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## Klipsun Magazine, 2000, Volume 31, Issue 07 - December

Scott LaMont  
*Western Washington University*

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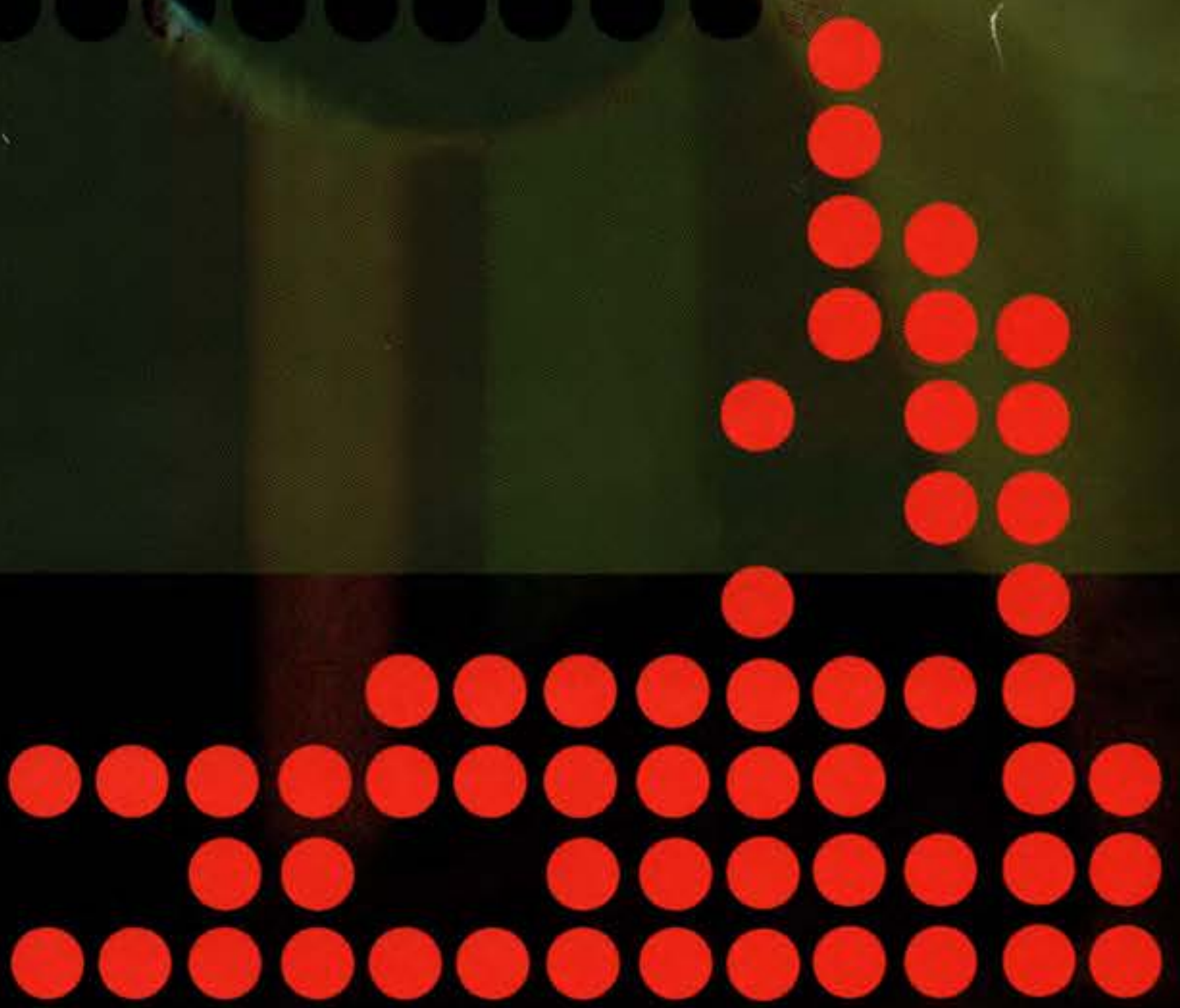
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# klip *sun*

December 2000 volume 31 issue 1



- whips & chains
- stuffed critters
- road trip
- 



# Klipsun

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journey to the end of the earth

4



**Liam House-Doyle** is a senior public relations major. This is his first contribution to *Klipsun* and he has previously been published in *The Western Front*, *The Journal of the San Juan Islands* and *The Islands' Sounder*. When he is not salmon fishing along a river, he's pickin' his banjo and discovering the perfect spice combinations for Indian cuisine.

derailing limitations

8



**Heather King** is a journalism major with random chunks of credits in art, business and computer science. Writing a mere passion, she plans to make the big bucks either by becoming Cameron Diaz's body double or one of Seattle's sexiest computer geeks after graduating from Western. With the spirit of Tupac guiding her way, anything is possible.

the royal treatment

12



**Kacee Gradl** is a senior communication major and journalism minor who will graduate spring quarter 2001. After graduation, she plans on pursuing a career in the field of sports public relations. In her spare time, Kacee enjoys hanging out with friends and eating her favorite food, marshmallows. Kacee has previously been published in *The Western Front*.

night games

14



**Shannon Ward** is a public relations major and psychology minor. She enjoys eating sushi and lifting weights with her husband Chad. After graduation in December, she will join Chad in Portland, Ore., and begin a career in public relations. She will also try to kick her six-cups-of-coffee-per-day habit. Shannon has previously been published in *The Western Front*. This is her first contribution to *Klipsun*.

anytime, anywhere

18



**Marc Fenton** is a 23-year-old journalism major who will graduate this fall. He has been published by the *Tacoma News Tribune*, the *Daily Breeze* in California and *The Western Front*. After graduation, Marc plans on utilizing his degree to its fullest potential. He has his sights set on moving to California to find a janitorial job. At nights, Marc will pimp the streets of Los Angeles for extra spending cash.

dead alive

22



**Melissa Evavold** is a journalism major who has previously written for *Klipsun* and *The Western Front*. She has a passion for peaches and juicy poetry. You can find her playing lacrosse for Western, cooking a saucy dish or indulging in a beer at Boundry Bay. In the future Melissa hopes to attend culinary school where she will find the best recipe for bobcat.

in search of the sandman

26



**Jessica Blair** is a creative writing major and journalism minor who expects to graduate fall 2000. After commencement, she plans to slip into a retirement mentality and re-gather some of the virtues she lost as a journalism student, namely patience and kindness. As a career, Jessica would like to work for a small magazine on the West Coast, or independently as a freelance writer in hopes of one day affording to build a white, split-level house somewhere in Washington's backwoods.

a kink in the system

28



**Jacob Horn** is a 23-year-old Western student who enjoys skiing, shopping and beautiful women. He is a public relations major who will graduate with a minor in the joys of skiing Mt. Baker. After graduation he plans to live in Seattle's Belltown neighborhood and work for a hi-tech public relations firm to pay for his obsession with snow. Jacob is easy going and extremely sarcastic, traits passed down from two of the coolest parents in the world. Jacob has previously been published in *The Western Front*. This is his first contribution to *Klipsun*.

fistful of rhymes

32



**Kelly James Cudworth** is a 23-year-old journalism senior. Excited by just about anything, he is down to kick-it whenever the time calls for it. Mountain biking, sport rock climbing and work take up the majority of his free time. Bartending at Black Angus has made him good with drunken vocabulary. "Noam Chomsky for President."

# Journey to the end of the earth

**Liam House-Doyle** follows two Blaine motorcyclists on the ultimate road trip: a six-month, 26,000-mile journey from the Canadian border to the end of the earth and back. Photos courtesy of James Luce and Tommy Ryser.

James Luce, 46, and Tommy Ryser, 45, toured on motorcycles at 15,000 feet for two weeks in the Andes Mountains, then descended upon the moon-like desert coast of Peru. They entered the driest place in the world: the Atacama Desert. Its annual precipitation of .004 inches comes from dew and fog.

"Lots and lots of nothing! Dirt, rock, hills and dust ... not even sand until lower elevations," Luce said. The dirt-colored plains drop into the fantastic blue Pacific Ocean.

On a remote stretch of road in the middle of the 600-mile-long desert, the unexpected happened. From a distance, Ryser saw a lump on the right shoulder of the road. As he approached, it moved.

"It got up, and it was a naked man!" he said. "He was out of his mind and telling us about people who had tortured him. You'd think aliens had abducted him.

He was hallucinating and completely out of his mind."



Ryser dressed the man with his socks, underwear, shorts and a shirt, but he couldn't spare a pair of shoes.

The naked man asked for water and poured it all over himself. Then he asked for gasoline, Ryser said. "I refused and told him that our bikes were diesel. It was hard to make sense of it."

Nine weeks earlier and 6,000 miles before, Ryser and Luce disembarked from Peace Arch State Park in Blaine at the Canadian-American border, each with specific goals as they traveled south. Their plan was to follow the Pacific Ocean and explore the Americas via "windy dirt, rock and mud kind of roads" on their BMW Paris-Dakar motorcycles — Luce on a 1,000 cc and Ryser on the smaller 800 cc version. When they reached the central Chilean town of Vina del Mar — Ryser's town of birth — they would go their separate ways. Luce wanted to drive his motorcycle to the southernmost place in the Americas: Ushuaia; Ryser wanted to return home to Chile to rediscover his birthplace and rejoin old friends. Six months, 26,000 miles, 15 countries and two equator crossings later, the motorcycle duo did that and more.

For Ryser, it was the completion of a motorcycle trip he started in 1976.

At age 17, he left Chile and moved near his parents' home in Zurich, Switzerland for four-and-a-half years. Then his father died and his mother remarried and moved to Blaine. When Ryser was 24, he shipped his motorcycle from London to Montreal and drove across Canada to visit his mother in Blaine. His original plan was to continue riding his motorcycle to Chile.

Twenty-four years later, Ryser was married, had two sons with his wife, Allie, built a house and started Ryser's Foreign Auto Clinic in Blaine.





The adventure started the first day of fall, Sept. 23, 1999. It rained.

Luce drove from his home in Bellingham to meet Ryser at Peace Arch State Park, where a photographer from the Blaine newspaper, *The Northern Light*, snapped a picture as they took off.

Luce took a six-month leave from his job as park supervisor for Bellingham Parks Department to travel with Ryser and drive to South America's island tip, called Tierra del Fuego — The Land of Fire.

While attending Washington State University, Luce used to ride alone from Pullman to Baja, Mexico during spring break.

"Two days down and one night out camping" on the motorcycle, he said. On a straight road around Bakersfield, Calif., he "once nearly burned a whole tank of gas without ever touching the handlebars ... I just leaned to the left or right to turn."

For this trip, Ryser and Luce avoided calm roads altogether. Sometimes the riding was so difficult and the roads so rough they rode all day and never went faster than 20 mph, Ryser said. Sometimes what looked like three hours of travel on a map turned out to be three days.

They entered Mexico at Tecate and coasted through the border without stopping when border agents waved them on. They traveled south along the Baja Peninsula in 112-degree desert climate to La Paz and then took an 18-hour ferry to Mazatlan.

The first day they rode in the rain was near Oaxaca in southern Mexico. The riders pushed hard to get under clear skies as streets in the little towns often turned to rivers in the torrential downpours.

When the rain started, dozens of dark-haired wild pigs, berserk with joy, ran into the street, Luce said. Ryser almost hit one.

"I know what pigs are like when you're trying to get them into a stall ... you hit them with a shovel and it's like hitting a concrete block, so I didn't want to hit one with my bike," Ryser said.

Ryser's fluency in Spanish enriched interactions with people. It helped the riders learn about what lay on the road ahead, Luce said. They were stopped at military checkpoints about three times a day when traveling in Mexico. Police would pull them over just to converse, Luce said. Ryser developed a strategy to get along with police, especially after Luce ran a red light.

"It's a chance to find out about road conditions, permits and danger on the roads," Ryser said. "You go up to them and offer to buy them a pop; offer the guys a cigarette and open yourself up to them ... that was the key to our success; the way of having no incidents — not being robbed, mugged or attacked."

Their beefed-up dirt bikes, with tall suspension, knobby tires, extra lights with rock grills and aluminum storage boxes, were magnets wherever they stopped — especially with kids. At the border between Honduras and Nicaragua, they stopped to buy fruit from a vendor just when a school got out. One hundred dark-haired elementary-aged kids immediately swarmed them, Luce said.

"It was a little unsettling, because you are literally in a sea of people," Luce said. "They're all talking, touching and grabbing, and you're hoping that no one pinches gear off your bike, but that never happened."

"The kids were great, I liked talking to them because their level of Spanish was closer to mine."

In Costa Rica, coffee plantations are packed between river valleys and dense jungles that climb into towering granite mountains. Next, to the south, is Panama, where the Pan-American Highway ends in the town of Chepo. Beyond that is

the Darien Gap — a 240-mile roadless section of jungle and swamp, made dangerous by guerilla and drug action.

So, Nov. 1, the riders crated their bikes and flew them from Panama City to Bogota, Colombia for \$150 each.

The inland city of Bogota is home to 8 million people at 8,000 feet of elevation.

"The pollution and traffic was life-threatening," Luce said. "It felt like breaking out of jail when we finally rode out of the city and across the Cordillera to Cali."

When Luce and Ryser got to a friend's house in

Cali, Colombia, they learned that the only route south to Ecuador was blockaded and that guerillas were killing and kidnapping people in the area, Luce said.

After a week of waiting for roadblocks to clear, their friends said it was still too dangerous to pass through a blockade. They had to find a way south into Ecuador.

They drove northwest 50 miles to the tropical mangrove coastline near Buenaventura. They arranged transportation, with their bikes, on a 100-foot cement cargo boat. The 22-hour trip along the Pacific Coast took them south of the blocked roads in Colombia to the port city of Tumaco.

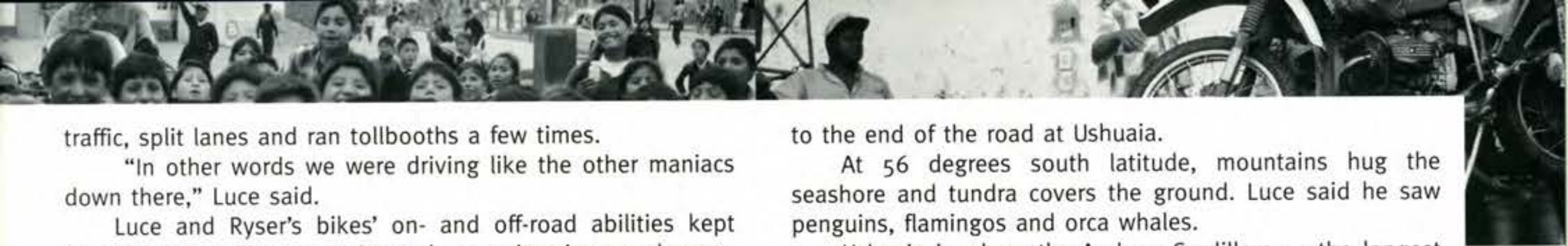
Rough, open-ocean waves drenched the motorcycles strapped to the deck.

Ryser said it was the roughest part of the trip. He was seasick and worried about the saltwater ruining the motorcycles' electronics. At Tumaco they flushed the bikes with fresh water and discovered they were OK.

In the next 125 miles they crossed into Ecuador and arrived at "Umbigo del Mundo" — bellybutton of the world — the Earth's equator, zero latitude.

It was tough travelling with the motorcycles through Panama and Colombia; other times, however, the motorcycles were an asset. The riders went around roadblocks, detours and





traffic, split lanes and ran tollbooths a few times.

"In other words we were driving like the other maniacs down there," Luce said.

Luce and Ryser's bikes' on- and off-road abilities kept them on steep, dirt mountain roads, crossing rivers and camping on remote beaches. The entire, six-month trip cost them \$5,000. Food staples like seafood, rice and beans were cheap, the camping was free, and gas cost about \$3 per gallon. A full, nine-gallon tank on the bikes lasted about 450 miles.

The portable stove the riders used to make tea heated water much slower at the 14,000-foot border crossing from Bolivia into Chile. The riders camped beneath unfamiliar, southern hemisphere stars in 16-degree air. Ryser was near his home.

"There was a tear in my eye when I saw that sign — Bienvenido a Chile," Ryser said.

Luce and Ryser had traveled two-and-a-half months and were about 7,000 miles, as the crow flies, from where they started at Peace Arch State Park. But to get there on motorcycles, they'd driven about 12,000 miles. Ryser's hometown, Vina del Mar — known for its luxurious hotels, casinos and fine beaches — was still 1,300 miles away.

"It was the biggest accomplishment of my life," Ryser said. "It was incredible to see the people I recollected from when I was 14 and 15 years old."

Ryser hadn't seen many of his childhood friends in 27 years. "They were exactly the same — the same smile, the same manners and movements. It was like being born again."

Luce's wife, Beth, and Ryser's wife, Allie, flew from Seattle to Santiago, Chile for a three-week visit during Christmas and New Year's to explore the area on the back seat of a motorcycle.

"I had forgotten how nice it is to ride two up, especially after not seeing each other for three months," Allie Ryser said.

After the holidays, the riders' wives flew Jan. 16, and Luce and Ryser parted ways a week later. While Luce headed south on Route 40, Ryser said he'd had enough punishment and stayed with friends.

Luce said he'd heard how tough the riding was on Route 40 through the dry, cold, windswept terrain of the Patagonia region in central Argentina.

"It was by far the most challenging riding I'd ever done in my life," he said.

Eighty-mile-per-hour winds and 10 inches of loose gravel on the road did not, however, stop him from continuing south.

"You can't even check out the scenery because you are totally focused on not crashing," he said.

It was impossible to get off the bike and leave it upright. He had to lay it down so it wouldn't blow over. He camped at night and had to lay down his sleeping bag behind a big rock, because the tent would blow away.

Luce took a ferry from a Bellingham sister city, Punta Arenas, and crossed the Strait of Magellan to Tierra de Fuego. He rode another 650 miles through icy peaks and stunted trees

to the end of the road at Ushuaia.

At 56 degrees south latitude, mountains hug the seashore and tundra covers the ground. Luce said he saw penguins, flamingos and orca whales.

Ushuaia is where the Andean Cordillera — the longest continuous mountain chain on the planet — tapers into the ocean and a plaque congratulates travelers for getting so far south.

"The focus from day one was south, south, south, and now you must turn around and go north," Luce said. Half the trip was over.

Luce said Route 40 was punishing enough that he didn't want to do it twice. He took a 3-and-a-half-day ferry ride from Puerto Natales to Puerto Montt, Chile. He added 30 new bird species to his personal "must see list" — including many albatrosses.

Luce met Ryser in Santiago Feb. 16 and they started home.

In southern Peru, they stopped at a bar and saw kids flying down huge sand dunes on sand boards. They talked with the owner, and Luce, a snowboarder, thought it looked like fun.

"Take a run," the owner said.

Luce ran up to the top of the sand dune and put his feet into the rope foot straps on the plywood board.

The first time he went straight down because that was what all the kids were doing, but the second time he cut some turns as everyone watched, he said. Nobody had ever turned before. The kids knew that something was different

and rushed for their boards. The owner smiled because all his boards were rented, Luce said.

They flew from Lima, Peru, to Panama City for \$300 to skip continued protests and political unrest in Colombia.


At the border crossing into Mexico at Tapachula, Ryser could not present motorcycle permit papers he had lost; it took two days to get the paperwork straightened out and the border agents gave them only five days to pass through Mexico.

The riders started at first light every morning to cover 2,000 miles and crossed over the Rio Grande River into the United States at Pharr, Texas.

"They received us like criminals and treated us like dirt," Ryser said. The U.S. Border Patrol searched the riders and never asked to see their passports.

"I was excited to get back in the good old U.S. of A, and we wanted to share our experiences with them, but they wouldn't even let us talk," Ryser said.

The riders stopped at a restaurant once in the United States. They ordered food and continued talking in Spanish.

"Six months is too short a time to do this right," Ryser said. 

**"It was a naked man! He was out of his mind and telling us about people who had tortured him. You'd think aliens had abducted him. He was hallucinating and completely out of his mind."**







# DERAIL LIMITATION

Autism is the fastest-growing developmental disability in the country, boasting a 210 percent rise in the last 11 years. **Heather King** explores the experience of a child who has broken through several of its barriers. Photos by Heather King.

Less than a minute had passed, but there it was again — two panicked taps to her right shoulder. Jenny quickly glances at the rearview mirror where two large hazel eyes peer quizzically from under thick blonde bangs.

“Train!” Kenzie shouts.

“Yes Kenzie, we will go to the trains today after Susan’s,” answers Jenny Walters, 22, Kenzie’s respite caretaker, for the fifth time in five minutes, but with as much reassurance as the first.

Kenzie relaxes back into her seat, arms full of stuffed yellow bears and blue mice, characters from her latest favorite television show, “The Bear in the Blue House.” Smiling contently, she returns to gnawing on Bear’s helpless yellow arm, reassured for the moment at least, that the day will proceed just as planned.

The happy, energetic 7-year-old sitting in the back seat of Walters’ tiny red 1994 Geo Metro, dancing handfuls of stuffed animals in the air above, has hurdled over a record number of limitations thrown in front of every step of her life by autism, a developmental disorder.

As an infant, Kenzie — Taylor Mackenzie Richardson — was a very “easy baby; quiet and kind,” says her mother Kristina Richardson. In Kenzie’s first year, Kristina noticed Kenzie repeatedly missed normal developmental stages. A

# NING



picture dangling from a wall in the family home shows Kenzie at 8 months, decked out in a frilly dress, a flowery hat hiding her peach-fuzz-covered head. A crutch, Richardson's hand, hidden under the back of her dress, is propping her up on a stool. Kenzie did not sit up on her own until seven months later.

At 14 months, things got really worrisome, Richardson says. Kenzie started biting herself and being really aggressive. She repeatedly banged her head on the floor, usually to the point of bleeding.

At 23 months, when Kenzie finally walked, her peers had been on their feet tearing through their homes for more than a year.

Three days after her third birthday, Kenzie was diagnosed with autism.

A neurological disorder characterized by delayed development of the senses, thinking abilities, language and communication and social interaction, autism affects one person in 500, according to a report given by the Department of Developmental Services in 1999. The occurrence rate of autism is more than four times higher than other developmental disorders such as cerebral palsy, epilepsy and mental retardation — exploding by more than 210 percent in the last 11 years. On average, the other categories weighed in a

40 percent gain in the same time period the DDS report states.

"Kenzie was classically autistic," says Susan McNutt, a Neurodevelopmental and Sensory Integration Therapist who began working with her at age three. Lacking eye contact, being nonverbal, aggressive and terrified of touch were a few items scribbled on Kenzie's diagnostic chart.

"She was very overwhelmed most of the day," McNutt explains, recalling Kenzie's constant screaming. "She was not a happy child."

Walters, a senior at Western, couldn't resist a flyer posted by Kenzie's grandmother her freshman year showing a picture of a then 3-year-old Kenzie searching for a volunteer therapist.

"I didn't know anything about autism, I just liked kids and didn't really have anything else to do," Walters says.

Now, Walters spends approximately 96 hours per month with Kenzie as her respite caretaker and is paid by the Department of Social Health and Services. Aside from basic caretaking responsibilities, such as cleaning up messes, bathing and laundry, she provides her with structured learning, friendship and a role model.

"We have the same sense of humor," Walters says, proud of the fact that her in-your-face personality has rubbed off. "She loves to tease and crack jokes," she says. "But she knows if she does something inappropriate, I'll call her on it," she says.

Walters looks over her shoulder at Kenzie, who laughs and gives her toys a big squeeze.

Walters and Kenzie pull up to a small gray building on Cornwall Avenue where they are ushered into McNutt's office to wait.

None of the room's four walls is greater than 10 feet in length, but what's contained within could fill a room 10 times its size. Shelves are overflowing with toys, and various hammocks and swings are piled up on one of the walls. Underfoot is a thickly padded floor.

Walters clamps four corners of a large purple hammock to the chains above. She helps Kenzie clamber into a pile of colored balls in the hammock's center and joins her. After a few minutes Kenzie gets uneasy and wants out.

A neurological disorder characterized by delayed development of the senses, thinking abilities, language, communication and social interaction, autism affects one person in 500.

"We are going to count to 10 and then get out," Walters says.

Kenzie's tension relieves slightly as they count together, looking trustingly into each other's eyes.

"One, two, three," they slowly count out loud, lifting a finger with each number.

"Children with autism think and learn differently because their brain is wired differently than the average person's," Walters says. "They have to be taught in a different way than a typical child who learns from example."

Kenzie first learned to communicate with sign language. Through signing she was able to request things like down, more, please and Mom.

"This is not typical for a child with autism," McNutt says. "Most can understand signs, but don't use them themselves."

Small cards with colorful pictures of objects and activities cling to a Velcro panel in McNutt's office. Part of the Picture Exchange System, these icons take place of other forms of communication to express needs or create schedules for nonverbal kids.

For the next activity, Kenzie chooses a picture of a swing.

A flat blue swing, long and wide enough for Kenzie's 4-foot-3-inch frame, is clamped to the ceiling.

When Kenzie first started at therapy, her body couldn't handle motion, Walters says. Leaning way back, bending her trunk left, forward and right, she demonstrates what Kenzie did when they put her on the swing four years ago. Motion terrified her.

Today, she plays contently with a toy barn as the swing sways back and forth.

McNutt finally arrives. Kenzie's face lights up; she immediately leaps up with a screech and gives her a big hug.

"You typically won't get a lot of smiles or hugs from kids with autism," McNutt says, explaining that most kids won't even recognize that she's entered the room. "It's discouraging when you work so hard and don't get any rewards."

McNutt sets up another hammock and helps Kenzie inside.

Kenzie pops out from inside then collapses back in with a giggle, her small hands grabbing the edge of the fabric, wrapping it tightly around her body.

"This is the type of seeking activity that a normal child with autism wouldn't do," McNutt says. "It's just is not interesting to play because they don't understand the look of surprise."

Most people are mind-readers to some degree; emotions are revealed through gestures, facial expressions and tone of voice. Children with autism, however, are usually oblivious to nonverbal communication.

Kenzie, however, is quite aware of people's state of emotion.

"She doesn't like it when people are sad. If she sees you feeling sad, she will say 'happy,'" Walters says. "Yesterday it was cloudy. Kenzie pointed to the sky and said 'sunny.'"

A bird clock high on the wall chirps, and Kenzie knows it is time to go.

In addition to sensory integration therapy, Kenzie also receives intensive schooling in a classroom setting.

A second grader, Kenzie now attends a "life skills class" at Geneva Elementary in Bellingham. Approximately five other students are in her class, ranging from kindergarten to fifth grade, with a variety of disabilities. At Geneva, Kenzie has progressed to learning skills such as cooking and math.

On Mondays and Wednesdays she is briefly integrated into a regular second-grade class. The entire class walks Kenzie from her classroom to its room for an unstructured 15-minute visit. Further integration is something many parents and professionals push for, but not Richardson.


"I'm not into making my kid something she's not," Richardson says. "She belongs in the program she's in. That's where she is going to learn the most."

Leaving McNutt's, Walters suggests ice cream at McDonald's next and Kenzie throws a tantrum. She knows trains are next on the schedule and no sabotage attempt will be tolerated. Kenzie climbs awkwardly into the back seat, energy level down a notch, and fusses over her seatbelt.

While the average person can adjust to deviation from a day's schedule, change is a nightmare for children with autism.

Some experts place the blame on the Limbic system of the brain, which is in control of emotions and the basic ability to deal with abstraction. That region of the brain isn't





formed normally in children with autism, McNutt says.

Trust is the key to making children with autism comfortable and more flexible.

"Now that I have gained Kenzie's trust I sabotage her schedule on a regular basis. I offer options, such as having chips instead of a cookie, to slowly make her adjust to small changes in her schedule," Walters says.

Seemingly isolated from the world around them and expressionless, conversation with an autistic child is typically unheard of. Kenzie, however, has a tremendous verbal understanding, McNutt says.

"Train!" Kenzie shouts repeatedly, each time receiving confirmation from Walters that they will see trains by her home.

"Oh my, Kenzie — look," Walters says, excitedly pointing toward the tracks as they exit the freeway.

A volcano of anticipation bubbles inside Kenzie as she looks forward to seeing a train. Finally, it boils over; eyes red and watery, face blushed hot with excitement, she watches as a train slowly creeps across the road.

"Are the trains moving?" Walters asks.

"Na," Kenzie answers, using her word for yes.

The black and white guards blocking the road rise behind the caboose, allowing cars to cross the tracks. Kenzie

twists in her seat, straining to see the last of the train pass behind the thick line of trees lining the tracks.

When Walters' tiny red car finally pulls up to Kenzie's olive-green home in Blaine, Kenzie hops out and chases her aging, orange, long-haired cat Jackson up the driveway.

Understanding consequences, part of abstract thought, is something Kenzie struggles with. She doesn't think that she can hurt animals, people or herself.

"She doesn't have reality versus pretend down yet," Walters says.

"If she pushes a swing in front of her she doesn't realize it will come back and clobber her," McNutt says.

"Losing her balance, she is terrified, but she doesn't realize that losing her balance could hurt her," McNutt explains further. "She is like a 2-year-old. There is a belief that someone will be there to catch them."

Richardson arrives home after a full day of work, collapses into a chair and discusses the day's events with Walters.

"It has been a chore from day one," Richardson says, yawning. "Including my husband, I have six kids."

Actually, the family consists of three girls — Kenzie, 7, Riyan, 4, Makahenna, 2 and Kristina, along with Judd, her husband. Walters, although willing to help, gladly leaves behind this full load of responsibilities as she says her good-byes and heads home for the night.

A cure is the dream of anyone suffering from a disease or disorder of this magnitude, but in the case of autism it is an unreasonable expectation.

Some parents and professionals experiment with controversial methods such as hormones and special diets.

"If injecting pig fat is proven to be a cure, yeah, I'm going to go for it," Kristina says sarcastically. There is definitely a line she won't cross.


Kenzie is not cured, but has pushed far beyond the typical limitations of autism.

"I'm not sure if I would give her the diagnosis of autism anymore," McNutt says.

The diagnosis remains, however, so she can receive the care that continues to help her progress.

"What will buy her a lot is her perky social attitude on top of it all," McNutt says, confident that Kenzie will continue to make gains.

Although McNutt predicts Kenzie will never live independently, reasonable expectations for the future include assisted work and limited language skills.

A cure for autism is not on the horizon, but these goals are something for Kenzie and other children with autism something for which to strive. 





In the day-to-day life of the working world, the weekend is the reward most people look forward to — a time to relax, let one's hair down or cut loose at a favorite watering hole. At The Royal in downtown Bellingham, the festivities start early. Thursday night at nine, to be exact, when the bar sells its ever-popular 50-cent well drinks.

Thursday night, also known as “college night,” is one of the hottest tickets in town. Hundreds of drinking-age students flood into The Royal between 9 and 10 p.m., when the well drinks are cheap.

The room is dimly lit, the only light coming from clear light bulbs hanging from the ceiling and rays of alternating colored light blinking over the nearby dance floor.

A young woman in a hot pink tank top reaches the front of the line.

“What can I get you?” asks Stan Czajkowski, a bartender at The Royal.

“Can I have a cranberry vodka, please?” she shouts over the sounds of Ricky Martin’s “Shake Your Bon Bon.”

For bartenders like Czajkowski, a Thursday night entails much more than simply getting ready for a night of fun and letting loose.

“We call downstairs here the romper room because it gets so packed,” he says. “The music in here is so loud, and there are so many people screaming at you, it’s hard to get the right drinks made quickly.”

Czajkowski, who has been a bartender for nearly 10 years, said he stumbled upon the profession while looking for a well-paying job during school.

“The hours are very conducive to school and the money was better than working at the mall,” he says while pouring rum and Coke into a clear plastic cup.

While many bartenders would find this fast pace challenging, they realize it is one of the aspects of service that customers have come to expect.

Western student Noel Norsworthy, 22, says The Royal is her favorite place to go on Thursday because of the bartenders.

“The bartenders are much more personable at The Royal,” she says as she orders a drink. “They don’t just throw your beer at you and tell you to get out. They’re quick, but not too quick.”

Senior Jennifer Wells, 21, agrees. “I don’t want to wait in line for 20 minutes just to order a cheap drink.” She points to Czajkowski and says, “This guy is pretty fast and he makes good drinks.”

From a customer’s perspective, bartenders have fun-yet-detailed jobs. One perk bartenders enjoy is viewing Thursday night behavior from an outside perspective.

Tom Stancampiano, also a bartender at The Royal, laughs hysterically while popping the top of a Budweiser.





In a blur of motion, Stan serves out the 50¢ wells.

# the royal treatment

Drinking and college go together like ... well, drinking and college. **Kacee Gradl** spends a night on the other side of the bar for a look at the glamorous reality of bartending in Bellingham. Photos by Angela D. Smith.

"If you are going to get some girls, you need a better pick-up line than that," he says as he hands the beer to a guy at the bar.

"Did you hear that guy's line?" Stancampiano asks a waitress. "He goes, 'Haven't I met you before? No wait, that must have been in my dreams,'" he says in a half laughing, half sarcastic tone.

"Drunk guys give the worst pickup lines. I have heard some that sucked so bad they were funny," he says.

Like many bartenders, Stancampiano and Czajkowski like to people-watch from behind the bar.

"You get to see all different kinds of people," Czajkowski said. "Really preppy guys who walk in wearing sweater vests and talking on their cell phones. They want to seem all cool, but then plop down 50 cents in nickels. That's so stupid.

Thursday nights are not all fun and games, however.

Out from around the corner, a muscular man wearing a black shirt reading Royal Security appears and grabs an obviously intoxicated man by the arm and asks him to leave the building.

"I'm not ready to go, man. I want another beer," the man slurs.

The security man grabs the customer by both arms and practically carries him through the crowded walkway to the front door and escorts him outside.

One negative and fairly frequent aspect of Thursday nights is over-serving.

Kathy Schuppel, general manager of The Royal, says bartenders have serious responsibility when it comes to the law.

"We have a job to do. A lot of students don't know that the law has limits to how much we can serve in a time limit," she says referring to the customer who was just escorted out.

"Bartenders and establishments can get fined up to \$1,500 for over service," she says.

"It's nothing personal to be cut off. It is really a safety issue for us," Czajkowski adds.

When a customer is asked to leave The Royal, they are escorted outside and told not to come back in. The establishment does not take responsibility for finding that person a ride home.

"We can't take care of all our customers," Schuppel says. "When they exit our doors, either by choice or are escorted out, they are no longer our

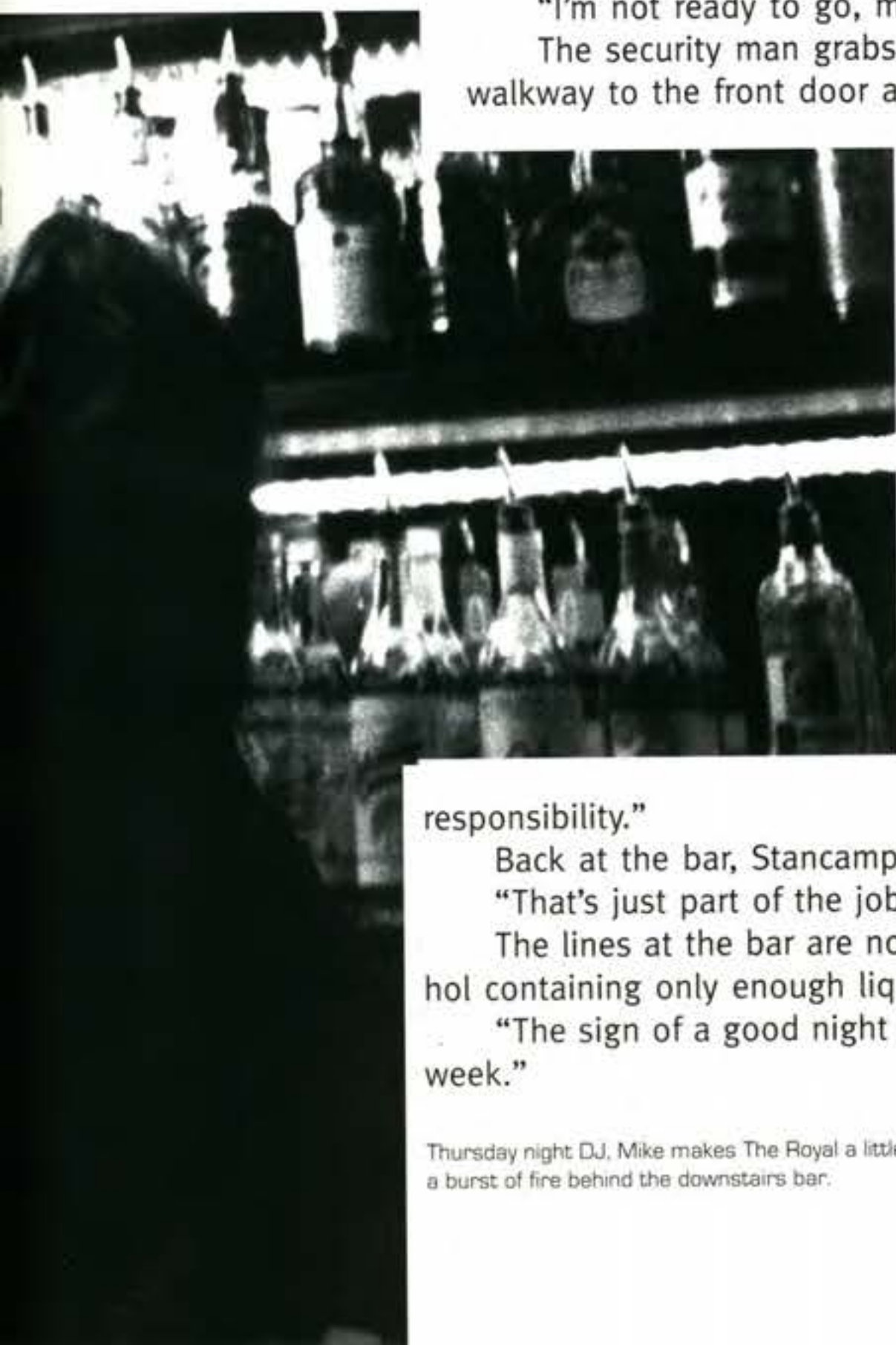
responsibility."

Back at the bar, Stancampiano seems unfazed by the incident.

"That's just part of the job," he says shrugging his shoulders. "It happens more than you would think."

The lines at the bar are now getting shorter and the dance floor has started to thin out. Bottles of alcohol containing only enough liquor to fill the bottom of a cup are all that are left now.

"The sign of a good night is empty bottles," Stancampiano explains. "Now we get to do it all again next week."



Thursday night DJ, Mike makes The Royal a little more personable as he blows a burst of fire behind the downstairs bar.

# night Games

Forget the pen and paper days of Dungeons & Dragons, these gamers take role playing up a notch.

**Shannon Ward** enters the dark and mysterious world of live-action role playing.

Photos by Daniel J. Peters



A gamer's fear of evil vampires forces her to flee Eric Pope in his mad doctor character.



Two suave vampires, Steve Rogers and Kristin Wenzel, converse about art and business.



A gamer takes a break to have a smoke outside Bond hall.

As Naydene Hays steps through the front doors of Godfather's Pizza Thursday night to begin her five-hour shift, her emotions are on fire. If anyone rubs her the wrong way, she'll snap. With a 21-credit load at Western and a 30-hour-per-week job delivering pizzas, she is a walking time bomb. But tomorrow evening she will be in a different world. Hays will be among 40-plus supernatural creatures like herself, playing "the game." In the warm safe haven of Bond Hall, she will become someone else. This Naydene Hays will have no problems, no worries.

On Friday and Saturday nights, Hays and other members of Live-Action, Role-Playing Storyteller, or SPRAL, the backwards acronym, act out their stress and aggressions by becoming vampires, ghouls and werewolves. The members of the Associated Students club at Western take on the role of supernatural creatures in a context or society that someone else has created and turning it into a game. The background is given by the storyteller under general guidelines outlined by White Wolf, a company that publishes rulebooks for role playing. The game is similar to improvising a play with nothing but knowledge of the background and motivations of the character one has created. Like a grown-up version of make-believe, these games help a person remember when, as a child, one played cowboys and Indians or held imaginary tea parties.

While some people exercise, read a book or take a drive to the mountains to relieve stress, SPRAL members spend a couple evenings each week as a different character.

"It's mostly cathartic," Hays, 23, says. "After a week of working hard to get good grades, we can let out our anger and stress."

Tiff De Vul, 19, joined the 6-year-old role-playing group at Western about a year ago. As a teacher's aide and teaching fellow with 400 papers to grade each week and a 23-credit load at Western, De Vul thought that besides relieving stress, SPRAL would be a fun way to meet people. She was more than a little leery at first, however.

"I didn't know what live-action role-playing was at first," De Vul says.

"When they said they were vampires, I thought, 'Do they bite each other, or what?' I used to work at the public health department — that whole blood thing really freaks me out."



Chris Pollock sizes up the competition.



Interacting with other gamers makes up a large part of role-playing's popularity.



**“You figure there’s one vampire to every 100,000 regular people. If people knew a vampire existed, he would be found out.”**

De Vault eased her worries by having her 6-foot-8-inch male friend accompany her to the games for the first month-and-a-half she participated.

“I was scared,” De Vault says. “I just didn’t know what to expect.”

At 6:30 p.m., members leisurely gather in the “out of game” room, Bond Hall 112. Dark-haired, pale-skinned men and women in their upper teens to mid 20s carry on multiple conversations at once. Many are discussing their characters.

Linsey Pollack, 21, is playing a card dealer tonight. She contemplates her character’s phobias and skills.

“You could have a phobia of foreign languages, because then you would assume people were talking about you,” De Vault says to Pollack. “Your skill could be biotechnology. Then you could make a translator and they couldn’t talk about you in a foreign language.”

Around 7 p.m., SPRAL members gradually begin filing out of Room 112 and into Room 105, the “in game” room, or the Elysium. Here, characters imagine they are in a local nightclub in Bellingham.

The characters imagine people are fighting, talking business or perhaps socializing amongst themselves. Outside the brightly-lit nightclub — Bond Hall to passersby — characters chat while enjoying a cigarette.

Behind the club in the shadows, a figure crouches over an imaginary laptop screen and furiously types. A man crouches beside her and quietly argues, trying to convince her of something as she blatantly ignores him.

“Okay, I have five points for computers,” she says to the male character. “I’m going to try to hack into the security systems of the nightclub.”

She performs what is called a “simple test” — rock-paper-scissors — with the male figure, the storyteller. The simple test is basically a replacement for dice that would be used in a table-top role-playing game such as Dungeons & Dragons, and it determines if she will achieve what she is after.

She produces rock, he produces paper. She tries again. Each failure means 15 minutes of trying in the game world. She finally succeeds on the third try. The storyteller describes what she sees and what is accessible through the system.

“An imaginary bright light flashes across the screen,” he says.

Both characters utter shrill exclamations before scanning their surroundings to make certain they haven’t been heard.



The Camarilla leadership meet to discuss clan politics

They bend over the computer screen — the club’s security system is hacked.

“I know they’re vampires,” she insists. They begin to argue again.

Two figures emerge, their fingers crossed, indicating they are “out-of-game.” The characters, male and female, describe themselves. She imagines she is strolling gracefully along the sidewalk arm in arm with the man, who is well-dressed. The male character leaves.

The woman explains, “We walk off together, and once we get beyond the range of vision, you hear a ‘pop.’ My character emerges from the wall and walks back inside.”

The male and female characters at the computer stop as they hear the faint “pop” from behind the door near to them. They can hear the woman walking off in the distance, but here she is standing in the room with them.

“What the — ?” the man and woman shriek.

The storyteller, with his fingers crossed indicating he is out of game, poses the question, “What do you do now?”

For members of SPRAL, the question of what to do next is constantly in the mind while playing the game. Quick thinking and improvisation replace a script and players need to know every detail and thought pattern of their character in order to determine how they would should react in certain situations.

For this reason character development is the most tedious part of the game. Each member develops his or her own character after the storyteller gives an overview of the world the characters will be a part of. The group members listen intently to the storyteller, envisioning who they want to be for the game. Then they complete character sheets, which include physical, mental and social traits — positive or negative — as well as abilities, disciplines, backgrounds and health conditions. Members create character profiles in detail, delving deep into the character’s flaws, such as phobias, allergies and abilities, including anything from the ability to play the violin to the ability to speak several foreign languages.

“My character has a phobia of bonds and doctors,” De Vault says.

In one game, a character played a doctor and De Vault had to stay away from him.

“It just puts you into a frenzy — you act like you’re scared of your phobias and you stay away from them,” De Vault says.

Friday night’s game revolves around the Camarilla vampires. Not the conventional “bad guy” vampires, the Camarilla are highly social and political. They struggle with the conflict of wanting to be good — but they are vampires. Financial gain and a comfortable lifestyle are important elements to the Camarilla. They keep to themselves, and they don’t want others to know they exist.



Wenzel's character belongs to an art appreciating, passion-driven clan of vampires.



Pope crosses his fingers using an out of game sign to discuss tactics while his second in command Erin Johnson looks on.



As a gargoye, Pollock spends much of his game time lurking.

"You figure there's one vampire to every 100,000 regular people," Hays says. "If people knew a vampire existed, he would be found out."

The Camarilla vampires don't believe the ancient kindred still exist. However, Saturday nights the Sabbat group strives to defend the vampire society from the ancient kindred by preventing the awakening of these creatures. The Sabbats don't bother trying to be good. Evil by human standards, these vampires' primary concern is acknowledging what they are and living as what they are, Saturday's storyteller Bjorn Townsend, 21, says.

The most recent Sabbat game just ended after continuing for two years, and a new game is in the making.

De Vul's character for the Friday night Camarilla game is Anya Ekaterina, a woman who is high-society, multi-lingual, gorgeous and loyal. As to beauty, the character is a three on a five-point scale.

"This means 'wow,' you are really a beautiful woman," De Vul says. "Not that I think this in real life, it's just the character. If she had five points, the maximum for physical traits, she would be the most beautiful woman in the world."

Anya doesn't sport the stereotypical supernatural creatures' garb - black leather, fish net shirts and trench coats.

"She always dresses nicely," De Vul says. "If I wandered in wearing shorts and a tank top, it just wouldn't look right."

De Vul inserts two fangs, molded specifically to fit her teeth, onto two of her upper teeth.

"I like to wear fangs - they just help me get into character," De Vul says. "Not everyone buys them - they're about \$40 to \$60."

This can get pretty costly when one adds in the cost of the dental visit to have them molded.

Dressing the part of one's character isn't required, but it can be essential to getting into character for the game.

Townsend has played Kesper Ravenswood-North, a British aristocrat, for the last year and a quarter. This wealthy 19th-century character is a vampire of Clan Tremere, a clan that practices magic and studies the occult. Ravenswood-North dresses in elegant attire that converges between modern and 19th century fashions. Dressed in a waistcoat with a pocket watch, a banded shirt and a dark trench coat, he immediately falls into character.

"When I have these clothes on, I straighten up, cock my nose in the air and speak with a British accent," Townsend says.

Some members of SPRAL explore their own personalities when creating characters by taking a small aspect of their own personality and amplifying it.

"I always try to play a part of me, whether it's the mean part of me that wants to kick the shit out of someone, or just vent my

stress," Casey Craig, 19, says.

Although Craig doesn't consider himself a mean person, he does have his moments. Too much time spent studying Political Science 360, Physics 114 and Macroeconomics 207 arouses his frustration level.

Just as in acting, frustrations from personal issues outside the game have to stay out of the game, and in-game grudges stay in the game.

"I can be totally pissed off at Bjorn's character, but I don't take it out of this room," Craig says.

When "in game," anger is never expressed by actual physical assaults. According to game rules, players use the "simple test" as an outlet instead of punching another player. For example, if one character says, "I punch you," and the other character says, "I dodge you," rock-paper-scissors determines who prevails. If the test ends in a tie and the character that wants to dodge the other has a trait such as "graceful," that character would triumph because of his or her movement ability.

In an effort to put the game in the real world and maintain a player's presence, some members change costumes - and characters, during a game.

"Last week my character was leaving town, and the game was only halfway over," Hays says. "Since I had time, I still wanted to role play, so I came back in jeans as another character."

Each character earns one point per week to go toward any type of trait, unless that character is nominated for "exceptional role playing" that week. He or she then has the advantage of adding another trait to his or her character sheet.

Nick York, 20, was nominated for exceptional role playing during a game in which characters were descendants of a group of animals that lived in a sewer. These animals were too grotesque to rise from the sewers.

"I had an Alka-Seltzer tablet in my pocket," York says. "I put some water in my mouth when I thought the time was right, and I foamed at the mouth."

For these people, the stress of pizza delivery, paper grading, teaching, 400-level classes, and an insane number of credits are washed down with the blood they feign to drink on Friday and Saturday nights.





ANYTIME

ANYWHERE



Whether you're plastered, smashed or sober and lacking an automobile, Bevis the taxi driver is there in a moment's notice. **Marc Fenton** gets behind the wheel with one of Bellingham's most interesting, most requested drivers. Photos by Daniel J. Peters.

He is requested on a nightly basis. People know him wherever he goes. He's got female groupies of all ages who are willing to trade sexual favors for his service. Drugs and alcohol make their presence known around him 12 hours a day, six nights a week. The life of a rock star? Famous Hollywood actor? Professional athlete? Guess again.

Welcome to a night in the life of Bellingham taxicab driver Robert Berwick.

Berwick, better known as Bevis in the taxicab community, has been driving for Yellow Cab since 1994.

"I'm the most requested cab driver, so I get to meet a lot of people — people of all different walks of life," Berwick said. "I love my job."

Berwick, who was tagged with the nickname Bevis when he first began working at Yellow Cab, is no stranger to the business. He chauffeured for several years in Europe during the late 1980s, followed by a year-and-a-half stint at Superior Cab, a company that has since folded.

During Berwick's six years at Yellow Cab, he has seen it all. One after the other, the stories have accumulated. Stories of back seat romance. Stories of back seat upchuck and of passengers who are drunk and high.

Berwick, who is single, currently drives the graveyard shift. He wouldn't have it any other way.

"Nights are harder on you, but I have more fun," he says. "You're not doing the laundry run or driving two blocks to and from the grocery store helping with groceries. Plus, you meet some really interesting people."

Driving the graveyard shift has its drawbacks, however. Berwick says he never knows what state of mind the passengers will be in.

At times, Berwick feels an obligation beyond driving his passengers from point A to point B in his yellow 1992 Chevrolet Caprice.

"This one time I picked up a guy who was high as a kite," Berwick, 55, recalls. "He hopped in the back seat with these two pillows, one underneath each arm, and told me he wanted to go out to Chuckanut," he says, pausing momentarily to listen to the Yellow Cab dispatcher.

It's 10:04 p.m. on Friday. Berwick is a little more than four hours into his 12-hour shift. So far, he has made various trips that have included going to Bellingham International Airport, as well as Squalicum High School for the homecoming football game. The night is still young.

Berwick quickly responds to the dispatcher, then continues.

"The whole way out there he was talking to the pillows. He said they were Martians. About halfway out there, he looked at his pillows and said, 'We're going to go out to Chuckanut and kill ourselves.'

"Right away, I turned the cab around and took him home. I didn't want to have something like that on my conscience. You don't know what they're going to do on drugs."

This wasn't the only time Berwick was forced to babysit one of his passengers.

He recalls the night he picked up a new bartender at a bar in downtown Bellingham.

"As I begin to pull off, I notice in the rearview mirror that he was throwing up all over the back seat. So I pulled over and told him that he needed to clean it up. It was either clean it up or pay \$50," he says.

"I knew he felt really bad about it, because he took off his shirt and used it to clean up the mess. It had to be pretty humbling for him."

As far as romance in the cab, there's plenty of that to go around — even for Berwick.

"Some of the girls want to exchange a ride for sexual favors,"



he says. "Every once in a while they like to flash you. That still doesn't pay the bills, though."

Regardless, Berwick is still entertained by his following of groupies.

"The other day I picked up these two girls," Berwick says. "They were going to a party and definitely dressed like it. One of them was a dancer. The whole way there, they were talking dirty to me. One of them kept telling me she had a new tattoo on her butt. On top of that, she said she wasn't wearing any underpants. She started telling me she was going to show me."

"Well, we get to the party and she pays, gets out of the cab and comes right over to my window. She lifts up the back end of her skirt and shows me her tattoo. It kind of shocked me. Let's just say she wasn't lying when she said she wasn't wearing any underpants."

After telling this story, Berwick simply rolls his eyes and laughs it off, knowing that it goes with the territory. He leans back into the driver's seat and adjusts his pine green and white Green Bay Packers hat so it fits snug on his head. He adjusts his glasses.

After passing the Royal, Berwick receives a call from the Yellow Cab dispatcher to make a pick-up at the Waterfront Tavern on Holly Street.

Berwick finishes his conversation with the dispatcher, hangs up, and continues down Holly, closer to the Waterfront Tavern.

Once again, Berwick adjusts his position in the seat. At 6 feet 2 inches, he is not a small man. His 220-pound frame is fairly large, yet not intimidating.

Berwick is dressed as if it's a night on the town with his

buddies. He is wearing ragged jeans with a couple small tears near his thighs. A light, sleeveless fleece covers his white T-shirt. Keeping his wallet in place is a long silver chain attached to the front of his jeans.

Berwick tugs on the bill of his hat and continues.

"One thing that isn't funny is when people don't pay," he says, suddenly changing the topic of conversation. "I could probably wallpaper my house with all the bad checks I've gotten."

He shakes his head and continues.

"One time I picked up a woman on Holly Street," he says. "It was obvious she had been drinking. Anyways, I took her to her destination and dropped her off. She gets out and doesn't want to pay. I keep telling her she has to pay, but she just kind of wanders off. Well, I know where she is going, so I keep the meter running and call the police."

A slight grin begins to emerge from Berwick's face

"The police show up, hog tie the woman and throw her in the back of the police car. I eventually got the money," he says, bursting out laughing.

Just another night on the job for Berwick.

It's 10:07 p.m. Berwick pulls up in front of the Waterfront.

He slips out of the car, runs inside the restaurant and calls out for the passenger. The passenger takes a few minutes to get ready, so Berwick uses the unusual spare time to use the restroom.

Eventually, the man is ready and Berwick drives him to a house on James Street.

After the drop-off, Berwick acknowledges another pick-up at the Valu-Inn on Lakeway Drive. The night has been steady, but not hectic.

"The time usually goes by pretty fast," says Berwick,



looking at the clock, which reads 10:15 p.m. "You get so busy racing around, picking people up, meeting people, stuff like that. So the night goes by fast."

With all of the different types of people, conversations and adventures he has encountered, Berwick is immune to just about anything.

"Bevis is calm, cool and collected," said Ryan Porter, 23, a senior at Western who frequently requests Berwick on weekends. "He can have some drunk babbling in his ear all the way to or from the bar, and it doesn't bother him. He's a real people-person. He'll talk about anything with you - sports, women or music."

Porter would get no argument from Western senior Matt Conneway, who also frequently requests Berwick.

"You can tell he loves his job and enjoys being around people," Conneway, 23, said. "We've requested him quite a few times on Thursday nights when we go out. He always makes the ride to the bars a lot more interesting with some of the stories he tells. He's an amusing guy to be around."

For Berwick, the feeling is mutual for the college students.

"They're really entertaining," he says, "They're a lot of fun, just as long as they can tell me the address of where they're going, and they can stay conscious. I've had ones hop in and not be real sure where they're going. They'll say, 'go this way and I'll tell you.' I'll ask them what street they want and they'll sometimes respond, 'uh, uh ... I don't know, don't you know?' It's usually because they're wasted."

"Some of them don't even remember the next day when I pick them up again," he adds. "They're good people, though."

Although Berwick loves his job, the long and busy days take their toll. Taxicab driving is by no means a typical nine-to-five job. Berwick's shift begins at 6 p.m. and ends around 6 a.m. Berwick puts in 70-plus hour weeks, Monday through Saturday.

"I don't even have time to go to the bathroom," he says. "I eat dinner on the run. I like the graveyard shift, but my body can never get used to those hours."

"On Sundays, my day off, I like to watch football. In that case, I'll get off at 6 a.m., sleep until about 10 a.m. and then go down to the Quarterback and have a couple beers. After that, I'm completely worn out. I'm exhausted. I lose a lot of sleep."

Berwick rounds the corner onto Harris Avenue. in Fairhaven. He drops off a couple of young men at Anna's Caddyshack. He collects his money and pulls off.

"I drove into a bad neighborhood to pick somebody up from a party," Berwick says. "Apparently the people throwing the party were playing a joke on one of their friends and told

him that some gang-bangers called and said they were coming over."

He pauses momentarily to listen to the radio dispatcher. The dispatcher asks the taxicab nearest to Bellingham International Airport to pick up a passenger.

"Ah, I'll just let Chester get that one," Berwick says.

Berwick glances at the clock, which reads 10:41 p.m. He cracks a window for some fresh air and continues.

"So, I go up to the door and knock," Berwick recalls. "The door opens and I've got this shotgun lowered at me. Meanwhile, everybody at the party is laughing while this guy has the gun pointed at me. It was a bad joke. That really pissed me off. I should have called the police."

Taxicab drivers and chauffeurs face the highest on-the-job homicide rate of any occupation. Roughly 18 per 100,000 workers in these occupations were killed last year, about 36 times the risk among all employed persons, according to The Editor's Desk monthly labor review.

In the end, however, it's all worthwhile for Berwick.

"I get a lot of benefits from this job," he said. "I get to know a lot of passengers that I drive. They develop a trust with me. I've had a lot of ladies offer to make me dinner. Even at some of the bars, especially The Royal, I get a lot of free drinks because I get to know the bartenders from driving them home all the time."

The radio dispatcher again interrupts Berwick. "I need a pick-up on Valencia."

"I got it," Berwick replies after listening for the house address.

He turns down the radio and resumes.

"Like I said, this job has a lot of benefits, but the best part of it is, I get to help people. I love to help people. If giving somebody a ride somewhere is helping them out in some way or the other, I feel really good about myself."

Clearly, Berwick loves his job.

Clearly, Yellow Cab loves the fact Berwick is working for them.

"He's very reliable," said Deb Logan, CEO of Yellow Cab. "I can trust him with anything. He's competent, reliable and he's got a great perspective. He's a great guy to be working the night shift. He's got such a great sense of humor. Everybody likes Bevis."

"I've got a lot of respect for anyone who drives that shift. It's a tough job."

Every day Berwick goes to work, he is entertained by amusing conversation, hit on by beautiful women and offered enticing benefits. He watches people get arrested. He deals with drunks, druggies and, according to some, Martians.

Just another night in the life of taxicab driver Bob "Bevis" Berwick.





# DEAD ALIVE

While the process of turning dead animals into trophies, rugs and drums may seem creepy to some, for Ralph Akers it's just a day's work. **Melissa Evavold** journeys into Akers' workshop to witness the transformation. Photos by Daniel J. Peters.

A three-foot-tall stuffed buffalo head sways slowly on a hinged post above his desk. With a small knife in hand and a meticulous eye, Ralph Akers carefully cuts out the cartilage from a mountain lion's eye sockets.

Akers, 45, is a taxidermist working in faded, well-loved blue jeans, a worn gray T-shirt and a muted red and black flannel shirt.

In the foyer, the air smells like wet deer — a lingering animal odor reminiscent of a petting zoo. The smell is a thick scent of rot and dust, unfamiliar and pungent. A colorful arrangement of American Indian wood carvings hangs between two dinner plate-sized Puget Sound king crabs, one bright orange and one purple, mounted on circular plaques. Around the corner, a two-foot-tall stuffed bald eagle is poised high upon a glass case, beak open and feathers raised. Next to it, a grizzly bear standing on its hind legs towers high above the floor. A tangled pile of more than 50 antlers lies on the hardwood floor beneath stuffed deer heads with blank stares. A chimpanzee, larger than most first-graders and donated from a Seattle zoo, hangs from a gym ring on the wall. The shop is crowded with more animals than people. In fact, at 10:30 no one is there.

A sign reads: "It's a good place to shop but not shoplift."





Just right of the displayed animals is Akers' work area. Unfinished wooden work tables and shelves of tools crowd the smaller room; a thin layer of what looks like sawdust covers the floor. A white refrigerator is covered in Far Side hunting jokes delivered religiously by a UPS driver. Beneath that, an average-sized cardboard box spills over with small animal skins.

Akers' workplace is contained in the walls of a bold, red, 105-year-old building located at 1303 Astor St. Akers said that, as a child, he would watch his father stuff animals in this same building, which once belonged to the Baptist Industrial School in 1895. His father started this business more than 50 years ago and passed it on to his talented son.

In the room where he is working on the mountain lion, a talk radio station full of static crackles in the corner. On a table, a pile of little sky-blue marble eyes stare out of a half of a soup can labeled "coon eyes." Here in Akers' shop the procedure of taxidermy takes place from start to finish.

Taxidermy is a process of preparing an animal hide, stuffing it and making it look realistic by shaping the animal's skin or fur.

Akers doesn't just stuff deer heads or make coonskin caps; he said they sell more leather and rawhide.

The mountain lion, Akers' current project, is being cleaned and de-fleshed.

"I'm going to prepare the skin in such a way that once it's off, it's clean and won't degrade. At some future point I can tan it, get it washed and ready to go," Akers says. In this case, the mountain lion will be a rug.

"When you peel the skin off an animal, all kinds of stuff is stuck to it," Akers explains, "like bits of fat, flesh and semipermeable membranes."

Akers says he has to excise the membrane so the skin of the animal will absorb whatever chemistry is

**"Most people hunt for meat. We end up with tons of meat here. It's available to us because other people don't eat bobcats — we do."**

involved in whatever he's doing to it. When our hands come in contact with gasoline, he says, we have a protective layer that keeps our hands from absorbing it. In relation to an animal,

that membrane needs to be cut or abraded off the skin, a process called de-fleshing.

Akers explains different ways to de-flesh an animal. One way is by machine that resembles a circular saw blade; another way is by hand with a knife.

"By hand I should be able to do a goat in 10-15 minutes," Akers says.

An animal is not really stuffed; the skin is placed on a cast he creates with molds or orders from a catalog. The casts are made from fiberglass or foam. When taxidermy first began, taxidermists used papier-mâché. Once the cast is created, the eyes and the teeth are placed on the mold. Akers reaches into a gray toolbox on his desk and pulls out a glass deer eye. It's brown and glossy around the edges with a deep black pupil. The next part of the process involves the skin.

"For skin I usually make a slow-acting glue that helps the skin slide around," Akers says.

A black bear head and torso are drying in a position with the bear's mouth open in a growl, showing a rubber tongue and plastic teeth. The bear's arms are outstretched, showing its claws. Once in position, Akers will shampoo and add highlights to the fur. Then he'll paint parts of the animal that may have lost pigment, such as the nose, around the eyes and the pads of the feet. The total taxidermy price for a bear is nearly \$600. Once the mountain lion is finished, Akers will have spent 16-20 hours of work from start to finish. Akers will charge \$125 per foot for his services.

Most people will pay with cash, check or credit cards, but Akers says that he'll do trades, like a half a cow, for his services.

Besides taxidermy, another line of work takes place on the second story of the big red building. That's where Gary DeZarn, 49, has been making drums for Akers for 12 years. Akers' shop is one of the few places where one can get drums made in this area.

"We're pretty much the only people doing this," DeZarn says. His long, dark ponytail aside, DeZarn resembles a shop teacher in royal blue coveralls splattered with glue.

During a good year, Akers and DeZarn sell 4,000 to 5,000 drums in Washington, Alaska and Canada. The drums all are handmade by DeZarn.

"The frames or hoops are hand-rolled fir



vener, 1/16 inches thick. Roll them up on molds and use lots of glue," he says pointing to himself. "As you can see there's glue all over me."

Next, DeZarn will put fresh, wet deer hide over the hoops and lace it onto the frame. DeZarn can make a 14-inch drum in an hour.

DeZarn holds up the drum. The deer hide, tight across the frame, is the color of honey and smooth, feeling like hard plastic to the touch. He gives it a couple heavy taps with his fingertips and a loud boom reverberates in the air. DeZarn says this drum costs \$55 wholesale, but the retail price can be double or more.

**"By hand I should be able to do a goat in 10-15 minutes."**

"There're certain things that we do here that are really obscure," Akers says. For example, Akers and DeZarn are the only people in the nation who make Yupik stomach drums.

"Then again, who needs a Yupik stomach drum?" Akers says laughing.

Many people from Alaska want this kind of drum. The drum originally was made from a walrus stomach, now it is made with buffalo or cow. It's for religious purposes or decoration.

Drums, trophies and rugs are not the only products of Akers' and DeZarn's work. They also make meals of the animals.

"Most people hunt for meat. We end up with tons of meat here. It's available to us because other people don't eat bobcats — we do," Akers says bluntly.

Along with cougar, bear and mountain lion, there are no constraints about eating anything you can hunt, Akers says.

"You've got to try it," DeZarn adds with a chuckle.

"Throw it in a crockpot," DeZarn says of cooking bobcat. "Elk stew, you know, is really good; deer tastes the best."

Although they are constantly working with and preparing hunting trophies, neither Akers nor DeZarn hunt. "Weekend comes, I don't want to see any animals. You have to have a break," Akers says.

Akers' work can be seen at the Brazil Interpretive Center, the Whatcom County Museum of History and Art, the Ferndale school district and even on Western's campus in the Science Lecture Hall. On the first floor in the back entrance a pheasant, an owl and a bobcat, to name a few, are displayed in a tall glass case.

Though taxidermy is a fine art to some and a profession to Akers and DeZarn, some people have negative views about it.

"I think that most students at Western would be shocked to see a dead bobcat stuffed — you know that it was obviously caught in pain," says Margy Morris, coordinator of Western Animal Rights Network. W.A.R.N. is a 3-year-old group on campus that primarily focuses on vegan outreach, animal rights and other aspects of activism.

Morris says having animals displayed as trophies devalues their inherent worth.

"The use of animals by our culture I don't find acceptable," W.A.R.N. member Michael Shepard said.

Shepard also said, however, the animal rights argument couldn't be solely black and white. The gray area lies in the situation of different cultures and their relationships with animals. Regarding American Indians, Shepard said it is not his place to tell a sovereign group of people their tradition is not valid.

Because he's spent so much time around taxidermy, Akers says his perspective is different from other people's.

He says he recognizes how much waste is at hand when butchering and stuffing an animal.

"We see things from an angle that maybe nobody sees," Akers says.

They see dead animals not as worm-feed, but as something they can make look realistic; they make dead animals look alive again.

So both of them have tried a few species other than chicken and pigs, and they may decorate a little differently. They don't have a cubicle job, but it's a lifestyle that is normal to them, and they take it lightheartedly. Akers has skulls in his garden and buffalo skin pillows in his house. DeZarn has a coyote skin on his stereo speakers.

"We never run out of ideas for Christmas presents," DeZarn says.





## in search of the sandman

Frenzied days and sleepless nights are an everyday reality for many students. **Jessica Blair** explores the half-awake state of mind that is insomnia. Photo illustrations by Matt Beechinor.

A bulky ankle brace hugged Jon Parsons' right foot as he stood under the flickering fluorescent lights wearing running pants and a gray sweatshirt at the Barkley Village Haggen cafeteria. Perhaps the aggravated football injury slowing his usual rapid stride down to a sluggish limp was nature's way of telling him to slow down. At 8 p.m., Parsons quietly chatted with a friend as he sipped on a bottle of Lipton Iced Tea.

He appeared as healthy as any other 23-year-old at Western with dark skin and a clear, dewy complexion. His eyes were far from bloodshot. No one would know from looking at Parsons that he suffers from chronic insomnia — a condition defined as sleeplessness persisting longer than three weeks.

Parsons, a finance major, has battled insomnia for about two years. Studies of insomniacs show that this group is prone to anxiety, stress and perfectionism. He said a fear of failure overwhelms his life.

"I basically try to live two days in one day," Parsons said. "If I have an exam at 10 a.m., I'll wake up at 4, regardless of if I studied or not. For me, six hours is a ton of sleep."

Stress about maintaining his near-perfect GPA is a major

factor to his restlessness, he said. For him, insomnia is a way of life. He works sleep around his schedule, fitting it into gaps when he is not working or studying.

"I used to live off Pepto-Bismol," Parsons said. "I had a lot of anxieties. I'm motivated by failing a lot more than anything else."

Parsons said he never used to believe in sleeping schedules. Now he realizes they are important, but finds it difficult to conform to a schedule that is supposed to be predetermined and inflexible.

"I can't just relax and go to sleep if I have stuff I know I should be doing," he said.

Parsons is able to cope with his on-the-go lifestyle by drinking excessive amounts of coffee to stay awake and downing sedatives in order to sleep. The consequences of trying to live 26 hours in a 24-hour day always seem to catch up to him, he said.

"I'll be super-tired, 'fall asleep when you drive' kinda tired," he said.

Parsons is not alone. An estimated one in three adults in the United States suffers from lack of sleep annually.

The problem also is rampant at Western, said Dr. Emily Gibon, the university's medical director. About one in 10 students have insomnia at any given time, she said. Most suffer from acute insomnia, which lasts only two weeks or less. Most student complaints of insomnia come during midterm and finals weeks.

"It's an extremely common complaint," Gibon said. "A lot of people get really upset about it. I try to help them put

it in perspective. This happens to almost everybody at some point."

To discover the cause of students' insomnia, the Student Health Assessment and Information Center (SHAIC) screens for stimulant use and depression. Stimulants are found in cola, coffee and tea and in non-prescription drugs such as Dristan, Midol and Excedrin.

Another stimulant, nicotine, is a potent drug that has powerful effects on quality of sleep. Smokers tend to fall asleep more slowly, experience less REM sleep and are awake more during the night than non-smokers.

When Parsons visited the doctor's office, he was told to stay away from coffee, but his erratic schedule would not allow it, and so his life, devoid of sleep, continued. Family problems only added stress to his hectic life.

"My parents got divorced a couple years ago, and it got really bad," Parsons said. His doctor prescribed pain medications, but Parsons said he found them troublesome because of morning grogginess.

Insomnia has several different causes and several cures. Alcohol, an often-tried remedy, actually hurts more than it helps. Although students frequently use alcohol as a sleep aid, Gibson warned against that practice. Parsons said he learned about the adverse affects of nightcaps from taking shots of whiskey to get to sleep.

"I used to think for a while that was a solution," Parsons said. "It's definitely not a solution. The sleep you get is very different. It's not good sleep."

Alcohol suppresses REM — deep, dreaming sleep — and possibly other stages of non-REM sleep, according to the book "Getting to Sleep" by Ellen Mohr Catalano.

"It may be effective for that initial falling asleep, but often people will wake up in the middle of the night," Gibson said.

Parsons said he does not know if he will ever get over the urgency to push himself beyond human limitations.

"I plan to go to law school," he said. "There's a certain amount of stress I need to maintain myself. But on the other hand, I won't have anyone to be around if I'm like this all the time."

As his voice softens, it is evident insomnia has affected his personal life and relationships.

"A lot of people I'm close with I don't see for a long time," he said. "It was pretty hard on my last girlfriend. I don't notice how set in these things I am, but it's clear to other people."

Parsons has adapted to living under constant stress, because he has done it for so long. He has managed to control his anger.

"I used to have pretty bad temper problems," he said. "There was a very fine line between snapping or not."

At home, Parsons' presence is witnessed but not usually felt. It seems the evidence of his occupancy is left over, much like personal possessions after someone has died. Reminders of his presence are scattered about the house. Ryan Meyer has been Parsons' roommate since July 1999. Meyer said Parsons' flighty lifestyle often leaves more housework for him.

"He leaves his dishes and shit everywhere," Meyer said.

On an October trip to a car dealership, Parsons and his roommate, Meyer, noticed a stale sandwich in the backseat of the car Parsons was driving to trade in. Parsons attempted to dispose of the food while driving down I-5, but was unsuccessful. Meyer was dismayed.

"It's upside down and it would not come off," Meyer said, laughing. "It was petrified. It did not move."

Meyer understands firsthand the idiosyncrasies that come along with living under the same roof as an insomniac.

"He's got this chair in his room," Meyer said. "It's got to be the oldest, most ancient, rickety thing on earth. I literally have pillows stacked on top of my head to keep from hearing him in his chair at 4 o'clock in the morning."

The good news is, for most people insomnia is transient, which means it is occasional. Gibson said this type is usually brought on by stress. For Parsons, it is not so simple.

It was after 10 p.m. when Parsons' eyelids began to blink more frequently, and he occasionally, but politely glanced at his watch. In the Haggen cafeteria, the lights dimmed as the minutes passed. He was anxious to go to bed and finally get some rest.

"Today I wasn't enjoying it," he said. "I didn't sleep at all last night. Sometimes it's just terrible." ✎



# W A K I N K W

The exchange of power through whips, restraints and buttock slapping is an often-misunderstood side of sexuality. **Jacob Horn** gets a look at the underbelly of bondage, discipline, sadism and masochism. Photos by Daniel J. Peters.

Chains hang down from fist-sized swivel hooks bolted into a black cement ceiling. A whimpering voice repeatedly cries for mercy.

**WHACK.**

Sounds echoing off of the small dungeon's brick walls create the illusion of many tortured voices. The air is thick and moist with a lingering smell of freshly cut leather. Intricate sweat stains circle the two-inch wide leather cuff restraints that dangle freely at the ends of plastic chains. A male voice begs to have his sore back left alone.

**SNAAAAAP!**

A dizzying array of multicolored leather whips drape neatly from the Triskeli Guild member's walls like pictures in a museum. A deep, loud voice booms, instructing the male that he will be punished severely if he speaks out again. The sounds of ropes sliding through pulleys whiz around the room.

**CRACK.**

AC-powered 12-inch-long handheld device that emits an electrical shock when it touches a person's skin.

Because kinky behavior is considered a taboo subject in today's popular culture, practitioners of kink are often labeled as evil or deviant.

Grey appears as unthreatening and approachable as a second grade teacher, with a smile that spans her rounded cheeks. She wears a floral print dress that neatly matches her green velvet hat. Long, chestnut-brown hair spirals down her neck to her lower back. Grey sits erect in her chair, seemingly unconscious of her commanding, upright posture.

Grey maintains well-balanced eye contact, only breaking to glance out the window at the wind-whipped trees. Her chocolate-brown eyes show what she is thinking almost as effec-

**"For me, there is nothing hotter or more fulfilling than the intensely caring relationship that I have with my submissive lover."**

No one is getting tortured here, at least not in the traditional sense. This type of punishment is consensual; both people involved have agreed to the exchange of power that is taking place.

Bondage, Discipline, Sadism and Masochism are four kinds of kinky behavior that Bellingham's Triskeli Guild, a BDSM/Alternative lifestyle organization, members practice or are simply interested in.

"Consent is what differentiates BDSM from any other kind of abuse," instructs Lady Jane Grey, a professional female dominant.

Grey is not her birth name; it is a title she uses within the BDSM community. Grey asked to be identified only by her alternative name to protect herself from possible discrimination. Unfortunately, she might face unwarranted discrimination if her employers knew about her personal lifestyle choices.

Grey describes her personal interests as kinky and refers to kink as any sexual activities that are not accepted by the mainstream public. Kink includes mild practices such as light bondage and spanking to more extreme practices like cutting and blood play.

Some individuals who practice BDSM have extensive collections of props, toys and outfits that they incorporate into their kinky play. One such toy is the Violet Wand, an

tively as her carefully chosen words.

One of the greatest difficulties BDSM practitioners face in their public lives is misinformation the public has about BDSM, Grey said.

The misinformation and misunderstanding surrounding BDSM creates a need for organizations to work to inform and educate interested individuals about the practices of BDSM. One such organization, the Triskeli Guild, has existed in Whatcom County for almost six years.

Grey is one of about 30 active members of the Triskeli Guild, who meets on the second Tuesday of each month at the Fairhaven Park Pavilion.

# THE SYSTEM



"We give people a common place to meet and network," Grey said, "but most importantly, we offer people information and instruction."

Guild members receive a monthly newsletter detailing all the local and national kinky events taking place. Members also utilize a Web-based discussion group that is linked to the Triskeli Guild.

Grey is also vice president of the National Leather Association, a kink group with chapters in every major United States city.

"We invite anyone and any questions at our meetings," Grey said. "We always have a lot of fun when we play with kink."

The Triskeli Guild was established in 1995 and has members from every social class that range in age from 18 to 60.

Grey sits quietly at a table in the window of Tony's Coffee House in downtown Fairhaven. She speaks pleasantly of her job at Western Washington University where she has worked for more than 20 years.

To many of her friends and co-workers, Grey is as ordinary as anyone else who they meet. Grey is open about her lifestyle and said she is willing to discuss it with people who ask her about it.

"I am happy to talk to any students who approach me about my lifestyle, but I do not flaunt my personal interests while I am at work," Grey said.

One of the Triskeli Guild's main focuses is to educate people.

"Abuse is not what BDSM is about — this is a serious misconception," said Master Aaron, vice president of the Triskeli Guild.

Aaron, a male dominant who lives just outside of Bellingham, also asked to be identified only by the name he uses within the BDSM community. Aaron said his boss is very old fashioned and he fears that he would not understand Aaron's kinky lifestyle.

"This is very unfortunate, because my involvement in BDSM has absolutely no connection to my ability to work," Aaron said.

Aaron said he has been involved in the BDSM lifestyle for nine years.

He describes himself as "a normal, heterosexual male who loves the intensity and passion of BDSM."

Aaron, 38, is lean and physically fit, with gray-blue eyes and closely cut gray hair. Aaron works in Bellingham as a volunteer firefighter and resembles any other working class father of teenaged children. He is open about his lifestyle to most of his friends and even to some of his coworkers.

In public, Aaron is anything but intimidating, with a stride so relaxed it appears a bit careless, even clumsy. His wrinkled black leather jacket hangs off his modest shoulders with no attempt at being macho. His eyes

Dominatrix Lady Jane Grey applies some discipline to a bottom.



dart around the room nervously, giving no signs of his ability to dictate and control.

Aaron said he is fervently unhappy with all of the misconceptions and misinformation that circulates about BDSM.

"We really emphasize safety," Aaron said. "Most of what the press reports is 180 degrees different from what we practice.

"For me, there is nothing hotter or more fulfilling than the intensely caring relationship that I have with my submissive lover," Aaron said.

Aaron accuses the press of primarily reporting on the individuals who practice kink that is illegal, nonconsensual behavior.

"The individuals who usually make the news are not practicing kink, they are sick people who are way outside of the fringe of BDSM."

Serial killers such as Jeffery Dahmer have been falsely associated with BDSM because of the methods in which he tortured his unwilling victims. Aaron said this is completely separate from true BDSM, where two or more people agree to an exchange of power that suits their personal interests.

Another common misconception, Aaron said, is that people who participate in BDSM have been abused at some point in their life.

"In reality, less than 10 percent of the people who I have been with have been abused in the past," Aaron said. "Abuse is no more common within kink groups than it is in any other sample of our society."

"About 5 to 10 percent of the general public is aroused by S & M activities," said Sexologist Sari Locker, author of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Amazing Sex*.

Aaron said many of his submissive female partners come from households with an especially stern father figure, which he believes plays a role in their need to be controlled.

Along with his full-time job, Aaron is the owner of Cascade Designs, a Bellingham manufacturer and retailer that specializes in custom made, handcrafted BDSM products such as whips and restraints.

Cascade Designs receives most of its business from Triskeli Guild members and from orders through its Web site.

The Internet is a resource people can use to gain information about various kinds of kinky behavior and also to connect

with other individuals who share their same interests.

With help from the Internet, individuals who are interested in BDSM have more outlets than ever before to discuss their similar lifestyles. One such outlet is the newly formed Western Washington University Associated Students' BDSM Club.


Ross Skilling, a senior at Western, is the organizer and president of the A.S. BDSM Club. Skilling said he was interested in forming a group that will meet to share ideas and discuss topics that are relevant to people who are interested in BDSM.

"Anyone is welcome to the meetings," Skilling said, "no matter what their level of involvement in BDSM is."

The club meets at 8 p.m. the first Thursday of every month in Western's Viking Union building, Room 219. Lady Jane Grey attended the first informational meeting and acted as the club's primary resource for information about the BDSM community. Grey said she is planning to attend all of the club's meetings to act as a link between the club members and other BDSM groups, such as the Triskeli Guild.

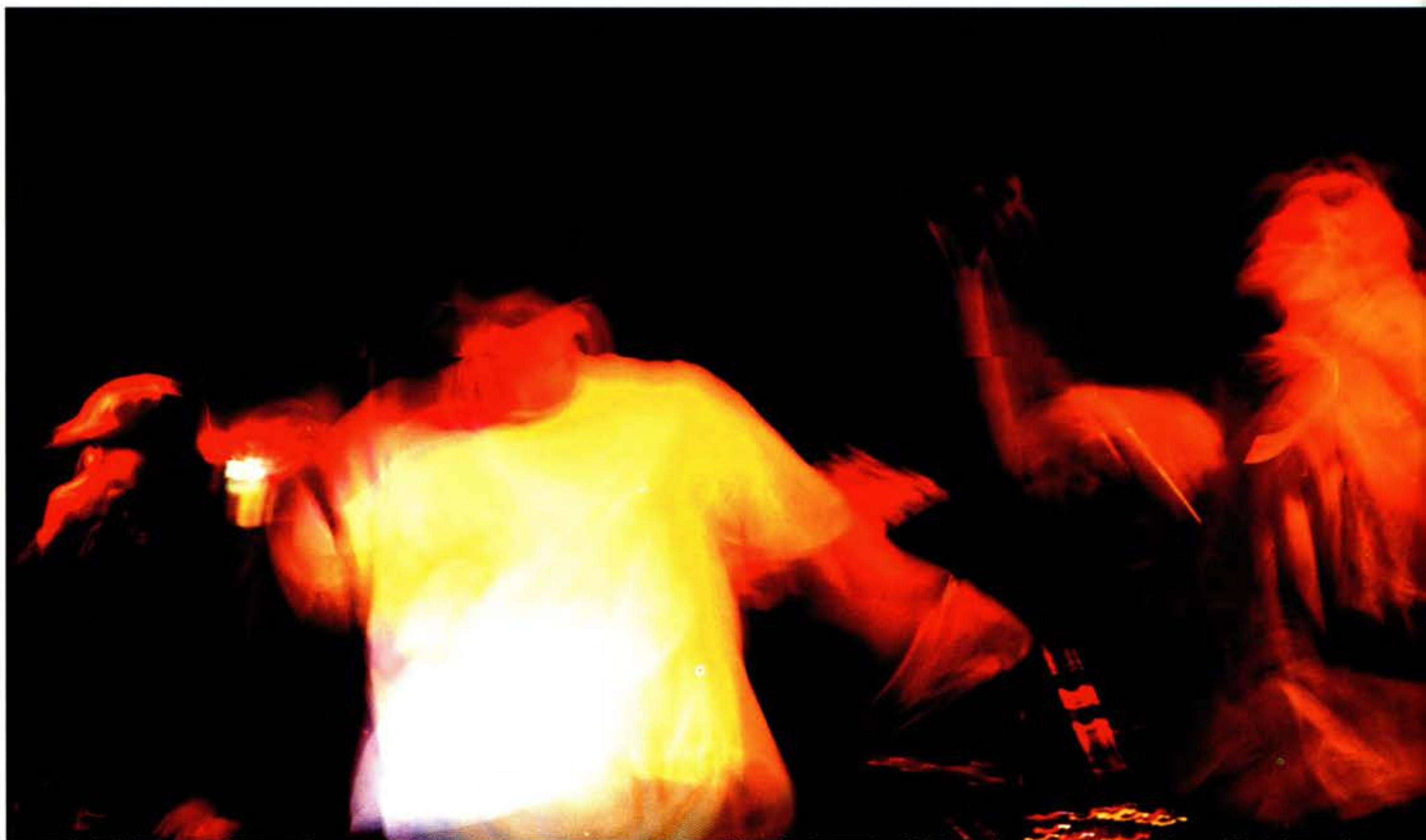
For the club's second meeting Oct. 2, Grey said she would like to set up a small demonstration of BDSM activities, not unlike the scene described at the beginning of this story.

"Misconceptions are why more people are not out in the open about their involvement in BDSM," Aaron said. "You would be surprised at the professional people and local business owners who are members of the Triskeli Guild. BDSM has its tentacles in every branch of the social structure."

"You would not believe the number of people who enjoy being spanked, whipped, paddled and tortured within the exchange of power that takes place between two people practicing BDSM." 







# Fistful of rhymes

Nathan Lill, Mathias Sanders and Herbal T on stage.



**Kelly Cudworth** rides a wave of freestyle flow with a Bellingham hip-hop trio trying to spread its words. Photos by Lance Jones.

A crowd gathers around the small stage at the 3-B Tavern. The dance floor is packed with all races and genders of young hip-hoppers. The sweat-soaked crowd moves as one as the rapid-fire voices of three freestyle hip-hop artists shoot through the speakers.

The new local hip-hop crew is not tonight's headliner; it is just filling in with a local band. Its members shout out to Bellingham and their friends who have come to support one of their first shows.

Mathias Sanders, 21, Nathan Lill, 24, and "Herbal-T," 23, have been freestyling from four to six years. The three have recently been performing as "The Light Brigade" at local underground clubs and parties. They are trying to bring a fresh feeling to their show with strong lyrics rather than sampling beats and jingling gold chains and diamonds.

"We're posing an alternative," Lill says of the crew's style. "Hopefully people won't dismiss that at face value."

The three don't want to be known as a "bling-bling" crew, or basically any group that flashes money and glamour.

"Coming up here with the explosion of hip-hop in the mainstream, it's making a big impact as it's taking over into fads," Sanders says in a passionate tone. "I clearly didn't grow up in a hip-hop lifestyle, but as long as you come correct and come real, then it's real. I do it for the absolute love of hip-hop. I want to be somebody that's respected for what they can

do lyrically."

Herbal-T shares Sanders' and Lill's outlook on rhyming about something that is not relevant to his life, but admits that at times he catches himself fronting.

"When I rhyme or write something that isn't me, I'm fronting," Herbal-T says honestly. "But I'll acknowledge that I'm fronting in my rhymes."

On stage, sweat splashes off Sanders' forehead as he bounces up and down and cuts left to right with each hard-hitting bass riff. Sporting a thick, navy-blue T-shirt with a prominent Seattle Mariners logo below his top left shoulder, the English literature major yells out word after word in staccato fashion.

As Sanders spits out his lyrics, Lill's voice slowly becomes more distinct through the speakers. The bill of his hat rests just over his eyebrows hiding his eyes from the crowd.

Standing just to the right of Sanders, Lill spits out a smooth, head-bobbing flow to bring the crowd into a zone of hip-hop. With one hand gripping the microphone to his lips, Lill punctuates the beat with his free hand.

As quickly as Lill took over, Herbal-T, who has been hanging in the back with an occasional shout-out, grabs the crowd as if to slap them out of Lill's zone with a fist of rhymes.

The crew will not rhyme about money, nor will they pretend to be hard. They rhyme about Bellingham or any political view they

have and aren't afraid to share. When practicing together, the crew uses a technique they call "drop a topic."

"We'll think of a topic, usually political, and people come up with things to rhyme about," says Lill, who received his bachelor of arts in English literature last spring. "That makes for a strong freestyle cipher as more emotions are expressed about what is being said."

A cipher is a freestyle circle where a group of people throw out lyrics to one another, occasionally creating competition to sway the crowd into favoritism.

To come up with lyrics on the spot that rhyme, flow and apply to the present environment is a skill only a few can pull off rhythmically. This crew is ready for any chance to strength-

late-night ciphers. "My first time was bad, but you take your knocks."

Thinking back to his own introduction to freestyling in a cipher, Sanders feels Lill's embarrassment.

"It was terrible," Sanders says, shaking his head in disgust. "I had a few cheesy rhymes that I spit out real quick, then there was nothing. If you think you have a lot to say and don't know what you're doing, you can run out of rhymes fast."

For this local underground hip-hop crew, freestyle hasn't been about anything but satisfying the hunger for funk and rhyme. All three are dedicated to it and have pledged to make the group a priority. Each one sacrificed job and travel plans this summer to hang around in Bellingham and tighten his

**"My poetry and hip-hop are two separate things. There is a political potential to freestyling. If you can carry a political message in your music, then that's a powerful thing."**



en and prove its skills.

Standing in the dimly lit hallway of an apartment complex above the local bars waiting to venture on to an after-hours house party, Mathias and Lill find themselves challenged to prove their freestyle skills by a group of 10 partiers. Without hesitation, Sanders asks for a beat, and a staggering friend in a black Adidas hat quickly begins beat boxing. Before anyone can react, Sanders and Lill start spitting out rhymes.

Ten minutes into it, they are both still going strong and are cutting on almost everyone standing around. At the end of the cipher a roar of approval comes from the circle of intoxication.

In just 10 minutes, the two freestylers have blown away and excited a group of drunken critics.

"MC, master of ceremonies, you're there to hype up a crowd," Sanders says while smiling at the idea of a large party. "There's a party going on, and you're there to keep it going."

Unlike in the hallway, the crew can, at times, receive mixed reactions when they start a cipher in the middle of a party or crowd of strangers.

"It may be annoying to people that aren't into it because you're commanding and drawing attention," Lill says. "You have to be willing to make an ass out of yourself."

Words and expression have always been a large part of this crew's life. Poetry and writing brought the three together to share their interest in freestyling. Sanders began open mic nights at his studio apartment this past summer, inviting freestyle hip-hop, poetry reading and spoken word. The three would hang around after everyone had left and freestyle together. As the flow of beer and wine increased, the flow of words become sloppy.

"Hella times it gets way too late to freestyle," Lill says as a grin creeps up on his face thinking about some of the crew's

lyrics.

"I gave up a job opportunity in Alaska this summer to see what we could come up with, and Sanders gave up a trip to the East Coast," Herbal-T says. "I think we're like an airplane taxiing, you know, like onto the runway. We spent the summer doing the maintenance check, and now we're running on the runway picking up speed."

Before hip-hop took off, it went through many stages of growth.

Its roots can be traced back to 1959 in Chicago and the Bronx. Jamaican disc jockeys began to talk over the music they played, which they called "toasting." As toasting began to mix with African, Afro-Caribbean and African-American rhythmic musical styles, hip-hop and rap were born. Hip-hop artists began using a strong urban street jive to rap about life in the ghetto as it evolved in the poor black communities of America.

Although none of the crew members grew up in this kind of environment, the three fell in love with freestyle expression and the personality each one can bring to hip-hop; the creativeness of the crew comes from its differences. Each one has his own outlook on hip-hop and what inspires him.

Herbal-T has an open outlook towards his rhymes and enjoys the spirit of his lyrics and the soul-funk that comes from hip-hop. Although all three write poetry, Lill feels his poetry and freestyle are two separate entities, while Sanders says lyrical motivation is his poetry.

"My hip-hop mindframe influences my poetry," Sanders says, while clasping his hands together to signify some type of unification. "My spoken word is almost rhythmic and rhyme. I think they go hand in hand; that's why I like rap so much. Rap is an artistic poetry. When you hear a funky beat like reggae or hip-hop, you feel it in your bones. And when you put poetry on



“I have no real formula for inspiration. It can come from anywhere. If you’re just walking around, there is a natural cadence to your footsteps or heart beat. Lyrics just come from what’s on your mind.”

top of that, that’s hip-hop, that’s the bud of my love.”

Lill found himself drawn to the challenge of freestyling through Mathias’ enthusiasm towards rhythmic poetry. He saw it as another way to express his words and thoughts through a form separate from poetry.

“I’m all about hip-hopping these days,” says Lill, who’s poetry was published a few years ago. “My poetry and hip-hop are two separate things. There is a political potential to freestyling. If you can carry a political message in your music, then that’s a powerful thing.”

As Sanders and Lill have an understanding of what influences them, Herbal-T seems to be motivated by the natural expression that comes from hip-hop.

“I’m just a funkafile,” says Herbal-T, a free-minded Fairhaven student. “I can’t resist funk. I have no real formula for inspiration. It can come from anywhere. If you’re just walking around, there is a natural cadence to your footsteps or heartbeat. Lyrics just come from what’s on your mind.”

As this crew’s motivation and inspiration differ, so do the types of lyrics the three spit out in a cipher or write as a song.

“I just think of words that’ll rhyme like that, cat, hat, bat,” Sanders says, bobbing his head to an imaginary beat. “What makes it freestyle is I’ll talk about what’s around me. I pick out a word to fall back on right at the end of the beat that rhymes.”

Lill tries to incorporate anything experienced or seen in a day to use in a freestyle session.

“Freestyle is kinda the MC’s conception,” Lill says squinting his eyes, thinking of the correct words to use for his

description.

“You think out rhymes during the day and new things come from the environment around you. When people start throwing things back and forth, that’s when freestyle comes into play.”

As these three raw lyricists are gaining exposure in Bellingham, they find themselves working to tighten their lyrics as the desire to hip-hop moves from a party thing to a priority thing. Their differences as a crew can both create walls and open doors while they struggle to tighten their lyrics.

“We have such an eclectic style,” Lill says. “All of us are totally different and that can be tough. But, that’s our strength. It forces each other to alter their perspective.”

Sanders attacks the crowd with a hard-hitting, head-knocking rhyme to get everyone up out of their seats and moving to the beat. Lill glides into the spotlight with fast-flowing words, which speak to everyone in the crowd. And Herbal-T, the “lyrical lexicon,” presents a dictionary of funky words in and out of the beat. Even onstage, these three are constantly freestyling, no matter how well they tighten their songs.

“I think a little bit of our show is freestyle,” Lill says, thinking back to their last show at the 3-B. “You might think you have things memorized and then you go out there and things are different. You can always rely on the guys behind you if you have to.”



