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healing with humor

herbal detox

liquid art

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Over the past few years, Klipsun has been a collection of assorted stories. For this issue, the editorial staff decided to return to a format of categories in order to introduce a more magazine-focused style. We wanted to inspire the staff writers to seek out meaningful stories for our readers. We encouraged them to find issues that affect people in our community, and stories that would be touching and compelling.

Our goal for Klipsun is to appeal to every reader by providing a diverse collection of stories, threaded together in uniting themes. We are leading this edition with three issue stories: the railroad blockades in Bellingham, transitional housing for the homeless and the James LaVine expulsion case.

We hope to set a precedent for future editions where Klipsun writers tackle important local stories that concern not only Western students, but the Bellingham and Whatcom County communities beyond.

We always welcome feedback from our readers. Email the staff at klipsun@faith.journ.wvu.edu or call 650-3737.

Linnea Westerlind, editor



Aaron Crabtree

has frequently crossed railroad tracks in his treks on Bellingham's beaches. Clark's Point, flanked by hundreds of sandstone cliffs and caves, was his destination of choice before its closure. The senior journalism major jumped through a network of hoops to get the scoop on the recent coastal access restrictions.



C. Nicki Krom,

a junior majoring in public relations, aims to break down the stereotypes many people carry about the homeless. She adds, "The homeless are our former neighbors. And in some cases our classmates. Homelessness is a problem everywhere, including Whatcom County."



Christine Callan,

a senior public relations major, was intrigued by the 1998 James LaVine case and called him for an interview, which led to this story. Questioning her own freedom, she asks, "As a student, how far do my rights go?"



Tiffany Campbell

is a senior majoring in Environmental Journalism and English. She decided to chronicle her experience with detoxification to explore the merits and options of alternative medicine. Here she shares the steps of this process.

Klipsun is a Lummi word meaning beautiful sunset.

Klipsun is a student publication of Western Washington University distributed twice per quarter.

Klipsun is available free for Western students and the community.

issues

04 **Access Denied** Aaron Crabtree investigates the blocked railroad tracks bordering Boulevard Park and Clark's Point.

08 **The Space Between** C. Nicki Krom describes how one Bellingham agency is helping the homeless find ways to get their lives back.

10 **Poetic Injustice** Christine Callan talks to a student whose poetry raised controversy among school officials and brought the Bill of Rights to Blaine.

healing

12 **Process of Elimination** Tiffany Campbell journeys into the whirl of detoxification, tasting some of the strangest concoctions ever invented by medical science.

16 **Prescribing Laughter** Erin Crumpacker finds a hospital where the staff wears rainbows, the medicine is laughter and the animals are made of balloons.

culture

20 **Tea of Tranquility** Kristin Bigsby unravels the ancient secrets of one Japanese ritual, Chanoyu, "The Art of Tea," and why it has helped keep a culture at peace.

24 **Tradition Afoot** Jennifer Collins follows in the footsteps of a local folk dancing group.

28 **Uncorked Passion** Jackie Martin discovers where one man's passion for wine began and why it will never end.

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Erin Crumpacker, a communications and public relations major, found that caring for the mind, body and spirit is not overlooked in Bellingham health care. She shares, "Yes the clowns at St. Joseph hospital are funny, but through my experience I have learned that the best thing about them is their compassionate hearts."



Kristin Bigsby, a senior journalism major, reflected on her own stressful life as she sought to share the importance of maintaining awareness in a busy world while writing about Chanoyu, the Japanese Art of Tea. She too, would like to find enlightenment.



Jennifer Collins, a journalism major, made several attempts at dancing with the Fourth Corner Folk Dancers, whose favorite saying is, "Dancing is just like walking — just add a left, a right, a hop, a kick, a chassé, a buzz-step..." She has come to one conclusion — she has simply forgotten how to walk.



Jackie Martin is a junior majoring in public relations. She now has a new interest in wine inspired by the contagious enthusiasm of wine expert Hans Wressnigg, who has turned his love for wine into a career.

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ACCESS

With chain-linked steel fences surrounding Clark's Point and looming slabs of concrete cutting off the view from Boulevard Park, **Aaron Crabtree** feels the heat as a standoff ignites between the people of Bellingham and the BNSF Railroad Company. Photos by Chris Fuller.

Large chain-link fences guard two trails that once accessed beaches nestled in the north corner of Clark's Point. Signs on each fence forbid entrance, reading, "This is private property. Trespassers are warned to keep off."

A marine landscape inside the city limits, Clark's Point juts south between Bellingham Bay and Chuckanut Bay. Local residents and outdoor enthusiasts once passed through Fairhaven and continued a mile down Fieldston Road to witness the Point's breathtaking views of the San Juan Islands, explore its gnarled sandstone cliffs and reap the bounty of its sea life.

In a town where industry and private ownership dominate scenic coastline, Clark's Point was revered as a community treasure.

Now the northern tip of 92-year-old Douglas Clark's property is closed to the public, and has been since June of 2000.

Further north, similar restrictions clamp access to the popular South Bay Trail that runs along the waterfront to and from Boulevard Park. Concrete barriers, erected in mid-March and flanked by a peeled back chain-link fence, attempt to block access to the section of the trail that connects with the downtown area.

The words "Welcome to Berlin" are scrawled in black on a barrier imposed at the northeast corner of the park, evidence of leftover sentiment from an April 7 town rally protesting the cumbersome blockades.

Both closures beg a question that has echoed throughout Bellingham the past year: what happened to these public mainstays for coastal access?

The answer lies in the miles of railroad track that run alongside Bellingham's already crowded coastline.

Citing concern for public safety, the Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railroad Company wielded its power the past year, claiming ownership of coastal access points at Clark's Point and Boulevard Park that have traversed its tracks since the company began 120 years ago. Now people using the tracks to reach both locations are considered trespassers.

The blockages were both spurred, the railroad claims, by the reality of people dying on the tracks.

"Trespassing was occurring regularly and we received numerous complaints from train crews operating this area," railroad spokesman Gus Melonas said. "This is a dangerous area ... The problem of people getting struck by trains has been getting worse and worse in the

corridor between Seattle and Bellingham. We had to crack down.

"We did not put the barriers down to be corporate bullies. We put these down for everybody's safety," Melonas said.

Melonas said BNSF trains have struck and killed eight pedestrians in Washington this year. Two deaths in Mt. Vernon and Everett in March and April bolstered the railroad company's stance on taking precautionary measures in Bellingham, Melonas said.

At the present rate, this year's death toll threatens to eclipse the 11 deaths recorded statewide in 2000, which mirror closely those tallied in 1999 and 2000, according to numbers provided by the Washington State Utilities and Transportation Website.

Yet some Bellingham land use experts contend that BNSF's reasons for curtailing local citizen's recreational freedoms are unreasonable.

"We've got a railroad who's totally arrogant about access to public places and for them to hide behind some kind of liability and safety issue is just wrong," said Ken Wilcox, owner of Osprey Environmental Consultants in Fairhaven, and an active trail planner. "I think it's ridiculous and probably illegal. They're just throwing their weight around."

"There's essentially an unholy alliance between the federal and state transportation agencies and the railroad," said Tim Wahl, Greenway program coordinator for the Bellingham Parks and Recreation Department. "The entrenched thinking is to close at-grade (ground level) railroad crossings. I honestly don't believe it's particularly based on sound reasoning."

Wahl said at-grade crossings adjacent to Teddy Bear Cove (on the east side of Chuckanut Bay), Clayton Beach (north of Larrabee Park), and Post Point (at the tidelands just south of the Fairhaven Ferry Terminal) are considered potential trouble areas by both the railroad and the city, and could be future targets for BNSF blockages.

Melonas said he is "not aware of any other barriers at this time."

Melonas also explained that BNSF's restrictive stance on Bellingham's questioned at-grade crossings is a universal issue.

"Track is track. Railroad property is railroad property," he said. "If this was the case anywhere across our 33,500 mile area, similar actions could occur. Our goal is zero tolerance and this is part of our program."

"This isn't the first time this situation has come up in Washington," Melonas added. "We're not just picking on Bellingham."

Gordon Scott, conservation director for the Whatcom Land Trust, said BNSF's burgeoning course of action compounds an existent problem of limited public access to beaches in Bellingham and beyond.

"The lack of public access to shorelines in Whatcom County is a serious problem," he said. "Waterfront is a tremendous natural asset to just waste on a transportation corridor. It has economic value for tourism and offers a real sense of character for the community."

"A Natural Heritage Plan for Whatcom County: Preserving a Way of Life," published by the Whatcom County Natural Heritage Task Force, stated that merely 3 to 6 percent of Whatcom County's 134 miles of shoreline was publicly owned in 1991. This contrasted with 17 percent statewide in 1991. Scott said the three to six percentage has probably lessened significantly since, considering BNSF's current access restrictions.

Clark's Point was one of the few areas set aside for coastal access in Whatcom County until BNSF blocked its public entrance in March of 2000. Its closure was a precursor to the railroad's ongoing actions prohibiting public access across its corridor of land.

Douglas Clark purchased the 78-acre piece of property in 1958 and constructed four houses on the land for his family. Clark left the northern entrance to his property, which accesses the beaches, open to the community in a conservation easement agreement with the Whatcom Land Trust even though danger from campfires and noise

from nighttime revelers bothered Clark in recent years, he said.

In the early 1990s, the Bellingham Parks and Recreation Department created several parking spaces at the Fieldston Road turnaround and encouraged public use of the trails.

But BNSF claimed ownership of the land where the trails spill down in a March 23, 2000 letter to the Parks and Recreation Department.

"Access to the points where the trails end cuts through our land," said Terry Nies, trainmaster at Bellingham's Burlington Northern/Santa Fe facility for 31 years. "All the clearing of the trails was done without our permission."

Nies said BNSF ignored the constant trespassing until a woman fell 25 feet to her death off Jones Point (at the northwest corner of Clark's Point) in November 1999, and then another woman was hit by a train coming out of the tunnel June 24, 2000. The latter incident was the catalyst toward closing public access to the trails, Nies said.

The upscale Edgemoor community surrounding Clark's Point allied with BNSF in closing the trails, forming a neighborhood block watch in early May to prevent access to the beachfront under their homes. Free use of the land often resulted in loud parties and property damage, Clark said.

"We had too much trouble with fires and refuse and everything else; we had to stop it," Clark said. "People overdid it. They spoiled it."

Jerry Mason, a private painting contractor who has visited the area at least ten times per year for 12 years, said the Bellingham community is sad about the Clark's Point closure.

"I'll miss going down there and I know quite a few who have been going down there longer than me," he said. "They're heartbroken."

Nies said BNSF "went through a battle of wills" with people tearing down the fences at Clark's Point.

Almost a year later, the railroad is experiencing the same backlash at Boulevard Park.

Persistent public use of the barricaded South Bay Trail and Boulevard Park intersection abounded in early May.

A local photographer snapped shots of a model posing on the tracks just north of the BNSF "no trespassing" sign. Mountain bikers carried their bikes over the tracks and sped past poles that once held up a chain-link fence now snipped and pulled aside to open a 16-foot crossing. An elderly couple shuffled across the railroad tracks, laboring to maneuver an occupied stroller across the ties.

Jogger Dick Ryan, a south side resident, looked back at the opened fence and said, "I'd have tore it down myself, but at my age I don't think I'd get away with it. I thought I'd leave it to some of these young studs."

design by | Erica Davenport





TICE
PRIVATE PROPERTY
IS ARE WARNED TO
KEEP OFF
BNSF RY CO

“The lack of public access to shorelines in Whatcom County is a serious problem. Waterfront is a tremendous natural asset to just waste on a transportation corridor.”

Ryan said he was appalled to see an armed railroad policeman monitoring the crossing in late March, right after the blockades were put up.

“What was he gonna do?” Ryan asked.

Such a strong-armed stance by BNSF has not been well received.

“Here this community had a great relationship with the railroad and all of a sudden Burlington Northern just throws up a wall,” Wilcox said. “What it has done is catalyzed the community against them. They’ve lost the good rapport they already had. They pissed it away overnight.”

Tim Donnelly, who walks the South Bay Trail with his wife five times per week, said the concrete barriers are pointless.

“They’re not going to stop us,” he said. “They’ve created another hazard in my mind. I can see where the railroad is coming from, but this is not the answer.”

City officials outlined their answer to the South Bay Trail crossing dispute in a May 1 public information meeting. Concerned for citizens’ safety in crossing the barricaded area during the peak trail season, Bellingham Mayor Mark Asmundson and Parks and Recreation Department representatives suggested rerouting the trail to a temporary crossing while the city and railroad sort out legal issues.

The city and BNSF met twice in April, once to discuss the railroad’s justification of the blockades and again to hash out legal proprietary rights of the crossing.

“We have advised BNSF that the placement of the barriers was a violation of city shoreline regulations and they should be removed,” Asmundson said of the second meeting’s results. “We were told they disagreed with our analysis but are sending off our demand for legal review.”

The city has since backed off its pursuit of crossing rights at the barricaded area and concentrated its efforts on proposing a new crossing at an unused street just south.

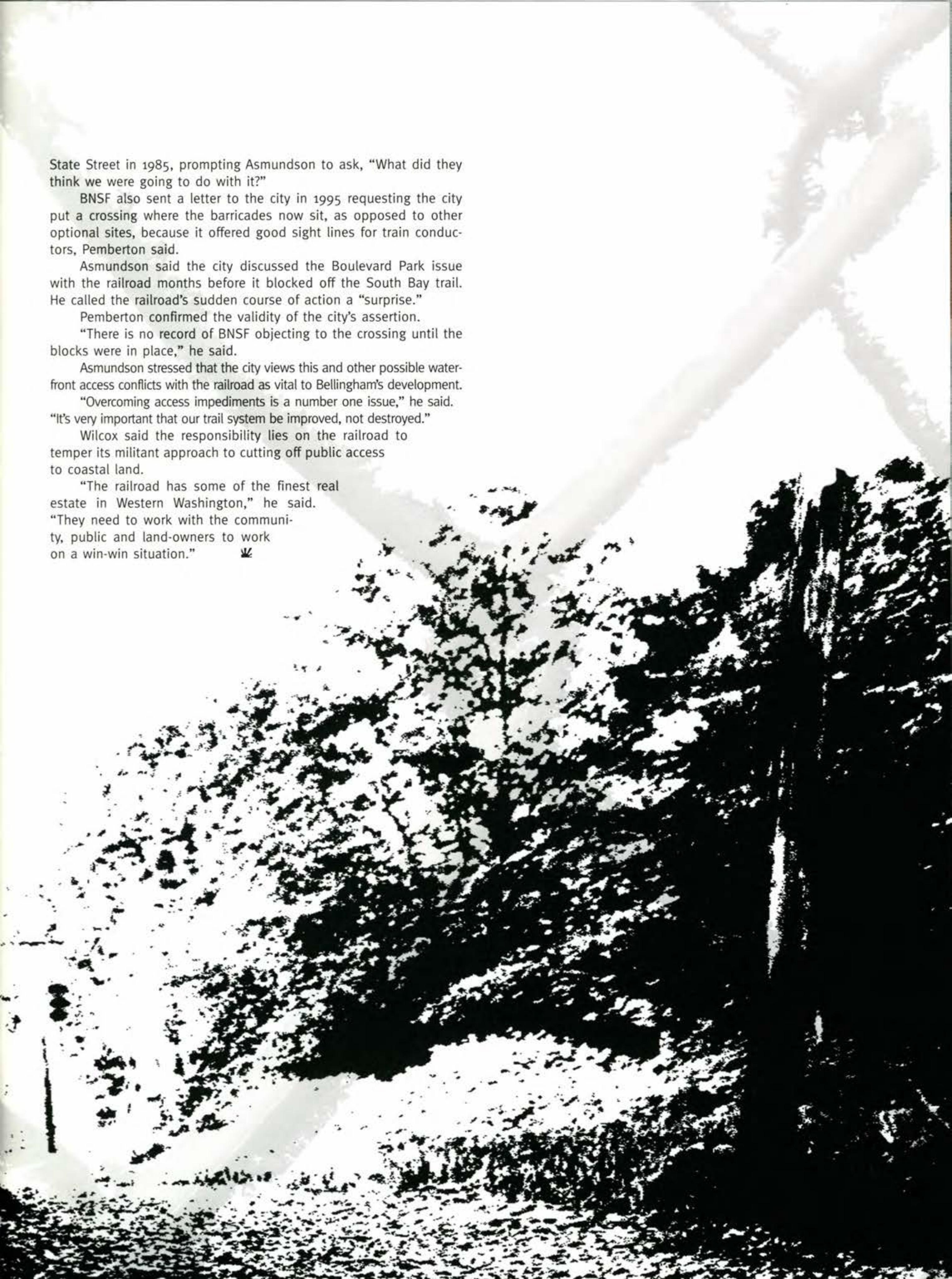
Acting Parks and Recreation Director, Marvin Harrison, said Bellingham has a legal right-of-way at the new, temporary site.

According to Melonas, the railroad is willing to negotiate details of a new crossing.

“We have a positive working relationship with the city and we will work together making progress on this matter,” he said. “Our goal is to resolve this as quickly as possible.”

While an engineering firm has been hired by the city to plan new crossings in both the north and south entrances to Boulevard Park, attorney Joe Pemberton has been employed to look into Bellingham’s property rights at the park and determine the legality of the barriers.

At the meeting, Pemberton said BNSF deeded the portion of the South Bay trail that connects the park with



State Street in 1985, prompting Asmundson to ask, "What did they think we were going to do with it?"

BNSF also sent a letter to the city in 1995 requesting the city put a crossing where the barricades now sit, as opposed to other optional sites, because it offered good sight lines for train conductors, Pemberton said.

Asmundson said the city discussed the Boulevard Park issue with the railroad months before it blocked off the South Bay trail. He called the railroad's sudden course of action a "surprise."

Pemberton confirmed the validity of the city's assertion.

"There is no record of BNSF objecting to the crossing until the blocks were in place," he said.

Asmundson stressed that the city views this and other possible waterfront access conflicts with the railroad as vital to Bellingham's development.

"Overcoming access impediments is a number one issue," he said.

"It's very important that our trail system be improved, not destroyed."

Wilcox said the responsibility lies on the railroad to temper its militant approach to cutting off public access to coastal land.

"The railroad has some of the finest real estate in Western Washington," he said.

"They need to work with the community, public and land-owners to work on a win-win situation." ✎

“It’s the family next door who has fallen on hard times that represents the homeless population in Whatcom County.”

Roxanne graduated from Western last fall with a Masters of Education degree in Art. She teaches at Northwest Indian College and her art is displayed nationwide. A few months ago, Roxanne, 46, mother of three, was homeless.

Women and women with children, who are victims of domestic violence, are the largest segment of Whatcom County’s homeless population, according to the Opportunity Council, a local human services agency.

“It’s the family next door who has fallen on hard times that represent the homeless population in Whatcom County,” said Gail deHoog, a program manager of community services for the Opportunity Council.

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, approximately 36.5 percent of Whatcom County households generate incomes in the low to extremely low income categories, meaning more than one-third of Whatcom County households earn less than \$15,000 annually. Low incomes, combined with rising rent and mortgage rates, have attributed to a demographic shift in the homeless population.

“We don’t have living-wage jobs in this community,” deHoog said. “Right now, we have a father with two sons living out of their car in a Bellingham park, and he has a job.”

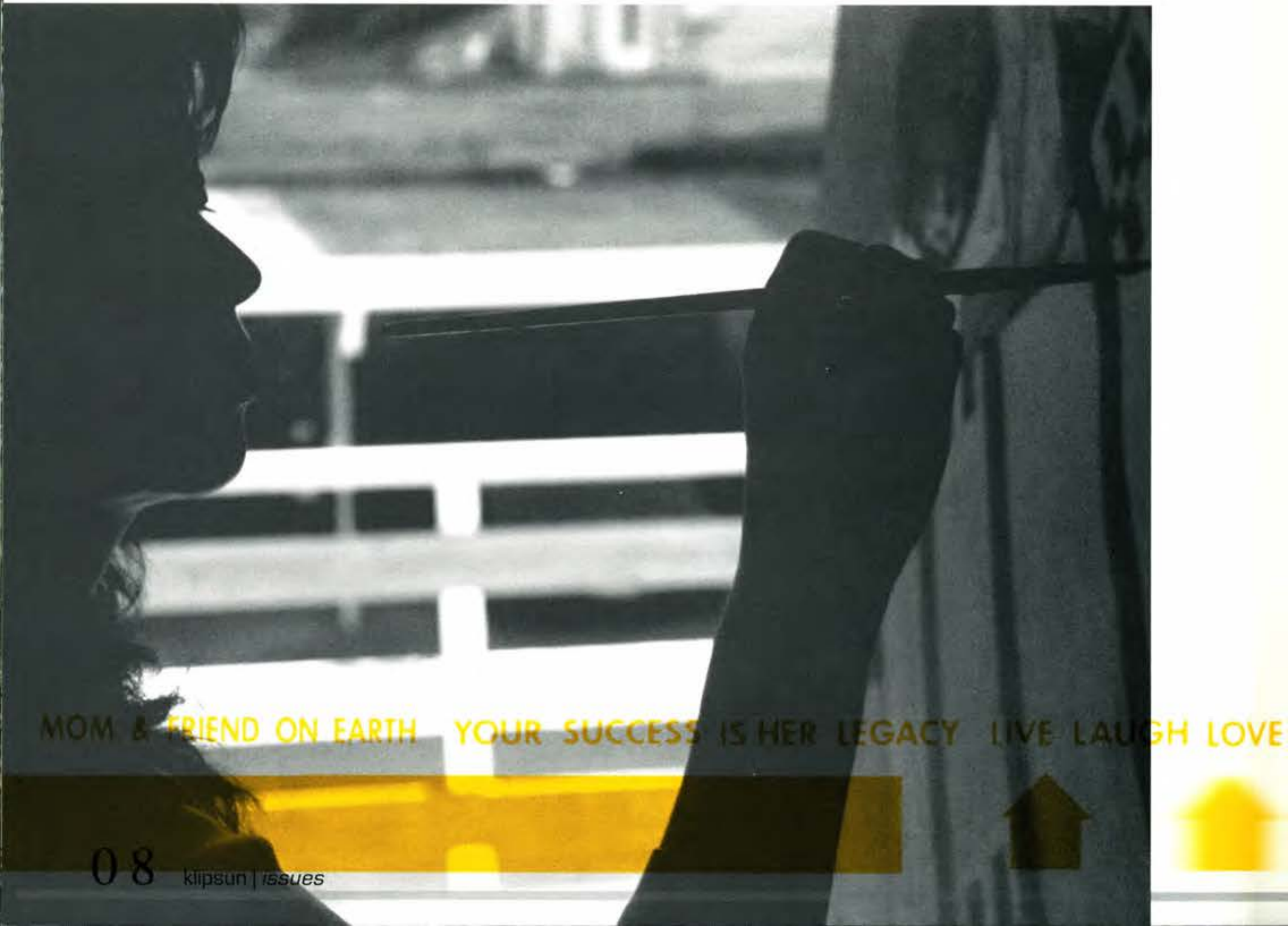
In response to a growing number of families on the street, the Opportunity Council established the Transitional Housing Program about 12 years ago. The program offers homeless families a short-term place to stay while working toward permanent housing and economic stability.

The Opportunity Council has as many as 40 to 60 families on the Transitional Housing waiting list at any one time with only 29 housing units available.

The Transitional Housing Program is “community-based.” The staff works with church congregations and community groups who own under-utilized housing units. Once a unit is found, volunteers make needed repairs using donated materials.

Each family is expected to pay one-third of its monthly income for rent, similar to the cost of federal subsidized housing. This offers low-cost living without eliminating the renters’ accountability. The program is not designed as a charity, but aims toward self-sufficiency of its clients, deHoog said.

“It’s the old bootstrap theory,” deHoog said of people’s misconceptions about homelessness. “You know, that you can pull yourself up by the bootstraps, and today it is not that simple. Today people need help to get back on their feet.”



MOM & FRIEND ON EARTH YOUR SUCCESS IS HER LEGACY LIVE LAUGH LOVE



Between

“We want people to look to themselves for their problem solving. That is the primary goal of case management: self-sufficiency.”

“Especially with women who have been victims of domestic violence, learning to be strong and independent does not come with a new home,” she said. “We want people to look to themselves for their own problem solving. That is the primary goal of case management: self-sufficiency.”

After spending years in and out of treatment facilities for alcohol and drug addiction, Roxanne (no last name for privacy) found success through the Transitional Housing Program.

Roxanne’s cycle of sexual and physical abuse began as a child, as a victim of incest. Then a beating by her husband in 1990, while she was six months pregnant with her third daughter, left her hospitalized. Although she left her husband, she could not leave behind the painful memories of abuse.

Roxanne turned to drugs and alcohol in an attempt to dull the pain.

“I drank because it helped me forget, but drinking was exactly what kept me vulnerable, what kept me a victim,” she said.

“There is going to be a happy ending here,” Roxanne said. “Getting my daughter back will be the ultimate happy ending.”

Although transitional housing offers temporary relief from homelessness, it is not a solution, deHoog said. The goal of the Transitional Housing Program is to use case management to cultivate confidence in the family.

“We only allow a person in our Transitional Housing Program once in a lifetime,” deHoog said. “And in most situations, once is enough.”

Most families who complete the Transitional Housing Program are able to maintain some financial security and don’t need the program a second time.

Although the Transitional Housing Program enjoys an enormous amount of success, there have been problems with inadequate screening, deHoog said.

On Feb. 9, a family in Transitional Housing in Bellingham barricaded itself in an apartment for 31 hours in

Homelessness is a problem in every community.

C. Nicki Krom begins breaking down the stereotypes of Whatcom County's homeless and explains one local solution. Photo by Chris Fuller.

Roxanne lost custody of her children in 1997 as a result of her addictions. This prompted her to leave Warm Springs, Ore., in 1998 to seek treatment in Washington.

After finishing treatment, Roxanne entered the Transitional Housing Program and moved into Dorothy Place, a home in Bellingham for domestic violence survivors.

“It helped to be around women who were going through the same things that I had gone through,” Roxanne said.

She began college in 1998 with student loans and scholarships. Roxanne graduated from Western last December while in the Transitional Housing Program.

“I think what has helped me the most was education,” Roxanne said. “You can’t change what you don’t know or understand. I had to understand my cycle of abuse before I could overcome it.”

Roxanne now teaches art at Northwest Indian College and works at Skagit County Youth and Family Services.

Her two older daughters, 19 and 22, have visited Bellingham numerous times during the past three years. Roxanne is struggling to regain custody of her youngest daughter, 11, who has lived with her abusive ex-husband since 1997.

“They gave custody back to the man that battered me and now my daughter is the victim of abuse,” Roxanne said.

Roxanne’s petition for custody has yet to reach court but she remains hopeful for her daughter’s homecoming.

a police standoff. Phillip and Frances Roberts had been sought by police in Modesto, Calif., for an investigation of 12 counts of first-degree child molestation.

The incident ended with Phillip dead, Frances arrested and Child Protective Services taking custody of their three children.

The failure to uncover police records on prospective Transitional Housing candidates indicates inadequate screening.

In response to that situation and to ensure case managers’ safety, the Opportunity Council plans to initiate a more thorough screening process when admitting families into the program. The new screening process focuses on strict applications and more extensive background checks, including arrest records.

“Sometimes too many questions can intimidate people who need the most help and could benefit the most from the program,” deHoog said. “We need to find a medium where we can effectively background check for the safety of all involved in the program, without discouraging people in need of help.

Despite this problem the Opportunity Council continues to enroll people in the Transitional Housing Program and typically has more success than failure.

“I know that I was technically homeless,” Roxanne said. “But I never felt homeless.

“I owe a lot of my success to the Transitional Housing program.”

The Space



Poetic injustice

It is often said that the pen is mightier than the sword. **Christine Callan** interviews a Blaine student whose written word resulted in his expulsion and a constitutional controversy. Photos by Erin Fredrichs.

"Death I feel, crawling down my neck, at every turn, and so, now I know, what I must do."

James LaVine, from "Last Words"

In 1998, James LaVine, 18, was expelled from Blaine High School his junior year after he asked a teacher to read and critique his poem entitled, "Last Words," a first-person account of a fictional character entering a school and opening fire, killing 28 students. At the end, the narrator fears he or she will kill again and then commits suicide.

What seemed innocent to LaVine turned his world upside down. Only four months before the deadly Columbine rage and four months after 15-year-old Kip Kinkel of Springfield, Ore. opened fire on his classmates, LaVine gave the poem to English teacher Vivian Bleeker. Troubled by the poem's content, school officials expelled LaVine "for safety reasons."

That was three years ago. And although LaVine returned to school and graduated in 1999, nothing has been the same.

"My life is up in the air," he said.

LaVine, with his short blond hair and blue eyes, looks like any high school kid; clean cut, well-shaven and dressed with a cowboy flare.

"Not really one thing inspired me to write the poem," LaVine said. "It was any normal day. I was just sitting at home and got a feeling and started writing."

The LaVines appealed the expulsion to Federal Court in Seattle. At a hearing on Dec. 15, 1998, the court ruled the case had

no legal ground to move forward, and declared summary judgment.

The court said LaVine was protected by the First Amendment, which includes freedom of speech and press, freedom of religion, freedom to peaceably assemble and freedom to petition the government.

Dr. Charles DeWitt, a licensed psychologist with the Whatcom County Department of Mental Health, examined LaVine. He concluded LaVine was fit to return to school and the expulsion was revoked. LaVine returned to school after about one month and finished the year without further incident — except for one.

LaVine always planned on joining the military after high school. Both his father and uncle had served.

His life was planned out for the next six to 10 years until he found out the military could not accept him because of the psychological examination.

LaVine sued the school board when they refused to clear his record.

Mike Patterson, attorney for the school district, said school officials acted reasonably under the circumstances.

"The school officials did not take action against LaVine just because of the poem," Patterson said. "There were other factors involved in the decision as well."

In legal papers, Patterson argued that other factors in LaVine's life, including a "major confrontation" with his father, caused the officials to be concerned as to LaVine's mindset.

School officials prepared a letter emphasizing that LaVine was expelled for safety reasons rather than disciplinary reasons. But LaVine's life remains on hold until the court proceedings conclude and his record is cleared.

On Feb. 24, 2000, U.S. District Judge Barbara Rothstein upheld the District Court's ruling, stating the Blaine School District "was not acting reasonably" when it deemed LaVine's poem a threat to safety of the students and staff, prompting his emergency expulsion in 1998.

She ruled the poem "was not a sincere expression of the intent to harm or assault," and for that reason, merited First Amendment protection.



design by | Curt Woodward

I pulled my gun,
from it's case,
and began to load it.



The school board appealed the decision to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco, where three judges continue to deliberate.

"We want to get his record cleared, (receive) damages for the chilling effect it will have on future poets, and (receive) damages for him missing a month of school," said Breean Beggs, an American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) attorney representing LaVine.

"The case could take a few months or it could take a few years to get a clear record," LaVine said.

The misleading part of the legal process, LaVine says, is that he has only won summary judgment so far and that is what Blaine District School Board is appealing. If LaVine wins the hearing in San Francisco, the school district can appeal that ruling to the U.S. Supreme Court. The case that could award LaVine damages and clear his record has not even begun.

"I don't regret writing 'Last Words,'" LaVine said. "But what I do regret is having to go through everything that has happened. No high school student should have to go through this. I lost the best years of my life."

On Oct. 3, 1998 Bleecker met with school counselor Karen Mulholland and vice principal Tim Haney to discuss the poem.

The LaVines were not aware of, nor invited to, that meeting.

"The letter stating my emergency expulsion was sitting on the principal's desk waiting to be signed before they even discussed it with me or mentioned it to my parents," LaVine said.

After the administrators met and consequently contacted local authorities, Whatcom County Sheriff's Department dispatched several deputies and drug dogs to the LaVines' farm in Blaine. The deputies interviewed LaVine and read his poem.

"I was in shock trying to figure out how it could happen and what to do," LaVine said. "At the time we were learning about the Constitution and the First Amendment, and then I realized I had to learn a lot more."

The deputies completed their investigation and decided there was neither an immediate threat posed nor a cause for further action.

On Oct. 4, 1998, vice principal Haney met with principal Dan Newell. They determined the situation called for an "emergency expulsion."

"I couldn't find any justification for it (the expulsion)," LaVine's father, Bruce, said. "We believe we are in the right. We don't trust the school anymore because if they did it to our kid, they can do it to anyone."

"It is so bad in public schools these days," LaVine said. "You're taught that once you step onto school property, you lose all your rights and that is not right."

"Up until this happened, there had been no other case in the United States like mine," LaVine said.

"Schools controlling what students write is going on all over the country," Beggs said. "You can put up posters about the Ku Klux Klan or say that 'homosexuals don't belong' as long as you do it in a location already used for expression. Offensive doesn't equal disruptive in the law."

"When I returned to school, it wasn't really weird, except that every single day someone would come up and welcome me back," LaVine said. "I thought to myself 'where were you when I was out of school?'"

"My family was supportive because they had to be," he said. "I was getting severely depressed when the school district would not let me back in."

LaVine just started a new job at Geographics, a paper plant in Blaine. He plans to reapply to the military this summer.

He still writes with passion.

"I haven't let it affect my poetry," LaVine said. "I write mostly about love and life in general."

Opening a black three-ring binder filled with drafts and final copies of his poetry, he pointed to a poem entitled "Love, Regret and Heartache."

"My favorite one is this one," he said.

It was the first poem he ever wrote.

Although the last three years have been "mind numbing" for LaVine, he hopes his case will set a precedent.

"The only sort of win is that future generations won't have to go through this," he said with a smile. ♣

Bang, Bang, Bang-Bang.

After two days of a strict diet regimen and a churning stomach, Tiffany Campbell touches on her body's cleansing experience involving grape juice, cayenne pepper, oranges, garlic, Yellow Dock root and a variety of other substances. Photos by Chris Goodenow.

The ingredients on the bottle didn't sound too bad: Red clover blossoms, Mojave Chaparral herb and resin, Oregon grape root, Burdock root and seed, Yellow Dock root, Goldenseal root, garlic juice and cayenne peppers. I carefully squeezed two dropperfuls of the tincture labeled D-Tox into a shot of grape juice.

I lifted the glass up to the light, squinted and smelled it.

Taking a deep breath, I plugged my nose and knocked it back.

And gagged. And retched. And nearly spit it back out. Snorting through my nose in short bursts, I hopped around my kitchen, whining through clenched lips to prevent the formula's escape as it seared down my throat.

I had just ingested the herbal equivalent of the bowels of hell. But if it did even a fraction of what I had been promised, it was worth it.

I had embarked on a process of detoxification, to eradicate my body of toxins in an effort to reclaim my health.

Detoxification, a process of cleaning the system through herbs and fasting to return the body to a healthy condition, is an ancient practice. A tradition of fasting is found in most major world religions, such as Buddhism, Judaism and Christianity. The Egyptians were some of the first to practice enemas using river water and reeds.

Today, naturopathic doctors use detoxification to treat chronic diseases and conditions, such as immune deficiencies, irritable bowel syndrome and chronic fatigue.

"Today, in this society, everybody has some toxicity," said Dr. Mark Steinberg, a naturopathic physician who practices in Bellingham. "You may not be able to measure it, but it's there."

He noted such possible sources of toxic contamination as pesticide residues, old water pipes and chemical exposure at work. Two typical results of a detox program are increased energy and mental clarity, he said.

Often, Steinberg said, he will place patients with nonspecific complaints on a detox. An example might be chronic headaches.

"We are continually absorbing toxins through our food, water and our environment," said Janice L. Reed, a certified colon hydrotherapist in Bellingham. "We need to detoxify and remove these impurities from the body."

The human body has several paths of elimination: the liver and kidneys, which process and filter toxins, and the skin, bowels and breath.

According to literature from the Advanced Health Center in Bellingham, the colon is also an important elimination organ, and most toxins end up there. Due to lifestyle and environmental factors, too many toxins may enter the body and overload people's systems. When the colon no longer properly eliminates toxins, they are dumped into the liver, and from there are absorbed by the rest of the body. Detoxification is a way to get these poisons out of the body.

My first detoxification experience began with a 4 a.m. trip to the emergency room.



When the doctor lightly pressed my kidneys, I screamed. Not a shriek, but a hissing exhale of pain. He diagnosed me with a kidney infection, and suspected it had started as a urinary tract infection (UTI), common in females my age, 22, which crept up through my system into my kidneys.

A total of 26 days on three different antibiotics over two months, two doctors and one specialist later, my symptoms dulled, but the periodic stabs of pain persisted. The nurse suggested my now-chronic UTIs could likely be a result of kidney stones tearing at the lining of my kidneys, making them particularly susceptible to infection.

Disgusted and frustrated with my current care, which treated each recurring infection like the first, I decided it was time to look for another type of medicine to pass the stones that were apparently the source of my problems: naturopathic.

"If you get the body healthier, you'll get sick less; you'll be able to fight things off better," Steinberg said.

Naturopathic medicine is founded on the belief that diet, mental state, exercise, breathing and other natural factors are critical for the treatment of disease.

All the doctors suggested a careful program and reminded me to listen to my body. I chose a short, two-day "cleanse and fast" program from a naturopath in California.

Armed with a borrowed juicer and my blender, I commenced the first day to make the Kidney Flush drink of cayenne pepper, water, a juiced lemon and lime. Then I drank two cups of the

Kidney D-Tox tea, consisting of juniper berry, corn silk and dandelion, among other ingredients. It came packaged in plastic, in solid form with bits of leaves and dried berries.

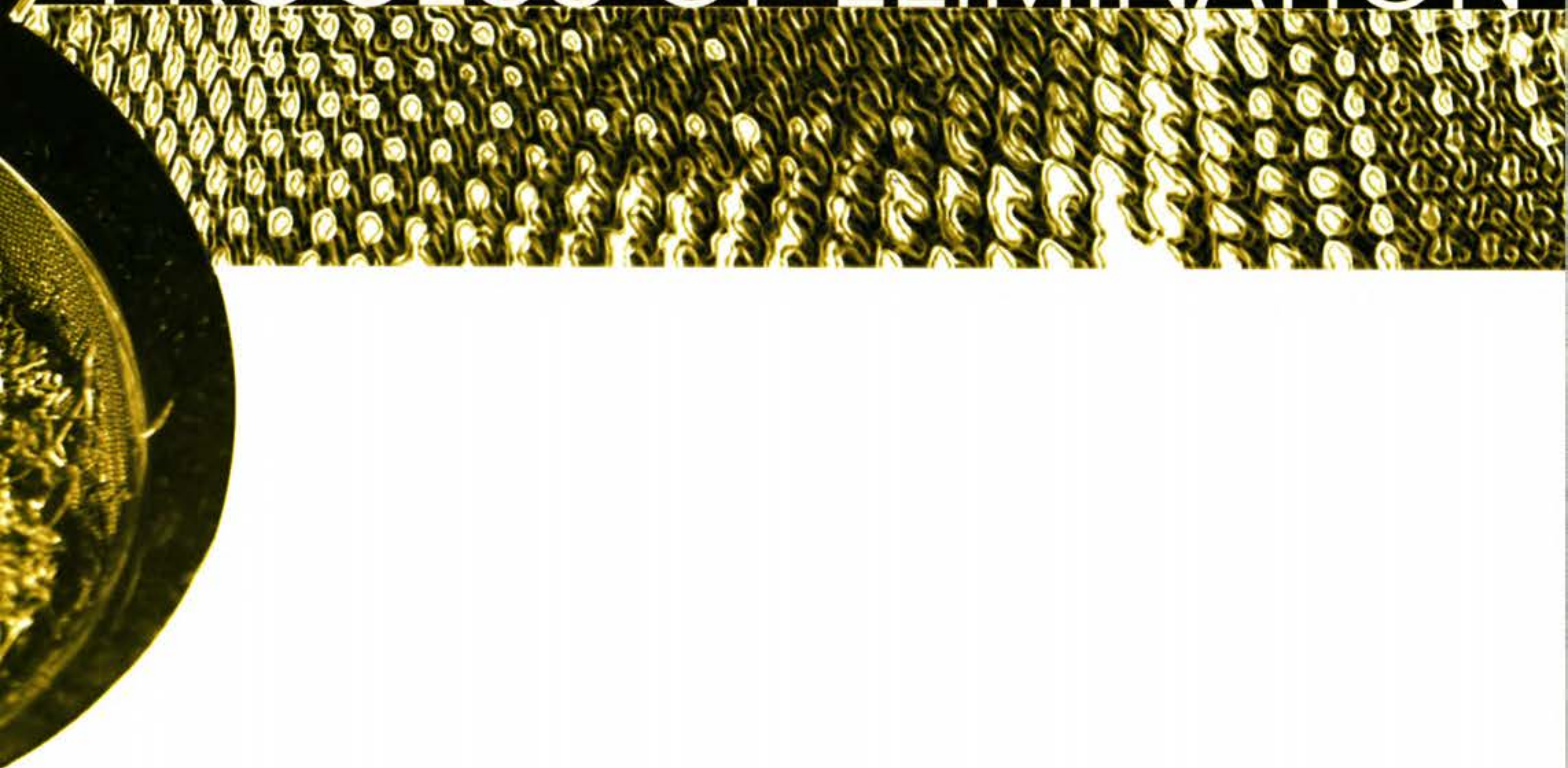
I held the package suspiciously, wondering what it was going to taste like. I had to strain it; it looked like something I'd foraged in the woods. I added the Kidney-Bladder formula. The tea was not so bad, even bordering on pleasant, like green tea. I had to consume more of the D-Tox formula — four times per day. I learned to gulp grape juice after I drank it, hindering my ability to smell the stuff, suppressing my gag reflex.

A detox program is full time. Just peeling, chopping, juicing and blending took up most of the morning. An hour later I made my "food" drink with juiced oranges, banana, strawberries and a vitamin and mineral supplement. For the next two days, I would consume only juiced fruits and vegetables.

"First ... day or so of a detox, you may feel worse," Steinberg said, because not only is the body withdrawing from any number of things (caffeine, nicotine, sugar) but all the toxins are beginning to mobilize from the fat cells. That is why it is important to follow through with a detox and not saturate your system.

Everything I had been told was true. I felt like crap — headache, body aches and lethargy. I wasn't hungry, with all the juice, but I wasn't satisfied either. I had no energy, but I was still restless, fighting a psychological need to eat. Something all the literature and doctors had recommended was plenty of rest, to allow the body to "concentrate" on the cleansing.

PROCESS OF ELIMINATION



So, a dutiful patient, I took a two-hour midday nap and crawled into bed at 11 p.m. I was absolutely spent.

My diet usually consisted of caffeinated pop and a bagel for breakfast; processed, ready-to-make packaged foods for lunch; more pop; and take-out anything, from teriyaki to burgers for dinner. I calculated my own toxin exposure history, from long years as a fast-food junkie to my unfiltered water taps.

The next day's procedure was the same as the first, except I felt so much better.

"I have never seen a case where someone has followed through with a detox program, where they haven't felt better," said V. Joseph Wessels, Jr., N.D., a naturopath who has practiced in Bellingham since 1976.

I had energy. Not the energy I am used to — sugar and caffeine surges — but a steady drone, like an idling motor. I was still hungry, so I broke down and had a piece of bread around lunchtime. But I was circling my house, delving into projects I had neglected for months. If I had been more confident in my stamina, I would have gone running. But I chose to ride it out and let my body heal. I felt lighter, in a way that's difficult to explain, but my body felt relaxed, loose, energetic, and I was up from 7:30 a.m. to 2 a.m., without breaking stride once. Before, I would be chronically tired all day, grateful to crawl into bed as early as possible.

Options for low detox could include simply exercising and sitting in a sauna. Because the skin is an elimination organ, increased sweating will help the excess toxins leave the body, Steinberg said. For more chronic conditions, more aggressive detox programs involving herbs, fasting and sometimes enemas are used, Reed said.


Steinberg stressed the individuality of people and treatments. "There are many ways to detox someone," she said. "It all depends on how sick they are."

"If you lead a healthy lifestyle — eat healthy, eat organic foods, exercise — you'll naturally detox on your own," she said.

A toxic system can generate many symptoms, including frequent headaches, constipation, skin problems, frequent colds, general aches, low energy, bad breath and premenstrual syndrome.

"People are more aware of the qualities in our air, qualities of our water, food source qualities. [There are]

many more things we're concerned about now than 30 years ago," Wessels said.



"I had just ingested the herbal equivalent of the bowels of hell. But if it did even a fraction of what I had been promised, it was worth it."

According to the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, the number of Americans using an alternative therapy rose from 33 percent in 1990 to more than 42 percent in 1997. In addition, Americans spent more than \$27 billion on those therapies in 1997 alone.

"It seems like [the idea of detox] has reached a more diverse population," said Sharon Cantrell, a buyer for the Community Food Co-op in Bellingham. "It's not just for hippies anymore."

Most naturopathic doctors and holistic healers feel that detox, which is sometimes called alternative medicine, is not just an alternative but something to be used in conjunction with mainstream medicine. Risks do exist in this type of treatment, just as in mainstream medicine, most naturopaths recommend that a detox be performed under a doctor's supervision.

"I've been in practice for 25 years," Wessels said. "When I first got here, there was hardly anyone in the medical community who would have anything to do with me. The situation nowadays is totally different. There's a big philosophical difference between alternative medicine and conventional medicine ... but there's more of a working relationship now than there ever has been. And that has a lot to do with the patients."

"People are searching for more alternatives because [they realize] there's more out there than just taking a drug for a quick fix," he said. "Or a lot of times the medications just don't work."

"A great deal of insurance companies cover visits to naturopathic doctors," Wessels said. But, he added that insurance companies usually don't cover materials needed for a detox program.

Insurance companies' current acceptance of this practice results partly from the popularity of alternative medicine among patients.

"As alternative medicine becomes more popular, insurance companies have to pay more attention to what we're doing, but we have to follow their guidelines as well, so it's kind of a two-way street," Wessels said.

Detoxification is something that can, and to most naturopathic doctors should, be incorporated into a healthy lifestyle. Detoxifying will not help unless toxins are prevented from entering the body.

"I feel sorry for M.D.s, when people come in and all they want is a pill, and are unwilling to change their lifestyle at all," Steinberg said.

"It's the quality of life, not the quantity," Wessels said. "Anybody can stay alive and take \$400 worth of drugs a month, but is that living?"

"It isn't for everybody, obviously," she said. "You shouldn't put a person with congestive heart failure on a detox program. For the average person, certainly; it's one of the better things they can do for their system."

An improperly performed detox might make a person sicker, since the toxins could saturate and overload the system. It remains as one option in an overall philosophy of healing.

"We're looking at true healing rather than symptomatic healing," Steinberg said, pointing out that detoxification, by literally cleaning the system out, allows the body to become healthier.

Cantrell incorporated cleansing into her daily life with vegetables, fiber and water, but detoxification remains an important tool in her health regime.

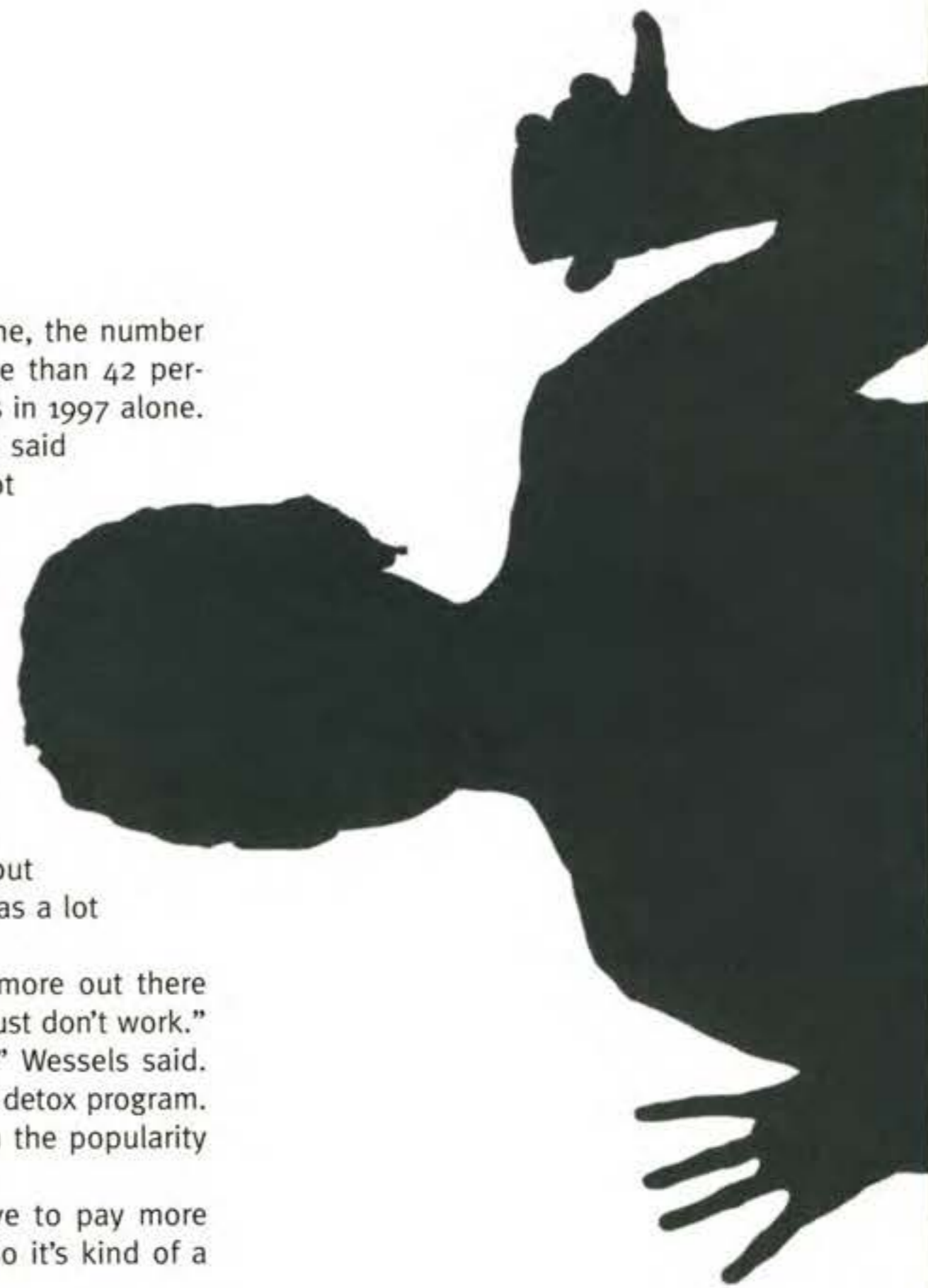
"I personally do a detox more intensely twice a year," Cantrell said.

Clearer, toned skin, better digestion and healthier hair were some results she attributed to her detoxification. The biggest result of the first detox, she said, was simply a boundless amount of energy.

Even with my newfound energy, the sheer amount of liquid I consumed during the two days was enough to drive me to a decent meal the third — a healthy one, yes, but solid all the same. I was unprepared for the mental, disciplinary lifestyle changes a detox program requires.

I will need to have another ultrasound to know if I passed any kidney stones. It is difficult to know what is a lasting solution, but incorporating healthy lifestyle changes cannot hurt and removing the toxins from my system can't either. The most important effect is that I now have a measure of control over my body.

I have eyed the D-Tox bottle again, wondering if I will need another round. I hope modifying my eating and drinking habits will prevent the need for any more gagging in my kitchen.



Erin Crumpacker introduces us to the masked men and women who perform little miracles every day, and discovers spiritual healing and laughter sometimes is the best medicine. Photos by Erin Fredrichs.

Sparkles, Yo-Yo, Puggin and Dazzling Daisy are not ordinary clowns. You will not find them performing somersaults at birthday parties. Instead, you will find them in the hospital, practicing their pedigree of silliness.

Today thousands of hospitals all across the country use laughter to help improve their patients' and members' lives. St. Joseph Hospital in Bellingham recently jumped on the "funny" bandwagon with a new program called Clown Ministries.

"Our purpose is to give someone a smile or a chuckle and help them forget, at least for a few minutes, an experience of worry," said Troy Faith Ward, chaplain intern within the spiritual care department at St. Joseph.

Ward has clowned 15 years and assumes the clown name Puggin after a relative couldn't pronounce her childhood nickname, Pud. Sister Judy Tralnes in the spiritual care department asked Ward to establish Clown Ministries at the hospital.

St. Joseph is a Catholic-affiliated hospital and Clown Ministries is one of the five ministries that the spiritual care department organizes.

Clown Ministries began in February when the hospital ran an ad in the newspaper requesting volunteer clowns. The clown troupe now consists of 10 people, ranging in age from 20 to 74, who visit patients at the hospital in outrageous costumes, big hair and painted faces.

The first step toward becoming a clown at St. Joseph is to take the volunteer class regarding hospital policy and procedure. The next step is to attend "clown camp," a workshop demonstrating the fundamentals of clowning.

Sonja Wingard, a veteran nurse and clown, administered the clown workshop for volunteers.

Wingard, whose 2 x 3-inch "clown card" reads, "Spiritual and political awakening or just plain foolishness," had her first experience as a clown 18 years ago when she was the nurse at a summer camp.

Each morning the minister of the camp, dressed as a clown, would meet the bus of students.

"One morning I dressed up with her and saw what a different reaction I got as the camp nurse versus being a clown, and it was so much more fun to just clown with these kids coming off the bus," she said.

After that summer, Wingard bought a rainbow-colored wig with \$20 she received as birthday money from her mother-in-law. To this day, she wears the same wig every time she clowns, which earned her the name Dancing Rainbow.

Since then, Wingard has attended several national clown conferences. Ward knew she had clowning experience and asked her to conduct the Clown Ministries workshop.

To begin "clown camp," she gave a brief overview of the history of clowns. However, it wasn't long before they were working on the hard part: clowning.

"One woman said she thought they were going to get lectured for six hours, but I had made them work," Wingard said.



PRESC



Ken Miller as Doctor Getwell.

At the workshop, volunteers developed the skill of entering a room in a clown-like way. Wingard demonstrated two approaches.

First, she peeked around the corner of the doorway and then immediately hushed back. She repeated this same shy movement several times and then said usually patients invite you in once they notice you appear afraid.

"Entering in a clown way is different," she said. "You have to let it be noticeable. If I just walked in, you wouldn't notice me."

Another approach would be to come in larger than life, she said.

"Hi, I'm Dancing Rainbow," she said tossing her arms every which way, rushing into the room and jumping up and down.

Tiana Larson, 20, a Western student trained at Wingard's workshop, recently developed her clown name. As a clown, she is called Sparkles.

Larson volunteers regularly at the hospital transporting patients, moving blood samples and distributing medicine.

On Tuesdays, she trades in her everyday volunteer clothes for her clowning costume.

As Sparkles, Larson wears baggy red polyester pants, a white button-up shirt and a necktie she bought at Value Village.

"I needed suspenders, so I tied balloons together and made them work," she said.

Larson said she and her partner, Dazzling Daisy, spend five to 10 minutes with each patient, telling jokes and goofing off.

"You play with your partner a lot and exaggerate your emotions and reactions to what they say," Larson explained.

Larson brought a Kermit the Frog puppet with her when she clowning for a boy, who didn't speak English.

"For people who don't speak English, you have a harder time getting through to them," she said. "But even just to be there and bring a smile to the family and to some of the other people was nice. They were so grateful to have a nice little interruption and happiness."

Each patient's reaction in the hospital is always a little different, Larson said.

"At first they are a little confused and asking themselves, 'Why are you doing this? Why are you here?'" Larson said. "Then they enjoy it so much and are so thankful that they start telling you stories."

On the fourth floor within the cardiovascular unit, an orange balloon dog sits on the windowsill of Donald Rouse's hospital room, indicating the clowns have visited him.

Rouse, 64, said he has had several small strokes and heart attacks. Today he is in the hospital because he lost consciousness and fell, hurting his back.

He said that Sparkle's and Dazzling Daisy's 5:30 p.m. visit to him was "real cute."

"They started making balloons into a little dog and a bouquet of flowers," Rouse said. "They were funny, made up, bright and witty. They were good clowns, just like they are supposed to be."

Rouse said that he, his wife and his granddaughter enjoyed talking to the clowns during their 10-minute visit.

"(Talking) is good medicine, because it gets your mind off other things," he said. "I just had fun seeing them. It made my day."

Another clown in the Clown Ministries who wanders the hospital talking to patients is Chuck Charbonneau.

Charbonneau, 54, adopted his clown name, Yo-Yo, after working in a yard and finding an old tin yo-yo.

"I have my ups and downs just like a yo-yo so I thought it would be a good clown name," he said.

RIBBING laughter



Chuck Charbonneau as Yo-Yo.

"Our purpose is to give someone a chuckle and help them forget, at least for a few minutes, an experience of worry."



He heard about Clown Ministries from his pastor. Charbonneau, a Vietnam veteran who has clowned at birthday parties and special events for 17 years, said he'd clowned in hospitals before, but not as part of a program such as Clown Ministries.

"Clown Ministries had never seemed right before," he said.

He said he always tried to keep religion separate from clowning but at this point in his life, the direction toward spiritual care seemed like the right way to go.

"It gives me a new avenue to explore in clowning," he said.

When he went to the workshop, he already knew a lot about clowning but said there is always more to learn.

"When I quit learning about clowning, it's time for me to quit," he said.

When he clowns, he bends, twists and ties many colorful balloon animals. He said his favorite is a balloon mouse.

"It's just simple and cute," he said. "I have found that the simplest stuff is the most effective."

Another tactic he employs in his clown act is "silly magic."

"I'll have a red, a yellow and a blue scarf that I will put into a black bag," he said. "Then I will say something like, 'and now the red scarf has turned into a yellow scarf and the blue scarf has turned into a red scarf and the red scarf has turned into a yellow scarf,' as I am pulling each scarf out of the bag."

He said he follows the joke with an actual trick by creating the illusion of the scarves changing sizes and shapes.

Yo-Yo, Sparkles, Puggin and Dancing Rainbow agree laughter generates positive energy. However the statement "everybody loves a clown" isn't true, Wingard said. To address this issue at the clown workshop, she talked about personal space.

"In the hospital, people are really vulnerable," she said.

"As a clown you have to be considerate of where they are at.

"You don't want to tell a woman who just delivered a baby three hours ago, 'Yes, you look pale and worn out,'" Wingard said.

She said because of the stress in hospital rooms, "you don't want to make normal human comments."

Bringing folly into the hospital began in 1964 after Norman Cousins, a journalist, used laughter to combat his own illness. At that time, previous research had shown that negative emotions had a negative impact on the body. Cousins theorized that positive emotions would positively impact the body. After watching a humorous film he found he slept comfortably without medication.

Cousins spent the last 10 years of his life supporting clinical research on the effects of humor.

Burton Vanderbilt, St Joseph's Chief of Staff, agreed with bringing humor into the hospital.

"From the standpoint of the medical staff when things can be so difficult, the idea of taking things less seriously sounded good," Vanderbilt said. "From the patient's standpoint, there is absolutely no question that it is a good idea."

He said humor won't cure patients, but it will make their stays happier.

People with a terminal disease possess the ability to have meaning in their life. It just depends upon their psychology, their religious issues and if they can laugh, he said.

"Just being able to step back from the seriousness of a situation is impor-

"It's my understanding that God is a laughing God and is delighted when we can laugh and see the joke of all creation."



tant," Vanderbilt said.

Wingard said that as a nurse she has seen pain and suffering lead to loneliness.

"People feel really alone in their pain and in their suffering and in that aloneness they tend to push people away and then they make it even more lonely," she said. "Clowns have a way of getting past that barrier.

"When someone comes to visit us we entertain them in a way," she said. "But when you're sick in bed, feeling bad, and a clown is there, they are the ones who are at the center of attention. They're not drawing energy from the sick person. The clown can expel the energy and the sick person can rest."

Wingard told her clown troupe that as clowns, they are not supposed to touch people because of the patient's stress level.

"As a clown, there are things you can do called gags," she said.

Wingard demonstrated a flower gag using a fork and a butter knife because she was without a flower bud and green straws. She held the top of the butter knife and the end of the fork in one hand to illustrate the flower bud and stem, creating the illusion that when held together, they made a flower. When a patient reaches for the stem, she takes away the flower bud saying, "Oh, I thought you might be allergic." Then she makes the patient a balloon rose that they can keep.

Another aspect of clowning is the face makeup and outfit. Wingard paints her face white, her eyebrows blue, her nose and mouth red, with her mouth in the shape of a smile. To complete the ensemble, she adds one-inch-long fake blue eyelashes.

She added that each clown character has a different appearance and personality.

"You don't become a clown in a day," she said. "It's like any kind of art form, you learn about it and try it out. You develop your character's walk or talk.

"White face clowns don't usually talk once they put the white face on, but we make that exception when we go to the hospital," she said. "You would lose a lot of your effect if you couldn't talk to people."

Larson said her goal is to make her face look captivating, but not scary and overdone.

She says when she puts on her face it gives her a different persona.

"It helps me lose myself," Larson said. "It doesn't matter if you failed your last chemistry test. You can focus on (clowning) and it becomes all you think about for the next two hours."

Wingard said the volunteers are great but Clown Ministries would not be complete without the nursing staff.

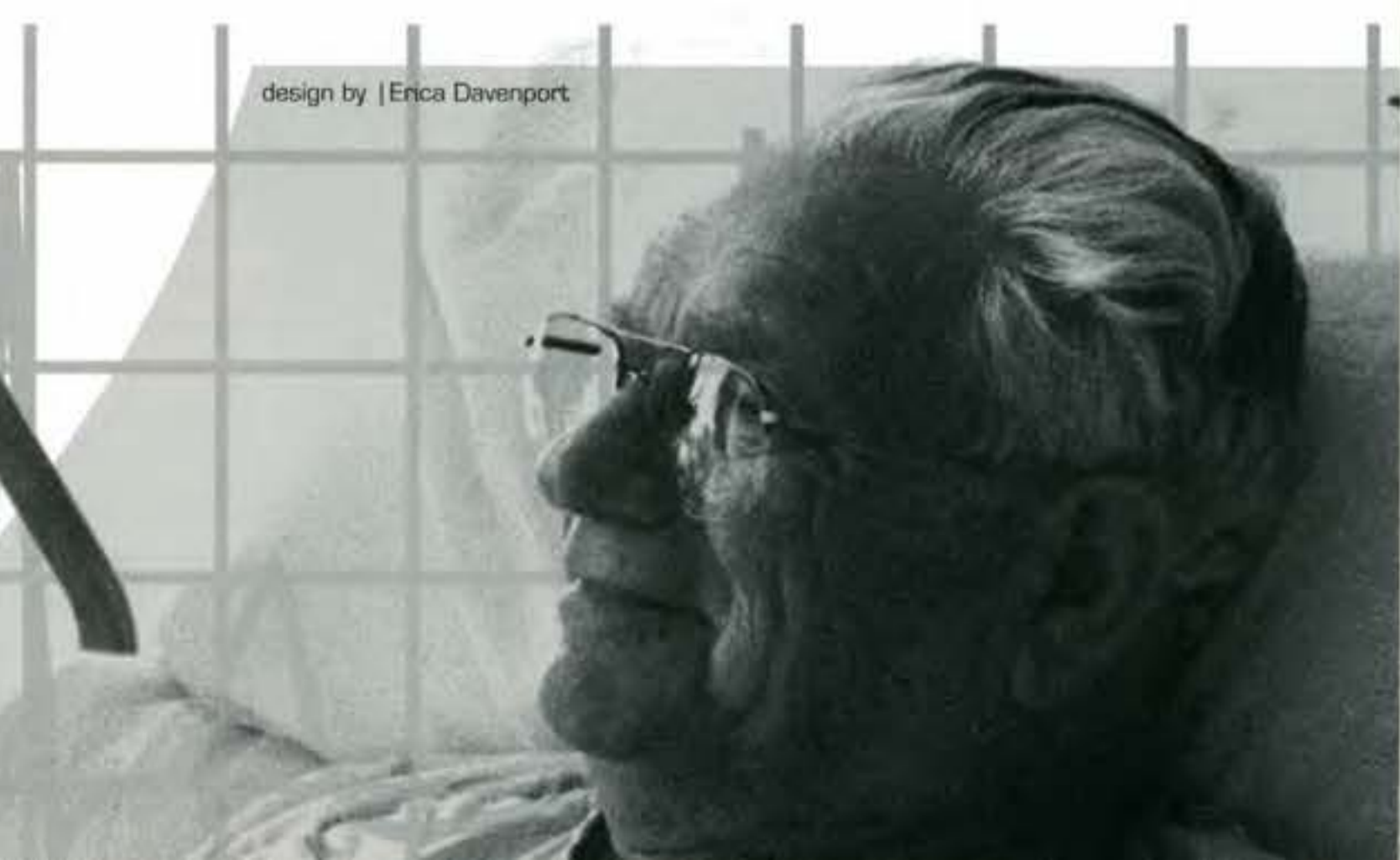
"If they know someone who needs a little boost hopefully they'll ask a clown that is assigned to their floor," Wingard said. "Nursing staff is often overworked and so clowns can do a lot for them just to boost their morale."

The volunteers and nursing staff believe the fundamental purpose of Clown Ministries is helping patients forget where he or she is, even if momentarily.

"Spiritual care is the connection between the spirit of the person and their healing," Sister Tralnes said. "It's my understanding that God is a laughing God and is delighted when we can laugh and see the joke of all creation." ✨



design by | Erica Davenport



tea of tranquility



Kristin Bigsby explores the ancient “Art of Tea” — an 800-year-old ritual of savoring life, one sip at a time.
Photos by Chris Fuller.

“To empty one’s mind is to forget the self. To forget the self is to awaken to the world. To awaken to everything in the world is to be enlightened.”

— Dogen Zenji, 12th century Zen master

The office door shut gently behind Marjorie Yap. She walked to her desk, switched off the telephone’s ringer and glanced out the window at the silhouette of the Cascades in the east.

As April came to a close, Yap was behind in responding to the usual 300 e-mails she receives daily. The CEO of the Corbis Corporation, a Bellevue-based image-licensing company where Yap works as the director of corporate communications, had scheduled a meeting with her to discuss the upcoming catalog with nine others in a teleconference to New York and Hong Kong. The London office had questions, and Yap searched for answers while she juggled more than 60 phone calls per day to relay media questions between Los Angeles, Paris and Kuala Lumpur.

In the midst of the corporate buzz, her office was a quiet place where she could retreat and return her focus to what is most important to her — an awareness of life.

Staring at the mountains, she realized it was time to rescue herself from “go” mode — no phone calls or one-liners to traverse the fiber optic hemispheres, no more signatures to be inked.

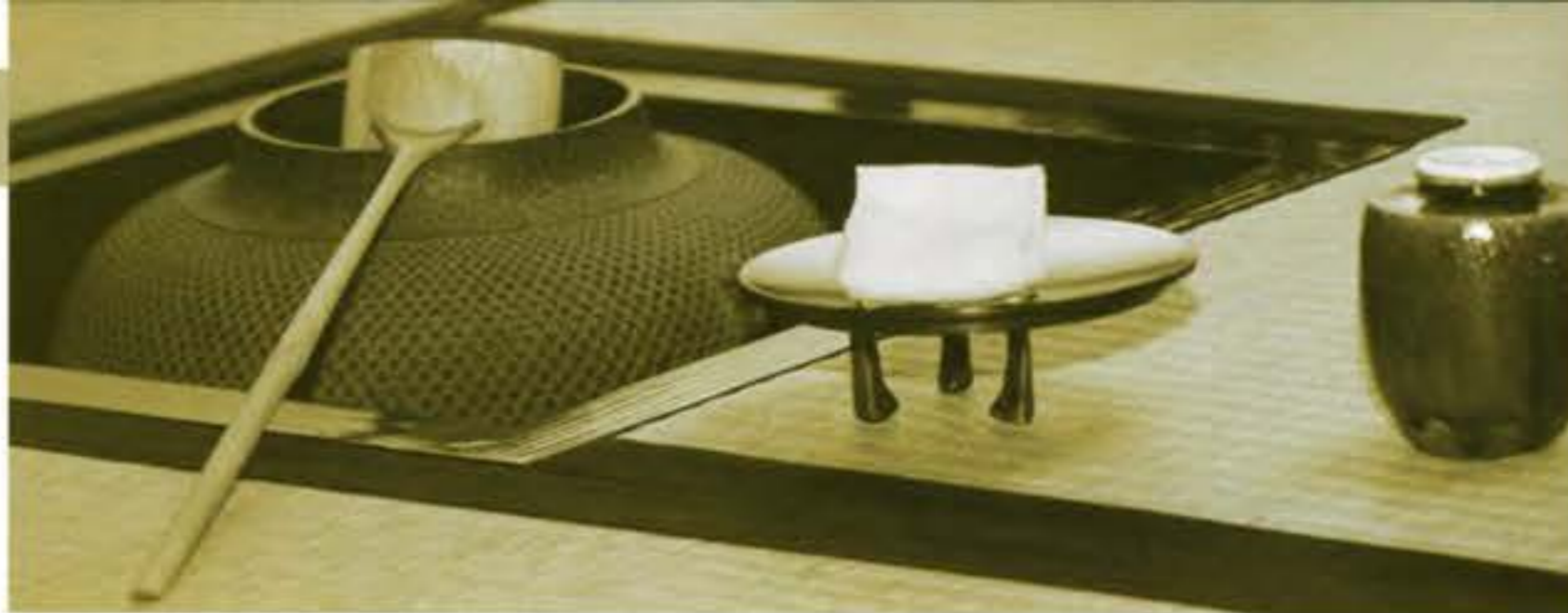
She unscrewed the top of the black thermos on her desk and poured hot water into a reddish-brown ceramic bowl. Dipping a scoop into the lacquer container next to the thermos, she emptied two heaps of matcha, a powdered green tea used in traditional Japanese tea ceremonies, into the dish and stirred. She picked up the bowl and let it rest gently in the cradle of her tiny hands, the ridges of its etched design pushed against her skin.

The tips of her fingers were exactly where they should be: pressed together near the lip of the bowl. Her thumbs covered the surface closest to her body, ready to support the angle of the container when she lifted it to her mouth.

She observed the deep green of the liquid. The tea’s color was of the same intensity as its taste—bitter, like biting into the tealeaf itself. As she drank, she brought herself back to her center, paying attention to each ounce of liquid as if nothing else existed but the very moment during which the tea rolled past her tongue.



design by | Curt Woodward



To keep focused in a life that buzzes with tasks, Yap practices Chanoyu, the Art of Tea, developed 800 years ago in Japan.

"Some people go skiing, some people garden, and I drink tea," she said. "It's how I get back in touch with myself. This just happens to be very effective for me."

Chanoyu, which literally means, "boiling water for tea," represents a ritual that transforms an everyday act into something sacred. The host of the ceremony and his or her guests practice living in the present moment, a concept of awareness rooted in Zen Buddhism. In Japanese culture, drinking tea is considered an art—a ceremony that celebrates simplicity and tranquility through the auspice of prescribed movement.

Aside from drinking her daily cup, Yap practices formal Chanoyu under the instruction of Bonnie Mitchell, a Seattle resident who began studying the ceremony by way of Urasanke—one of three schools of tea—in Kyoto, Japan, in 1974.

Chanoyu is rarely practiced outside the island country, but once per month, students from Seattle's Urasanke Foundation gather at the Seattle Art Museum to share matcha with museum guests.

To practice for public appearances, the students engage in weekly classes. They are taught to focus on each gesture, treating movement as art.

In a quiet house in central Seattle, in the midst of a bright day in mid-April, Mitchell knelt in the corner of a 144 square-foot room and guided three onna, or women, through a formal Chanoyu ceremony. Yap and Eiko Shima, enveloped in matte-colored silk kimonos, sat on their knees, buttocks resting on their heels. Each robe was intricately designed with black thread, which curled into perfect circles along the waistline, then turned straight, like the short dark hair which fell loosely on Yap's shoulders.

Sunlight filtered into the room and illuminated Eiko's hair, a sweep of raven and silver held together with a chopstick. The two looked carefully sculpted, concentrating on their crafted appearance. The onna acted as guests, humble and patient, gracefully postured into position like the long necks of swans.

Their host, Michiyo Shima, Eiko's 35-year-old daughter, sat across from the onna in a similar position.

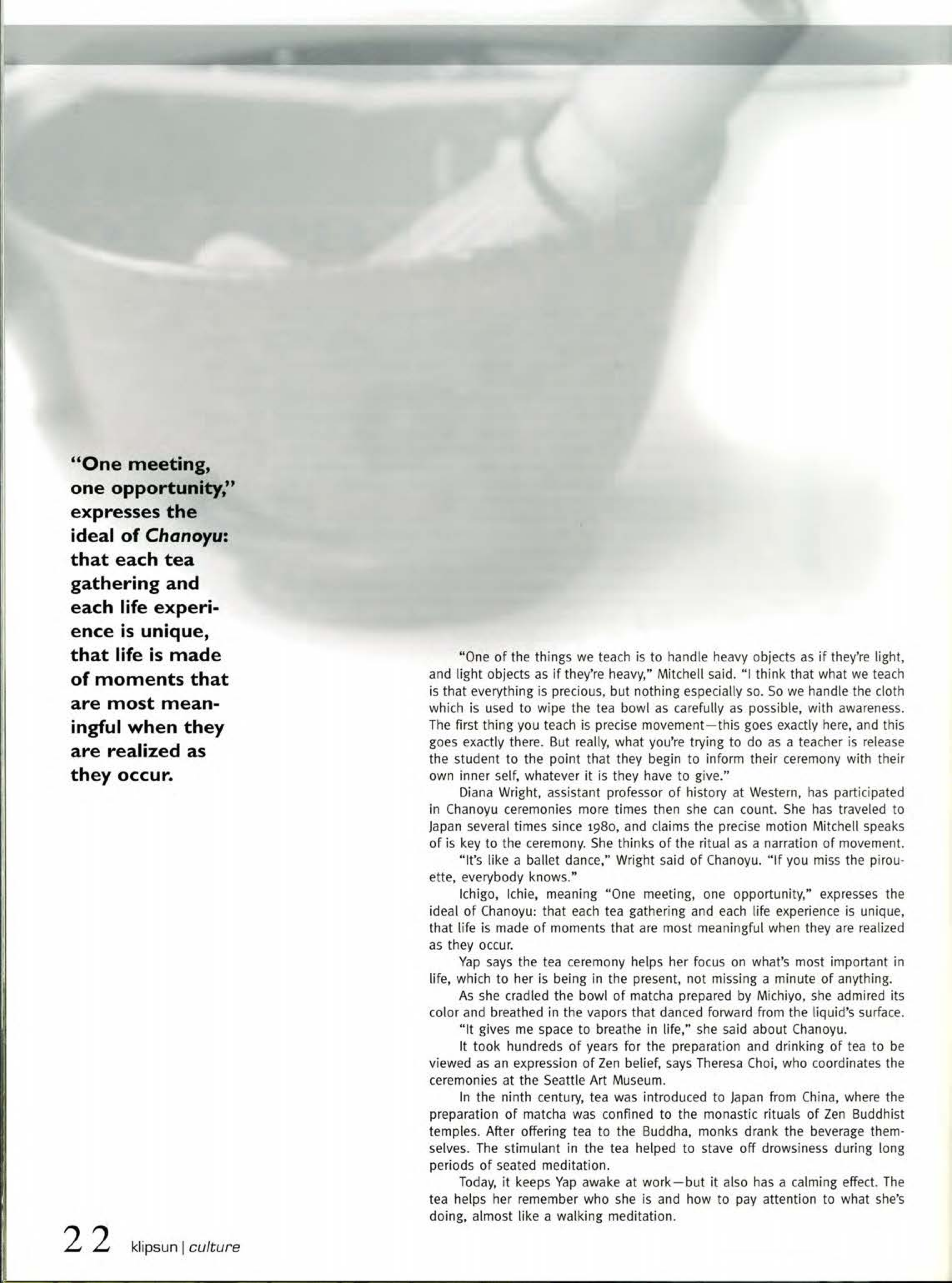
Gracious yet firm, the teacher guided her students in the correctness of each gesture, from setting the water to boil on the sunken brazier, to gathering the accouterments of the tea ceremony in smooth gracious movements from the ground-level shelf on the side of the room.

When Michiyo got up to retrieve a bamboo ladle and the lacquer vase containing the tea, she stood in one swoop motion; her back end lifted her body, unfolding from the ground up. She walked upright, slowly; her feet pointed forward, one in front of the other, gliding silently.

Steam rose out of the pot, disappearing into the air. When Michiyo returned from gathering the utensils, she demonstrated folding the orange napkin. She whisked the matcha into a frothy concoction, turning the tea bowl to show off its exquisite design. Each movement was careful, controlled, almost perfect. The first bowl of tea seemed to float from Michiyo's delicate hands into those of Yap's.

茶の道

"Some people go skiing, some people garden, and I drink tea."



“One meeting, one opportunity,” expresses the ideal of *Chanoyu*: that each tea gathering and each life experience is unique, that life is made of moments that are most meaningful when they are realized as they occur.

“One of the things we teach is to handle heavy objects as if they’re light, and light objects as if they’re heavy,” Mitchell said. “I think that what we teach is that everything is precious, but nothing especially so. So we handle the cloth which is used to wipe the tea bowl as carefully as possible, with awareness. The first thing you teach is precise movement—this goes exactly here, and this goes exactly there. But really, what you’re trying to do as a teacher is release the student to the point that they begin to inform their ceremony with their own inner self, whatever it is they have to give.”

Diana Wright, assistant professor of history at Western, has participated in *Chanoyu* ceremonies more times than she can count. She has traveled to Japan several times since 1980, and claims the precise motion Mitchell speaks of is key to the ceremony. She thinks of the ritual as a narration of movement.

“It’s like a ballet dance,” Wright said of *Chanoyu*. “If you miss the pirouette, everybody knows.”

Ichigo, Ichie, meaning “One meeting, one opportunity,” expresses the ideal of *Chanoyu*: that each tea gathering and each life experience is unique, that life is made of moments that are most meaningful when they are realized as they occur.

Yap says the tea ceremony helps her focus on what’s most important in life, which to her is being in the present, not missing a minute of anything.

As she cradled the bowl of matcha prepared by Michiyo, she admired its color and breathed in the vapors that danced forward from the liquid’s surface.

“It gives me space to breathe in life,” she said about *Chanoyu*.

It took hundreds of years for the preparation and drinking of tea to be viewed as an expression of Zen belief, says Theresa Choi, who coordinates the ceremonies at the Seattle Art Museum.

In the ninth century, tea was introduced to Japan from China, where the preparation of matcha was confined to the monastic rituals of Zen Buddhist temples. After offering tea to the Buddha, monks drank the beverage themselves. The stimulant in the tea helped to stave off drowsiness during long periods of seated meditation.

Today, it keeps Yap awake at work—but it also has a calming effect. The tea helps her remember who she is and how to pay attention to what she’s doing, almost like a walking meditation.

In the 13th and 14th centuries, the ruling samurai of Japan took up the tea ritual and incorporated it into social gatherings, and by the late 15th century, tea drinking came to be regarded as a path to enlightenment.

While the ceremony itself was called Chanoyu, the path to enlightenment came to be known as chado, the Way of the Tea. Harmony, respect, purity and tranquility became the principles that lined the path, and were paid great attention to while drinking matcha.

As the Art of Tea evolved under the influence of Zen, the wabi aesthetic emerged. Closely related to the frugality of life in a Buddhist temple, wabi emphasizes compassion, honesty, prudence and the appreciation of simple, natural objects and space. Each chashitsu, or teahouse, is constructed using this concept as an architectural ethic.

Wabi exhibits a preference for imperfection and impermanence.

But the onna, like Yap and Michiyo, who perform in the ceremony, counter the asymmetry with an awareness of their own grace and balance.

As Yap finished her tea in class, sipping from the bowl three times, (as instructed by Mitchell), Michiyo handed a bowl to her mother. Eiko nursed the frothy green tea, maintaining her perfect posture. Yap waited for her elder to set the bowl down, then they both unfolded the white napkin which rested on the ground to their left. Placing each napkin squarely in front of their knees, the onna folded their hands like paper origami cranes into their laps and turned their gaze to Michiyo, who maneuvered a black lacquer box filled with sweets toward her guests.

When the box was placed in front of Yap's napkin, she

removed the container's lid and selected a sakura mochi, or cherry cake, a bean-paste candy wrapped artfully like sushi with gelatin sugar and topped with a cherry tree leaf. She slid the box across the tatami mat to Eiko, who also selected a sweet.

"In the beginning, you have to think about where your hands should be," Michiyo said. "Everything seems refined, but it's more. Once you get that down, you can enjoy the tea. You can enjoy the flavor, the frothiness, and the color—how it matches the room. You can enjoy how the tea looks in the bowl, and when you're drinking, you think, 'Oh, that tasted good after the sweet.'"

Michiyo watched as each guest brought the sweet to their mouths—not their mouths to the sweet, as often seen in American culture—and giggled with delight.

When the last of the candy was swallowed, the guests remarked on the taste of the matcha and sakura mochi served during the ceremony. They asked who created the bowls from which they drank the tea, and where the latter had been grown. Eiko commented on the single flower beneath the scroll in the corner where Mitchell was seated. It was a pink chamelia, that's petals were slightly open.

"The moment is the moment, and you can never recapture it," Yap said.

Still kneeling, the women placed their hands on the floor in front of them, angled their fingertips in ever so slightly, and bowed to their host.

The ceremony was complete; the tea was gone, but Eiko and Yap — calm and composed, safe from the chaos of everyday life — could still taste it on the tip of their tongues. ✎





tradition afoot



For 32 years, the Fourth Corner Folk Dancers have circled the dance floor, exploring world cultures. **Jennifer Collins** gets caught up in their enthusiasm as she takes a peek at this local passion. Photos by Chris Fuller.

Some people say dancers have ugly feet — contorted and scarred from years of abuse.

But as Doris Sepich scuffed the pine floor with a flourish of her toes, her graceful movements attracted the eyes of every uncoordinated dancer in the room.

Maybe they were struggling to mimic her movements and avoid being trampled by the circle of people who dragged their twisted ankles to a Croatian traditional dance called “Pevano Kolo.”

Sepich, in the same circle of dancers, seemed to float on the balls of her feet instead of stumble. She never looked at her own feet or anyone else’s. Rather, her eyes glistened, fixed somewhere in the space between dancers’ heads and the dance hall ceiling.

Her laughing voice morphed into a hoarse, Croatian forte as she blissfully exploded in song with confidence as if she were a native.

Sepich is 79, but when dancing, the years fall away and her deeply creased face relaxes and smoothes into a Noxzema girl’s complexion.

The 5-foot-tall woman, who depends on thick lenses to find her way around the dance floor, said she dances out of “pure pleasure.”

“I don’t like to learn new steps,” she declared defiantly. “Personally, I don’t want to be challenged. I just want to enjoy myself.”

With her grace, she could dance the same steps every night and make them look different. But when Sepich began folk dancing 15 years ago, she didn’t know a step. Sepich is one of the oldest members of Bellingham’s longest standing ethnic dance group, Fourth Corner International Folk Dancers.

For 32 years, Fourth Corner has transported visitors to villages in Israel, Transylvania, Greece, Sweden and Quebec — to name a few.

Fourth Corner is open to anyone who has or doesn’t have rhythm. The group meets Thursdays from 7 to 10 p.m. in the Fairhaven Public Library for “vicarious world travel,” as organizer and dancer, Jo Miller describes folk dancing.

Fourth Corner members ask for a \$2 donation so they can pay for the dance hall, which costs \$35 per week.

“If (dancers) can’t afford it, we ask them to put in 50 cents,

and if they can’t afford that, then we just let it go,” said Miller, a Whatcom County substitute teacher by day.

Miller said she never wants to restrict prospective attendees who don’t have the funds. Fourth Corner’s goal is geared toward enabling dance addictions, she said.

“If they needed, we have people that would go pick them up and bring them here,” she said.

Miller assumes that once people come and join in dancing to the live band, they will be hooked.

At her first meeting, Sepich said she caught on to some simpler dances. Her background jitterbugging as a teenager to jazz clarinetist Benny Goodman in her hometown of Santa Ana, Calif., helped her pick up the motions, she said.

A retired elementary teacher, Sepich noticed an advertisement for Fourth Corner in a Fairhaven coffee shop. She told her husband, a second-generation Croatian and longshoreman, about the group and he was eager to accompany her so he could relearn his family traditions. But she said it was a love affair with the intoxicating music that kept her coming back to the group.

The “Kitchen Band,” as Sepich christened them, accompanies the folk dancers for about half an hour. She said she calls them the “Kitchen Band” because they practice in the kitchen of the dance hall for an hour before coming out to play.

They play the “Pevano Kohlo” dance, from Slavonia, Croatia, almost every week. One Thursday, with sweaty palms, one in front, one in back, dancers grasped hands of those once removed as they skipped around the five accompanying musicians.

Accordion player Doug Dodd’s fingers danced across the keys with the same precision embodied in Sepich’s dancing. Dodd taught himself to play the accordion after he heard a visiting musician play the instrument 10 years ago.

Dodd began dancing with a folk dance group at Western in the early 1970s. About 70 students, faculty and community members packed Fairhaven lounge once per week to dance to the ancient tunes with a group that later merged with Fourth Corner.



"It's the emotion and the energy; the music's exciting," he said, explaining the reasons he continues coming to Fourth Corner after several of his comrades from Western graduated and moved on. Although he still dances, his vice is providing the fluidity and rhythm to the dance.

His songbook was collected from Vancouver folk musicians. The pages' frayed edges seemed like they might at any moment disintegrate from years of use. But like the tradition of folk dancing, the book survives for another turn of the page — another song.

For "Pevano Kohlo," the violin, accordion and mandolin provided the melody, while the dancers orbited the musicians, crooning lyrics they read off tattered papers safety-pinned to the musicians' backs.

"Ej," the voices held the first word out in a hard "A" sound. Above everyone else, Sepich's voice led the group, faltering only once, when she forgot a verse of the song she knew mostly by heart. As the rest of the dancers' eyes were glued to the sheets of lyrics, Sepich's eyes remained fixed — as usual — above everyone's heads.

"Najljespse je selo slavonije," the spattering of offbeat voices continued, singing one of the song's 10 verses with the tinny Croatian accents.

"Pevano is the most beautiful village in Slovenia," Sepich translated.

On the last verse of the song, the dancers chuckled the final chorus, "Ej, moka, late, kapacino grande. Ej cocolate dilitant biskati."

"That's from the Seattle (folk dancing) group," she said.

Fourth Corner is a member of the Northwest Folk Dance Association, an organization of folk dance groups ranging from Alaska to California. Fourth Corner dancers attend workshops organized by the Seattle folk dancing troupe.

Clarice Willis, 84, who helped found Fourth Corner, said although many groups speckle the Northwest, folk dancing is a fading art.

"At one time we had 70 to 100 people dancing with the group," she said. "Now it's 20 to 25. I guess it's just not 'in' anymore."

But for Willis, a retired kindergarten teacher and education professor, folk dancing's waning popularity doesn't diminish her interest in the skill her father taught her at traditional German picnics she attended as a girl in San Francisco.

"It's the best kind of high you can have if you really throw yourself into dancing," Willis said. "The Swedish Polka — it's just like flying when you have a good partner. And Viennese Waltzing — it's just spinning and spinning," she said.

Willis stood up to demonstrate some of the steps, but she doesn't dance anymore.

"The feet broke down," she said in a somber tone. "I can still dance, but it just hurts so bad."

Willis and the original members began dancing in the basement of Sacred Heart Church on the hill above Fairhaven. But for Willis, folk dancing was a way of life.

She danced in several performance groups as a young woman. When she married, she stopped performing because her husband's job with the Air Force moved the family frequently. But in each town, they started a folk dance group. They lived in France, Germany, Japan and the southern United States before they moved to Bellingham.

"Today, national dances are performed in costume, on religious or political holidays, or on ceremonial occasions and then put away for another time," writes dance teacher, Louis Ellfeldt from the University of Southern California in his book "Folk Dance."

"No longer is the participation a part of everyday life," he wrote. Willis said she was disappointed Fourth Corner never took the next step to become a performance group.

Although members claim Fourth Corner is not an exhibitionist group, they occasionally share their skills for festivals like the "Diversity Festival," which took place at the North Forest Hall last year.

But even at performances, Fourth Corner dancers wear modern clothing instead of traditional "get-ups," Sepich said. The group's focus is always to involve new dancers and she said she never wants to segregate would-be dancers because of uniforms.



"Just follow the flow of the circle. Don't think about your steps."



The group moved to several locations around Whatcom county, flourishing to about 120 dancers at its height of popularity while at the Mount Baker High School. People aged 3 to 70-years-old came to dance, Willis said. Some mothers carried their babies in backpacks while they two-stepped.

"The rule was kids couldn't run around the floor, but they could dance with us," Willis said with a smile.

Because folk dances from Europe and the Middle East are built essentially on the same steps, the children found the steps simple, she said.

"After you learn the basic step, the step reappears," she told an overwhelmed newcomer to Fourth Corner.

Ellfeldt's handbook echoes the same thought, "There is amazing similarity among folk dances, no matter what the land of origin."

For instance the schottische step with its four-count cycle is traditionally found in dances from the British Isles, Willis said. But variations of the hop-step-hop-lift pattern can be found throughout Europe as well as in Israeli and Mexican traditional dances, she said.

However, the variations in dances sometimes create barriers to stumbling beginners, Miller said. Because steps reoccur, dancers often improvise on the basic step, which causes confusion when newbies try to learn the step by mimicking an advanced dancer in the line, she said. If the basic dance is broken down and taught, dancers can learn it through repetition.

"No matter what anybody else does, you can do this step and keep face and keep time," Miller said after demonstrating a basic step similar to the grapevine. "Some of the people are hot dogs and they get to do hot dog steps. But others are tired and they just want to move — just move to the music."

The steps to each folk dance have such similarities, Willis said, sometimes the only way to identify dance's country of origin is to feel the musical beat.

Each region has an individual rhythm. For instance, Israeli dances always have a four-count beat, Miller said. German dances usually have a three-four rhythm, Willis said, where one beat is emphasized for two counts. The beat is what creates the "omp-pa-pa" sound indicative of the country's music, she said.

Willis, Sepich and Miller agreed that folk dancing broadened their interests in other cultures. In addition to moving throughout the world, Willis and her husband traveled by bus from England to Nepal. She also spent time in Australia and Indonesia. To each country, she went with an open mind, ready to learn new dances.

Miller traveled to Transylvania two years ago for a dance workshop. She boarded with a former Fourth Corner member who had returned there to live with his family.

Sepich said she taught herself Croatian several years ago, in preparation for a trip with her husband to Croatia. The dances she learned at Fourth Corner allowed her to join in spontaneous street dances with Croatian villagers. She and her husband traveled to Croatia seven times, but they haven't been back since fighting broke out in the early 1990s.

For all three women, whether they can still physically dance or not, Fourth Corner is where they say they are most content.

One Thursday evening, Sepich and Miller were propelled around the circle; they felt transported to distant a village ceremony. Magically, the people in the room became like relatives and dancers' blue jeans became skirts, ruffled by the twists and turns of the circle. Some people sang along, while others concentrated on the feet of other dancers.

"Just follow the flow of the circle," one man whispered, sensing a beginner's frustration. "Don't think about your steps."

Amidst the chaos of beginning and master dancers, Sepich beamed, her arms interlocked with dancers aged 7 to 84.

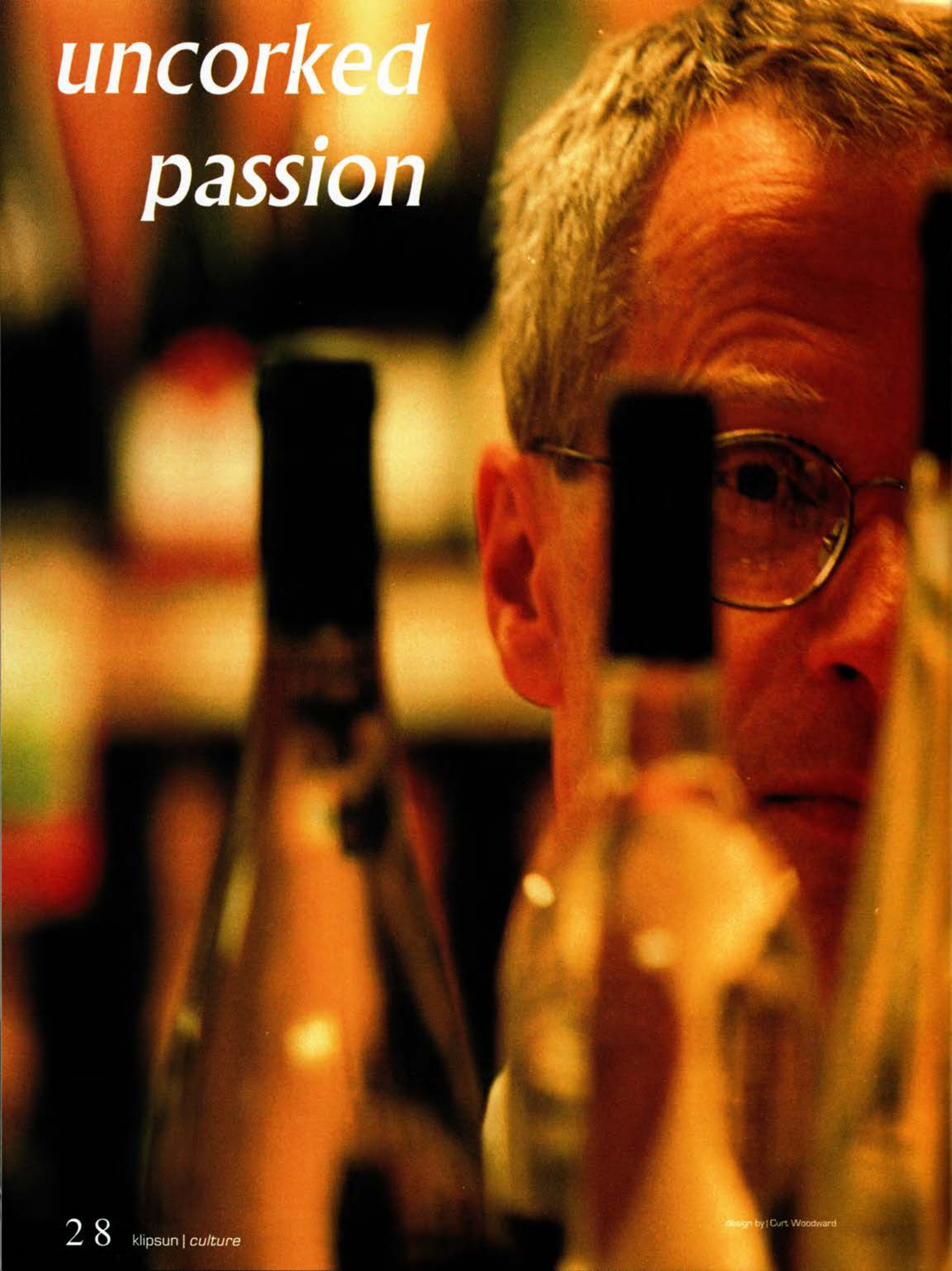
Later in the Fairhaven Public Library loft, the group exuded a community spirit lost in the individualistic American culture. Dancers helped each other make the dance work — the sort of unity lost in modern sports like wrestling, where each person works against the other.

As darkness fell over the dance hall, Sepich took a breather while advanced dancers showed off new and intricate moves in fast-paced line dances to recorded music. Sepich termed this "hot-shot time."

But at the end of the night, the dwindling group reconvened for one final dance. By that time, the beginners found some grace and the "hot shots" energy was spent.

As the group joined hands for a farewell dance, a more experienced dancer's wisdom resonated through the room, "If you don't fall down and nobody gets hurt, it's a good dance."

As Sepich's eyes blissfully fixed in the space between the dancer's heads and the dance hall ceiling, she seemed to say, "Indeed, it is a good dance." ✎



*uncorked
passion*

As a child in Austria, Hans Wressnig began his wine education playing in the barrels of his family's wine cellar. **Jackie Martin** follows this wine enthusiast from the cask to the classroom, a local restaurant and even the aisles of a Haggen grocery store. Photos by Chris Fuller.

"Wine is liquid art... liquid poetry. It lifts inhibitions and brings people closer," says wine expert Hans Wressnig. "When it is consumed in a controlled way, wine is a highly civilized thing."

For thousands of years wine has graced the tables of kings, pharaohs and gods. It was once prized for its antiseptic properties and it remains the center of many religious and cultural traditions.

Although some wines are rare and expensive — a single bottle can cost \$10,000 — Wressnig says great wine has never been so easy to find. It lines the shelves of local supermarkets and is so cheap, even a college student can afford it.

Wressnig, 45, teaches wine courses at colleges from Seattle to Bellingham. He also manages the Haggen wine department in Mount Vernon, supervises the wine service at a local restaurant and provides private and commercial wine consultation. He is a 16-time recipient of the Wine Spectator's "Best Award of Excellence" for having one of the best wine lists in the world and has served on numerous tasting panels judging wines and wine lists.

Wressnig says his passion and love for wine have been the fundamental elements of his success. He began cultivating his fruitful career in the wine industry more than two decades ago after leaving his family's farm and vineyard in Styria, the heart of Austrian wine country. That farm, he says, was where the seeds were planted for his interest in wine.

Wressnig exudes a casual, un-American elegance as he sits cross-legged with his hands on his knee in the café at Haggen. He wears khakis, a pressed white shirt and a beige sweater draped across his shoulders.

His blue eyes brighten as he recalls the days of his childhood, which he spent planting and harvesting, churning butter, feeding pigs and creating "liquid art."

"I remember so clearly spending time in the wine cellars," he says, his features growing animated. Wressnig's accent is thick, but his English is nearly flawless.

"As a kid, this was a fascinating place. It was an environment that instills very deep memories — the sounds, the smells, the tastes of the fruits. There were huge barrels. They were so huge you could actually crawl into them."

Wressnig said the wine cellar was magical. When the barrels had been filled, mysterious sounds seeped from inside as the wine fermented.

"It was an environment that conjured up a sense of mystery," he almost whispers, his thick accent adding drama to each word.

"Of course we tasted everything we made. When you grow up in such an environment, there is such a tremendous sensory element you carry away. It is a world of scents and tastes."

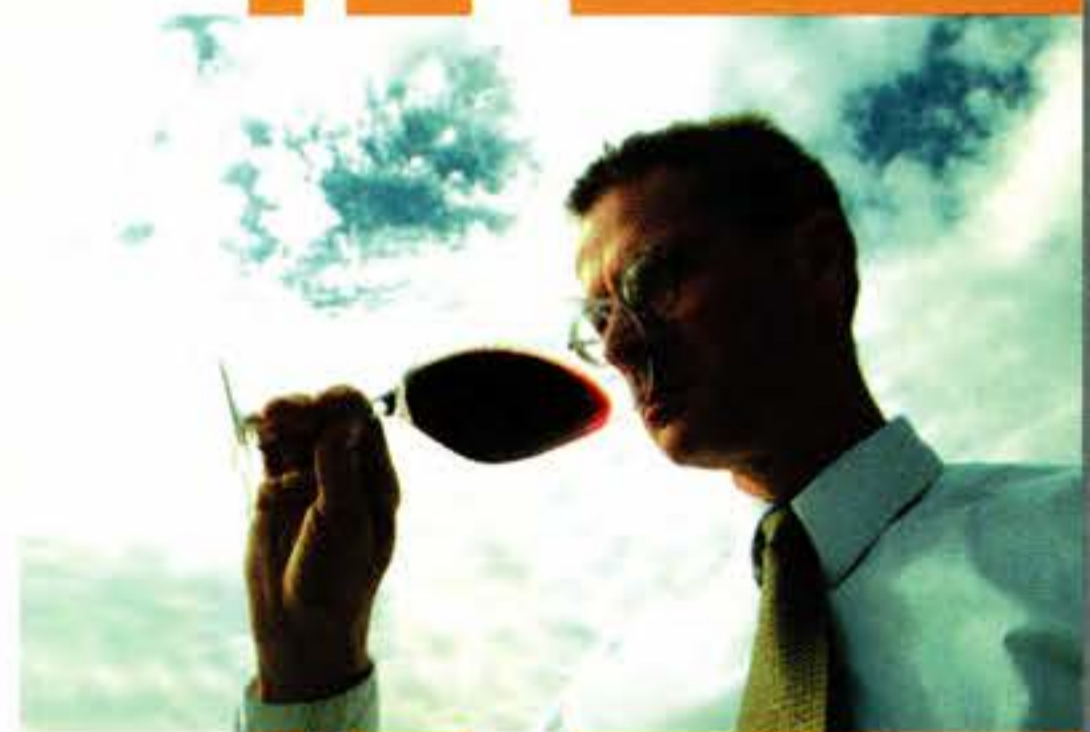
Now, 15 years after traveling to the Northwest, Wressnig teaches formal wine classes to show others how to use their senses to discover and appreciate good wine. The five-week classes cover a broad spectrum of wine topics such as tasting, etiquette, history and grape varieties.

"Of course, wine is the most fascinating of agricultural products — except maybe cheese," Wressnig says laughing. But he is serious. In his eyes, wine truly is the greatest beverage on earth. It is something to be studied and experienced.

"There is an intellectual dimension to wine," he continues. "It has an immense civilized appeal. When you sit down at a table, it makes a big difference whether you have a glass of milk with a fine meal or a beautiful golden wine or ruby red wine. The sight alone is a joy to be held."

Preparing for an evening class at Whatcom Community College, Wressnig sets 16 places, one for each aspiring wine connoisseur, on long tables arranged in a large U. Each place setting is a rather scientific paper place mat designed specifically for the night's topic: wine etiquette. The mats are covered with temperature charts, aging graphs and long, difficult words like "acetaldehyde." Four circles, numbered one through four, are printed across the top of the tasting mats. On each circle rests an empty wineglass, waiting to be filled, tasted and dumped.

A small table stands alone in the center of the room, surrounded on three sides by the long tables. As the stage for Wressnig's presentation, it is spread with



"You probe the wine with your nose and every time there is a new smell to be discovered — a new surprise for you."



bottles of red and white wine, massive wineglasses, small wineglasses, corks, a decanter and spitting receptacles.

"We encourage spitting," he says seriously.

As 7 p.m. approaches a mixture of people begin filing in and taking their seats — restaurateurs, novice winemakers, servers, Western students and others who are curious about wine.

Christa Reagan, a 23-year-old Western graduate, says she takes the wine appreciation class simply to expand her knowledge of wine. As a server at a local restaurant, she says it is helpful to know about the different types of wines, how they should look and smell, and which years produced the best wine.

"Hans makes wine practical and easily accessible," says Reagan. "He doesn't show us \$80 bottles. He always says you don't have to be a snob to enjoy wine."

Wressnigg pours an inch of Manzanilla sherry into one of the four glasses in front of each person. The glasses fog from the liquid's chill. Each student delicately grasps the stem of his or her glass, smoothly swirls the wine around, then tilts the glass to a 45-degree angle beneath the nose. They inhale deeply, then sip, swish the wine in their mouths like mouthwash, and swallow.

Wressnigg repeats the motions of sniffing and tasting, but with the grace and swiftness of an expert. He energetically moves the wine around in his mouth, gargles as he takes a breath, then spits into his small bucket.

Wressnigg comments that the wine is crisp and smooth, perfectly chilled.

"Temperature brings out different characteristics in a wine," he points out. "If you serve a wine too warm, the alcohol is over-

powering. It buries the delicacy of the wine. But serving it too cold has a numbing effect — the aroma is closed, there is nothing exciting."

Light-bodied wines with high alcohol content such as sparkling white wines and fino sherries should be chilled before serving, Wressnigg tells the class. Light-bodied red wines should be served at the lower end of room temperature and full-bodied red wines with lower alcohol content at room temperature.

Next, Wressnigg opens and pours a 1999 cabernet franc from New Zealand. Wressnigg calls it a "true value" at \$12.99 a bottle. Two weeks ago, he says, a bottle sold for \$21.99.

Through the evening, more wine is poured, tasted, swallowed and spat. Wressnigg instructs the class on the effects of aging wines, how to check appearance and decant a treasured, aged bottle of wine.

"The most enjoyable part of teaching is the fact that there is a crowd of people in a classroom that is eager to learn about wine," Wressnigg says. "That, to me, is exciting."

In addition to enriching the Northwest community with his extensive wine knowledge, Wressnigg's responsibilities as manager of the Haggen wine department keep him busy helping experts and novices alike select wine. When guiding customers in the wine selection process, he asks how much they want to spend and what type of food they plan to serve the wine with.

"The underlying pairing fundamental is to make sure the intensities of the wine and the food match," he stresses. "For example, don't use a light-bodied red wine with beef. The meat would overpower the wine.

"When you have rich, red-colored food such as fowl, lamb or beef, a safe choice is a red wine of the appropriate weight. With a rich New York steak, for example, serve a cabernet sauvignon."

With a hamburger, he says, try a syrah or a California red zinfandel.

For pasta, Wressnigg suggests choosing a wine according to the sauce. A pinot grigio goes well with white sauces. Strong reds, such as Chianti, are made to stand up to the acidity of tomato-based sauces.

"With a delicate fillet of sole, you would make a big mistake to serve a red wine," warns Wressnigg. "You would just slaughter the sole."

Salmon, however, can handle a good medium-bodied wine.

"I would recommend a pinot noir," Wressnigg says.

He is well known among his customers at Haggen for his personality, helpfulness and expertise.

"Hans is very accommodating and very knowledgeable," says Susan Actor, a Mount Vernon resident and regular customer. She says Hans went out of his way to find a wine she saw in a gourmet-cooking magazine. Haggen did not carry the particular wine at the time, but she says Hans made some calls and ordered it for her.

"He'll find you a good, cheap bottle of wine," adds Lisa Fisher, also of Mount Vernon. "He doesn't try to pawn expensive wine off on his customers. He doesn't make you feel stupid."

Besides helping shoppers find good deals on good wines, Wressnigg tastes and selects wines to display on the store shelves.

"I have to know what a wine tastes like so I can talk intelligently about it and suggest it with enthusiasm," Wressnigg says.

"But I don't taste the boxes of Franzia or jug wine," he adds, chuckling. "Every once in a while, I'll get a chance to experience it, like at a wedding reception. Curiosity drives me over to the box and I taste it. It's good to know, every once in a while, what it tastes like."

He says most people want to spend about \$10 on a bottle of wine, but students usually stay in the \$5 range.

When shopping for a decent, yet inexpensive wine, don't be fooled by pretty labels. Wressnigg warns that winemakers will use gold and black colors and designer bottles for even the cheapest wines.

He recommends choosing a wine according to the name of the winemaker and the region in which the wine is made. Wressnigg says the best values are wines made in Spain, Southern Italy, France, Chile and Australia.

"Washington is a haven for good white wines under \$10," he said. "But a decent

“I have to know what a wine tastes like so I can talk intelligently about it and suggest it with enthusiasm,” Wressnigg says. “But I don’t taste the boxes of Franzia or jug wine,” he adds, chuckling.

red wine from Washington will cost a minimum of \$10.”

For a value-priced, Washington-made red wine, Wressnigg suggests the cabernet-merlot blend made by the Bernard Griffin Winery.

Wressnigg also recommends the Powers Winery. He says they make a 1997 Merlot with “complexity.”

“Complexity,” he says, “can be experience in the nose.”

“You probe the wine with your nose and every time there is a new smell to be discovered – a new surprise for you,” Wressnigg says, accentuating each word with a pointed hand. “And when you put it in your mouth, you experience the same multidimensional characteristics. A hallmark of good wine is complexity.”

Wressnigg also recommends Columbia Crest’s 1998 merlot and cabernet sauvignon, which he deems “reliable values.”

When Wressnigg is not imparting his wine knowledge on his students or helping customers choose wine, he utilizes his wine expertise as the wine sommelier at the Oyster Bar, a Bellingham restaurant renowned for its selection of great wines. The restaurant sommelier selects wine for the cellar, suggests wine to guests and ensures proper wine service on the floor.

“I’m in a lucky position to experience wine on so many fronts,” Wressnigg says. “I enjoy each aspect. I think it allows me to see wine in a broader context. If you’re just stuck in a restaurant, I think you lose sight of economic realities. You are in there with people who are willing to spend more money; it’s a shaded point of view.

“But you move into the retail environment at Haggen and you realize people who like to drink wine on a daily basis are confined by economic realities. So I make a great effort to find the best values for them. That is an exciting challenge in itself.”

For those curious souls who want to master the fine art of wine tasting, or who just want to learn wine basics, Wressnigg suggests taking a formal wine class – and drinking wine, of course.

Unfortunately, becoming a true wine expert does not allow shortcuts, he says.

“It comes from experience, experience, experience, which adds layers of knowledge that only time can teach you.”



Below and above: Students at Wressnigg’s Whatcom Community College class taste samples; a few chosen bottles sit in front of Wressnigg’s lectern.



volume (31) issue (5)

no trespassing

croatian forte

(klipsun.wvu.edu/experience.html)