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*Western Washington University*

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# KLIPSUN

AUTHENTICITY

SPRING  
2019

# Letter From the Editor



**Dear reader,**

Being ourselves takes courage.

Courage to be honest and courage to be vulnerable.

I chose authenticity as the theme for this issue of Klipsun because I wanted genuine and honest stories. What I received were stories about fighting for identity, what we can learn about ourselves through the lens of cross-cultural psychology, confronting the past to better understand who we are now and more.

When we muster up the courage to tell honest, authentic stories like these, it can remind us we're not alone. Sometimes that's all we can ask for.

When we're honest with who we are with each other, we can find what it truly means to be ourselves.

All the best,

Kristina Rivera  
Editor-in-Chief

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# Contents

2

## After the Storm

One boat continued to change people's lives, even after it was wrecked on Locust Beach

6

## Indigenous Blondes

Native American without the Native exterior

8

## Ode to the Jeep

Finding solace on Interstate 5

10

## A Century on Holly Street

How one of Bellingham's oldest cafes has kept its doors open for over 130 years

13

## Confronting

A reflection on growing up low-income

16

## Lights Out at The Leopold

Retired Leopold tenants forced to leave what they believed to be their final home

22

## At the Bottom of the Atlantic

A family's journey to the U.S. cut short

24

## Heirlooms of Bow Hill

The renewed legacy of the oldest blueberry farm in Skagit Valley

27

## Psychology Through the Looking Glass

Addressing the complex question of self through cross-cultural psychology

30

## Walls Redefined

Gretchen Leggitt is a local muralist challenging viewers to redefine the spaces they pass every day



*The bottom of the  
Osprey's chipped hull.*

# After the Storm

## *One boat continued to change people's lives, even after it was wrecked on Locust Beach*

Story by Landon Groves  
Photos by Kelly Pearce

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**O**n a balmy morning in late January, Foster Marcus Nelson set out to find a sailboat she lived on as a kid. She ambled down Locust Beach, rocks crunching underfoot as she peered out across the bay.

The boat was called The Osprey. She lived on it for the first four years of her life and kept returning to it until she was 13. It was rumored the boat was wrecked on a beach somewhere in Bellingham, and she wanted to see it again with her own eyes.

Foster hadn't seen The Osprey in eight years. The last time she did, it belonged to someone she also hadn't seen in eight years — her father, Karl Nelson, who owned it until his death in 2006.

Karl was the youngest of five siblings. He was an adventurous kid who was always drawn to the water. He spent the days at their cabin on Lummi Island making rafts, and from time to time he took a skiff from the marina to Orcas Island, about three-and-a-half miles away. When he was old enough, his parents enrolled him in sailing school where he learned the ins and outs of operating sailboats, a passion he carried with him his entire life.

"Karl, he was always looking for adventure no matter what," Christy Nelson Marsh, Karl's sister, said. "He was just an outdoorsy type of guy, and he always said he was born in the wrong century."

Years later, Karl convinced his father to help him salvage a sunken ship off the coast of Anacortes. His father was hesitant — restoring a sunken ship is known throughout the boating world as a sign of bad luck. Eventually, Karl convinced his father, and they bought the boat that summer.

There's another superstition in the boating world, one they chose not to cast aside: Changing a boat's name is a bad omen. As they pulled it out of the strait, they decided the name painted across the bow would never change. The boat would remain The Osprey now and forever.

Karl and his family spent the years sailing throughout the Gulf Islands and San Juans beneath the black pirate flag he flew atop the mast. Between trips, they lived and worked out of the boat in Squalicum Harbor.

Karl was diagnosed with ALS in November of 2004 following his divorce. At the time, he was planning an expedition to Mexico with his girlfriend and a skeleton crew.

He made up his mind — he would die among the palm trees, drifting on the crystal-blue waters of the Mexican coast.

They left the Strait the following summer and traveled south along the coast. Karl made it to the Columbia River before his muscles began to betray him. Karl, the most experienced sailor aboard, decided it best to turn back before symptoms worsened.

The disease spread quickly. It affected his speech at first, and without realizing it he began to slur his words. Not much later, he couldn't walk. Resigned to his bedroom on the boat, he spent his days lying in bed, bobbing up and down with the currents. He smoked cigarettes through a contraption Christy made that minimized the amount he had to turn his head. When they returned to the harbor, all of Christy's in-laws carried him off.

A year after setting sail for Mexico, he died. Karl is buried in Lynden — a place Foster and her father never liked.

The uninhabited boat lived peacefully in the harbor for a time, but not for long. Karl's father, the new legal owner of The Osprey, sold it to a man named Bill Mustard in August 2006. Bill was an older, affable member of the boating community, but he was rough around the edges.

Alex Zecha, a fellow boater and Bill's neighbor from 2012 to 2015, likened Bill to a character in a Steinbeck novel — lively but unpolished. Alex and Bill ran into each other often at the Community Boating Center. Bill would row in on an inflatable skiff, painted black with roofing tar, and fill his gallon jugs with water.

The Osprey entered a general state of disrepair. Bill built a shoddy plywood cabin on the deck and moved it closer to the boardwalk, right in front of the Chrysalis Inn & Spa. Six months later, the city stepped in and chased him away. The Osprey, once a beautiful vessel and a winner of decorative awards, was an eyesore.

Like Karl, Bill had grandiose dreams of Pacific excursions. He saw himself sailing to Costa Rica, though Alex posits both Bill and The Osprey looked in poor shape and weren't up to the task of sailing thousands of miles. Bill's health was already diminishing, and to

*Karl Nelson upon the Osprey.*



those at the Boating Center, it looked like he was finding it harder and harder to get around. He sailed as far as Cape Flattery, where the Strait empties out into the Pacific Ocean, before a combination of poor health and bad weather forced him to turn around. The Osprey returned home once again. Its journey abruptly ended; its dreams never realized.

“BOATS DON'T HAVE CURSES THEMSELVES — JUST THE PEOPLE WHO SAIL THEM.”  
—BILL MUSTARD

After the attempted trip to Costa Rica, Bill and The Osprey were the subject of a photo essay by photographer Mark Katsikapes. In the essay, titled “The Curse of the Osprey,” Mark asked Bill if he thought the boat was cursed, doomed to sap the health of anyone who tried to remove it from the bay.

“Boats don't have curses themselves,” Bill told Mark. “Just the people who sail them.”

Not long after, Bill disappeared.

For the second time, the boat was ownerless. It floated alone in the bay, abandoned.

Then the storm came.

On Thursday, Dec. 20, 2018, a storm blew through Western Washington, leaving some 322,000 homes and businesses without power. Whatcom County caught the worst of it, with gusts reaching a reported 66 mph. Fire crews, overwhelmed, responded to 45 reports of downed power lines in just under nine hours.

To make matters worse, an exceptionally high tide — what oceanographers call a king tide — put the many boats anchored up and down the Puget Sound at risk. The storm left a number of boats unmoored, cast violently adrift on the Strait, and grounded high up on nearby beaches. In the days and weeks that followed, rescue boats were unable to retrieve them.

That's how Foster found The Osprey at Locust Beach a month later. Her spirits lifted when she first saw it, then fell as she got closer. Moss was growing sideways in the folds of the sail, and the sun's reflection glinted softly off the stern as it sat cockeyed on the beach. Beer cans were scattered everywhere. The bright orange plastic of insulin needles poked out from nearby rocks. The hull, once a uniform shade of royal blue, was now covered in graffiti.

Still, she knew it was the right boat. She climbed around on the deck like she did when she was a kid, pointing through passageways to rooms she remembered from her childhood. Here was the kitchen where her father cooked nothing but ramen and eggs for months at a time. Here was the bow where she

spent long days peering out across the bay, watching the water lap up against the side of the hull.

Foster said in an ideal world she'd like to see The Osprey salvaged and sailed again, but she knows she doesn't have a say. That's for the new owner to decide.

Josh McElhaney, a lieutenant in the Coast Guard's incident management division, has been on the case of The Osprey since the wreck. He tracked down past owners and went out periodically to make sure no hazardous chemicals were leaking into the bay. He learned the ownership changed last spring, and the state was working with the new owner to determine The Osprey's future. He declined to disclose the owner's name.

**"THE OSPREY RETURNED HOME ONCE AGAIN. ITS JOURNEY ABRUPTLY ENDED: ITS DREAMS NEVER REALIZED"**

For some, The Osprey was a kind neighbor and a constant, something you'd look to when you wanted to make sure the Earth hadn't shifted seismically beneath your feet. For the Nelsons, it was an embodiment of a person they'd never see again. A time in their lives they'd never return to.

As Foster left that morning, trodding back up the beach to her car, she kept peering over her shoulder, watching The Osprey shrink in the distance.

"That almost feels like a better burial spot for my dad, you know what I mean?" she said.

The word "Osprey" comes from a type of bird, a large raptor found all over the world, including Costa Rica and Northern Mexico. They're here in Washington as well. While the bird thrives when stationary, over half the species' total fatalities occur during migration.

*Top: The Osprey lays against a hill down Locust Beach, covered with fresh tags.*

*Middle: Masts intertwine, sails scavenged, holding up the Osprey against a slope down Locust Beach.*

*Bottom: The Osprey's name chipping away at the stern of the boat.*



# Indigenous Blondes

## *Native American without the Native exterior*

Story by Kamiah Koch

Photo by Kelly Pearce

“We are so incredibly lucky,” my grandma said to me when I was 10. We were sitting in her Honda Odyssey, waiting for the school bus to pick me up on an especially cold winter morning.

In the early morning of what I assumed would be an insignificant moment of my life, her gratitude for our unique lives made a lasting imprint on me.

My grandma has tan skin, and for as long as I can remember, she’s dyed her hair pitch-black and kept it in a long single braid. All my grandma’s children have dark eyes and tan skin. Yet, when they had kids of their own, we were all born with pale skin, green or blue eyes, and most deceptively, bright blonde hair. My cousins and I all share these features, so we call ourselves the “indigenous blondes.” Did we look Native? No. Were we raised Native? Yes.

At the end of our long driveway, my grandma and I sat trying to talk over the classical radio station she always had playing a little too loud. The bus wouldn’t come for a few more minutes, but I sat in the front seat, backpack on, ready to go. I remember the inside of the car was warm with the heater blasting and the sun shining through the windshield. Our driveway sat at the bottom of our neighbor’s sloped field. The sun was just coming out over the hill. It reflected off the frosted grass and glared into the car with blinding brightness.

I grew up on 64 acres of forested land near Vancouver, Washington. My grandma raised her kids there, and when they had kids, they raised us there too. We were a close-knit

childhood experience was the universal one. At 10 years old, I didn’t comprehend what my grandma was saying as we waited for the school bus.

As I grew older, I often revisited this memory. Each time I did, I understood more of what she was saying. We knew who we were and what we valued. We were tribal members of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, but my grandma created a tribe of our own on those 64 acres.

Oral tradition is a common practice in Native communities. Sharing stories is what keeps the identity alive in my family and many others. Colonial practices of assimilation tried to exterminate Native heritage in a lot of families and was fairly successful. I heard stories of my great-grandmother, Dora, hiding her heritage as a Native woman because she had been taught to do so. Luckily, the regrettable practice of hiding Native identity has died off, but so have many people who identify as Native.

My cousins and I are the last generation of my family who are federally recognized as Native people. It’s a sad realization to know the colonial wish to exterminate Native communities has been a success. But this has also encouraged me to hold on tighter to this identity than ever before.

However, every time I feel secure in my identity as a Native person, I get a reminder that I don’t look the part.

“No way, you have blonde hair.”

“You don’t look Native.”

Or the most irritating and common question, “how much are you?”

Responding to questions like these can be awkward to navigate, and I feel like I can only answer with a submissive response. Asking me, how Native I am makes what my family has taught me feel invalid.

“DID WE LOOK NATIVE?  
NO.  
WERE WE RAISED NATIVE?  
YES.”

family with three generations living on the property together. We valued our heritage as a Native American family, and that kept us close. Growing up this way, I thought my

**"I LOOK LIKE YOUR AVERAGE WHITE GIRL. BUT THIS WHITE GIRL EXTERIOR GIVES ME THE ADVANTAGE TO SPEAK UP FOR A SILENCED COMMUNITY. AND I WILL USE EVERY LAST BIT OF IT."**

Repeatedly being asked "what is your percentage" knocks down my confidence as a Native person. I feel I should just resort to calling myself white and hide my Native heritage.

Asking Native people their blood quantum is a long practice of the federal government's efforts to limit Native citizenship and identity.

The blood quantum question is a reminder of the government's illusive hold on Native communities. It is a reminder of the history of Native communities as a minority fighting for their sovereign rights and culture. It is a reminder that my identity is questionable in your eyes. I don't need your validation in my identity, but asking how

much Native blood I have doesn't support a minority group's fight for their identity. Nonetheless, as a Native person who gets asked this a lot, my best advice to you is, do not ask this. It may seem inconsequential to many, but it has a lasting impact.

I'm trying to speak up for a community that has lost its indigenous voice. I look like a white person. I look like your average "white girl." But this "white girl" exterior also gives me the advantage to speak up for a silenced community. And I will use every last bit of it.

Next time I tell you about my Native ancestry, don't ask me about my blood quantum or non-Native looking features. Ask me about my tribe. Ask me how my journey identifying as a Native person has been. Ask me about the Native issues we have seen in the media over the last couple of years, and ask me how you can help this neglected minority.

Thanks to my grandma, my identity is ingrained in my family and in me. Many other Native communities know who they are as well. It's others who don't know who we are, but don't worry, my grandma and I are here to tell you.



*Kamiah Koch holds up her tribe member identification card, showing her previously blonde hair.*



# Ode to the Jeep

*Finding solace on Interstate 5*

Story by Brooke Wilson  
Illustration by Renee Klemmer



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He said to take it on the chin and just work through the pain.

That seemed to be his solution for everything, including how to continue working together after splitting up.

Saturated in ample sunshine, a workplace romance blossomed in the bashful smiles and jokes exchanged across the counter that past summer. But as quickly as it started, it was over. And the sun-stained snapshots from those days grew faded, from another lifetime.

On the brink of the holiday season, I hauled bulging suitcases into my awaiting chariot, a 1998 Jeep Sport Cherokee. I plowed across I-5 with a conviction that could part the seas, move mountains and perhaps seize what might be the last opportunity to resolve a bitter, anticlimactic end to a hopeful relationship.

Needless to say, expectations were running high and ignoring the storm clouds that gathered overhead became challenging but not impossible.

Not until I received a phone call that startled me awake on the morning of Christmas Eve.

“Your grandpa passed away.”

And the rain poured. Cranking the faded needle past 60 mph on the speedometer, bass boomed from the speakers inside my faithful bucket of

“THERE ISN'T ANY PRESCRIBED TIMELINE FOR HEALING”

bolts. Sleigh bells and Sinatra faded from crooning to crackling as I lost signal past the exit for Marysville. I flicked through the channels, instinctively searching.

I spent a great deal of time on the road the past few months, driving back and forth between two lives. One with responsibilities in Bellingham and the other back home with a pursuit dictated by heartache. I drove to forget, to reminisce, to keep myself preoccupied and to seek some elusive answer for curing all the pain that might be in the pastures and road signs that whizzed by. Between planning a funeral, scheduling a memorial and reconciling a romantic loss, I came to realize a few truths on these road trips.

Through all the moments we feebly attempted to carry on with business as usual, the abrasive silence could have easily filled a canyon. With my grandpa, who I exchanged fewer words with than I could count on both hands, I lost the chance to grow closer. Since his passing, I wondered about the person beneath the man everyone recognized. The one who served in the Air Force and toured overseas, who created his now infamous jelly recipe and became a New York Times crossword puzzle extraordinaire in the Wilson household.

“I OWE MORE THAN SAFE TRAVELS TO THAT RUMBLING RIDE”

I grappled with the distance, gaping wider with each step closer to the void.

Rather than retreat to the Jeep for another solitary road trip, I began leaning on family, friends, neighbors and roommates who helped lighten the load. The ones who listened patiently, embraced me warmly and encouraged me to lead with positivity kept me grounded when everything else appeared in vertigo.

On another caffeine-induced drive, bending around Chuckanut and silently pleading with the universe to end its siege, a muffled lyric from the late-'90s stereo prompted a realization.

“You can't hurry love, no you'll just have to wait.”

Diana Ross and The Supremes had a point about not rushing love. There isn't any prescribed timeline for healing. Though the incessant ticking from the clock sounded haunting, the time that passed also signaled an opportunity to navigate the terribly paved and uneven cracked road. Time creates a buffer that racking up mileage simply cannot achieve.

Above all, within the stretch of 101 miles that physically separated me from the muse of my grief, I awoke to a beautiful, nostalgic truth.

The Jeep has carried me without question, without ridicule, without revolting against the driver fraught with tears. Cup holders stuffed with random junk became mementos in a time capsule on wheels. Crumpled tissues, a shriveled yellow rosebud from a bouquet my ex-whatever brought me, and a mason jar that once carried delicious homemade apple pie jelly.

I owe more than safe travels to that rumbling ride. First carrying me home from the hospital as a newborn baby, bearing with me as a newly licensed driver and now a tried and true companion in the wake of inexplicable grief. Four wheels and dated upholstery have served a purpose greater than merely reaching a destination — it has restored peace of mind.

Yes, that road may be a long winding one that circles back or steers off the beaten path, but these seemingly infinite travels are not even close to what lies ahead — the whole journey. Processing grief becomes a crucial part in reaching the next destination, wherever that may be.

Grief is often illustrated as a journey that must be faced alone, with an unabated inner-monologue as your only companion. But when I accelerate onto the ramp, flying solo down the highway, I am never truly alone.



# A Century on Holly Street

*The unique community created by the  
Horseshoe Cafe has given it the ability to  
stay open over 100 years*

Story by Grace McCarthy  
Photos by Kelly Pearce and courtesy of Whatcom Museum

The few lamp posts lining Holly Street glow above downtown Bellingham's bare streets. The night's full moon waxes from its neatly placed position in the sky and assists the twinkling lights below.

Distant cars on Railroad Avenue chase the inevitable silence of a subdued Tuesday at midnight. The softened patter of rain lingers like a guest who has overstayed their welcome.

From the Gold Rush to the digital age, the Horseshoe Cafe's flickering crimson sign reminds passersby of its enduring history since 1886 on Holly Street. The Horseshoe continues to welcome guests at least 17 hours every day while claiming to be Bellingham's oldest cafe.

The Horseshoe has witnessed dozens of neighboring storefronts open and close their doors over the past century — from war surplus businesses to other homestyle cafes like McCracken's.

But one thing has kept the Horseshoe's doors open through numerous wars, changes in commercial industries and exponential raises in property taxes: the community of its customers.

"Very few businesses last over 130 years. That's unheard of," said Kate Groen, one of Horseshoe's current owners. "It's a testament to the community of Bellingham to support something so long that's going to keep it open."

For over a century, the Horseshoe has shifted to the beat of the people around it. Sehome was the original hometown of the "Horse Shoe Saloon." It catered to a population of fewer than 3,000 residents who flocked to the region for its natural resources. The Horseshoe survived the state's prohibition that spread across Washington in 1916. Later, it was incorporated as a fish and tackle store that sold hunting licenses and sandwiches. Smoky cardrooms filled with gamblers also defined the early years of the restaurant.

"VERY FEW BUSINESSES LAST OVER 130 YEARS. THAT'S UNHEARD OF. IT'S A TESTAMENT TO THE CITY OF BELLINGHAM TO SUPPORT SOMETHING FOR SO LONG THAT'S GOING TO KEEP IT OPEN."  
— KATE GROEN

Jeff Jewell, historian at the Whatcom Museum, said the Horseshoe moved across Holly Street in 1958 to its current location, in part, to expand their post-prohibition cocktail lounge. Day drinkers regularly camped out at the Horseshoe's ominous bar, the Ranch Room, until that demographic died out in the early 1990s. Around that same time, the Bellis Fair Mall opened in 1988, and retail shifted to north Bellingham which cast downtown into a minor identity crisis.

Downtown's ability to redefine itself was a process that took many years, Jeff said.

Bellingham eventually created a culture and arts hub from downtown. But many still deemed the the block Horseshoe was on as "seedy." The Horseshoe managed to balance this change and played up its role as a retro staple with an enigmatic history at the turn of the millenium.

"They presented it in a kind of Tom Waitsian, Charles Bukowskian way. A certain romance to the alcoholic lifestyle." Jeff said. "It's hip. It's cool there's a place like this still."

During the artistic era of the late 1990s, longtime Horseshoe customer and local graffiti artist Shawn Cass packed his bags at 19 and moved from Arkansas to Bellingham.

For Shawn, the homey environment of the Horseshoe is an embodiment of the town itself.

"After a late night you could come here and eat and it's cooler than going to Denny's. The Horseshoe just has that local, privately owned vibe to it," Shawn said.



## “SURVIVAL FOR THE HORSESHOE HAS MEANT ADAPTING TO BELLINGHAM'S MANY TRANSFORMATIONS”

There are a lot of people who come into the Horseshoe who haven't been here in 30 years and others who have been coming here for 30 years, Blaire said.

The community that continues to support the Horseshoe is just as diverse as Bellingham itself.

“I walked into the bar last week where we had someone from every walk of life sitting there. A person in a suit was having drinks with people, and then there's Eva, a little old lady who's been coming here since her 30s and she's probably in her 80s now,” Kate said. “We had service industry people, we had tattoo industry people. You look down the line and it's literally everyone.”

Many things about the Horseshoe remain unaltered, including the gooey, cheesy fries.

Kate still remembers her first meal at the Horseshoe: A hot coffee and the cafe's signature fries. The greasy dinner shared during an evening study session with pals symbolized a newfound freedom for high-school Kate.

At 16, Kate would never have imagined herself in charge of one of Bellingham's treasured icons. Kate said sales have gone up since her family took over in 2015 and doesn't plan on losing that momentum.

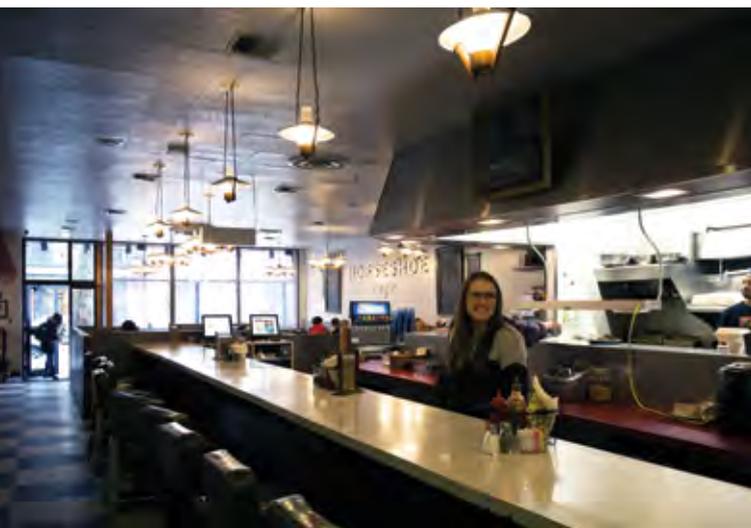
The current owners are well aware of the seedy reputation attached to the restaurant's location. To combat this, they're invested in marketing themselves as a friendly establishment for everyone. Part of this marketing includes new merchandise collaborations with local Bellingham artists. After Cass's mural of Rowdy Buckaroo, the Horseshoe hired him to design shirts and hats, featuring a play-on-words design of a horse coming out of a shoe.

Survival for the Horseshoe has meant adapting to Bellingham's many transformations.

“It started as a smoke shop, fish, tackle, bait shop where you could get your hunting license or fishing license and a sandwich and your smokes. The idea was that it was open to anyone and inclusive to everyone,” Kate said. “I think the Horseshoe has done a good job of being that way for the last 130 years, where everyone feels as if they can come in.”

The grill sizzles above laughter of service workers nursing their last beer. Smells of the most recent batch of cheesy fries waft through the cafe, tempting hungry customers. Daily specials scrawled on the chalkboard entice regulars as American folk rock fills the silence of an otherwise quiet Tuesday at midnight.

A new generation of customers pay their tabs and shuffle out to Holly Street, not knowing the changes they bring to Bellingham will shape next incarnation of the Horseshoe Cafe.



*Top: 1958, Times have changed, but the layout remains. The wallpaper seen in the photo can still be found above the ceiling in the current building. Photo by Jack Carver/Courtesy of Whatcom Museum*

*Bottom: Owner Kate Groen stands behind the bar of Horseshoe Cafe.*

He noted subtleties like the black-and-white photographs of Bellingham at every booth, reminding customers it has been around longer than they have been alive.

A few of the the archived images that line the Horseshoe's narrow hallway remember the late Rowdy Buckaroo, known as Bellingham's Robin Hood of the early 2000s. The Horseshoe hired Rowdy Buckaroo to put coins in expired parking meters around town to help save unsuspecting residents from tickets.

Shawn created a portrait of Rowdy Buckaroo decked out in his iconic ten-gallon hat, denim ensemble and red bandana on the side of the Horseshoe to commemorate his public servitude.

“Just thinking this place has been open over 100 years is pretty wild. The same seats we're sitting in people have been sitting in, eating [...] food in for over 100 years,” Shawn said.

Horseshoe General Manager Blaire Edwards watches every day as customers connect to the cafe's history over steaming cups of coffee and warm buttermilk pancakes.

# Confronting

## *A reflection on growing up low-income*

Story by Alissa Vanlandingham  
Photos by Kelly Pearce

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“**M**ore than 20 shots fired on west side.”

“Series of stolen cars on west side of Madison.”

“More youth are carrying weapons, disputes are personal.”

These are just a few of the headlines that pop up when I Google my childhood address in Madison, Wisconsin.

My parents moved from our crime-riddled and impoverished neighborhood years ago but still live a mile away. They tell me things have only gotten worse since I left the city.

I feel both removed from and attached to that statement. While it's devastating to consider my childhood home as a place where people continue to suffer, it feels surreal to me now.

Now, I live in a predominately white, leftist, liberal bubble. I wake up in a one-bedroom apartment with an ocean view. I never go hungry.

But there was a time before now. There was a time when my parents had no money left to buy food after paying rent. There was depression, alcohol abuse and, subsequently, neglect.

Those issues punctuated the first 13 years of my life, but my situation wasn't special. We lived in one of the lowest income neighborhoods in our city, and I had it easier than many of my peers.

There was a time when I was no more than 5 or 6 years old and playing outside. I was skipping down the sidewalk, clueless and innocent when a police officer, gun drawn in active pursuit of a suspect, stuck her head out from behind an evergreen tree.



*Alissa blowing out candles on her fourth birthday living in her family's first apartment in Wisconsin. Photo courtesy of Martha Robbins*

“What are you doing?” She asked me frantically. “Where do you live?”

I remember feeling stunned and angry. I felt like I was in trouble for something I didn’t do.

“I’m playing,” I said. “I live over there.”

“Get inside. Now,” she said.

I did.

There was the kid who approached me on his bike when I was in fifth grade. He asked me if I wanted to see something.

“Sure,” I said, not knowing exactly what to expect. He pulled up his shirt and showed me a gun tucked in his waistband. I froze. But I’d lived in that neighborhood my whole life, and I knew better than to react.

“Cool,” I said. “I’m on my way to a friends house, and I’ve got to go.”

I went home.

I wasn’t particularly afraid in either of these moments. The memories stick out because they directly involved me, but they weren’t surprising. I saw police officers in our neighborhood almost daily. I knew many of my friends’ parents had guns. I’d seen some of them before, and some of my friends talked about wanting their own.

I wouldn’t call those “normal” experiences, but they were normal at the time.

My junior year of high school I overheard a newscast about a body found so decomposed police weren’t able to identify the man. They found him on the outside stairwell of an apartment building across the street from the one I grew up in. The coroner estimated he’d been dead for weeks.

“I LIVE MUCH OF MY LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF MY EARLY EXPERIENCES”

Although the report said no foul play was suspected, I had to ask myself how a body left outside for weeks in the Midwestern summer heat was able to go undetected for so long. I had to consider that in the neighborhood I grew up in, calling the police was often the last resort. I had to check my privilege. I had to understand while I felt safe among cops, for many of my neighbors, a far graver site than a pistol was a squad car.

During my freshman year of high school, I remember being approached by a boy I’d invited to a few birthday

“THERE WAS A TIME WHEN MY PARENTS HAD NO MONEY LEFT TO BUY FOOD AFTER PAYING RENT. THERE WAS DEPRESSION, ALCOHOL ABUSE AND, SUBSEQUENTLY, NEGLECT”

parties when we were younger. I hadn’t seen him in three years, as he went to a private middle school.

I assumed he wanted to say hello, maybe introduce me to his friends. Instead, among an army of his private school peers, he looked at me wide eyed and said, “Do you still live in that apartment?”

I turned so red I was pushing purple. I hadn’t felt shame so physically before. He and the other kids gawked and waited for an answer.

In fact, we had just moved, but only into a slightly nicer apartment in an area still considered low income. Up until that point, I had been thrilled with our new home, but I knew where this boy lived: in a large house with a large yard and a tree house in the back.

Our new apartment was suddenly a tragic embarrassment I couldn’t bring myself to admit to.

Beyond the weapons, drugs, abuse and crime I witnessed growing up, I consider that moment with the boy and his friends to be my loss of innocence. It was the point where I learned to be ashamed of where I was from and the way I lived. It was then I realized I was lower class and attempted to hide that reality in every way possible from thereon. It altered my perspective, so I began to see everyone I encountered through the lens of class status.

Although my biological father had a large house on a nice street in Illinois, there was tension between my parents, and I rarely stayed there. The apartment I lived in with my mother had cheap plastic lawn furniture poised as a dining set in the living room, an old TV perched on a milk crate, the dank smell of old cigarettes and not much else.

During that time in that apartment in that neighborhood, I witnessed the direct effects of institutional racism, the nearly impossible-to-break cycle of poverty and rampant sexism which often meant mothers left alone and fathers stuck in prison. We didn’t talk about



these things. I wouldn't understand any of them in a larger context until I was much older and attending a university.

For the first 13 years of my life, I was living, learning and engaging with a more diverse cast of people than I have at any other point in my life. But all those people struggled to work, eat, raise children and survive. There was no time or energy for a broader discussion on institutional oppression and reflection at the end of the day. The irony is, I now live in a city where about 80 percent of the population is white, and I hear those issues discussed daily.

Some days, I feel like I still don't entirely understand those issues. I'm still trying to make sense of my memories within my new vocabulary. Some days, I find myself entirely fed up with Bellingham and its sea of ultra-privileged students talking, impassioned, about issues they've never faced.

Other days, I feel like I am fed up with myself. I find myself

talking with authority about justice while failing to realize, for all I've experienced, I've had a number of privileges along the way. I didn't have to work as hard to climb out of the poverty hole we lived in for so long. It isn't as easy for some of my peers.

I live much of my life through the lens of my early experiences. I rarely talk about it. Quite frankly, until I moved to Bellingham and found those experiences useful to me, I tried to never think about them.

Although I have a broader understanding of my early life now, there are deeply embedded pieces of that history which still sting. I may spend my whole life trying to dig them out, to find the meaning, to make the change. Beginning to acknowledge them in the light is simply where I start.

*March 1, 2019*

*Alissa Vanlandingham sits on her bed inside her Bellingham apartment.*



# Lights Out at the Leopold

*Kicked out before Christmas, Leopold residents reveal layers of mismanagement in what they believed to be their final home*

Story and photos by Hailey Hoffman





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**O**n a sunny January afternoon, Marlene “Mickey” Spencer, 82, zips around the corkboard floors of her apartment in her red power chair. For the last five-and-a-half years, Mickey has gazed over downtown Bellingham and across the bay from her corner apartment on the ninth floor of the Leopold Retirement Residence.

“This is the best view in town,” Mickey said. “I get the winter sunset here and the summer sunset there.”

The south-facing windows overlook South Hill and Western where her two grandsons attend school. Patches of bright sunlight filter through the soft, white curtains, illuminating piles of psychology books, folded clothes and a few open suitcases. Her large oak dresser stands empty, waiting for her daughter to come pick it up.

Mickey is one of 79 former residents of the Leopold. Just before Christmas, the Leopold announced it would close its doors to the retirees on March 31, 2019. A press release on the Leopold’s website cited rising costs and lowering occupancy for the closure.

“We are a locally-owned business in an old and historic building,” Leopold Executive Director Peter Frazier said in an email. “With a quick and significant loss of occupancy, we decided finally to leave the senior living business to the larger companies and pursue a more sustainable business model.”

*The view of downtown, Western and South Hill from Mickey’s ninth-floor window that she has looked over for the last five and a half years.*



Shock, anger and sadness spread through the residents of the Leopold as they planned their next step to find their future home.

“I plan on staying until the 31st of March,” Mickey said.

#### **LIFE AT THE LEOPOLD**

In 2013, Mickey moved into the Leopold. Like many other residents, she was attracted to the central location downtown. It gave her the freedom to walk to different shops or easily hop on a WTA bus for a ride around town.

The building itself is a 1929 addition to the original Leopold Hotel Josiah Bryon first opened in 1899. After many years of changing hands, the building was restored in 1979, revealing the original hand-painted tiles, the interior fountain and the classic beauty of the building. In 1982, it was added to the National Register of Historic Places. And in 1985, it opened its doors to the over-55 community of Bellingham as the Leopold Retirement Residence.

In 2006, David Johnston and Bob Hall of Clearstory Investments bought the Leopold and continued its operations. The pair also own the Bellingham Herald building, the Heliotrope Hotel and the Bellingham National Bank building.

Retirees enjoyed their afternoons lounging around the lobby during coffee hour, chatting with other community members or competing in rounds of “Wii Bowling.” Residents shared meals in the Chandelier Room, where notables like former U.S. President William H. Taft and explorer Richard Byrd once dined.

On the first Wednesday of every month, the Leopold hosted dances open to the community, where residents waltzed beneath the iconic crystal chandeliers.

As much as 17 percent of Americans 50 years and older experience social isolation, according to an AARP Foundation study.

Residents of the Leopold were given memberships to the Pickford Theatre, the Kulshan Community Land Trust, the YMCA and many other local organizations to keep them active in the community.

The Leopold marketed itself as a place where residents could “age in place.” According to the CDC, aging in place refers to the ability of an elderly person to continue to live in their community independently and safely.

The residents took this advertising to heart.

“[It] was a big thing as far as we were concerned — the fact that you can stay here until you die,” Mickey said. “It’s your last home. You never have to move again.”

When Mickey first moved into the Leopold in 2013, she signed a month-to-month rental agreement as part of the independent living community. She planned to switch to assisted living when she eventually needed further accommodations and aid later in life.



*Marlene "Mickey" Spencer, 83, sits in her apartment as she begins reorganizing and packing prior to her move from the Leopold.*

Assisted living facilities allow elderly residents to live on their own with additional support from staff. They may receive help with cooking, cleaning, showering or managing medication based on their need. Independent living communities don't have the same support for daily activities, but residents have easier access to things like dining and medical care than retirees who live completely independently.

On Jan. 1, 2016, three years after Mickey moved in, the Leopold cut all eight nurses and aids on staff. It changed its business model to be solely an independent living community.

"We determined that outside caregivers would be able to provide more options of care and support [for] the residents and their families than what the Leopold was licensed to provide," Peter Frazier said in an email.

For residents who remained and needed the extra care of an assisted living facility, the Leopold directed them to Right at Home, an organization that provides in-home care to seniors.

Aside from the change in business plan, the Leopold raised Mickey's rent by 8 percent in 2017 and 8 percent in 2018, despite the reduction in services.

For five months, Dolores said she lived in the guest suite room in the basement of the Leopold. This room, formerly a sauna, is marked as the "computer room" on the building's floor plan provided in the resident handbook.

Without windows to cast natural light, the dark wood panels on the walls eerily reflect the incandescent lights. The room has no heat, according to Dolores, and has only one electrical outlet which was blocked by her bed when she stayed there.

Dolores said she was provided an extension cord and a small,

rolling space heater for warmth. However, at night, Dolores had to choose between plugging in her scooter to charge, the heater for warmth or her CPAP to breathe. If she plugged all three in at once, it would blow a fuse, leaving her alone in the dark basement.

"The Leopold Retirement Residence is a historic building in which it is 'grandfathered' in with regards to certain local codes and state statutes," Peter Frazier said in an email. "All facets of the Leopold Retirement Residence are and have been in strict compliance."

One night in November 2018, fire alarms blared through the Leopold. Residents hid behind their fireproof doors and waited for the Bellingham Fire Department to check on them, as advised in the Leopold resident handbook.

**"[IT] WAS A BIG THING AS FAR AS WE WERE CONCERNED — THE FACT THAT YOU CAN STAY HERE UNTIL YOU DIE. IT'S YOUR LAST HOME. YOU NEVER HAVE TO MOVE AGAIN."  
— MARLENE "MICKEY" SPENCER, FORMER LEOPOLD RESIDENT**



*The basement room where Dolores lived for five months last year stands empty, except for a TV and dresser.*

However, Dolores said no one came to check on her in the basement. Unable to walk up the stairs and with the elevators shut off, she said she was stuck in the basement alone for over two hours without cell service.

“I have two cell phones and neither one of them work down there,” Dolores said. “I couldn’t call anybody for help.”

Once the elevators turned back on, Dolores escaped to find other residents mingling in lobby. She said they told her the fire department had come and checked on everyone else in the building.

The Leopold management did not comment on this alleged incident.

On Jan. 4, 2019, Dolores moved into a standard room after many had moved out due to the impending closure.

## CLOSURE

On Dec. 17, 2018, Mickey, Dolores and the other 77 residents of the Leopold packed tightly into the Chandelier Room, where for many years they ate, laughed and made memories with each other.

Peter Frazier stood in front of the crowd and announced the Leopold Retirement Residence was closing.

“It has been difficult to uproot the people I have gotten to know over the last three years and having to give difficult news to elderly people who had hoped the Leopold might be their home for many years to come,” Peter Frazier said in an email.

**“I COULDN’T CALL ANYBODY FOR HELP.”  
— DOLORES KOZERA,  
FORMER LEOPOLD RESIDENT**

In the days and weeks that followed, a deep-seated sadness and high levels of stress plagued the Leopold.

“Every day brings negative vibes to the Leopold,” Mickey wrote in a diary entry on Wednesday, Jan. 16, 2019.

There was widespread frustration among residents and staff after the announcement. They said it was abrupt and the timing was poor. They also complained the owners, David Johnston and Bob Hall, did not attend the meeting to announce the closure themselves.

“Business is business, but you can do it with humanity,” said former resident Marsha Feldman, 72.

Peter Frazier said he remembers being apologetic, and it made little sense for the owners to attend the meeting, as they rarely interacted directly with residents.

With the announcement made days before Christmas, many residents said the holiday season ceased to exist. The press release on the Leopold’s website states they chose to make the announcement before Christmas because many gather with their families at that time of year.

“Most people here took that as, ‘You just ruined our Christmas, and it may be our last because we are old,’” Mickey said.

Family members flocked from all corners of the country to Bellingham to help their parents and grandparents find new housing. Mickey's daughter, Karen, trekked from Edmonton, Alberta to help her plan the next stage of her life.

Several former residents said the prices of retiree housing throughout Bellingham jumped significantly immediately following the closure of the Leopold.

"The handwriting was on the wall — 79 [people] all of a sudden blown away and having to look for quarters," said former resident Stephane Ligtelyn, 82. "I won't say it was a stampede, but you had to make a quick decision."

Elder care at an assisted living facility in Washington state costs a median of \$61,000 a year and nursing homes around \$104,000 a year, according to the Genworth Cost of Care Survey 2018. Former resident Sue Schelinski, 75, said she had to shell out an additional \$1,000 in relocation fees to move to Affinity at Bellingham, just a 15-minute drive away.

The Leopold management provided aid to the residents by hiring Dan Hammill, a member of the Bellingham City Council, as a housing specialist. He was tasked with helping residents find new homes, Peter Frazier said in an email. More than 100 community members and former Leopold staff volunteered their personal time to help the residents move out.

In the meeting, residents were told the Leopold would run normally until the final closure, former resident Nancy Hirsch, 83, said.

However, to cut costs in the final months of operation, the Leopold reduced its bus service, turned down the heating and removed half the lightbulbs from the light fixtures in the hallway. On Feb. 16, 2019, the Leopold began catering food to the remaining residents.

The Leopold also quickly cut the general staff. Senior server Lily Walter, 20, said she was told she would have her job until

March 31, 2019, but they ended her employment on Feb. 2. "They were really desperate to get rid of the workers, which I think is really unfair to both employees and residents," Lily said.

Nancy wrote a letter to Peter Frazier with the support of Mickey, Dolores and the other six remaining residents on Thursday, Feb. 14, 2019. They asked for financial compensation and to be pro-rated for February's rent because the Leopold was not fulfilling their side of the rental contract.

In response, Peter Frazier said he believed the Leopold was providing the level of service to which they were contractually obligated. He stated there was still staff on call 24 hours a day, there were other options for transportation, the activities were reduced because no one showed up and the food was still wholesome and high quality.

On Feb. 6, 2019, the Leopold held its last community dance. The tables donned red and pink tablecloths and were scattered with Hershey's Kisses wrapped in pink tinfoil. Guests enjoyed complimentary cookies and wine. Live music filled the room as 40 locals swung and waltzed around the ballroom, as had been done for more than 90 years.

The community came together to celebrate the end of an era. Meanwhile Mickey, Dolores and the other remaining residents sat floors above them in their rooms, preparing to pack up and leave their homes, once again.

As of March 1, 2019, darkness enveloped the Leopold Retirement Residence. Only one light shone out across downtown Bellingham from room 901 where Mickey spent the last five-and-a-half years. She, her daughter and two grandsons spent the last week, packing her things in preparation for her journey to Edmonton, Alberta.

The Leopold now stands empty, lights out and doors locked, with an unclear future ahead.



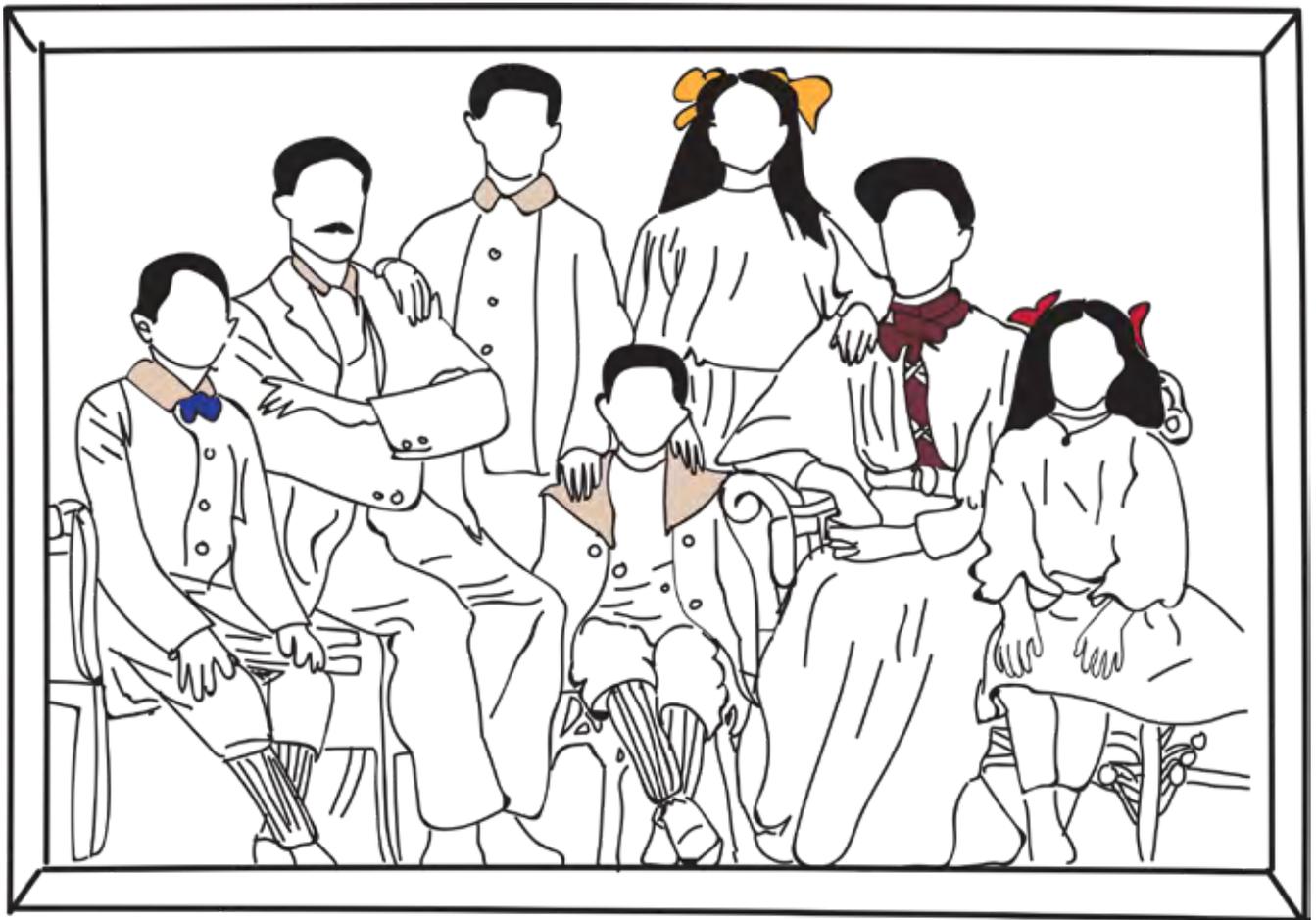
*Dolores Kozera sits in her apartment on the first floor to the Leopold as she waits to move to her next home.*

# At the Bottom of the Atlantic

*A family's journey to the U.S. cut short*

Story by Aubrey Sage

Illustration by Isabel Lay



**N**ineteen of my family members lie at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean with the rusted century-old remains of the RMS Titanic.

At 10 years old, my grandfather told me the two largest families to go down with the infamous Titanic were my relatives, the Goodwins and Sages. The Sages, from my father's side, had a family of 11 where the youngest was four. The Goodwins, from my mother's side, had a family of eight. Their youngest was 19 months. Both were in the

steerage class of the ship, hoping to make a life in America.

Just over 107 years later, I am living in America. I am getting an advanced education. I am living the dream that they all died for.

A 1911 postcard from John Sage to his wife reads:

"My dear,  
Have found a lovely plot of land. Jacksonville is quite the

most wonderful of places. I count the days until I'm home with my dear ones.

Your loving husband, John.”

That plot of land would soon be the Sage family pecan farm in Jacksonville, Florida. The tropical foliage and the sun must have made a picture of paradise — nothing he'd ever seen in Northamptonshire, England where he worked as a baker for most his life.

George, his eldest son, travelled with him to America in April, 1911. They worked several months in the cramped, rattling carts of the Central Pacific Railway until they earned just enough money to make the purchase of their new home.

By late autumn, George and John returned to England to gather the rest of their family and essential belongings. They originally planned to board the RMS Philadelphia, but due to coal strikes, they had to book passage on the Titanic instead.

After saying goodbye to their friends and neighbors, the family travelled to Southampton to sail off. There they were, all 11 Sages among thousands of excited passengers boarding the most luxurious ship in the world. There they were atop the steel beast as it slowly pulled away from the only home and life they knew, looking on the crowd of spectators waving handkerchiefs. April 10, 1912, RMS Titanic, third class.

I often take everything around me for granted. I complain about insignificant things every day while getting a college education in a free country. I think about how I have never crossed the Atlantic Ocean. Hell, I've never

“I WONDER HOW BEAUTIFUL THE STARS WERE THAT NIGHT”

left North America. How can I begin to understand the distance or appreciate the feat of my ancestors' willingness to live an unrealized dream?

Ninety-six miles away from the Sage family in Wiltshire, Frederick Goodwin received several letters from his brother and sisters. They had settled in Niagara Falls, New York, and were urging him to join his family. He lived his adult life working in a dark and tiny print shop, so working a big power station in Niagara Falls didn't sound so bad.

Once Frederick's sisters gathered enough funds for travel, they sent it his way so their families could be reunited. Frederick brought his wife and six children to London to board a different steamer, but the coal strikes also changed their plans and their fate. April 10, 1912, RMS Titanic, third class.

I wonder what it was like to walk along the decks watching the ocean waves pass at unimaginable speeds.

I try to picture the vast night sky with no land in sight. I wonder what it was like to wake to the awful noise of ice scraping metal.

Some accounts say the Sage's made it to the upper deck before the Titanic sunk. I wonder, were they all together? What was four-year-old Thomas thinking amidst the frantic surge? Was he scared?

“HOW CAN I BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND THE DISTANCE OR APPRECIATE THE FEAT OF MY ANCESTORS' WILLINGNESS TO LIVE AN UNREALIZED DREAM?”

I wonder if the Goodwins even made it up to the decks. Were they still in their rooms waiting for it to be over? Were they at peace when they died?

I wonder how beautiful the stars were that night.

I have so many questions, but I can't come close to imagining what that night was for the over 1,500 people who met their ends. Of my 19 ancestors, only two bodies were recovered: Thirteen-year-old Anthony Sage and Sidney Goodwin, just 19 months.

I'm not sure when the Sage's and the Goodwins made it over to America. Yet, here we are, over a century later, and there they remain at the bottom of the ocean. Just another name on the passenger list.

Sometimes I wonder why my ancestors wanted to come here so badly. Especially in recent years I find myself ashamed to be American, but looking at this list of names, and where I am, I can only hope that I am here for a reason.

## Rest in Peace:

Sage, John	Sage, Thomas
Sage, Annie	Goodwin, Frederick
Sage, Stella	Goodwin, Augusta
Sage, George	Goodwin, Lillian A.
Sage, Douglas	Goodwin, Charles E.
Sage, Frederick	Goodwin, William F.
Sage, Dorothy	Goodwin, Jessie
Sage, William	Goodwin, Harold
Sage, Ada	Goodwin, Sidney
Sage, Constance	

# BOW HILL BLUEBERRIES

Today On The Farm  
Mon-Sun 10-5pm  
Tue-Thu 11am-5pm  
New Year, New You.  
Come try our  
**SUPERFOOD!**  
bowhillblueberries.com

Bow Hill Blueberry  
Ice Cream



Today!

**NOTICE**  
THIS AREA IS  
UNDER 24  
HOUR VIDEO  
SURVEILLANCE

# Heirlooms of Bow Hill

## *The renewed legacy of the oldest blueberry farm in Skagit Valley*

Story by Grace Westermann  
Photos by Kelly Pearce

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The blueberry bushes at Bow Hill Blueberries stand regal in their rows, roots hibernated in frozen mud under a pale pink sky. At 72 years old, the vines aren't about to be rushed.

This field of sleeping beauties will welcome heaps of bright blue berries come summer, continuing its legacy as the oldest blueberry farm in the Skagit Valley.

Inside the farmhouse, owners Susan and Harley Soltes lean against their kitchen island, backlit by a bright morning sun and ready for a day of pressing, dehydrating and pickling blueberries.

They found and renamed the farm "Bow Hill Blueberries" in 2011 to serve as a new adventure for them and to satisfy people's hunger for the tiny blue fruit.

Susan, a film director, and Harvey, a photojournalist, pursued their individual successful careers for 25 years.

"I'm a farmer by marriage," Susan said. "I had done the film thing and just wanted something new, and I said, 'Hey I'll farm with you as long as we do it in Skagit Valley.' And that's when we found the blueberry farm."

The U.S. is the largest blueberry producer in the world, and Washington state is the largest blueberry producer in the nation, according to Washivior, a Washington state website for agricultural education.

An Eastern Washington native, Susan said she felt like farming was always in her somewhere.

Harley had dreamt about becoming a farmer since he was a child.

In the beginning, the Soltes didn't set out to be blueberry farmers. They had a 40-acre farm west of Edison and lived in a trailer. The blueberry farm was appealing to them because

it had a house, a processing facility and a distinct history. The farm was conceived in 1947 by the Anderson Family in Bow, Washington. Susan said the blueberry plants are desirable because they're an heirloom fruit.

Heirlooms are historic plant varieties refined by generations of gardeners and known for their delectable taste, according to an article by Farm and Dairy. To be considered heirloom, the plant must be more than 50 years old.

It wasn't enough to own a historic blueberry farm for the Soltes. They wanted to transform the blueberries to being as pure as possible by sticking to their organic values they practiced at their other farm.

**↑ THE BLUEBERRIES ARE DIFFERENT EVERY YEAR THEY'RE LIKE A SNOWFLAKE — SUSAN SOLTES**

The organic transition takes three years, according to the USDA. From day one, growers must start everything organically in order for the previous chemicals from conventional farming to break down and disappear from the soil.

While transitioning, farm and labor costs are greater than using organic methods and having to sell the fruit at conventional prices until they can be labeled "certified organic."

Despite jumping through the hoops of certification, the Soltes had their first organic blueberry harvest in 2014. With success came obstacles.

"Growing organic fruit in the Northwest is challenging because it's so wet; you have to combat fungal diseases through organic methods," Harley said.

The farm uses fermented antibacterial products like clove and orange oils that can be very expensive, and they combine mechanical pruning methods to allow for more air flow.

It's a challenging process, but they wouldn't do it any other way. Their employees and the people who walk through the blueberry field are safe from pesticides used in a conventional



*Harley and Susan Soltes stand in the middle of their favorite row of blueberries.*

## “HARLEY HAD DREAMT ABOUT BECOMING A FARMER SINCE HE WAS A CHILD”

field.

For their small five-acre farm, Harley said they complete as much paperwork as a 100-acre, non-organic blueberry farm.

“Washington State Department of Agriculture goes over everything we do,” he said. “But that’s what gives the logo of ‘organic’ integrity. You pay for it, but it keeps the system honest.”

Back in the kitchen, Susan took a sip of pressed heirloom blueberry juice made on the farm and elaborated on what she appreciates about her job now.

“[In advertising] I used to sell all kinds of things. I would sell things to people that they didn’t need, and I would think as I’m filming, ‘People don’t need this. Why am I doing this?’” she said. “People might not need a blueberry, but at least it’s good for them.”

Outside, the sun was beating down and the air was crisp. An occasional honey bee from the Soltes’ bee hives whizzed by in search of its next plant to pollinate.

Harley walked through the field, his boots lined with mud that had begun to ooze out of its frozen form.

“We didn’t invent this place. This is a continuation of what the Andersons did for 65 years,” he said.

The blueberry plants are the star of the show, but on top of their soil and in the surrounding field lies a community of life that grows and sustains their production.

A succulent called purslane grows as a cover crop, choking any surrounding weeds. Later in the year, thousands of sunflowers will grow to help feed the bees for blueberry pollination.

The farm is an organic team effort between the land, its farmers and the community that supports it. Until their seasonal debut, the blueberry buds will remain dormant.

“The blueberries are different every year, they’re like a snowflake,” Susan said. “Every harvest will be different and you don’t know what’s going to happen.”

# Psychology Through the Looking Glass

*Addressing the complex question of self  
through cross-cultural psychology*

Story by Regan Bervar  
Illustration by Isabel Lay



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**O**n the third floor of the Academic Instructional Center at Western, Professor Joseph Trimble resides in his office. The door is ajar letting in fragments of hallway conversation. He sits in his chair surrounded by rows of books on either side.

Trimble stands. He is tall with wise eyes, white hair and a gentle voice made for storytelling. His hand goes directly to a book on the shelf, as though it had been there many times before. Most of the books are titled in regard to psychology and American Indian studies.

“Have you ever read ‘Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland?’” he asks. Trimble holds “Through the Looking-Glass” by Lewis Carroll in his hands and turns it over.

“She follows this stupid rabbit down a hole and she’s lost. She doesn’t know where she is, and she starts to shrink. She can’t get out of this room, and she gets really, really tall,” he says.

Trimble puts the book back on the shelf and resumes his story. “She says ‘curiouser and curiouser.’ Grammatically that’s incorrect, but remember that line? I love that line.”

Wonderland, made famous by Carroll, is a world of tantalizing possibilities and the beguiled unknown. “Curiouser and curiouser” speculates a world of untold imagination where normal rules don’t apply. With each step further into this realm, Alice forgets about the world and its precedence outside the rabbit hole. Instead, she seeks to find her own identity and meaning, driven by her curiosity relative to this extraordinary place.

“I have interest in so many fascinating things, and I think it stems from my insatiable curiosity,” Trimble says. “That’s what keeps me going is just curiosity.”

Trimble is a psychology professor at Western. After studying psychology extensively at the University of Oklahoma, University of New Hampshire, Waynesburg College and Harvard University, Trimble came to Bellingham to continue his learning through teaching.

During his time in college, Trimble found himself challenging his professors’ teachings on psychology. He wondered how the same principles could apply universally without regard to ethnic background,

especially when there is so much diversity to be celebrated in the world. celebrated in the world.

“I thought to myself that [diversity] was all over the place, and psychology doesn’t even use the word ethnicity or culture in its textbooks,” Trimble says. “I started asking, whose psychology is this?”

Cross-cultural psychology is the study of how cultural differences influence human behavior. This leads to differences in how people think, feel and act. There was no field for this type of research when Trimble began his career in the 1960s, but with an ambitious appetite for believing in the impossible, he pressed on. Western lured him in as the only place with an established center for cross-cultural psychology. He created a network with people around the country who shared the same logic.

“There was a struggle; we had to deal with a lot of resistance,” Trimble says. “We were challenging conventional theory and wisdom.”

Fueled by his curiosity and the inner workings of the mind, Trimble became fascinated with British literature. He was interested why so many famed books and reputable knowledge came out of the small country of Britain. He decided to take an independent study in the topic during his sophomore year at the University of Oklahoma. After the first meeting with his professor, he was taken aback by the books she chose for him to read — “Through the Looking-Glass,” “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland” and “Jane Eyre.” He didn’t know why his professor had chosen these texts, but he was determined to look for the hidden meaning in the words.

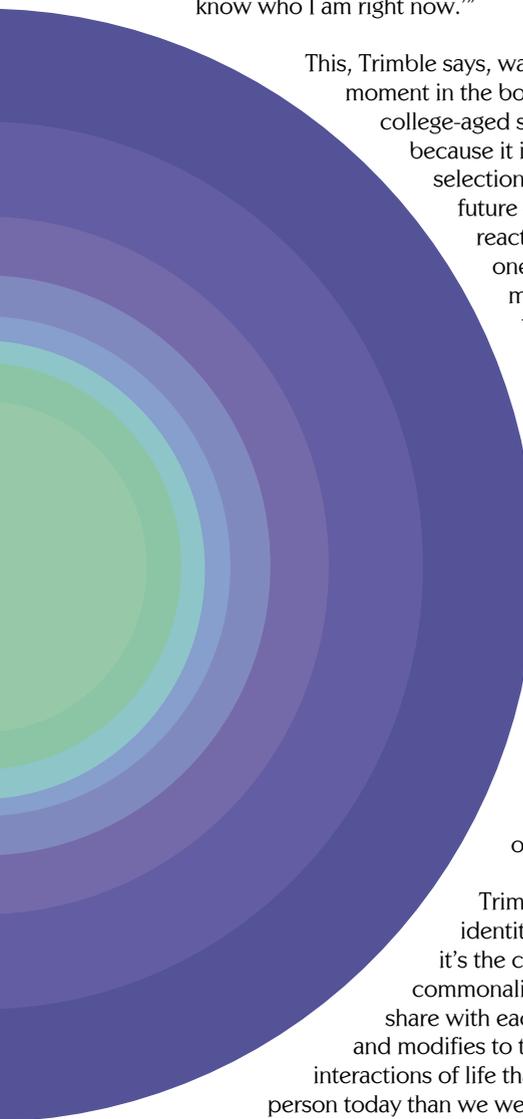
“I realized these authors, male or female, knew more about the personality of individuals than we profess in the field of psychology as I understood it at the time,” Trimble says. “And I still contend that’s true to this day. How they develop characters [...] is astonishing.”

A dilemma Alice faces throughout the novel is discovering

“I HAVE INTEREST IN SO MANY FASCINATING THINGS, AND IT STEMS FROM MY INSATIABLE CURIOSITY. THAT'S WHAT KEEPS ME GOING IS JUST CURIOSITY.”  
— JOSEPH TRIMBLE

who she is relative to this new world called Wonderland. She forgets her knowledge of what she learned in school and of where she comes from, leaving her confused and lost in her multiple identities. She often fights with herself in the book and other times gives herself courage by pretending to be someone else.

“She sees this caterpillar sitting on a rock. Do you remember what he said to her?” Trimble asks. “The caterpillar asks her, ‘Who are you?’ And she says to him, ‘I don’t know. I don’t know who I am right now.’”



This, Trimble says, was a profound moment in the book that spoke to his college-aged self. Identity matters because it is involved in the selection of friends, partners, future aspirations and the reactions of others in one’s social environment. It empowers us to make the distinction between “self” and “other” which allows us to create our own self image.

“We all have a need to know who we are, and that guides us in terms of how we relate to people,” Trimble says. “It serves as an anchor of where you get your values, beliefs and behaviors on a deeper level.”

Trimble says a sense of identity is vital because it’s the connectedness and commonalities that people share with each other. It changes and modifies to the experiences and interactions of life that make us a different person today than we were yesterday.

At the University of Oklahoma, Trimble went on to do his doctoral dissertation research with American Indians. Although Oklahoma was in the middle of what they called “Indian Country,” his adviser told him he would be the first to study this. Like Alice, he was propelled forward by a hungry gnaw of curiosity.

Working among many indigenous groups of American Indians, Trimble coined the term “ethnic gloss” which refers to an overgeneralized way of labeling cultural groups. Labeling American Indians all under the same category would be unproductive when it comes to studying their cultures because



*Photo courtesy of Joseph Trimble*

it ignores the deep cultural framework and unique values that vary among tribes.

Trimble has done research on counseling methods among different cultures, particularly American Indians. He has found traditional counseling methods fail to make an impact on these indigenous communities when it comes to facing issues of drug abuse and suicide intervention. By merging counseling techniques with local values and theories, counseling had a greater impact on reducing the rates of drug use and suicide.

Culture and diversity matter, especially when it comes to treating mental health through meaningful relationships and trust, according to Trimble.

“I’ve learned from experience that people won’t quite divulge everything, and I firmly believe that it has to do with the relationship you establish,” he says. “You have to avoid glossing over someone’s culture and overgeneralizing it. You have to get down to what matters to a person.”

Trimble has learned through his work that reality is relative to those experiencing it. The closest we can get to understanding someone else’s reality is through trust and being genuine with one another. When we combine these ideas with empathy, we can begin to discover our own identity. Like Alice navigating through Wonderland.

“Was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different,” Carroll wrote in “Through the Looking-Glass.” “But if I’m not the same, the next question is ‘Who in the world am I?’ Ah, that’s the great puzzle!”

# Walls Redefined

*Gretchen Leggitt is a local muralist challenging viewers to redefine the spaces they pass every day*

Story by Grace Westermann

Photo by Kelly Pearce

**B**londe wavy hair streams wildly out of artist Gretchen Leggitt's winter hat as her rugged boots cover her feet. She looks ready to step inside her sketches of mountains surrounding her.

The images that line the walls of Leggitt's petite studio makes her artwork look deceptively small.

As a muralist, her recent work is as anything but small.

It's hard to miss the 21,800 ft mural — the size of two football fields — emblazoned on metal panels on Cornwall Avenue in Bellingham. The scene ignites the eyes to visions of the Pacific Northwest in a symphonic fusion of colorful flowing lines and mountain ranges.

It's hard to miss the sundial mural on Unity Street of Mount Baker and the Skagit Valley lit up in vibrant colors of yellow, blue, purple and orange on a gloomy day.

Sipping tea from a handcrafted mug her friend made, she reflected on her self-discovery and the important role her creative upbringing had on her as an artist.

Leggitt's mother, father, stepmother and brother are all artists.

"I grew up in a very creatively influential environment," Leggitt said. "My parents encouraged creativity, whether it was structured or spontaneous, ranging from, 'You want to play a board game? Make one.'"

Growing up, she went to a small private school in Denver where she took an art class from Rick Sigler. There, they broke the rules of art cast down in society. They were allowed to make messes, but they were encouraged to discover the art in them.

"In middle school, you begin to define what you want to do and who you want to be, and it's a really easy age to lose interest in childhood passions. Sigler was the one who kept that hook in my cheek," Leggitt said.

Leggitt moved to Bellingham where she continued to teach and create after getting her degree in fine arts, moving to Seattle and balancing a career as a K-8 art teacher and artist

She said living in Seattle became tough when Amazon arrived. Rent increased and it became harder for her and her friends to afford the city when they had lived humble, low-cost lifestyles. They always valued a balance of work and play not easily



"I GREW UP IN A VERY CREATIVELY INFLUENTIAL ENVIRONMENT"

achieved in a high-income job.

Bellingham became a creative and inspiring art mecca Leggitt hadn't experienced in Seattle. She was blown away by how friendly and outgoing people were. Her artwork was well received and opened up opportunities for her to explore new mediums.

She created her first murals at Vital Climbing Gym — flowing mountain ranges on one wall and a crawling octopus with entangled tentacles on another.

"It was intimidating to have this public podium that was going to be semi permanent," she said. "I love it though — to be able to be held accountable for something that was going to exist on that wall."

In 2018, Leggitt knew she would need some help after finding out her sketch for a sundial mural was chosen to be painted on the side of a building. She decided to ask her dad, Jim Leggitt, to fly to Washington from Colorado.

Luckily, Jim had free time from his nine-to-five partner position at an architect planning firm and was ecstatic when he heard his daughter's proposition.

He said tackling the mural together 10-12 hours a day, five days in a row, was something he'll never forget. In the process they found a rhythm, momentum and focus that carried them day by day.

"There's a phrase, 'How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time,'" Jim said. "We eventually created this mammoth of a task of creating a mural. It takes a lot of courage, you dive in and make it happen. If you fail you fail, if you succeed you succeed."

To Jim, there's a lot of creative people out there, and street art is a great way of expressing their talent. It activates a dead space and creates a sense of pride for the community. Over the years, mural art has burst through the seams of rising social media, showing its growth and popularity around the country and back in Gretchen's home state.

She said downtown Denver has embraced street art through a revitalization project where downtown is now known as the River North Art District, or Rino.

“There used to be a pretty run down slummy, industrial area,” Leggitt said. “An art epicenter got created with art studios and along with that came street art.”

Street art in the 1960’s gained popularity in the ‘70s and ‘80s. This type of art is a descendant of murals with a long history of bringing cultures and communities to life.

The first known murals dates back 35,000 years to images of hunters and animals carved into walls of Indonesian caves. Throughout time, they have found their way onto walls from the Roman Empire to Chinese depictions of paradise to current commissioned building designs.

Unlike entering a gallery or art museum where the viewer is anticipating judgements and reactions to artwork, street murals redefine our notion of where art lives.

“We expect the streets to be gray with blank walls, and it’s a beautiful surprise to mentally unwrap this unique work of art when you turn the corner,” Leggitt said. “Having a painting on the side of the building pushes the boundaries for how we interact with architecture.”

However, murals can be fraught with challenges.

Liggett admitted to loving the problem solving elements of each uniquely different mural. She said designing the work is one small facet, and it’s mostly about questioning how to get a drawing enlarged to a massive scale while maintaining the quality of the image.

She said the last thing she thought she would come across in creating murals is the perception from others she would need help because she’s a woman.

“I have had clients question my ability to operate heavy machinery like boom lifts or question if I’m able to get the job done alone, and it feels really empowering and really good to

be able to prove them wrong,” Liggett said.

Apart from murals, Leggitt stays busy with various art projects. Each one tells a visual narrative of her outdoor adventures.

Her face was animated as she talked about growing up in Colorado with a passion for the environment.

“I started skiing when I was two years old,” Leggitt said. “My dad had us rock climbing outdoors, white water kayaking in the third grade and mountain biking – so I was definitely raised on the lands with an appreciation for conservation and the wild.”

Her next mural will be 160 ft by 15 ft on a shoring wall in Seattle off Lake City Way on what was once a concrete and wood retainer.

“Street art is blowing up. I’m excited to see more businesses investing in beautifying their buildings and their streets in unique ways,” Gretchen said. “It redefines the space.”

In her studio, a writer’s desk sat against a window where a face lay half sketched on the back of an old map. Other figurative portraits adorned the space, a surprising twist from her signature landscapes of mountain ranges and outdoor adventures.

She said her own style is something she’s been chipping away at in her lifetime. To recreate a person on paper captivated her. Then, she broke away from it and entered geometric line work and realism within an abstract space, incorporating a more nature-based theme.

When she’s creating murals, moments don’t only belong to her. They’re shared.

“A mural is so rewarding,” Leggitt said. “To get to put myself out there and engage with people on the streets and see their reactions is so encouraging. I feel like I’ve reached a point in my creative output in which I have thankfully defined my authentic style.”



Supposedly the largest mural in Washington State spans across a Puget Sound Encogen building in downtown.



Photo by Matthew Tangeman

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