Dumpster Diving
Three Western students dig through garbage to promote sustainable living

Wag of the Tail
A mother and a trainer hope dogs can help the autistic form relationships

Gone, but Not Forgotten
A soldier's family finds solace in his letters and belongings

105 degrees of Yoga
Popular exercise uses heat to heal
Editor's note

Time flies. For example, I can't believe my baby sister just turned 5. She's starting to ask those hard-to-answer "why" questions like "Why is the sky blue?"

After a series of these questions, I experienced an "ah-ha" moment when I recognized her constant curiosity — and my lack of it.

In today's information-cluttered world, I think we coast too much. We need to ask more questions, seek more answers and initiate more change — starting in our own lives.

From the slums of Africa to Memorial Park in Bellingham, these Klipsun articles are stories of people living on a learning curve.

Check out "Roughing It" to see why a Western student chose to live on Sehome Hill. I also recommend reading about one mother's greatest loss in "More Than a Number," and another mother's saving grace in "Andrew's Will."

My hope is that one of these stories inspires you to create a change in your life. Be the curious 5-year-old you once were, and, at any moment, be willing to sacrifice what you are for what you could become.

Thanks for reading.

Jessica Evans
Editor in Chief

Staff writers & photographers

Michelle Acosta, Liz Adamack, Leslie Adams, Rob Ashlock, Brandy Bratrude, Kathryn Brenize, Lindsay Hamsik, Caleb Heeringa, Jacinda Howard, Dan Johnson, Michael Lee, Annalisa Leonard, Kara Lundberg, Kadi Matherne, Kate Miller, Sean McCormick, Sean McGrorey, Ted McGuire, Liz McNeil, Laura McVicker, Corée Naslund, Jenae Norman, Crystal Oberholtzer, Amanda Raphael, Mark Reimers, Claire Ryman, Adam Rudnick, Greta Smoke, Trevor Swedberg, Chris Taylor, Courtney Walker

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Bellingham Slam
Members of this first-year basketball team — including three Western graduates — share their dream of taking themselves all the way to the American Basketball Association championship.
By Sean McCormick
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Independent Woman
Indie film actress Kim Tyler talks about celebrityhood and bringing Hollywood to Fairhaven. By Michelle Acosta

Robin Hoods of Garbage
Some Bellingham residents choose their local Dumpster over Haggen or Fred Meyer when looking for the bare necessities — including food. By Liz McNeil

More Than a Number
Cpl. Jonathan Santos of Bellingham lost his life in the Iraq War. His mother tells his story — and how to remember others like him. By Laura McVicker

Andrew’s Will
A mother struggles to bring together her son, Will, and an assistance dog to aid him as he lives a life with autism. By Jenae Norman

8-bit Nostalgia
Old-school Nintendo sends video game junkies to the wunder years of gaming, and for some, the feeling of wonder is nearly as strong today. By Sean McGrorey

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W  estern senior Eric Bortel can say he kicked himself in the face. Bortel hit a tricky jump a little too hard while biking a trail in the Green Mountain State Forest on the Kitsap Peninsula four years ago. The tires of his bike lifted from the upside of a rock jump, flew over a ridge, and lodged in a tree instead of hitting the intended landing. Bortel struck the tree with his bike, bounced off of it, hit the ground and tumbled down a steep hill.

He kicked himself in the face on the way down because he tore the ligament in his knee that keeps the leg from bending the wrong way.

“I had other injuries before the big one, but just minor stuff,” Bortel, 24, says with a shrug. “I ran into trees a few times, got a few concussions. Nothing big.”

A tolerance for pain is important in any sport, says Dr. Ralph Vernacchia, physical education professor and director of Western's Center for Performance Excellence. To athletes, getting injured is not a matter of if, but when and how to respond.

“There is a level of risk in everything,” Vernacchia says. “Some things increase the chance of risk and have the possibility of being very detrimental. That is what these athletes are doing. The higher the risk, the better the rush.”

Learning the Hard Way
Western senior Andrew Jones can say he came just inches from death. Jones was rock climbing in the Tieton River Canyon near Yakima on a beautiful summer day three years ago. All day, Jones had a nagging feeling he was forgetting something. He finally realized what he forgot and turned to tell his climbing partner. Momentarily distracted from the task at hand, and with no ropes to hold him up, Jones dropped 20 feet to the ground.

“It was my helmet,” says Jones, 22. “I’d realize I had forgotten my helmet.”

When Jones awoke from unconsciousness a few moments after the fall, he noticed his head was mere inches from a jagged boulder.

“Just a few inches closer, my head would have cracked open like a melon,” Jones says.

Jones says that since the fall, he has never climbed without a helmet or proper gear.

“Usually when climbers have a big accident, they don’t live to talk about it,” Jones says. “I definitely learned from that experience.”

Rough Landing
Tim Vanden Haak can say he touched his bone while it was jutting out of his arm. On a hot and sunny June 2004 afternoon, Vanden Haak built up speed on his bike to attempt a jump he had successfully landed hundreds of times. This time, a little too much speed led to too much air and an overshot landing.

“I wasn’t going to eat handlebar, so I ditched the bike,” says Vanden Haak, 20. “The landing wasn’t very pretty, anyway.”

Vanden Haak hit the dirt and rolled. When the dust cleared, he was on his hands and knees. His forearm had snapped, and the bone was sticking out of his skin, forming an unnatural angle between his wrist and elbow.

An ambulance took him to the emergency room, where he waited — bone jutting 4 inches through his skin — for six hours. Doctors spent two hours of a three-hour surgery chipping away at a rock-like substance that was the result of Vanden Haak’s bone marrow mixing with dust and air.

“It’s one of those sports where broken bones, concussions and sprains are just going to happen,” Vanden Haak says. “When the time comes, you just have to respect the mistake and learn from what happened.”

Challenge and risk are what draw athletes to extreme sports. Through repetition, odds are the extreme sports athlete eventually will fall on the bruised and broken side of the risk equation. The thrill of being in the moment and getting a trick or a climb just right, however, is enough incentive that people who kick themselves in the face, come within inches of death and live to touch their own bone, come back begging for more.

—Crystal Oberholtzer
Collin MacLeod, a sixth-year Western senior and biology and secondary education major, left behind a “typical” way of life for a few months. In the fall of 2003, he experienced homelessness. He moved into the woods and, while attending school, survived on only what was necessary.

**When did you live in the woods, and what was your living situation?**

From Sept. 18, 2003 — two-and-a-half months. First I was on the Interurban Trail, and then it flooded, so I moved to Sehome Hill. I constructed a dwelling from plywood and by tying branches together, and then put a tarp over them. Then I heaped grass and debris over the tarp so it couldn’t be seen.

**Why did you decide to move to the woods?**

I thought it would facilitate some sort of a change in my perceiving the world. I wanted to know what it would be like to be largely homeless. I also wanted to get a better grip on the idea of living in a sustainable manner and maybe focus better on school and yoga.

**What made you decide to move out of the woods?**

It was difficult to focus on school while living out there. Living in the woods takes up so much energy. I didn’t have much energy for other things. I spent a lot of time in the student recreation center on campus because it was warm. I would shower there and wash my underwear and socks with me, then dry them on the sky bridge.

**What did you enjoy the most about living in the woods?**

My view. I had a wall I could easily lift up with a branch tied to it. I was right above the Communications Facility, so looking out I could see all the lights on campus.

**What was the most difficult thing about living in the woods?**

Never having anywhere to put your stuff. Eating was difficult sometimes. At one point, I wasn’t able to transfer money, so I only had $20 for two weeks and that time I really figured out what it meant to not have. I was buying for calories rather than for taste. I always had enough food but never more than I needed. Also, it was definitely kind of lonely.

**Do you think you accomplished what you wanted to by doing this?**

I didn’t accomplish everything I wanted to. But, it gave me the confidence in my ability to get by and be happy. Because even if I have nothing, I know I’ll be fine.

**Why do you think other people should try this at some point?**

People are very disconnected from the world around them, in that we live in a place completely coated in cement and filled with man-made things. A lot of people seem to be coming from a position that you should take whatever you can in the world to make yourself more comfortable. You learn to appreciate things more. I’m sure I will do it again.

MacLeod now lives in a house with five other roommates, but he still tries to live as simply as possible. He doesn’t own a car. Instead, he rides his bike or walks in almost all weather conditions. He eats healthily and practices martial arts four to six days a week. MacLeod hopes others will learn the lesson he learned, whether by living in the woods or by finding other ways to live with only what is essential, as opposed to taking earth’s resources for granted.
No stranger to the camera, Kim Tyler brings creative experience to the production of a locally produced indie film. Michelle Acosta catches up with the busy actress and producer to discuss Hollywood fame and the demanding entertainment business. Photos courtesy of Kim Tyler. Design by Lauren Miller.

Bloody Mary... Bloody Mary. Imagine repeating those words in front of a dusty mirror, in the murky darkness of an old, abandoned asylum. As the spine-chilling urban legend of Bloody Mary lingers, a sense of comfort overcomes the idea that the creepy scenario is only a movie. This past summer, many scenes for the independent film "Mary" were shot in Fairhaven, and Kim Tyler, 37, actress and producer, played one of the leading cast members.

A stylish, 2004 325i BMW parks across the street from Tony's Coffee House in Fairhaven. The car is flashy compared to the others parked along the street. Tyler steps out of her white, polished four-door vehicle and approaches the café. The tall, slender woman with long, shiny, brown hair paces slowly in front of the entrance, looking deeply involved in a conversation on her cell phone.

Minutes later, she strolls in with a welcoming smile. As she approaches, the exhaustion from long hours of work hides behind her ageless face. Despite Tyler's weariness, her demeanor is friendly yet professional.

"Oh my gosh, these phone calls just keep on coming," Tyler says after taking a deep breath. "Post-production has been crazy. I have people constantly calling me trying to figure out what is going on."

Before sitting down, Tyler, in her 3-inch tall, brown, suede pointy heels, walks toward the counter where the barista greets her.

"How's it going with production?" asks the barista.

Tyler sighs, gives the barista a quick scoop on the status and orders a tall, double-shot mocha before finally taking a seat. Most of the people in Fairhaven are familiar with Tyler because of the production that took place in the area.

Her skin is radiant like a movie star on the cover of Glamour Magazine as she slouches comfortably. Tyler, looking barely older than 30, has spent most of her years in the entertainment industry. Despite her 25 years in the business, the Bellingham resident still knows how to keep her cool and not let the success go to her head.

"Even though I've done a lot in the entertainment business, I don't like to consider myself a celebrity," says Tyler with a modest smile. "I'm just a working actress."

Independent Film

"Mary," a 90-minute thriller, is about the urban legend of Bloody Mary and her effort to kill those who summon her from the mirror. Kat Pictures, a motion picture company Tyler owns, produced the film.

Shooting took place in various locations around Fairhaven, such as Tony's Coffee House, the Fairhaven Public Library and Flat's Tapas Bar. Another major location was The North Cascade Gateway Center, an abandoned mental institution in Sedro-Woolley, where much of the story is based.

Tyler worked hard during last summer with director Richard Valentine and spent long hours acting in the lead role of Natalie, in addition to producing the movie.

Casting director Alison McBryde worked with Tyler on the set of "Mary." The two traveled to New York City, Los Angeles and Seattle to find the right actors. Acting and producing go hand in hand for Tyler, but moments occur when they tend to clash, says McBryde, adding that Tyler's biggest challenge is having to balance being a quality producer and a creative actress.

"There are times where Kim will act in a scene and suddenly switch to producer mode when she hears something that she wants to get involved in," McBryde says. "That's when I look her in the eye and tell her, 'Kim, you are an actress right now!'"

Unlike the staff on some low-budget independent films, Tyler and the other cast and crew members spent several aggressive 23-hour days, working meticulously to create a large, developed movie with the small budget they had.

Director of photography Billy Summers, better known as the film's cinematographer, helped Tyler with the finishing touches to make sure the features were perfect and the quality did not look cheap.

"My job is to come up with solutions and ideas for lighting, framing, color and how to achieve camera movement," Summers says with a calm, laidback tone.

The difference in budgets between an independent film and a studio blockbuster varies by several hundred million dollars, Summers says.

"In order for an independent film to be successful, there needs to be good characters backed by great visuals," he says. "A movie can't be great having one without the other."

Tyler says she had no hesitation about
'When I was 13, I was the tall, lanky, gawky kid. Someone actually walked up to me at the mall and told me I should try modeling.'
producing the movie because upon reading the script, she could already anticipate “Mary” being a success. After exceeding the $200,000 budget for production, the staff took money out of their personal accounts in order to achieve a more quality film. 

“I would’ve never taken money out of my own pocket if I didn’t think this movie was worth it,” says Tyler, adding that income varies depending on the costs of production and success of the film.

The frequency of receiving paychecks can also vary greatly, she says.

“In acting, you can make as much as $8,000 to $15,000 a week, but you don’t always make it that often,” Tyler says. She adds that in producing, all the money earned from the independent film usually goes into making the movie.

“I’m minus at least $40,000 for this ‘Mary’ film, but I know I’ll make the money back,” Tyler says with a hopeful laugh.

The film is expected to come out on DVD sometime in the late spring or early summer of 2006, she says.

Growing Up

Tyler’s involvement in “Mary” is one of her many accomplishments in the entertainment industry. She discovered her passion for the business at a young age and has since been eager to achieve a career in modeling, acting and producing.

“When I was 13, I was the tall, lanky, gawky kid,” Tyler says. “Someone actually walked up to me at the mall and told me I should try modeling.”

While growing up in British Columbia, Tyler balanced school with modeling and acting. Her determination to accomplish a career in the entertainment business brought Tyler to Ramona Beauchamp, an acting school in Vancouver, British Columbia, where she took classes during the weekend and summer. She eventually made her first appearance on television in a Sun-Ripe Juice commercial at age 15.

“God, I can’t believe I even remember that,” she says. “I think I made around $2,000 from that commercial.”

Through the years, Tyler appeared on various TV shows, including “Wiseguy,” “Unsolved Mysteries,” “University Hospital,” “The Sentinel” and “Viper.”

She also shared the spotlight with Cindy Crawford while modeling in New York City for Ford and Elite. Tyler’s experiences in modeling helped expand her network in the industry, as well as befriend celebrities like Brad Pitt and former boyfriends Sean Penn and Judd Nelson.

In all of the excitement, Tyler cautioned herself not to get swept away by the entertainment industry’s fast pace. Her experiences in New York helped Tyler realize what she was missing, and what she wanted to do with her life. Before Tyler knew it, she was leaving New York to pursue a steady acting career.

“I think I made around $2,000 from that commercial.”

“Eventually, she’ll retire, but I don’t see that happening for another 40 years,” she says. “I don’t see Kim driving off to the sunset for any long period of time because she has a passion for what she does, and as long as that passion is alive, we will keep seeing her move forward.”

Tony’s Coffee House is practically empty now. Tyler takes the last few sips of her coffee and stands up, holding her well-framed statue. Her heels clack back and forth against the wooden floor as she heads for the door.

The day has only begun for Tyler as she prepares to meet with Summers and finish the last few touches of “Mary.” With the sun shining, the image of Tyler disappears as she steps into her polished BMW and drives away.

Kim Tyler’s Last Three Movies

Peep (2003)
A desperate screenwriter fighting a terminal case of writer’s block finds inspiration when he discovers a peephole into his neighbor’s apartment.

Run (2003)
To save his girlfriend's life, a man is forced into a race against time by a sadistic control freak.

Nowhereville (2000)
A marriage proposal is sabotaged by two friends for their own romantic intentions.

SOURCE: IMDB.COM
A
n elderly woman clutches a cream-white blouse as
 tears slide down her cheeks and sink to the ground
 with the weight of overwhelming joy — and Mike
 Wasisco is to blame.

"It was because of the free pile," Wasisco says, recalling the
 event. "This one old woman got her entire summer wardrobe
 out of there. She was in tears."

Wasisco, 39, owns the aptly titled Buy, Sell, Trade; a store
 dedicated to buying and selling odds and ends. He is a slender
 man with tan skin and a calm friendly voice. He sports a purple
 Crown Royal corduroy baseball hat on his shaven head and a
 pair of black wrap-around sunglasses that barely show his eyes as
 they glance at the rain-soaked pile of free stuff.

The store rests on a grass lot north of Bakerview Street on
 the 4700 block of Pacific Highway. A big royal blue truck marks
 the entrance to the store. A few yards away, toys and clothes
 litter the ground, strewn about like an angry girlfriend has just
 torn through the place. But the clothes aren't doused with white
 bleach splotches, and the original Neil Diamond records are
 actually whole and unscratched.

A large garage door in the front opens to reveal a vast array
 of things. VHS tapes stripped of their cardboard covers, kitchen
 utensils with no conceivable purpose, wide-eyed clown dolls
 that would surely frighten any child and even an issue of the
 August 1983 People Weekly with John Travolta as Tony Manero
 from "Staying Alive" on the cover litter the shelves of the store
 — and that's just the entrance.

"Every day is Christmas around here," Wasisco says.

The massive store consists of a main building, a side room
 built to the right, a tent-covered area in front and a house-sized
 shelter in the backyard area.

Wasisco stocks the store by going to auctions and purchas­
ing entire rooms of people's unwanted things. Some rooms sell
 for a measly $17, Wasisco says, while others reach $1,500 or
 more.

"I love to be the first one to open the boxes," employee
 Jackie Gallipo, 23, says. "It's like a treasure hunt."

Gallipo has been with Wasisco since the store's July incep­
tion.

The constant replenishment of things in Buy, Sell, Trade
 makes it impossible to keep everything, even the dozens of Play­
boy back-issues and the wood-framed portrait of a young Eric
 Clapton that looks like it came straight off a wall from some
 hippie's glory days. The store gives many of the goods away,
takes them to the dump or places them in the coveted free pile.

Behind Wasisco, three men barbecue lunch for the Buy,
 Sell, Trade staff. Flank steaks in tortillas, hotdogs, avocados and
 a case of black cherry Mountain Dew are the fixings. Wasisco
 knows the men as customers who frequent the store. This is the
 first time they have made lunch for the staff, he says.

Barbara Caya, one of two volunteers who work at the
 store, began as a digger. Caya, a Western alumna, came to the
 store one day and helped organize the free pile, she says.

When the day ended, Wasisco asked if she would return.
Now she works almost six days a week. Her pay: first dibs on
 the free pile, which she rarely takes advantage of, Wasisco says.

"I just enjoy coming out here," Caya says, with a blackened
 and mustard-covered hotdog in her hand. "It's like an extended
 family."

As she speaks, Wasisco pulls a small, velvet pouch out of
 his flannel jacket. He opens it to reveal a tiny .32 revolver, only
 four inches long and no more than two inches wide.

"This is from the 1800s," Wasisco says, his eyes fixed on
 the ancient weapon. "This is the kind of thing you would find
 buried in a box of linens or something."

Caya nods with an unchallenging look of agreement on
 her face as she watches Wasisco repackage the weapon and put it
 back in his jacket.

The gun is Wasisco's treasure, a small piece of history that
 belongs to him. The revolver is just one relic among the thou­
sands of other lost pieces, resting on dusty piles and cluttered
 shelves, waiting for people to find them.

—Michael Lee
The key to building a solid professional basketball team isn't just looking good on the court, but also having the skill to back it up. **Sean McCormick** speaks with members of the Bellingham Slam to see whether this first-year team has what it takes to succeed in the professional basketball arena. Photo by **Sean McCormick**. Design by **David Wray**.

Rob Ridnour is a busy man. Aside from teaching at Blaine High School and being an active member of the community, he also is the father of a Seattle Supersonics basketball team member, Luke Ridnour. In addition, Ridnour is the head coach of a brand new team in the American Basketball Association — the Bellingham Slam.

The first-year professional basketball team boasts a bevy of local names, starting with the elder Ridnour and continuing with former Western men's basketball stars Brian "Yogi" Dennis, Jacob Stevenson and Craig Roosendaal. Lynden High School graduate Drew Langstraat comes back to Whatcom County after achieving all-conference honors at California Baptist University.

merged with the National Basketball Association and eventually dissolved. Based on some of the current ABA team names such as the Minneapolis Slamma Jamma, Louisiana Cajun Pelicans and the Texas Tycoons, the five-year-old league is about style and exuberance.

The league puts an emphasis on an up-tempo style, and the Slam wants to follow that by giving Bellingham an exciting brand of basketball, Dennis says.

Slam fans can go to home games at Whatcom Community College. Ridnour says the venue is new and will be a great place to play, and because of the size of the gym, the stands fill easily, making for an intense atmosphere.

How is a title as catchy as
And the names keep dropping. Bob Hofstetter, general manager for the Slam, works at Western as the manager of marketing and membership services for campus recreation. John Dominguez, owner and originator of the Slam, has a Western connection as the father of Tony Dominguez, men's basketball assistant coach.

The Slam collects basketball players like stamps, snatching players from Eastern Washington University, Washington State University and Evergreen State College.

Ridnour is pleased with how the team came together, saying he handpicked the Western players and knew what other local guys he wanted.

"It's about getting these guys together," Ridnour says. "We have a good group of guys, and I think we'll have a good team."

Dennis, the only member of the Slam with ABA experience, agrees with Ridnour.

"I think we have all the tools necessary to be a successful ABA team," he says. "If we can play like a team, like I know we can, we can make it to the ABA championship."

The Slam plays in a reconstructed ABA, which is starting its fourth season since it made its rebirth in 2000. The ABA began in 1967 and lasted until 1976, when it dissolved.

Bellingham Slam agreed upon? Hofstetter says it's important to see whether the name fits the image of the team. The name, he says, will be appropriate to the style they hope to play — high flying.

Dennis knows that however the team plays, the Slam will be another key addition to Bellingham's already substantial athletic reputation.

"Bellingham is a great sports town, they really get behind their teams," Dennis says. "If we play hard and make the games fun for the crowd, people will come out."

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TIME OUT

with Craig Roosendaal

By Adam Rudnick

Former Western basketball forward Craig Roosendaal has dazzled fans in Sam Carver Gymnasium for the past two years, utilizing his skills as a deadly three-point shooter.

Now he hopes to bring his talent to a new venue — a professional basketball team.

Roosendaal, whose jump shot puts him in Western's record book as the most accurate three-point shooter in school history, plays for the Bellingham Slam, a first-year expansion team in the American Basketball Association. The Slam started its inaugural season Nov. 18 against the Los Angeles Aftershock, and it hopes to find an iron-willed crowd base in Bellingham to compete with Western.

Roosendaal took a short timeout to talk about basketball after a late October practice at Whatcom Community College.

Can you tell me about the series of events leading up to you becoming a member of the Slam?

Actually, I was a little bit disappointed with my senior year. Personally, I felt like I could have played a lot better and done a lot more. I think one thing that set me apart and got me on the team was that every team needs a shooter. Some of the people helping out with the Slam also watched a lot of Western games and are affiliated with the Western team, so they kind of knew I could shoot. It always helps when you're in a situation when you need someone to get some shots up, and I think everybody needs that guy.

What do you miss the most about playing for Western?

I know I'm going to miss the college atmosphere. They're going to get a lot more fans than we are. Western basketball has been established for a long time. It's a big program. I'm going to miss the Central games [and] packed stands. Also, the road trips with the players and the team. College basketball is a thing you'll only experience once, and I'll definitely miss it.

What is it like being paid to do something you have always done for free?

It's definitely nice. Ever since I was little I've always wanted to play in Europe. Then they started putting the ABA and all these leagues in, so it works perfectly. I'm going to school, and I'm getting paid to play for school because I'm done with basketball. I can't complain. I get paid to play basketball.

Where do you see yourself in five years?

Five years? I've always thought about going to play in Holland. My family is from Holland, and if you can get your passport as a basketball player to a European country, you can make quite a bit of money. If that happens, then I want to keep playing. I have an opportunity to make a decent amount of money playing. I would love to do that for just a little bit longer. Probably the tops I would be playing is five years. Probably by then, I would be getting a job and starting to work.

How has the Bellingham community reacted to the team so far?

A team from Bellevue just started last year, and they kind of struggled for fans. They didn't really get much at all. I feel like they didn't tell anybody. We never saw them in magazines, newspapers or radio — we never heard a thing about them. The only reason I knew about it was because some people knew we were playing on it. With us, people come up to us and say, "Oh, you're playing for that Bellingham team?" I think [the team marketing department] is doing a great job.

What's it like being able to tell people that you are a professional basketball player?

It's kind of weird, because Bellingham just started a team and not too many people know about us. It's definitely nice. People are all "what are you doing?" and I'm like "Oh, just playing for this pro team in Bellingham." They're all, "Oh, are you serious?"
Robin Hoods of Garbage

Some find it strange, others would not do it if they were paid to, but some do it for sustainability. Liz McNeil explores the ins and outs and stereotypes of dumpster diving with those who choose to do it. Photos by Liz McNeil. Design by Elana Bean.

O
n a crisp fall evening, the faint smells of stale bread, nearly rotten fruit and musty clothes mingle in the air. A large, metal trash bin bathes in the moonlight, plastic bags piled inside like an overflowing cornucopia. Beside the bin rests a working microwave with a single scratch and a gently worn mattress still capable of providing a full night's rest. This is what Dumpster diving dreams are made of.

Dumpster divers are the Robin Hoods of garbage: take from the wasteful and give to the resourceful. Divers are individuals who sift through the refuse of society to find useful food, clothes and household goods.

Western junior Jakob Lunden says he has been Dumpster diving since at least age 15, when he rescued a slightly damaged foosball table from the trash and reassembled it. A friend later introduced him to the term Dumpster diving, and since then Lunden has dived into most of what trash bins have to offer.

"You name it, I've Dumpstered it," Lunden says. "I've found just about everything there is to find."

Lunden says these findings include working televisions, complete sheet sets, tattered notebooks, entire cases of beer bottles, delicious pastries and even sexual devices.

While living on Capitol Hill in Seattle more than a year ago, Lunden says that because of the items he acquired from trash bins he was able to furnish his apartment and spend only $10 a week for groceries. Lunden says the Value Village trash bin on Capitol Hill, with its surplus of overstuffed bags, was an ideal place to find a wide range of things. He says he found entire bags of unsorted clothing.

Dumpster divers as environmentalists

Despite the obvious savings that rummaging through garbage brings, Western junior Willow Rudiger says Dumpster diving attracts people because of their desire to conserve and consume less.

"Dumpster diving is just one other thing I do in my free time that I feel makes a difference in terms of combating the destruction of the environment," she says.

Rudiger says the mammoth amounts of refuse American society discards merely because of a small scratch or ding amazes her. While diving, she found a warm sleeping bag that only needed mending, a large frying pan she prepares her food in and numerous articles of clothing.

When he lived in San Francisco in the summer of 2003, Western fifth-year senior Garrett Moon lived off Dumpster diving. Moon began diving because it is something exciting to do with friends and also reduces his own environmental impact. Moon says if he didn't have to pay rent in San Francisco, he could have found everything needed for survival from the trash.

"No job necessary," Moon says. "This is urban sustainability at work. While people - really mostly corporations - continue to waste, there will be those that take advantage of their excess and lack of sustainability."

They're not poor, dirty hippies

Most of the general public has preconceived ideas of Dumpster diving and the people who do it. However, the image of crazy, filthy hippies sifting through mounds of foul-smelling sludge while rats climb over them is far from reality.

Generally, Dumpster divers are not destitute individuals searching for a meal, but people wanting to make a difference. The majority of divers are perfectly capable of buying the things they find — they just choose not to. Lunden says he has met a diverse mix of people with one common theme: a desire to recycle and protect the environment.

"I thought they would all be fairly low-income and self-sustaining, but I've met all..."
sorts of people,” Lunden says.

Moon remembers an interesting diver he met while living in San Francisco who went by the name “Toxic Tony.” A 40-something with an apparent drug-abuse problem, Tony rode around on a mountain bike searching for discarded messenger bags.

**Ew, what did they just stick their hands in?**

The possibilities are endless in regards to what could be in trash bins. The idea of eating something freshly picked from the items average people throw out can be a little stomach turning. But in actuality, things are not as horrific as one might think, Rudiger says.

Rudiger hasn’t dived for food too much because she still is wary of it. However, she says most food thrown in trash bins doesn’t even touch the inside because the food is fully packaged. Rudiger remembers finding a great bunch of packaged cookies, still tasty and edible, while diving.

Moon says that despite the inevitability of sticking a foot or hand in a puddle of Dumpster juice — garbage water with a bad odor — no health risks or serious unpleasantness are involved in Dumpster diving.

Lunden says the most disgusting thing he found happened on a dive in Seattle. One night, while garbage scavenging, Lunden found what he thought to be a nice teapot, but when he turned it over to look inside, a rubber dildo tumbled out. To avoid similar traumatic occurrences, Lunden says he tries to avoid any questionable looking bins.

“If a Dumpster seems sketch, I won’t go near it,” Lunden says.

**Free and legal? Get out!**

The legality of Dumpster diving is questionable. Seasoned divers seem to have their share of stories involving run-ins with the law.

“I’ve had mall security catch me before,” Lunden says. “I just tell them I’m doing a recycled art project for school. That line usually works.”

While a number of businesses padlock their garbage to keep trash thieves at bay, no federal laws exist against the taking of one’s waste. The 1988 California v. Greenwood U.S. Supreme Court decision held that no common-law expectation of privacy for garbage exists. That means diving is legal when not mentioned in state or town statutes. When people put their trash on the sidewalk, they leave their right to privacy with it.

After numerous attacks on its trash, Western’s Miller Market is taking measures to put a barrier between divers and its garbage.

Starting in spring 2005, a familiar sight greeted Miller Market staff members who went to empty the garbage. The contents of plastic waste bags lay strewn outside of the Dumpster. And, small piles of discarded bagels, cookies, and other food past its prime littered the perimeter of the Miller Market trash bin from the rummaging of Dumpster divers.

Because of Dumpster diving, Miller Market student manager Dana Mottet, a Western senior, says the market’s waste is now kept in coolers inside until it gets picked up in the early morning.

“Our garbage has been completely torn apart,” Mottet says. “It is a nuisance to pick up, and we don’t want anyone to get sick from the old food.”

People wanting to eat the market’s discarded goods used to simply ask the staff for the market’s refuse. Staff members turned them away because of the health hazards involved in giving out the expired food. Mottet says Miller Market employees made an attempt to keep divers out by locking the bins, but divers still broke into them. Until reinforced metal locks are put on the containers, the market will continue to store perishable goods in coolers.

Rudiger says she finds it unnecessary to spend money on security for trash that is going to go to a landfill anyway.

“The whole locked Dumpsters thing is pretty ridiculous — it’s trash,” Lunden says. “We’re probably the only country who locks up our trash.”

Many Americans continue to bury themselves ever deeper in a pile of their own trash. Dumpster Divers take that trash and turn it into their own treasure — creating a less consumptive society by reusing what already exists.
Two figures, barely visible in the threatening flurry of the snow blizzard, carefully make their way across Western's campus. Twenty-year-old Chris Bickert, who has been blind all his life, walks back to his dormitory in Edens North with his mentor, English professor Laura Laffrado. The snow-covered, slick red bricks on campus are difficult to navigate because Bickert's usual landmarks feel different in the storm. He and Laffrado shiver in the cold as the wind blows snow into their faces and stings their cheeks.

"Chris couldn't 'feel' the path, and I couldn't 'see' the path," Laffrado remembers, shaking her head and smiling.

A year later, sitting quietly amid towering bookshelves in her office, Laffrado says her first impression of Bickert was that he was determined. She first met Bickert when he was a student in her American Literature class.

“He's accommodated his blindness to the extent that you don’t really notice it,” Laffrado says. "I think the only people who notice are people who don’t know him.”

Bickert lives in the basement of Edens North. His room contains his computer, a scanner and a printer that can produce Braille text. A bright yellow rubber ducky, a Jesus figurine, the head of Frankenstein's monster, C-3PO and R2-D2 all stand proudly on a shelf above Bickert's computer. A thick stack of Braille sheets rests on one corner of his desk.

Bickert sits in his white office chair in the middle of the room, occasionally taking a sip of his Coke as he talks about his experiences at Western. He says he has an extra obstacle to success because people are skeptical about students with disabilities.

“I'm not out to change the world,” he says. “If you have a stereotype, I'm not gonna try to change it for you.”

People have set ideas about what a blind person can and cannot do, he says. Bickert says he gets across campus easily once he becomes familiar with various landmarks — such as the dense wall of bushes alongside Arntzen Hall and the metal grates on the ground near the Humanities Building.

Bickert says he is pretty independent, which helps him stay equal in society and earns him the respect of his peers.

One of Bickert's friends, Aaron Stockton, 23, a Western alumnus, says he and Bickert still talk frequently.

“I can't imagine what his life is like,” Stockton says. “He's overcome that obstacle in his life, and he's living his life to the fullest.”

Bickert demonstrated his determination to succeed when he was young. His goal was to become an English teacher.

But first, Bickert had to learn how to function in society as a blind person. From elementary school to high school, he had a vision, orientation and mobility instructor who taught him how to use the cane and how to read Braille.

David Brunnemer, director of disAbility Resources for Students, has known Bickert for two and a half years. Brunnemer meets with Bickert a couple times a month to make sure he has all necessary academic materials for each class, such as books and worksheets, so he can have time to transfer them from electronic form to Braille.

Brunnemer says Bickert is one of 17 Western students who are visually impaired.

Throughout the years, many types of technology have helped Bickert function at Western. He has talking software called JAWS that reads everything on his computer screen. This allows Bickert to surf the Internet, read e-mail and read his textbooks for class.

Bickert will graduate from Western at the end of summer 2006 with an English literature major and sociology minor. He plans to attend graduate school at Western to become an English professor.

Stockton doesn't have any doubts about whether Bickert will succeed.

“Chris’ life is bound to be extraordinary because he doesn't settle for doing what is easy,” Stockton says.

—By Annalisa Leonard
Saints in the Slums

While attending the International AIDS Conference in Durban, South Africa in 2000, Tim Costello, met a Kenyan doctor who talked to him about the escalating AIDS epidemic. The doctor explained that 70 percent of his patients were suffering from AIDS, his colleagues were dying and he had lost his brother and two sisters to the disease. Often, the doctor could not bring himself to tell his patients they had AIDS because no medication was available for them.

"While talking to this doctor, I promised him I would do something," says Costello, 52. "I didn't know what, but I knew I had to do something."

Costello fulfilled his promise. The people whose lives he impacts live in Nairobi, Kenya, 9,763 miles away from his hometown of Bellingham. The Slum Doctor Programme he founded and directs is feeding 150 preschool orphans a day, helping put 15 orphan girls through school and providing an HIV treatment clinic that has treated 2,800 since it opened in February 2005. Evidently, Costello, a tall, slender man with black-rimmed glasses and a peppered goatee, had more than a mission to achieve.

Costello sits in his office, known also as his kitchen table, deciding how he will juggle the upcoming week with his three jobs.

The AIDS crisis is an issue that has consumed Costello's life for more than 18 years. When he lived in New York City, he was part of the AIDS activist group Aids Coalition to Unleash Power, begun in 1987. But after experiencing numerous deaths of close friends from AIDS, Costello started losing hope and became depressed. He decided to move back to Bellingham.

"I was burned out and decided I couldn't do AIDS work anymore," Costello says.

Yet, one year later, he helped open the Sean Humphrey House, an AIDS care facility in Bellingham, followed by a five-year stint at the Evergreen AIDS Foundation.

Realizing his passion for helping those with AIDS would never fade, Costello decided to focus his attention on a place that needed it most — Africa, the continent that had more than 2.3 million AIDS deaths in 2004. In Kenya alone, 15 percent of the adult population is infected with HIV, the deadly virus that causes AIDS.

After returning from the conference in South Africa, Costello teamed with doctors from the University of Washington and the University of Nairobi and started the Slum Doctor Programme.

"The conference was a defining moment for me," Costello says, as he sits comfortably in his simple, brown leather chair in his living room. "I knew intellectually what the statistics were, but I had the opportunity to meet some heroic African people who were educating people in their community about AIDS."

Initially, the program collected recycled medical supplies to send to the hospital in Nairobi, the second largest in all of Africa. Yet, the difficulties of finding and shipping supplies led the Slum Doctor Programme to raise money for the doctors in Nairobi to buy generic drugs for the AIDS patients. They raised $23,000, which treated 25 patients for one year.

After creating this model, which provided free medical treatment for these 23 patients, the University of Washington doctors wrote and received a grant from the U.S. government for half a million dollars to build a clinic for AIDS patients. In February, the Hope Clinic for Infectious Diseases opened. The Slum Doctor Programme provides a complementary emergency fund for AIDS patients who unexpectedly face additional surgeries.

The program became an official nonprofit organization in July 2004. Currently, the program has 12 members and a core volunteer group of 30 people. In the past year, the Slum Doctor Programme has grown 50 percent and is starting to take on a life of its own, Costello says.

Board president Ken Bothman, 36, can list many organizations he is involved with, but the Slum Doctor Programme speaks to him in a powerful way.

"We're not doing big research," Bothman says. "We're giving specific aid, and people relate to that. We do what we say we're going to do."

Much of the program's financial success has soared because of generous individuals and businesses in the Bellingham community. Costello explains that without all forms of support, the program would have faded long ago.

Costello spends 20 to 30 hours per week working on the Slum Doctor Programme, without any financial compensation. Yet, Costello doesn't complain about exhausting work weeks, his modest 800-square-foot cabin or the fact that he can barely afford health insurance. He displays a humble generosity with his welcoming smile and eyes that long to tell stories about the children in Nairobi. Costello glances around the room, out the window and finally refocuses his eyes on the Slum Doctor Programme brochure folded on the coffee table next to him.

"There's a lot of joy in doing this work, even though it just breaks my heart," he says. "But I couldn't be more rewarded. I have a life with meaning."

—Kathryn Brenize

Orphan boys in Nairobi, Kenya. PHOTO COURTESY OF TIM COSTELLO
Above: KGMI talk-show host Amanda Hostetler and her husband, Doug, of Ferndale, take a moment to reflect on the loss of Cpl. Jonathan Santos at a new Memorial Park monument dedicated to Whatcom County soldiers killed in the Iraq War. Above right: Santos' family members stand at their home with the flag that was draped over his coffin. Below: A park bench commemorating Santos.

"I must survive this cursed war. And I will fight until I have exhausted every single last resource."

Cpl. Jonathan Santos
Laura McVicker tells the story of Bellingham resident Doris Kent's plea to Americans to take a hard look at the Iraq War and to ask for what reasons soldiers like her son, Cpl. Jonathan Santos, sacrificed their lives. Photos by Chris Taylor. Design by Elana Bean.

The American flag that draped Cpl. Jonathan Santos' coffin on its trek from Iraq to Bellingham more than a year ago now rests neatly folded in a wooden box on the fireplace mantle in his family's home.

A candle is flickering on the coffee table, faintly illuminating the darkened room as Santos' mother, Doris Kent, gazes at the propped-open triangular box containing the flag and her son's Purple Heart and Bronze Star medals.

"Someday, I'm going to have to close it because it's dusty, but for now it stays open," Kent says, a mixture of grief and unabashed pride in her eyes.

A photo of Santos taken during his basic training at Fort Bragg, N.C., adorns the mantel next to the flag — it's the face of the young son, brother and friend who always was smiling, Kent says. In front of the photo is a gold star figurine that reads: "Never Forgotten." She received this from the general commander of Santos' psychological operations unit of the U.S. Army — the unit that deals with linguistics and foreign relations aspects of war — following his Oct. 15, 2004, death.

The family's fireplace serves as a vestige of Santos' life — his prom pictures, his graduation pictures from Sehome High School and even his extra pair of dusty boots from Iraq.

Kent sees this miniature monument, located in the most frequented room of the family's home, as a fortuitous addition to the living room.

"We've never had a TV in the living room," she says, lingering on her next words. "Now, I think in some strange way I meant to create this space."

More than a year has passed since Santos was killed in Karabilah, Iraq, by a suicide bomber who hit his ground vehicle, and his mother, his two younger brothers — Jared, 16, and Justin, 13 — and his stepfather, Chris Kent, still take painstaking efforts to honor him daily. Their desire is that people won't remember him merely as Iraq War casualty number 1,096, but for the young man he was.

Santos was the soldier known as "the librarian" by his comrades because of the number of books he owned. Santos was the independent, tenacious firstborn — enlisting in the Army in order to pay his way through college. Santos was the son who lived life with heart and vitality, the family remembers.

"More than two of them had said to me that he was the best man they had ever met," Kent says of the phone calls she received from his comrades after he died.

Artifacts, such as Santos' journal, retrieved from Iraq and given to the family following his death, carve a rich collection of memories. Other
keepsakes, such as his bench at Memorial Park, show how Bellingham still honors the 2001 Sehome graduate who would have turned 23 this past September.

Jonathan's journal

Before Santos’ military trunk, or tuff box, was sent home after his death, arriving a week before Christmas, Kent did not know her son kept a journal. During his deployments to Haiti from March to June of 2004 and to Iraq in September, Santos wrote every day in a notebook.

It was not until a fellow soldier in Santos’ unit and close friend called her following his death that Kent knew.

“He said, ‘Mrs. Kent, Jon has a journal,’ ” she says.

When the tuff box arrived home, Kent found the lime-green journal at the top, amid Santos’ 75 books, including one of his favorites, “The Da Vinci Code,” and about 2,000 CDs.

The trunk’s homecoming, and especially the journal’s home-
coming, was just what Kent needed to get through the first Christmas without her oldest child.

“I wanted to have his stuff,” Kent says, choking on her next words. “I wanted to open it. I wanted to smell it. Everything in that tuff box meant a lot to him.”

Kent was the first to read the journal, learning more of her son’s duties as an Arab linguist and his travels across the Syrian border in Iraq. Santos also frequently wrote about the books he read as well as the movies he saw. In his entry the day before he died, Santos wrote about recently seeing the movie “The Human Stain.”

“It was like I could actually hear him talking,” Kent says.

After Kent finished reading the journal, Santos’ brothers Jared and Justin read it. Now, Justin is avidly typing the September and October entries for a book he hopes to publish someday. His brother’s story could serve as a history lesson of the Iraq War, Justin says.

“I just want to do it so people can read it easier,” Justin says with the glimmer of a little brother’s pride.

The journal is something the family can refer to when wanting him nearby. Along with Santos’ snowboarding jacket and army hats, Jared treasures having his big brother’s journal close.

“Other than that, I have his gravesite, but that’s far away,” Jared says of Bayview Cemetery on Woburn Street in Bellingham, where Santos was laid to rest. “I think the more I have of stuff to remind me of him, the more I feel closer to him.”

Memorial Park and Jonathan’s bench

Beyond the Kents’ living room, the city of Bellingham can pay homage to Santos at Memorial Park at the intersection of Maryland and King streets. Erected on Veterans Day 2005, six granite walls, surrounding a flagpole, bear the names of nearly 500 Whatcom County residents to die in a war since World War I. Santos and another Whatcom County native, Peter Oswald, were the only county war deaths listed when the walls were erected. Oswald died in military preparation for the Iraq War, whereas Santos was the only county soldier to die in action.

In addition, a bench with Santos’ name engraved into it is in Memorial Park — a $1,000 tribute the Bellingham community helped fund this past summer.

In June, when Kent first heard about KGMI-AM radio’s plan to renovate Memorial Park, she called the radio station inquiring about funding a bench to honor her son. But as soon as Kent got off the phone, listeners inundated the station with phone calls, wanting to pay for the bench in her place.
Now, Kent feels that the Bellingham community has given her an eternal gift, and one that echoes the reason for the park in the first place. At the entrance is a plaque dedicating the grounds to the 88 soldiers who died in World War I, which their mothers erected in 1922. Names like Santos join these fallen soldiers on the granite walls inside the park.

"If you think of true honor — one is to not forget them and the other is to memorialize them," she says. "And, this is a beautiful memorial."

**Remembering him further**

As Western’s former Wellness Outreach Center coordinator, Kent has spent the past eight years recruiting, training and supervising student lifestyle advisors.

Her job experience mentoring future leaders intertwines with her new hope in life: to influence how young people view the world, and in this instance, the reality of war.

Though she says she doesn’t want to take an overt political stance, Kent wants fellow Americans, and especially young people, to critically contemplate the reality of war. She wants them to realize that war is not just a far-removed battle fought in a distant country, but one that devastates real families who had expected their loved ones to return home.

"I want them to ask that question," she says. "What did he die for?"

And with the growing number of deaths in the Middle East, she remembers the others and empathizes with the families.

"A wartime knock on the door is devastating," she says of the day when two officers informed her of the unthinkable, "Whether you’re pro-war or anti-war, it doesn’t matter. They were killed."

A small piece of her son will live on each time someone approaches war casualty numbers as real human beings who didn’t get the chance to come home because they were faithful to the cause. For lack of better words to further explain her son’s devotion to his country amid the exhaustion of war, Kent refers to his journal.

"So this is my birthday wish," Santos writes in the entry dated Sept. 23, 2004. "I wish that this time next year I have left the Army behind me and I live in Los Angeles, Calif, in a nice place where I am truly, incredibly and indefinitely happy. ... Every day I struggle so that one day I may have something to hold dear to my heart. So I must survive this cursed war. And I will fight until I have exhausted every single last resource."

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**Jonathan Santos’ last journal entry**

**DAY 37 October 14, 2004**

I once again enjoyed the splendors of Driver’s. I am an ace at that game. Missions have been on hold lately because Crypto (a.k.a. Communications) was compromised. Some unit lost a rad, o when they hit a mine. The new till comes out tomorrow, so we’ll be going out.

Tomorrow is the first day of Ramadan, the Muslim equivalent of Lent, or-equivalent. They can’t eat or have sex(not even alone) between sun up and sun down. So most of them just reverse their schedule and sleep throughout the day.

I watched a very good movie today; The Human Stain starring Anthony Hopkins, Nicole Kidman, Gary Sinise and Ed Harris. Anthony Hopkins plays an aged college professor who is wrongly accused of racism at the school, so he decides to quit. Then his wife has a severe brain embolism from the news of his retirement. So Hopkins goes to Gary Sinise to write a book about the incident. They become friends. Then Hopkins and Kidman hook-up and it turns out that Anthony Hopkins character is African-American. He just has really, really light skin. \( ? \) SURPRISE!

'I want them to ask that question. What did he die for?'
Dandayamana-Bibhaktapada Paschimoththanasana
Standing Separate Leg Stretching

Dandayamana-Dhanurasana
Standing Bow Pulling

Pada Hastaana
Hands to Feet

Bend It Like Bikram
During her sophomore year in high school, Sarah Baughn found out she had 30 degree scoliosis in her spine. The condition was causing difficulties breathing, she was having trouble sleeping at night, and she was struggling with depression. Her doctor wanted to put rods in her back to correct the scoliosis. Fortunately, Baughn, 20, found a natural treatment — Bikram yoga.

Bikram yoga is done in a heated room, with the desired temperature of 105 degrees, says Whitney McCormick, formerly an instructor at Bikram's Yoga College of India on Railroad Avenue and now at The Funky Door in Berkeley, Calif. McCormick, 28, explains that the high temperature keeps the body from overheating, prevents injury, increases the heart rate, improves stretching ability and cleanses the body by flushing out toxins.

According to the Bikram yoga Web site, bikramyoga.com, the Bikram method delivers total-body health by strengthening and balancing every system in the body.

Yogiraj Bikram Choudhury, the creator of Bikram yoga, moved from India to the United States in 1973. At the age of 3, Choudhury began studying Hatha yoga; at 11 years old, he became the youngest person to win the National India Yoga Competition. Six years later, a weightlifting accident left him crippled.

Choudhury created a series of 26 postures, now known as Bikram yoga, which restored his health. Researchers at Tokyo University in Japan have proven the combination of postures and breathing exercises, if done in a precise order, regenerate tissues and cure chronic ailments.

When Choudhury moved to the United States, he quickly became one of the most prominent yoga teachers. He has instructed many athletes and celebrities at the Yoga College of India in Beverly Hills, Calif., and now travels the world instructing classes.

In the past three years, the number of studios in the United States has jumped from 20 to approximately 300. More than a hundred studios are located outside the United States, from Africa to Chile.

Baughn has achieved incredible flexibility and strength by practicing Bikram yoga every day, sometimes twice a day. She says it has changed her life completely.

"Everything has gotten better — my breathing, my mood, my outlook on life," she says. "If you just give it a chance every single day for two months, your life will do a complete 180."

On Nov. 5, 2005, Baughn placed first in the women's division at the third annual Washington State Regional Competition for the International Yoga Asana Championships in Seattle.

She will continue to the international championship, the third annual Bishnu Charan Ghosh Cup, on Feb. 10 in Los Angeles. Last year's championship had participants from 11 countries, including China, Australia, India, Japan, Thailand and Canada.

—Greta Smoke
The air is crisp on an early Sunday morning at Lake Padden in Bellingham, but that doesn't deter 15 or more determined joggers who are bobbing along the two-mile loop encapsulating the placid water. As they heave in cold air with each breath, their cheeks become pink and their brows sweaty.

Non-runners often wonder what draws people to this form of exercise that exasperates lungs and exhausts muscles. The answer may lie in the feelings that physical activity generates. Many runners describe the feeling they get during and after a run as a "runner's high." According to an article from the February 2005 issue of Shape magazine, a runner's high is "the euphoric feeling some people get from exercise." Experts dispute what causes these feelings. Many people credit the runner's high to the release of endorphins — neurotransmission messengers that are found in the brain and have pain-relieving properties similar to the drug morphine. Researchers believe that when some people exercise for a long period of time the brain releases a multitude of endorphins. This may result in the happy feeling at the end of a long run or other forms of intense aerobic exercise.

"The hypothesis is [your brain] initially releases endorphins when you exercise and that contributes to a runner's high," says Dr. George Koob, a professor in the department of neuropharmacology at the Scripps Research Institute in La Jolla, Calif. "Endorphins respond to acute pain, and it is thought that when runners begin to get sore on a run, they are released to help that."

Koob says researchers have not yet done any studies linking neurotransmission messengers, otherwise referred to as opiate-peptides, to the high from exercise, so no direct proof exists. "There aren't many runners who will let me do a spinal tap mid-run and let me find that out," Koob says with a chuckle.

Experts agree that endorphins, or any other receptor found in the brain, are responsible for this phenomenon. Dr. Ralph Vernacchia, the director of Western's Center for Performance Excellence and a professor in the physical education department, says people feel good after they run because they have accomplished a goal and something beneficial for their body, not because of chemicals in the brain.

Vernacchia says the happy feeling people get after exercise is not a biomedical phenomenon, but the final step in the challenge mastery theory. Simply put, athletes set out to achieve a specific goal when they exercise, and when they accomplish that goal they feel good. He refers to the moment a person accomplishes this goal as a peak moment.

"To me, running is a very healthy behavior," he says. "It's not a drug thing. It's an emotional thing."

Like any compulsive behavior, Koob says feeling a withdrawal from not exercising is possible if the body is used to doing it on a regular basis. He says runners could feel physically worse if they do not exercise because they have a lower level of opiate-peptides than is normal for them. The bottom line: too much of a good thing can be bad.

Western freshman Arielle Genther has seen running addicts before. She recalls a former track coach who continued running through her eighth month of pregnancy, for example. Genther, now a member of the Western track team, fell in love with running in fifth grade.

"It's a hobby for me, because I like physical exercise," she says. "I feel healthy about myself after I finish running, and that feels good."

Genther says that whether the runner's high is a positive feeling of achievement, endorphins or even a push of adrenaline, she loves to run and will keep running as long as she can.

In the future, researchers like Koob hope to identify a concrete reason for the drive people like Genther have to exercise. Until then, the experts will continue to debate the reason behind the high. And runners will continue to do what makes them feel good — run.

— Kate Miller
When I hear the word “roast,” I usually think of a nice, juicy pot roast, a carefully brewed pot of coffee or perhaps a handful of delicious burnt almonds. Rarely, however, does the subject of a human body, slowly cooking in a tanning bed, come to mind.

That is because much like bulimia or anorexia were once unspeakable subjects, so is the new disorder that is taking over the youth of America. According to the Food and Drug Administration, more than 1 million people visit tanning salons each day.

This disorder, which is becoming as serious as one’s weight, is what people call tanorexia.

Similar to how anorexics never feel they are thin enough, tanorexics never think they are tan enough. No matter how many trips they take to the tanning salon, they can never be happy with the color of their skin.

“There are definitely regulars who come in every day or every other day,” says Emily Smith, staff member at one of the more popular salons in Bellingham, Tahiti Mi Tan.

Lindsey Harvey, 21, who tans twice a week at Bellingham Fitness, says she tans because she likes the way it makes her look aesthetically and admits she has many friends who tan every other day. Harvey, however, says she does not really believe in the concept of tanorexia.

“I think people become addicted to tanning because once they achieve the perfect bronze they want, they never want to become any paler than that,” Harvey says. “Some of my friends will already be extremely tan, but they don’t feel like they are.”

Isn’t that the same unhealthy attitude of many people who are concerned with their weight? I feel avid tanners and dieters have the same mentality. Rigid dieters have a connotation of achieving the ideal weight and obsessing enough so they will not gain a pound more.

Besides plain obsession, indoor tanning might also induce some devastating health effects. According to the Federal Trade Commission’s Web site, most tanning beds emit UVA, or long-wave ultraviolet rays, which may be linked to malignant melanoma and immune system damage.

Basically, experts blame UVA for the common skin cancers — basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma and melanoma.

According to the Skin Cancer Foundation’s Web site, UVA light in indoor tanning causes skin cancers in three ways.

“First, ultraviolet light directly damages DNA leading to mutations; second, it produces activated oxygen molecules that in turn damage DNA and other cellular structures; and third, it leads to a localized immunosuppression, thus blocking the body’s natural anti-cancer defenses,” according to the Skin Cancer Foundation Web site.

Not that tanning is a bad thing — once in awhile. I take a trip to the salon occasionally, especially during the winter when the sun is nonexistent. The occasional tan is not the problem. The part when it becomes an obsession is.

Yes, everything in excess is bad for a person. Going out for a couple of drinks, eating a greasy hamburger and taking a couple days to sit around and do nothing are all fine. Abuse these scenarios, however, and a problem presents itself.

While people go to extreme measures to achieve the bronzed-California look, they are choosing not to confront serious issues that may affect them in the long run, such as premature aging and skin cancer.

Besides, who wants to look 80 with wrinkled, leathery skin, when they should be at their prime?
Will Cowger is one of 1.5 million Americans with autism. Jena Norman talks with Will's mother and explores the struggle behind bringing together her son and Andrew, his lifetime canine assistant. Photos by Kathryn Brenize and courtesy of Charity Cowger. Design by David Wray.

Clockwise from top: Will Cowger and his brother, Evan; Will's future assistance dog, Andrew, and Denise Costanten, founder of Brigadoon Assistance Dogs; Will at the beach; Will; Andrew.

FAMILY PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHARITY COWGER; OTHERS BY KATHRYN BRENIZE

In the waiting room of the doctor's office, people sit patiently waiting for the nurse to open the door and call out a name. The only humor entertaining the patients is listening to the nurse trying to pronounce people's names correctly. The only noise filling the air is the soft music in the background and the rustling of magazine pages. The only thing to watch is children playing with worn and overly used toys and books.

That is, until Charity Cowger and her 2-year-old son enter the waiting room. Now it seems the only entertainment and noise is Will Cowger, a boy with dark brown hair and eyes to match, a boy larger than most other 2-year-olds.

Arching his back in attempts to get free, Will sits on his mother's lap and throws a tantrum. He fills the air of the small waiting room with shrieking screams and sobbing tears. As Cowger attempts to control her son, Will resists with face-slapping and even louder screaming.

In a no-nonsense tone, a nurse tells Will he will have to quiet down because other people are getting upset.

"Like that helps," Cowger sarcastically says, as she explains how people respond to her son's outbursts. "Typically, others make a point of looking away. Some people will make a comment to Will about straightening up and behaving, perhaps thinking they are doing me a favor. All it does, in actuality, is embarrass me and my family and..."
with me like his older brother Evan did," Cowger says. "He didn't reach certain milestones as early in his life as Evan did. He still wasn't able to sit alone at 8 months, and he refused to eat solid foods.

An autistic child seems to exist in his or her own world; a place characterized by repetitive routines, odd and peculiar behaviors, problems in communication, and a lack of social awareness or interest in others, according to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Web site.

"Will intentionally crashes into walls and jumps onto the floor to satisfy his cravings for deep impact sensations," Cowger says. "He compulsively blinks his eyes when he wants to block out too much stimulation and jumps up and down repeatedly when he's excited. Will also likes the sensation of objects in his ears."

Doctors diagnosed Will one month after his second birthday, a typical time as most autistic children are diagnosed by age 3.
babies born in the United States is affected by autism.

The U.S. Department of Education estimates that autism is growing at a rate of 10 percent to 17 percent each year. Consequently, the number of Americans with autism could more than triple to roughly 5 million in the next decade.

What Is Autism?

Autism is a developmental disorder characterized by impaired social interaction and communication and limited or unusual activities and interests. Scientists have found no cause nor cure for the disorder. Yet some believe autism is not a disorder at all, instead merely a different way of experiencing the world. A small minority of autistic individuals, termed "autistic savants," display exceptional skills in math, music and art. Additionally, for unknown reasons and around the globe, autism is four times more prevalent in boys than in girls.

Dogs don't care if their person's speech is impaired or if he isn't as smart, cute or as talented as the other kids.

DENISE COSTANTEN

"I was actually relieved because I knew what was affecting him and what we could do to help him," Cowger says. According to the Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Web site, no known cause exists for autism, although current theories suggest a problem with the function or structure of the central nervous system.

COPING

Cowger is optimistic about her son's future. Will works with an educational therapist at the Cowger home who helps him learn communication and social skills. Moving from Georgia to Fort Lewis in August changed the Cowger's insurance coverage area, and Will is now on a waiting list to receive occupational and speech therapy in a learning center.

"I have every confidence that Will will be able to function independently," Cowger says. "I think most of his difficulties will be in forming true relationships with others. To his own detriment, Will won't stop playing or looking at books alone.

"His brother, who is only 6, doesn't understand why Will doesn't accept his overtures of physical contact. Evan still asks me why Will doesn't like it when he hugs or kisses him."

A regular target of Will's outbursts, Evan backs down and does not fight back when Will attacks him because he knows Will can't always control his compulsive behavior, Cowger says.

"I get upset because when Will hits or chokes me and bites me, it hurts a lot," Evan says. "But sometimes I just say it's OK when he wants a toy."

As with most children, routines and known boundaries are important for Will to function and feel secure. Changes in routine, noisy or busy environments, and new experiences trigger Will's outbursts.

"Family outings used to be a nightmare," Cowger says. "There is still an underlying tension that Will might melt down, but when outings are scheduled around his routine and he has his favorite objects like his Superman figurine, blankey and chocolate milk, the likelihood of outbursts have decreased."

Cowger has helped her son work through outbursts in unknown places by systematically desensitizing him, a process of spending short amounts of time in busy places followed by a reward if he gets through the excursion tantrum-free.

"Now Will can withstand longer times in noisy environments, but I fear things will change as he gets too big to ride in the cart while shopping," Cowger says. "When we go to a restaurant, Will still prefers to sit under the table."

To further help Will with his social and communication delays, and eventually help Will succeed in an independent lifestyle, Cowger sought out an assistance dog organization in Bellingham that is training a dog to help Will in personal development and safety.

The benefits of an assistance dog include improved psychological well being, facilitated learning and increased communication, according to The Delta Society Web
Above: Denise Costanten and Andrew. “Every penny we have goes into the dogs,” she says. PHOTO BY KATHRYN BRENZEY

site, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the research and resources of assistance animals.

“My ultimate hope for Will and his assistance dog is that the dog can enable Will to develop a bond with another creature that will expand to include other humans in his environment,” Cowger says. “I also hope the dog will decrease Will’s need to endanger himself by running away, climbing and jumping.”

Brigadoon Assistance Dogs is a nonprofit organization founded by Denise Costanten, who trains border collies and golden retrievers to assist disabled people. Costanten is working with Will’s future assistant, a smooth collie named Andrew, who will alert Cowger if Will is doing anything destructive, such as climbing trees or running out in the road.

Costanten isn’t just a dog trainer, and Andrew isn’t just a pet. She is passionate about a cause, and he is a life companion.

PASSION

Costanten has spent most of her life working with dogs, especially collies. As an adult, she started training dogs professionally and during a training session Costanten attended, she saw first hand what assistance animals could do for people.

After Costanten spent 15 years as a professional dog trainer, the doors opened for her to attend an assistance dog training school last year. She now spends her days in a renovated, yellow barn behind her house, training dogs to turn lights off and on, pick up dropped items and perform other skills the dogs will use as assistance animals.

“This is a 24/7 job,” Costanten says. “If you don’t have passion, you’re not going to stick with it for very long. I live out here with my dogs. My time is not my own. But this is my passion. Especially for the kids.”

Costanten’s passion extends further than just helping a child complete a physical task by having an assistance dog. She intends for her dogs to act as a life companion providing emotional support, as well.

“Children can be very cruel to one another. If a dog will help a child be more accepted by his peers, then he should have a dog. The dogs deflect some of the stares and comments, and provide the child with a companion who loves them no matter what he looks like. Dogs don’t care if their person’s speech is impaired, or if he isn’t as smart, cute or as talented as the other kids his age,” Costanten says.

Costanten has sacrificed personal time and money to get Brigadoon Assistance Dogs established, including selling her lakeside home to purchase a home with acreage for dog kennels, play areas and places for training facilities.

Each dog spends a minimum of 300 hours or two years training with Costanten. The feeding, boarding and veterinary assistance for the dog’s first year of life costs Costanten $1,200. Feeding alone is $40 to $50 a month.

“Everything we do is for the dogs,” Costanten says. “Every penny we have goes into the dogs.”

Costanten charges recipients of the assistance dog $3,000 to $5,000, depending on the level of training — a price that does not even cover the dog’s food. Once factoring in the specialized training, housing and feeding, the out-of-pocket cost to Costanten is $36,000 per dog, she says.

“I might go up to $5,000, but the thing is, people can’t really afford [$36,000], and you don’t want to make it so expensive that it’s impossible to find the money,” Costanten says.

LIFE COMPANION

Will was denied an assistance dog voucher from Assistance Dogs United, an organization providing monetary assistance, because the organization doesn’t see the need for a psychological assistance dog for an autistic child, Cowger says. Cowger is searching out alternative funding options, including fundraisers and donations in order to buy Will’s life companion, Andrew.

The Cowger family made a trip to meet Costanten at Brigadoon Assistance Dogs, and Costanten brought out each dog, one at a time, to see how the dog and Will interacted and responded to each other.

The collies, who Costanten says have an innate ability to watch over children and protect them, took an interest to Will and calmly followed him. Colin, one of Costanten’s older collies, was a good match because of his temperament and demeanor but another person has already selected him. Andrew is a younger version of Colin, Costanten says, so she selected him as Will’s assistance dog.

“I was almost in tears when I witnessed little Will tell Colin to ‘down’ and the dog dropped to the floor,” Costanten says. “Will cannot pronounce his C’s, so it came out ‘Olin, down.’ It was so heartfelt.”

Cowger says she doesn’t know how Will feels about having his own dog, but he likes to look at pictures of dogs in his books. He jumps up and down whenever he sees a dog, now that he has been introduced to Andrew.

“Will has never in his life spontaneously given affection to anyone or any object,” Cowger says. “But the first time he encountered the dog, Will gave him a kiss on his back without any prompting.”

WAITING

In two years, when Will is 5 and Andrew has completed 300 hours of training, Cowger will enter the waiting room of the doctor’s office, where people will be waiting for the nurse to call their names. People will entertain themselves by reading three-month-old issues of magazines and listening to the soft music coming from the invisible speakers in the ceiling. They will watch their children interact with other children and look at the toys scattered across the playroom, until Charity Cowger and her son enter the waiting room.

People will stop worrying about how much longer until their name is called, stop humming along to the music and stop watching their children play with toys. The only entertainment and noise will be a little boy with his dog — Will and Andrew.
Video games today are produced like big-budget films, but no one can forget the feeling of playing the 2D, 8-bit Mario Bros. classic. Nintendo's legacy continues 20 years after its release. Sean McGrorey relives the nostalgic feelings it holds for so many people. Photos by Sean McGrorey. Design by Lauren Miller.

Old-school Nintendo. Most 20-somethings feel a stab of nostalgia when they hear the bleeps of Mario music or reminisce about Saturday mornings with sore thumbs.

Collectors of vintage Nintendo see the games as a way to reach back to a time of electronic innocence, when the video-game industry was in a flurry of 2D innovation, and "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas" was not yet letting players commit simulated crime sprees.

"Anything that's around now that people recognize as a legend of gaming started in the '80s," says Jon Gibson, the curator of last year's "i am 8-bit" art exhibit in Los Angeles, which featured art inspired by classic video games. "It's because all those games were character-based."

Between 1986 and 1996, now-iconic Nintendo heroes Mario, Link and Samus fed children's cravings for adventure in the 2D worlds of the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) and its successor, the Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES).

They wielded magical swords to battle evil wizards, raced one another in quirky bumper cars, and explored the secret passages of Bowser's castle.

"They added something to my childhood that books and TV couldn't offer," says Tony Peters, Western creative writing major and classic Nintendo collector. "It was like an interactive world."

CONFESSIONS OF AN ADDICT

One of Bellingham's most avid NES collectors is Jess Manley, who began collecting in 1999 to quit smoking. Every time he bought cigarettes, he made himself spend the same amount on games.

"I ended up addicted to both," he says, "a rolled cigarette between his fingers."

Manley now owns 397 Nintendo games and eight NES systems in various stages of repair. He says he has spent more than $1,000 buying games and haggling them from garage sales and pawnshops.

"I don't think I could handle living without a Nintendo now," Manley says. "It wasn't a big part of my childhood, but ... I collect because it's fun."

Manley, who calls himself a "half-assed video game historian," appreciates the first generation of Nintendo games, which came from an era when video games were still a nerdy pastime, and their developers were unafraid to experiment.

His list of quirky, favorite games include the enduring classics "Bubble Bobble," "Super Mario Bros. 2," which features Mario roaming a surrealistic dream world, and "Golgo 13: Top Secret Episode," a film-noir-style game.

"It's classic," he says. "It was based after a '60s Japanese comic strip about espionage. The gameplay was horrible, but the storyline was really good."

To make up for simple 2D graphics, the NES and SNES developed creative text-based plots or gameplay. Manley says modern 3D games have unwieldy controllers and rely too much on eye candy.

"The bigger video games get, the closer they get to big-budget movies," Manley says. "Cut scenes, explosions ... that's not nearly as fun as using your brain."

A COLLECTING COUPLE

"Collecting has added something to our relationship," says Western sophomore Bonnie Molleston, Peters' girlfriend. "It's cheesy, but we play together and shop for games."

Peters and Molleston began collecting NES games after Molleston's birthday in 2004. Peters bought her an NES through eBay after hearing how she regrets her family
Selling its NES when she was 12, Peters' and Molleston's apartment now has 10 different gaming systems, 20 NES games, seven SNES games, a classic Nintendo calendar and a Yoshi guarding the top of the microwave.

"It’s cool that we live together and can combine all our stuff," she says.

Molleston and Peters say they most often buy their games online at eBay, which has the market price for Nintendo games, but they also scrounge through pawnshops and thrift stores several times per month — for them, it’s an exciting Easter-egg hunt.

"It’s really cool to come across a rare, classic game and have it be $5 or $10 instead of $30 or $40 on eBay," Peters says.

Molleston agrees. "We want to start our own game store," she says.

**INspiration in the Art**

Classic Nintendo inspires impressive artwork from devotees, as it did from many of the 101 artists at the art exhibit "I am 8-bit." With paint and canvas, the artists paid homage, whimsical and even bawdy, to icons of their youth.

"It was all about the artist re-interpreting their memories," Gibson says.

"The 'MK,'" an oil painting by Jose Flores, pokes fun at the absurdity of a pixilated Mario world full of floating ledges. Flores painted every brick, question block and pipe in painfully realistic detail.

Another oil painting, Bob Dob's "Cheers," shows Mario and Donkey Kong reaching a truce over pints of beer.

"Nintendo wanted to make sure that when they introduced those characters, they lived on," Gibson says. "That's why Nintendo has the legacy they do."

Fifteen hundred people poured in to see the exhibit on its opening night, April 19, 2005, in Gallery Nineteen Eighty Eighty and the Acme Game Store.

"There’s tons of art that goes into video games, just like movies are art and music is art," Gibson says. "I think our generation is realizing that."

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If religion was the opium for the masses in the 19th century, as philosopher Karl Marx wrote, then video games represent it in the 21st century. Gamers of all ages are spending more of their time playing these massive online games.

College students pack into dorm rooms around the world to play "Halo 2" on Xbox Live, an online video-game network that allows gamers to compete against one another from their living rooms. Other online players test their skills in either "World of Warcraft" or "Everquest II," two fantasy-based role-playing games for the PC. These three games are among the most popular online-based games.

These games are so addicting, a 27-year-old Taiwanese man died of exhaustion after playing online games nonstop for 32 hours in late October. Another 24-year-old South Korean man died after playing for 86 consecutive hours 10 days earlier. In the wake of such occurrences, Chinese game companies will begin penalizing gamers for playing for more than three consecutive hours, according to an article on IT Week, a European Internet news service. The government will begin enforcing these new regulations next year, which will supposedly help increase the social and moral resolve in China's ever-expanding population.

A player's online character will lose experience, money and other intangible items that online gamers strive to collect.

U.S. video game companies may feel pressure in the not-too-distant future from government officials and parents to start limiting players' access to video games or video-game content. Gamers must unite in order to keep video games out of the public-opinion cross hairs until the United States embraces video games as the art form they are.

Video games do not receive the same praise from Americans that novels and movies do. According to "The Medium of the Video Game," a book by Mark J. P. Wolf, video games have not gained respect from scholars as an artistic medium. Movies, books and music all rank higher than video games in most scholarly opinions. Some games are made based on novels or movies, such as the numerous "Star Wars" video games.

For games, this discrimination is not new.

Gamers growing up face criticism from parents and politicians. These video game opponents have characterized youth video-game habits as a waste of time.

Despite their claims, most parents would not think twice about sitting their child down in front of Disney movies such as "The Lion King" for hours at a time. However, in "The Lion King," Simba's uncle Scar kills his dad near the beginning of the movie, and hyenas kill Scar at the end of the G-rated movie.

Violence dominates mainstream movies. "The Passion of the Christ" was one of the goriest movies in history, yet many critics raved about it since the director used violence to illustrate a story. According to Chris Vognar, a film critic for The Dallas Morning News, "The Passion of the Christ" is an intense, skillfully constructed movie that will have an impact on people of all faiths. So movie critics encourage violence as long as it has some redeeming value — in this case, religion.

Although some government officials have tried to censor certain genres of music in the past 50 years — such as rock 'n' roll in the 1950s and gangsta rap in the 1990s — not many Americans would consider jazz music as being obscene.

Yet in the late 1940s, popular culture suggested that jazz music was evil and unsuitable for certain listeners because its sexual rhythms supposedly encouraged lewd behavior. But now, jazz music is played on National Public Radio and most Americans see it as an art form.

Video-game companies would most likely not dare tamper with limiting players' access to their games in America because of potential First Amendment violations, but this bold move by the Chinese government could gain sympathy from parents and government officials in the United States.

Video games are not always violent or sexist. For every violent video game a publisher releases, it usually will release two or three games that are not.

Americans must realize video games are an increasingly popular form of entertainment and need to recognize them as an art form. If they do not, they can feel free to burn their children's favorite Disney movie or face the consequences of living their lives in hypocrisy.

—Adam Rudnick
Western sophomore Thomas Yount plays “Super Mario Bros: Star Theme” on the piano in the Fairhaven College lounge. Remixing Nintendo
Music helped Yount to begin composing and to create his own Nintendo sheet music. PHOTO BY SEAN MCGROREY

Classic Nintendo has inspired creativity in music, as well.

Western linguistics major Thomas Yount says remixing classic Nintendo music on piano and keyboard taught him how to compose his own music.

“Mario music is completely genius,” Yount says. “If this music is played in piano or any other instruments instead of synthesizers, you'll realize how difficult this music is to play. It's performance-quality.”

After learning to discern melodies and rhythms, Yount eventually joined a chamber music group and now practices Frederic Chopin's waltzes.

Yount says he admires how Nobuo Uematsu, the chief composer for the “Final Fantasy” series, and Koji Kondo, the composer for “Zelda” and “Mario,” tell stories with their music.

“I try to have my music tell a story I can recall every time I play it,” he says. “It really brings out more meaning in the music.”

THE FUTURE OF THE PAST

The collectors of old-school Nintendo say they notice a generation gap in appreciation of classic games.

“It's just flat images [to the younger generation],” Peters says. “Because I was immersed in these worlds at one time, I can make them tangible.”

In a December 2004 article posted by Electronic Gaming Monthly, EGM tested old-school games on children ages 10 to 13, who ridiculed the games’ lack of gore, simplistic controls and crude graphics.

Yet, the collectors say some from the younger generations will stay faithful to old-school Nintendo.

Although doing so is illegal, some teens use emulator programs to play ROMs, file versions of NES and SNES games. Hot Topic, a chain of stores devoted to teen pop culture merchandise, sells Nintendo-themed items from Mario-mushroom air fresheners to “Zelda” shirts and NES-controller belt buckles.

“I think a new generation is picking up on old-school Nintendo,” Peters says. Cartridge games have been stepped on and dropped for almost 20 years, proving themselves to be far more resilient than compact discs.

“Maybe three games [out of 3,000] came through here in the past two years that didn’t work,” says Miranda Boyer, manager of Ron's Game World in Ferndale.

Nintendo no longer manufactures the NES and SNES, but even when the last of the systems break down, their games will live on in file. Nintendo says it will release a new console system sometime after March 2006, the Nintendo Revolution, which will allow users to download the games from the NES, SNES, N64 and GameCube for a yet-unannounced fee.

“They added something to my childhood that books and TV couldn’t offer. It was like an interactive world.”
A Curse to Their Cause

Pro-life picketers incite ire, not compassion

Walking on campus in the fall, I notice a lot to take in: leaves crunching, breeze blowing, the scent of wet pavement mixing with mud. As I wander through this wonderland of sights, sounds and smells, however, an unlikely source visually assaults me: pro-life demonstrators, standing nonchalantly outside the Viking Union.

These dozen students hold a symbolic slap in the face. Their signs are colossal. Three feet wide and nearly 5 feet tall — a dead fetus sits glaring at me from one of the posters. I'm disgusted, and my immediate reaction is to look away, but the signs are like a five-car pileup on the freeway. I have to look.

Some of the images on these five signs are harder to distinguish, but they all have an abundance of blood and are reminiscent of scenes from “Friday the 13th.” The cliché slogan “Abortion is Murder” is branded across the top of the images. A group of pro-choice advocates also are gathered nearby with signs.

I approach a girl holding her bloody-baby banner with pride.

“We’re trying to stop baby killers,” is her simple reply.

After a bit more probing, I discover a local association, Priests For Life, has brought a pro-life speaker to campus, prompting the demonstration.

The protests are peaceful, neither side getting too uppity with the other, but to me, the messages on the pro-life signs are clearly an assault. Glancing back at the gore, I am struck by how sickened I feel from the pro-lifers' displays of horror.

I thought we were past all of this, that this type of exposition had run its course. The demonstrators obviously used the signs for shock value — at least they succeeded in that — but to be totally honest, they completely missed the mark. The disgusting display did not incite compassion within me but rather complete revulsion.

As I was walking home, the images from the signs kept popping into my head like revolting little jack-in-the-box dolls. But they did not make me think, “Wow, abortion is really awful.” My thoughts were more along the lines of, “I wish I'd passed on that hot dog for lunch.”

According to the Academy of Marketing Science Review, disgust is the single most deterring emotion linked to product sales. In fact, people expressing disgust toward a product are 90 percent more likely to reject it. In other words, if you want someone to buy what you’re saying, do not gross them out. If pro-lifers looked at their campaigns strictly from an advertising standpoint, I think they would reconsider the horror show.

The abortion debate is alive and well, even in a small campus community setting. For some, the demonstration is about murdering innocent children. For others, it is about liberating women and their bodies.

If you can get past the jungle of jargon, the abortion issue is actually quite simple. Does life begin at conception or birth? The truth is, we don't know. This is an assessment everyone must make for themselves.

When I got home that day, I sat down on the couch, huffy and flustered. The sad thing is, I, too, am against abortion. I know for a fact I could never kill my unborn child. I am pro-life. But seeing that demonstration made me ashamed to admit it.
Klipsun is a Lummi word meaning “beautiful sunset.”