inform Sherrodd his idea to house train an alpaca may not be particularly wise.

Werre says alpacas need only a small space — one acre is enough for five to ten alpacas.

Alpacas do have some similarities to an average domesticated pet, but there are incredible differences.

"The most that a maiden female has sold for at an auction is $56,500, and a breeding herdsire male has sold for up to $150,000," Werre says.

The less expensive alpacas start at $10,000. The initial cost depends on the quality of the alpaca, judging by bone structure, hair density, thickness and texture.

For breeding purposes, it is beneficial to start with a higher quality animal, and that is why people will pay large sums of money for a high-quality breeding male.

Many breeders, not wanting to pay the high price to own a top-quality male, take their female to a ranch that specializes in stud service.

Sherrodd says he discovered that the average cost of a stud service is about $2,500.

"Breeding is the main investment of alpacas in America," Werre says. "But as the population grows, the alpaca textile industry in North America will as well, creating a demand for their coats."

Ready to meet that demand is Alpacas of America, billing itself as the largest alpaca ranch in the Northern Hemisphere. It began its operation with a handful of alpacas that produced a herd of more than 1,500.
Alpaca ranches are the homes to the two types of alpacas — Suris and Huacayas. While they look similar, they have distinct coats and personalities. Suris have silky, straight coats that form tight spiral locks as they get longer, creating a dread-lock look. Colored Suris are a rare and thus valuable breed. Huacayas, the most common type of alpaca, have softer, crimped coats.

More than 40 owners and breeders, including Alpacas of America, belong to the Alpaca Association of Western Washington. These alpaca owners participate in events such as the recent "Alpacapalooza," an exhibit at the Evergreen State Fairgrounds touted as "Two days of peace, love and livestock."

Alpaca owners Debbie and Barry Bartmasser were anxious to show off their animals and eager to share their alpaca stories with visitors.

"We wanted an animal that you didn't have to milk, slaughter and that didn't make any noise," says Debbie, co-owner of Emerald Farm, as she glances over her shoulder at her collection of furry companions.

While attending a livestock exhibit at the San Juan County Fairgrounds, the Bartmassers found their dream animal — the alpaca.

Today, they own eight alpacas, which graze on their 11-acre farm in Friday Harbor on the San Juan Islands.

"We would eventually like to turn our alpaca farm into a full-time business," she says.

For beginners in the industry, Werre suggests buying a pregnant female and boarding it until its baby is born.

The Hagemans started their farm with one pregnant female, Ginger. They purchased her in March of 1998, and shortly thereafter, her baby Gigi was born. The two alpacas arrived at the Stanwood Farm together.

People are able to start their farms the way the Hagemans' did, with just one alpaca and without the large-scale financial burden.

The cost to purchase a large number of alpacas is high, but as long as the animals are used for breeding — not wool production — they can be written off.

Upkeep for the alpacas may also be written off, Werre says, pointing at a large barn filled with neatly stacked hay bales and eight of the ranch's female alpacas who lapped up the attention Sherrodd poured on them.

The cost may be high, but owners at "Alpacapalooza" say it is worth it.

"We fell in love with the animals," says Barry as he enters the stall where his two alpacas eagerly wait for his attention.

Sherrodd says he also fell in love with the animals and was impressed by the industry.

He stares into the deep brown eyes of an alpaca standing near the fence and pats it on its slight head. Shrugging, he realizes his hopes of owning an alpaca will have to be put on hold for now.

photography by Michelle Rennie
‘Rap is something you do

Hip-hop has gone from novelty act to enduring art form. Klaus Gosma explores a culture's impact in Bellingham. He talks to some of the region's purveyors and peels away the layers of hype to reveal its hip-hop urban essence.
What is hip-hop?

Hip-hop is a culture. Born in New York’s five boroughs, hip-hop became the nexus of four elements – turntabling or DJing, rhyming or emceeing, breakdancing and graffiti.

**hip-hop is something you live.**

— KRS One, rapper, scholar.

A quick reference guide for the hip-hop impaired: DJ (deejay) – someone who uses two turntables and a mixer to play records, sometimes simultaneously and mixes them together creatively; Scratching – what a DJ does to the records by moving them back and forth under the needle to create a unique sound, which is an element of many rap songs; MC (emcee) – master of ceremonies or in hip-hop, one who uses a microphone and rhymes over beats with clever lyrics; and Freestyle – when an MC has no written or prefabricated lyrics, but rhymes impromptu over an instrumental.

For almost two decades, hip-hop has gone through various phases, most visibly through its music, rhythmic American poetry, or rap.

Hip-hop has invaded popular culture through its newfound marketability and vast number of consumers. Hip-hop artist Lauryn Hill just ran away with five Grammys for her borderline R&B album *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*, soft drink contracts and clothing lines are aimed at the culture, and *Time* magazine ran an article on the "Hip-Hop Nation." In short, hip-hop is becoming omnipresent.

Even in Bellingham, Wash., a city nestled in between the major urban centers of Vancouver, B.C., and Seattle, there is a modest hip-hop scene.

"I can't live without my radio."

— LL Cool J.

Jaques Cousteau is the original purveyor of hip-hop music in Bellingham — Whatcom County’s Sir Mix-A-Lot, if you will.

A Bellingham native, Cousteau, 28, had a nine-year stint on KUGS (89.3 FM) hosting Bellingham’s only hip-hop show before passing the torch to friend and fellow DJ, J-Tyme.

In an old building off West Holly near the lettered streets, Cousteau is on the phone in shorts, a blue T-shirt with the cartoon character “the Flea”’s face emblazoned on it and black pigtails.

His apartment is tidy, but not painstakingly so.

Japanimation action figures stand guard on shelves bordering the walls. Other animated posters jump out of their one-dimension. Hip-hop posters featuring Bobby Digital and Los Angeles rapper Defari look at home among the random pieces of semi-pop culture. Records adorn the ceiling and two turntables rest atop the dresser next to the bed.

He tells me he doesn’t practice turntabliring.
"Everybody wants to be a DJ, everybody wants to be an emcee."
— De La Soul.

DJ J-Tyme, AKA Jason Guerrero, got Cousteau's number from Seattle DJ B Mello as a contact person when he reached Bellingham.

J-Tyme graduated from North Seattle's Shorecrest High School in 1991, and borrowed his record shop co-workers' turntables and a crate of records. After initially calling Cousteau, J-Tyme sat in on his radio show a few times to get the feel for it. Eventually, Jacques left the show. "Jacques gave me an opportunity," J-Tyme says. "He felt he needed a break and passed the show off to me."

J applied for the vacant hip-hop show and got the job. The program "Mass Appeal," a title that is an allusion to a song by Brooklyn's old-school duo Gang Starr, is on Friday nights from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m.

J-Tyme is a mellow guy. He is shorter, with a medium build. Close-shaved black hair and glasses give him a Clark Kent—quality. He is working toward a communications degree between classes at Western and Whatcom Community College. In addition to his show, he deejays house parties and likes to DJ battle.

J-Tyme says he knew about Bellingham's hip-hop scene, or lack thereof, before coming here. "My attitude was (Jacques Cousteau is) the only one," J-Tyme says. "I wanted to help him expand on it [the hip-hop scene]. It needed to be exposed more. I felt like this could be my launching pad."

J-Tyme recently competed in the Northwest DMC battle at Seattle's RCKNDY. During the DMC battle, DJs each got two minutes to wreck shop. The 24 DJs are quickly cut to six, with each getting six minutes to either move the crowd or move off stage. The winner — unfortunately not our man — goes to San Francisco for the United States finals and then nationals.

J-Tyme says he'll always be into DJing, but if he had to choose between that and getting airtime, air is the priority. "My main focus is to work in the radio or record industry," he says. "Hopefully, radio, records or promotion."

The other half of KUGS' current hip-hop rotation is Seattle-native Dathan Ladniak. A 1998 graduate of Western and alumni of Seattle's Garfield High School, Ladniak talked program director Josh Sanchez into giving him the 2:30 a.m. to 5 a.m. time slot on Wednesday nights last quarter.

Ladniak, a wearer of baggy pants and backward-baseball caps occasionally tilted to one side, worked to promote Western's first hip-hop festival, which he organized with Associated Students Special Events and Popular Music.
When he first approached the Associated Students in fall of 1998, they were receptive of the idea, but basically told him to check back in the winter.

When Ladniak approached the A.S. again, they were trying to get alternative hip-hop veterans and Long Island natives De La Soul to perform at Western, but their stakes were too high.

With a sizable budget from the A.S. to work with, Ladniak was able to coax an all-star lineup to Western including Los Angeles' Pharcyde and the Bay Area's brash emcees Souls of Mischief, of the super-group Hieroglyphics, to perform in Carver Gym. DMS and Ghetto Children, of Seattle, were also in attendance. Former De La Soul DJ and current hip-hop darling Prince Paul hosted the event.

"The title emcee means master of ceremonies. A lot of emcees don't know what this term means." — A Tribe Called Quest.

On the third Wednesday of "L.A.D. da gorilla's hip-hop show," Ladniak featured friends and local emcees Smokey Ro and Sergio.

"I was like, 'Come do it, come do it.' And so they came through on the third show," Ladniak recalls.

Since then, Ladniak has featured various freestyle artists on the show, and Smokey Ro has been a staple.

Ro, aka Sean Robinson, has won the freestyle contest finals held at the Canadian nightclub Funky Planet twice — once in a tie with his friend Harold Robinson, AKA Exile.

Winning the freestyle finals at Funky Planet is a distinction Ro shares with Western student Harold Robinson, aka Exile, and a female rapper from Vancouver, B.C., named Sketch J-Imani.

Ro is currently working with Exile and Isei, Western student Ian Flambeuf. The three performed together at the hip-hop festival's freestyle contest.

Freestyling is difficult, but when done correctly, people give you props. Imagine being at a party or on the radio or in front of a crowd and spitting out rapid-fire rhymes off the top of your head that are clever and intelligible. Some emcees with record contracts can't do it. Freestyling is integral to hip-hop.

What is the true essence of hip-hop? Is it in Time magazine? Is it dressing a certain way at the mall? Is it Will Smith?

J-Tyme responds quickly. "That's the million dollar question." He quotes KRS-One and continues to explain. "You've got to be down not just with the sound of hip-hop, but the history and four elements as well."

J-Tyme says it's not so much the music, it's about a way of doing and looking at things, changing things and going to the next level.

"The scene in Bellingham has a lot of heart and a little pulse." Ladniak reasons. "Hip-hop is beautiful because you can say whatever you want or stand however you want, as long as it rhymes (in rap music), it's cool. It is definitely a culture, not a sub-culture. It's too big."

"Your experiences are what hip-hop is to you," Ro says. "When everyone has an open mind, hip-hop will blossom. A farmer might not like it because all he sees are tractors and cows. But someone could rhyme about it and he would dig it."

Hip-hop can no longer be ignored. Record companies learned that the music would sell in the '80s, now everyone wants to exploit it.

Although hip-hop exists in relative obscurity locally, there are underground purists working to ensure the preservation of the music and culture in Bellingham.

"(Hip-hop is) not just one thing; it's a lot of things," Ro says. "Some people are more into lyrics and underground hip-hop. Some people hear the beats, not what people are saying. When both are tight, that's 100 percent hip-hop."

"everybody wants to be an emcee." — De La Soul.
Beyond the seductive music, high-heel shoes and smoky haze, the life of a stripper is exposed, piece by piece. **Elisha Joseph** talks to local entrepreneur Kashmir Erikson.
Erikson tends to her pet chameleons, some of the many animals she raises.

In her thigh-high leather boots, a short skirt with a design of swirls and flowers at its edge, and a black tanktop revealing her thin arms, Kashmir Erikson causes men to swivel on their stools.

She slides into her seat, cigarette in one hand, tequila sunrise in the other and welcomes the attention she has gathered since her entry into the Quarterback Pub and Eatery on a Sunday night. She quickly places her cellular phone on the table and casually glances around the bar.

The waiter approaches with the first request from a gentleman at the bar to buy Erikson a drink. She brushes her long, loosely curled hair from her face and special-orders another pink concoction with two straws and a cherry.

The Quarterback Pub is adorned with men and women playing pool, those drinking away their day of worship at their usual altar and one 30-year-old woman who likes to garden, make jewelry and remove one article of clothing per song as she dances.

Erikson is a stripper and owner of Kashmir's Dream Angels, an exotic dancing service for bachelor parties, birthdays and other occasions, private and public. The cellular phone on the table awaits incoming calls from clients and serves as a means of reaching the dancers she employs.

Erikson smiles nonchalantly at the benevolent man at the bar awaiting appreciation, recounting how she finds her dancers.

"I put out ads for dancers, but a lot of them I meet just when I go out and do things," she says. "If I see somebody who looks like they would be a good dancer and they have that kind of attitude, I approach them."

Tonight, Erikson is awaiting Tracy*, one of her dancers. Tracy has worked with Kashmir's Dream Angels since its entrance into Bellingham's erotica scene two years ago. Tracy called Erikson and inquired about a position as a dancer. Her experience and professional manner led Erikson to hire her.

*name changed

"I met somebody who was a dancer before, and she got me a job down in Everett at a stripper club, but I was just waitressing," Erikson says, recalling her own entry into the career. "The management asked me to dance. The first time they called me on stage my heart dropped, but I liked being on stage."

"I started working for someone who had a business like mine, but she didn't seem to care about us, and she didn't really pay very well," Erikson continues. "She took more money then she gave the dancers."

"So that was kind of, like, my motivation to start my own company — to take care of my dancers better. I felt like I could do a better job of it."

Tracy arrives a little after 10 p.m. With her brown hair parted down the center, drawstring pants and an unzipped blue sweatshirt revealing a simple white T-shirt, Tracy appears as someone who may spend her days working at a public library and her nights reading general fiction. Instead, her profession requires her to bare her shoulders, not catalog books.

She is here to meet Erikson to settle accounts from last night's dancing.

Tracy has been dancing since she was 18. Now 22, she currently lives a double-life, keeping her stripping a secret from her parents. She says she finds Erikson accommodating and professional.

"Kashmir has every aspect organized about how to go about the business because she has done it herself," Tracy says. "Males just want the money. They don't know all of the aspects, such as getting beautiful, setting up and driving time."

Tracy says Kashmir is unlike other bosses she has worked for in the business — she is also a friend.

"I call her up to gossip," Tracy says. "We hang out, club dance, go on long walks."

A second gentleman offers to buy Erikson another drink. This
"If you're a dancer, you have to be able to deal with any kind of situation."

Erikson with her boyfriend at her Lake Whatcom home.
man, more bold than the first, joins the table Erikson is sitting at and starts a conversation about his line of work.

When confronted with the question, "What do you do?" Erikson doesn't hesitate to say she owns a stripping business.

Erikson lights another cigarette, orders another tequila sunrise — courtesy of the second suitor — sweeps her sandy blonde hair away from her face, thanks the gentleman and strongly urges him to leave her alone.

Erikson points out she has her own way with the clients she strips for.

"I kind of have two different personalities — my real me and then there is this dancer. I don't ever like getting too personal with (clients) or anything. I just try to keep it on a level, although a lot of times they just want someone to talk to and hang out with, so I try to converse with them and stuff. But I don't like giving them too much information about myself."

Her clients are likely oblivious to her maternal side. She is the mother of two.

Erikson brushes her bangs from her eyes for the third time in mere minutes, with fingers individually covered by tarnished gold and ruby rings, and leans into the table to explain what she expects from her dancers.

"If you're a dancer, you have to be able to deal with any kind of situation," she explains. "You have to be mean about it sometimes and just say, 'You just have to be mean about it sometimes and just say, 'You paid for a dance and that is all I do.'"

Erikson's average client is not unlike the President — affluent, white, married businessmen in their early 40s to late 60s.

Does the job often turn to other presidential affairs?

"They try to go there," she says. "A lot of them think that is what they are going to get. I just have to be mean about it sometimes and just say, 'You paid for a dance and that is all I do.'"

In such situations, Erikson warns the client that they are going to leave if their conduct doesn't improve. Erikson personally accompanies her dancers if she is concerned the situation may get out of hand.

"Kashmir doesn't put us in that sort of situation," Tracy says. "She goes, 'Go ahead!' So, I call them and he moved right out of the way."

"There is a certain way you walk, and you have to smile a lot and give a lot of eye contact. Any sexual type of moves that you can think of.

"We also do floor shows, where you go down on the floor and up on your knees," Erikson says casually. "Clients can also make requests."

"It is all about the performance," Tracy says. "A costume is a gown, underwear, gloves and a wrap for your shoulders. Theme shows are also very popular and a lot of fun."

In a theme show, the music and the dance are coordinated, Tracy explains.

"In a country western theme show, the ensemble may include cowboy boots, a hat and fringe to tease the client with."

Erikson describes the first steps she takes in her process of stripping once she enters a home of a client. The television is turned off, the coffee table is pushed aside and the music is started.

Music is essential to Kashmir's Dream Angels.

"We bring our own CD player and stuff, so we have a variety of dancing music," Erikson adds. "I try to put a good selection in there though because some people don't like rap, or some people don't like old Steve Miller. I try to have a variety to gear that toward the customer."

The background music for Erikson's greeting on her answering machine is an even, rhythmic beat broken by the slow strum of an electric guitar run through a wa-wa pedal — a sound rightly associated with '70s movies. It beckons the caller into the stripping experience.

A private show performed by one of Kashmir's Dream Angels is $40 per hour, with a one-hour minimum. Erikson keeps $50 per hour of that.

"If you're a dancer, you have to be able to deal with any kind of situation," Tracy explains. "For $50 dollars an hour, you have to be able to dance for the President if that's what's required and not worry about it."

Erikson's average client is not unlike the President — affluent, white, married businessmen in their early 40s to late 60s.

"I have had people tell me that I am actually doing mankind a favor by this," Erikson says.

"I feel good about what I am doing and I think it is something that, as an adult, adults should be able to do. I'm kind of proud of it, especially owning my own business for two years now."

It is apparent that the smoke from Erikson's Marlboro Lights has semi-permanently found its way into the fibers of her gray hooded sweatshirt.

I stand up from the table and begin to leave the bar, thinking I could start my life of fast cash, stripping and tequila from this moment forward. I could spend my days sleeping and my nights dancing for large heaps of money and lavish attention. I could seize the opportunity to wear my prom dress more often.

I quickly recall, however, a comment made by Erikson minutes earlier, "Men are pigs" — a revealing testament to her life as a stripper.

"I stand up from the table and begin to leave the bar, thinking I could start my life of fast cash, stripping and tequila from this moment forward. I could spend my days sleeping and my nights dancing for large heaps of money and lavish attention. I could seize the opportunity to wear my prom dress more often."

I quickly recall, however, a comment made by Erikson minutes earlier, "Men are pigs" — a revealing testament to her life as a stripper.

It is getting late. The second suitor comes back to the table. Erikson is now more receptive to his inquiries about her line of work. She lights another cigarette and leans toward him.

Another night's work lies ahead, and three empty cocktail glasses stand before her eyes.
A fire station on the outskirts of Bellingham has serviced communities and saved lives for more than 40 years.

R. Andy Faubion talks to the veteran and "the rookie" of Marietta's fire stations.

The cool cement floor is smooth and stained from years of wear. Crank case oil and diesel fumes hang in the air. A bright red fire engine and a late model ambulance — white with orange stripes — sit beside each other in the apparatus bay. Recently washed and possibly waxed, the overhead track lighting reflects brilliantly on their exteriors.

These are the front-line aid unit and fire engine of the Marietta Fire Department, located near the corner of Bennett and Eldridge Streets in Bellingham. The two vehicles sit patiently in the oversized garage of Marietta's Station 1, waiting to serve the community. The department services the Lummi Indian Reservation and communities near the Bellingham Airport and around Bellingham Bay.

Since 1958, the garage at Station 1 has housed a variety of fire engines and aid units. If these walls could talk, they would have great stories to tell. They would recount the heroic nights when an engine rolled out to save a burning house, or perhaps when the aid unit was dispatched for a drowning victim and the EMTs saved a young boy's life. Then there was the time when a young firefighter mopped the cement floor and slipped in a puddle, bruising his ego more than his backside...

Instead, these walls do the job they were designed to do, showing their age in the layers of exhaust residue accumulated since their last washing. The once luminous white paint has faded to a dull, yellow hue. The walls are probably due for a new coat of paint, but because of more stringent building and safety codes, the station will be demolished and relocated elsewhere.

The loss of two neighborhood houses to fire in 1957, prompted the community of Marietta to establish a fire department. The community generated funds through the women's auxiliary, taxes and donations. In 1958, enough money was raised to build a station and operate a single fire engine.

Some 40 years later, that station is Marietta's Station 1.

The department's five fire stations serve a community of approximately 3,500 residents, almost three times as many as in its infancy.

Present commissioner Wally Croy recalls the ancient emergency system used for alerting the modestly staffed fire department in its early days.

There were six phones — three in private residences, two located in the local businesses such as the hardware store and the gas station and one in the
fire hall itself — that would ring when somebody called the fire department for an emergency.

The system was slow and primitive compared to the central dispatch that exists today.

"There were three, if I remember right, eh, phones in private homes," Croy says. "I think Ivan had one and Carl Reel had one ... and I don't know if Eisner had one or not."

Croy, a former Western student, has been a member of the fire department, in some capacity, since its inception. Now serving his third term as one of five fire commissioners. Croy started as a firefighter and worked his way up to assistant chief and then deputy chief. He has been commissioner since his retirement.

His stark white hair hides under a wrinkled, dirty black ball cap, and his blue sweater is remarkably clean considering he is kneeling in the middle of a freshly tilled garden, planting a handful of sugar snaps. His worn, gray rubber knee pads convey his passion for gardening. A large pair of sunglasses mask his eyes, making it difficult to see any emotion, but his vocal inflections give some clue to his feelings.

"Oh, they're brassy and pushy," Croy jokingly says of the new generation of firefighters and aid providers. "They are better trained ... they've got better equipment. We don't even let them in the department until we can get them over to the fire school. In the old days, 'Hey, you're warm, you're breathing, count to 10 real quick — ah, that's fine, you come on in, give ya' a coat and a hat.'"

Spencer Nelson, 22, is one of the "new generation" firefighters. A member of Marietta Fire Department since November of 1998, and a recent graduate from the volunteer recruit academy. Nelson is about as green as they come. As a resident at Marietta's station 5 at Gooseberry Point on the Lummi Indian Reservation, he doesn't get paid, but he doesn't pay rent either — he resides at the station with three other firefighters and one lieutenant.

A senior in finance at Western, Nelson will graduate soon. At this point he says he has no intention of using his finance degree. His future job is in the fire service and he is simply putting in his time.

Nelson is really no different than those who have come before him. Instead of "kick-the-can," he grew up with Nintendo. Instead of the "Piccolo Blitz," a heroic one-man attack strategy used by his predecessors, Nelson makes use of a Rapid Intervention Team, where no one enters the building until two additional rescuers are waiting outside.

At just 5'10", with blond hair and a certain wild-eyed childishness, one could envision Nelson on a surfboard in California or Hawaii.

He is seated on the weight bench upstairs in the dayroom, a lounge and weight room, at Station 1. One half of the room is a maze of metal and weights that loosely resemble a fitness center. The other half is occupied by an antique pool table with a scattering of balls adorning conspicuously new felt.

As he lifts weights and speaks enthusiastically of the fire service, it is difficult to picture him kneeling down planting sugar snaps in 50 or so years.

Nelson's eyes are wide and bright as he articulates his enthusiasm for his post-collegiate plans and aspirations of becoming a firefighter in a large department.

Nelson says he believes the most important trait for a firefighter to have is compassion. He says he has been on many calls where it was embarrassing for the patient or awkward for the aid providers. In those situations, a firefighter must be at their most compassionate.

"You have to make them understand that you are there to help," Nelson says solemnly, his voice cracking.

"A man had had a heart attack while he was driving and he crashed into a fence. His heart had stopped, so medically he was dead," he continued. "The medics were on scene so they slapped the DeFib on him and popped him one time, and I saw his eyes open up, and man, I saw a man come back to life. That's what stands out in my mind the most. It gave me tingles; it made me realize that what we're doing is important."

In the short time he has been a firefighter, Nelson has seen more traumatic situations than the average person might see in their lifetime.

"Everything in the fire service is team oriented, it all revolves around getting something done effectively as a team," he says. "Trust is also really important. If you can't trust your partner, you can't be an effective team."

He is filling the boots of his predecessors quite well, and it is fitting for him to be one of the last inhabitants of Marietta's Station 1. Nelson will go on to bigger and better things in the fire service, but he will always be rooted firmly in the first fire station he ever served in. He will tell his children about the checkerboard floor and the antique pool table. And smile and shrug his shoulders as he thinks of the wood paneled walls and the old weight bench he worked out on.

While Wally Croy thinks back about the "good old days" as a rookie firefighter and the when the fire station was new, Spencer Nelson is living out those days now.

Whether Nelson knows it or not, these are the "good old days." Croy knows it and so do the aid unit and the fire engine in the apparatus bay. Soon they will leave the only home they have ever known to make a new start in a new bay. There, they can smile and swap stories with each other and tell the new walls about all the things that they have to look forward to.
Amid recent reports of sexual assaults on campus many students may be asking, "Are Western students safe in Bellingham?"

Karen Mandic and Diane Wilder probably thought that they were. There's always safety in numbers, right? Wrong. In 1979, while students at Western, Mandic and Wilder were brutally raped and murdered. Ken Bianchi, one of two men later dubbed the Hillside Stranglers, killed Mandic and Wilder during a west coast murder spree. Bianchi lured the women by asking them to "house-watch" a luxury residence. The women were found dead in a locked car near the house.

Maybe you think, "That was 20 years ago. It could never happen now. It could never happen to me." Maybe Kerri Sherlock thought the same thing.

Sherlock was looking forward to attending Western winter quarter. She never made it. Her body was recovered near Glacier; her alleged killer, a transient named James Allen Kinney, has not yet been apprehended.

Students have most recently feared for their safety after a rash of sexual assaults on campus. In 1996 and 1997, there were no official reports of rape on campus. In 1998, one report was filed, and just five months into 1999, two reports of alleged rape have already been filed with campus police.

Weeks after an informal report of an attack in the Sehome Arboretum area, a different woman said she was raped — in broad daylight — on the busy 600 block of North Garden Street.

She claimed two men grabbed her and held her arms while a third man raped her.

“Whether murder or rape, there is no real set [type of] person to be afraid of; sometimes we find a poster-boy for sex offenders, but sometimes it is a teacher or a police officer.”

— Detective Kenn Mackintosh

In April, a different woman reported to Mount Vernon police that she was raped in a restroom in the basement of Miller Hall, at 8:30 a.m.

She claimed one man raped her while another kept watch.

One may feel quite safe sticking close to Detective Kenn Mackintosh.

Mackintosh's 6-foot 5-inch frame looms over the table as he eats an egg-salad sandwich and picks at his potato chips.

"Most killings are not planned out like you see on TV," he said. "They tend to be acts of passion or anger. The main difference with serial killers [such as the Hillside Stranglers] is the total lack of any conscience; they tend to only care about themselves.

"For the most part, they view the rest of us as beneath them and really have no feeling about killing their victims," he said. "The only feelings they have are the ones that they derive from their actions."

Mackintosh, who spent eight years working as a Homicide detective for Mason County, now also works for the Mason County Sexual Offenders Unit. The gun in his belt and badge at his side intimidate passers-by as the large man stands to make the short walk back to the city hall after lunch.
Cindy Nunley questions Detective Kenn Mackintosh about societal forces that foster sexual offenders.

Karen Mandic  Diane Wilder

It is hard to pinpoint what kind of person is a murderer or rapist, Mackintosh said as he entered the interrogation room.

A suspect, entering the same cramped room, would focus on the accusing glare of the white board that reveals the identities of those closest to them in an attempt to intensify their near-paranoid intimidation.

Mackintosh seems at home.

"Most of these guys have a predatory nature. They sense fear," he said, his eyes widening as he nodded his head, "but serious criminals are not the brightest bulbs in the box.

"Whether murder or rape, there is no real set type of person to be afraid of," he said. "Sometimes we find a poster-boy for sex offenders, but sometimes it is a teacher or a police officer. They can be from any walk of life.

"Real classic breakdown in the family structure causes these criminals not to understand that other people have rights," Mackintosh continued.

"We see these kids acting out, and the parents aren't watching. It's sad to see, but they just don't have a chance."

Mackintosh said he believes that women in today's society need to be more aware of their surroundings. "My advice for a female in a college setting — information is power.

"The best a person can do is know the person that you are going with, know where you are going, know when you will be back and share that information with at least two other people," Mackintosh said. "Don't just say, 'I'm going to the library; I'll see you later.'"

Trust your instincts, he said.

"When things don't feel right to you, there is a good reason they don't," he said.

"Many people say, 'I should have listened to myself. If something doesn't feel right get out of there — don't press yourself forward. There is a reason.'"

"Most women know their attackers," Mackintosh asserted.

"A rapist can be someone that knows you — even acquaintance," he said. "They'll see somebody and maybe they will fantasize. It's not about sex, it's about power — it's about assault. It's about violation of someone's private self.

"A person has a right to be safe, and that's the key. We have to tell people that they have the right to be safe."

"Many times the victims are accused of making crimes happen by the way they dress, drinking too much or going out alone after dark," Mackintosh said.

"Something women in college need to understand is that they have the right to have absolute control," he said. "No one has the right to make them feel guilty by saying, 'You shouldn't have been at that party or wearing that dress or drinking too much.'"

"If you do all of these things, is there still going to be a crime? Sure, but you can do things to reduce your risk of becoming a victim."
The lure of fireworks extends Fourth of July for a lifetime for pyros.
When Phil Paquette thinks back to his childhood in Springfield, Massachusetts, he reminisces about the Fourth of July with particular fondness. Every year, he and his friends would gather on a neighbor’s lawn and watch the fireworks explode over a nearby park. They were not tremendous shows, but Paquette found himself allured by them.

The fact that amateur fireworks were frowned upon in his family and community only fueled his passion. As each explosion crackled to life and lit up the night sky, as if laughing at the surrounding darkness for just a second, Paquette says he remembers a tremendous rush of adrenaline pulsing through his veins. The only problem, Paquette recalls, is that they were just too far away.

Thirty-five years later, Paquette, or “World Famous Nuclear Phil,” as he is now known, lights the fuse of a 12-inch cylinder. Seconds later the cylinder, or “gun,” will send a 40-pound shell hundreds of feet into the air. Proximity is no longer a problem.

For about five years now, Paquette has been as close to the action as one can get. He has ignited fireworks of all sizes and from all places.

Paquette, like the many men and women who will join him at professional firework shows throughout the spring and summer, is a pyrotechnician. “There’s an old saying,” Paquette says, clearing his throat to prepare his best medieval accent, “He who hath smelt the smoke ne’er be free again.”

For Paquette and pyrotechnicians like him, “the smoke” has made a profound impact on his life. It has created a passion that compels him to risk his life regularly, all in the name of a good show.

Paquette is in his late 40s and looks like a typical family man. One wouldn’t guess he’s a pyro by a quick glance, but it probably wouldn’t be ruled out either.

Anne Cisney, a senior at Western, on the other hand looks anything but the typical pyro. To start with, she’s a woman — a rarity in itself in the pyro world.

She barely stands more than five feet tall and her slender arms look ill-suited for the purposes of lifting heavy shells. Add a gentle manner and a soft-spoken voice and it is nearly impossible to guess that Cisney likes a good explosion as much as any pyro.

On days when she’s not wearing her black T-shirt that boasts her nickname in red letters on the back, one would never know she leads another life as “Little Annie Thunder Twinkle.”

It was about two years ago when Paquette asked Cisney the question he asks almost everyone over 18-years-old that possess an interest in the fireworks scene: “So, do ya’ want to get close to the thunder?”

Paquette, a long-time family friend of the Cisneys who also lives just outside of Gig Harbor, saw Cisney as a perfect candidate to accompany him on his firework adventures.
She says she was apprehensive at first, but now as Cisney's eyes light up with excitement as she describes her last shoot, it is easy to see that she too has caught a whiff of "the smoke."

Cisney says her favorite shoots are those done from the barges. Being tucked into the tight quarters of a 120 by 60-foot barge with five or six other people and lots of explosives is not the safest way to shoot off fireworks, but it is safer for the audience and the excitement far surpasses anything found on land, Cisney says.

Three-quarters of the barge's surface area is occupied with large crates filled with sand and the cylinders, or "guns" that fire the shells. At one end of the barge, as far away from the guns as possible, is another large crate covered with a flame-retardant tarp. Inside the crate are the shells that will be used throughout the show.

Cisney often performs the duty of opening and closing this box as runners grab shells and rush them to guns that have just fired.

Opening and closing a box may not seem that difficult a chore, but the stakes are high. If a spark, a flaming piece of debris or anything capable of producing static electricity finds its way into this box, the show and the lives of everyone on the barge may come to a premature end.

"I guess it's neat in a scary way," Cisney says. "The same way a roller coaster is fun."

Cisney has participated in five shoots in her career. With one more shoot under her belt, she will be free to pursue her official Pyrotechnicians License from the state.

After taking a test provided by the state and submitting two letters of recommendation from established pyrotechnicians, she will have the freedom to purchase fireworks and supervise her own shows.

Paquette has six shoots under his belt and knows plenty of licensed pyros that would write him a letter, but it is not a top priority to him right now. Paquette is content to ignite fireworks while in the company of a licensed pyro, just as long as he's the one doing the igniting.

Paquette says he often shoots with Steve Thornton, owner of Eagle Fireworks. Thornton imports, builds and manufactures his own shells. "He's a lot of fun to work with," says Paquette.

For Paquette, there is nothing better than being on a barge full of fireworks with a flare in hand.

"There's just something about fireworks where it's fine to watch 'em, but it's delicious as hell to light 'em," he says.

And this is exactly what Paquette does. Throughout the show he weaves through the guns exploding all around him, always searching for that next all-important fuse.

"I suppose there is something slightly erotic about it," Paquette says, with a guilty giggle. But Paquette is not talking about lighting the fireworks or even watching them. He's referring to something he never had back in Springfield while sneaking off to light caps, snakes and party poppers—an audience.

As Paquette describes the exhilaration of hearing the crowd erupt into cheers after the final shell is fired, it becomes apparent that "the smoke" is not just about fireworks, it's about people as well.

"The audience goes to the show for the fireworks," Paquette says, sounding as though he's quoting pyro-scrip- ture. "The pyro goes to the show for the audience."

Working so close to something so explosive is bound to produce some close calls and it certainly has for Paquette. At one of his last shoots, he was acting as the loader, the person who lowers the shells into the gun. As Paquette slowly lowered the tethered shell into the gun, something went terribly wrong inside the cylinder. A spark fired the shell back out of the gun instantaneously.

"I could feel something whiz by my right hand even though I was wearing some pretty heavy gloves," Paquette recalls. "A few inches the other way and they would have had to call me 'lefty.'"
Phil Paquette puts the finishing touches on the grand finale. Tape is put over the cannons so the pyros know if a firework has not yet ignited.

Steve Thornton holds one of his homemade, six-inch fireworks.

The cone-shaped explosive moves through the air with a different propulsion than the cylindrical explosive.

Cisney says she doesn't know if she's quite up for anything like that. The truth is, she's not sure she's "crazy" enough to go all the way and become a pyro's pyro — someone who not only shoots, but also builds the components.

"I think pyros have to be a little bit crazy by nature," Cisney says. Her "Exhibit A" is a man they call "Combine George."

The story of Combine George is far from pretty, but it is a good example of what "the smoke" may do to a person.

A couple years back, Combine George was known only as George, a swell guy who loved to ignite fireworks. He was unfortunate enough to fall off and get run over by the combine he was riding on.

After a couple of weeks in the hospital, Combine George — not doctors or hospital staff — decided it was time to go. The accident left him intact, but unable to move very quickly and with doctor's orders not to lift anything remotely heavy.

Doctor's orders did not, however, determine when Combine George would leave the hospital, nor did they determine his relationship with fireworks.

Cisney said it wasn't long before people saw George working on the barges lighting fuses and even lifting heavy shells that would probably require George to adopt a new nickname if dropped.

Maneuvering through exploding cylinders while carrying an explosive shell is risky with a perfectly healthy body. To do so with a body that has felt the wrath of a combine is proof that George definitely "hath smelt the smoke."

Though the story of Combine George may lead one to believe there's a certain haphazard attitude that surrounds the shoots, Paquette says nothing could be further from the truth.

"There's a definite risk involved and you have to appreciate that," he explains. "The trick is to never stop being slightly afraid. In fact, it's best if you stay scared — very scared."

When Paquette tells the story of Combine George, he is always sure to emphasize that George has never had a firework-related accident.

Paquette says he sticks to a set of pyro rules, such as always having someone with an extinguisher in hand and never placing a body part over a loaded or unloaded gun, a rule which saved his right arm. By following these rules, he has the utmost confidence in his ability to stay alive.

In fact, Paquette feels so confident that he tries to persuade his teenage daughters to participate in the fun with him. While most kids plead with their parents to let them shoot off the biggest and baddest fireworks they can find, things are a little different in the Paquette family.

"They used to love to shoot them off with me when they were younger, but now they're just into being teenage girls," Paquette says in a melancholy tone.

And so, as fate would have it, Paquette finds himself in a situation similar to the one he experienced as a child. Paquette still can't find any family members to pursue his passion with. But now, he has a remedy. He has made friends in explosive places and his need to smell "the smoke" is satisfied with the start of every spring.

"I've always said that I'm a failure as an adult," says the World Famous Nuclear Phil. "But I'm a raging success as a 12-year-old."
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