Spring 2019

UA12/2/2 2019 Talisman: Paradise

WKU Student Life

TALISMAN

PARADISE

Issue No. 06

About the cover photo: This photo represents paradise as the idea of a place without flaws that is unique to every individual. The mirror represents a portal to that place, with the yellow background complimenting the bright connotations that come along with it.

COVER PHOTO BY CHRIS KOHLEY

OUR MISSION

We believe in the power of good storytelling, and we hope the stories that we tell inspire you to live an empowered and impassioned life.

We are the forever-present, eclectic, intelligent, bright and cheery voice of WKU's student body.

We're forever connected to our Hill and dedicated to serving our community through high-quality journalism, stunning photography and quirky, relatable content.

We are the Talisman.

Issue No. 06

PARADISE

Spring 2019

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Paradise

Dear reader,

This issue's theme is "Paradise."

The origins of our modern word for "paradise" are from French, Greek and ancient Iranian, but most refer to a physical space, often a grove or garden. Versions of it appear in the Torah to describe the Garden of Eden, the New Testament uttered by Jesus on the cross and the Quran where heaven is described as a garden. In these iterations, paradise is a place of lush flora and fauna, peace and tranquility.

Our editorial board was drawn to the theme of "paradise" because of this lavish imagery. We loved the idea of paradise being something you create, whether physically or mentally, and we wanted to create a magazine that was its own kind of paradise.

We visited the earthly paradises students create in how they decorate their bedrooms (page 36) and literal gardens like the Baker Arboretum (page 40). Our "Death do us part" series (page 56) explores paradise as it relates to death. The first story in this series explores how the dying live their final days, the second looks into the lives of those tending to death daily and the third reflects on the aftermath of losing a loved one.

In literature, paradises are often walled off to protect them from the corruption of the outside world. But paradise often has a dark side, hence the phrase "trouble in paradise." After all, the Garden of Eden in the Bible is characterized as much by the sins of Adam and Eve as its flowing rivers and lush greenery. We explored what happens when a natural paradise is polluted (page 48) and when pursuing paradise leads to addiction (page 86).

Ultimately, paradise is something that requires intention and hard work to both create and maintain, whether it's a place, an idea or a state of mind. The Talisman, to me, is a paradise in all these ways and more. Our office is a paradise of creativity and warm company, and our magazines are a paradise of storytelling that nurtures human connection. We hope you feel the results of these efforts as you read this magazine.

Thanks for reading, and welcome to "Paradise."

Love always,

Hannah Good

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

photo by **EMILY MOSES**
illustrations by **HANNAH GOOD**

What's your paradise?

story by **CHELSEA MORGAN** *photos and illustrations by* **MANZAR RZAYEVA**

In February, while gray clouds seemed to refuse to leave Bowling Green and students settled into the spring semester, the Talisman asked students a question:What's your paradise?

ADVENTURING IN ALASKA

Caden Dosier sat tucked away in a corner of the Mahurin Honors College as he studied a Russian language textbook in his lap. Dosier, a Gatton Academy senior from Walton, studies Russian and mechanical engineering, both of which are fields that were not in his original plan. When he was 15, Dosier took a trip to Alaska that altered the trajectory of his life.

Dosier spent a month that summer with his mother's second cousins in Anchorage, where he saw things he had never seen before.

"I'm from middle-of-nowhere rural Kentucky," Dosier said. "I'd never seen 50-foot redwood trees or evergreens. I'd never been kayaking around fjords. I'd never been in a small, two-seat airplane."

Dosier kayaked in the Kenai Fjord National Park, which is located in the southeastern peninsula of Alaska.

"I was in this little, 10-foot kayak just going around these huge oceanic waters," Dosier said. "Out to the left of me, there were these blue whales just breaching out of the ocean."

Not only did the wildlife awe Dosier, but the towering trees and glaciers in the national park left a lasting impression on him as well.

Dosier aspires to utilize his education as a mechanical engineer to aid conservation efforts in the Pacific Northwest and Western Canada.

Caden Dosier has been mesmerized with Alaska since he spent a summer break with his relatives in Anchorage, Alaska, as a teenager. A mechanical engineering and Russian major, Dosier said his future goal is to establish more natural forests.

IMMERSED IN NATURE

Louisville senior Kenny Ott sat alone in the crowded Downing Student Union Starbucks, gazing at his laptop screen. Baristas shouted names into the crowd; groups of students clustered together, and conversation buzzed around him. As the morning chaos surrounded him, Ott said he would rather immerse himself in nature.

Ott enjoys hiking and camping, which he often does by himself. When Ott is miles away from everyone, he said he can appreciate the freedom it gives him from everyday life.

"Even if you're with people, there's limits, you know, people have limits," he said. "But when you're by yourself, there's nothing holding you back."

Ott said it is sometimes scary to camp alone. Once on a trip to Gatlinburg, he went hiking alone and came across a black bear. Being by himself makes situations in nature more intense because he must rely solely on his own abilities and instincts.

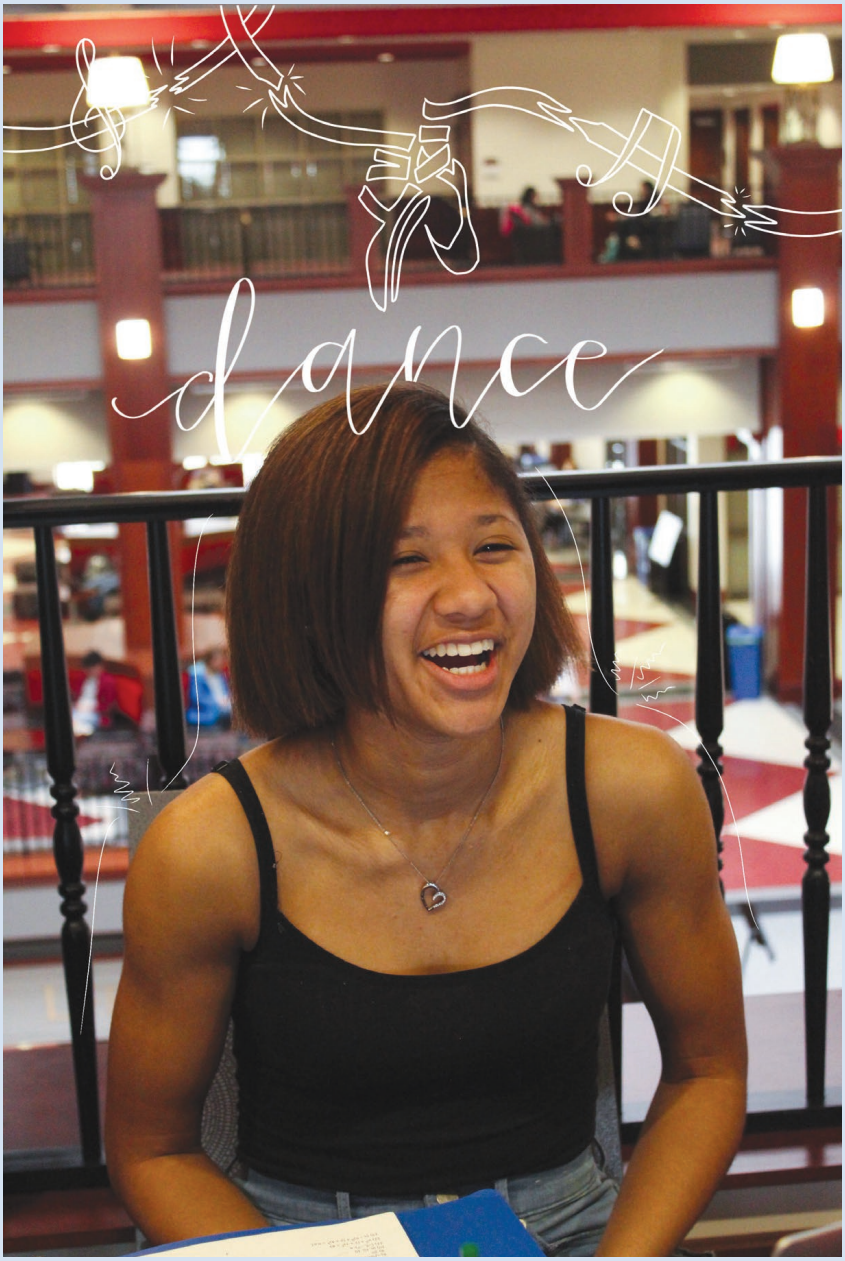
Although he likes to camp alone, Ott said the happiest week of his life was traveling and camping with his friends on a spring break trip in 2018. They ventured out west to Zion National Park, Bryce Canyon and the Grand Canyon.

Despite its grand name and reputation, the Grand Canyon was the most underwhelming part of the trip for Ott. He is colorblind, so the colors in the layers of the rock were not as prominent for him as they were for his friends. However, Ott saw Zion National Park in a completely different light.

"I could see all these colors in the rocks, and it blew my mind," he said. "That was like the best day of my life, and that's not an exaggeration."

Ott captured the view with a picture on his phone and set it as his phone's background, so even though he is hundreds of miles away, he still sees the beauty of Zion every day.

Despite the obstacle of being colorblind, Kenny Ott said he has admired the landscapes he has seen while hiking and camping. He said the view of Zion National Park has made him see in a distinctive perspective. "I could see all these colors in the rocks, and it blew my mind," Ott said. "That was like the best day of my life, and that's not an exaggeration."



As a dancer, Renesha Griffin enjoys bringing smiles to people's faces. Griffin said she is most proud of herself when performing in front of an audience or dancing behind the camera on Snapchat. Her current favorite style is hip-hop, but she also enjoys liturgical dance, which is often performed as an expression of worship.

DANCING FOR A CROWD

Cincinnati freshman Renesha Griffin spent her early childhood watching the praise dancers at her church, itching to get up and perform alongside them. Once she reached age 5, Griffin began dancing at her church and has not stopped since.

She said she receives the most recognition for her dancing from people she knows and attends church with and that her favorite performances have been at her church. After performing, she said people come up to her and say they can't keep their eyes off of her. Others sometimes tell her parents how impressed they are.

She has danced many genres like liturgical dance, also known as praise dance, at her church and ballet in classes as a young girl, but she said hip-hop is the genre that has stuck with her the most.

Griffin dances for the WKU Kaois dance team, a hip-hop group formed in 2018 that sometimes performs on campus and at other college campuses.

She said that what brings her the most joy is performing in front of audiences.

"I'm very happy because I'll be like, 'I just killed that shit,'" she said.

Griffin said she enjoys dancing with her friends in addition to doing the choreographed dance she is used to.

"I think dancing and hanging out with my friends is what really shaped me," she said. "I feel like most of my laughter comes from that."

ADVENTURES WITH FAMILY

Sophomore Jade Grabeel was born and raised in Somerset, much like her grandfather, whom she calls Papaw. Aside from a hometown, the two share a love for nature.

Grabeel said she and her 70-year-old grandfather do everything together. They often go hiking and even run 5K races together.

"He's like one of my best friends," Grabeel said. "He's very adventurous."

Grabeel's favorite memory with her grandfather was hiking Mount LeConte in the Great Smoky Mountains two years ago. Together, they trekked to the top of the mountain, which peaks at an elevation over 1,000 feet. Grabeel and her grandfather ate lunch together on the mountaintop before heading back down to stay the night in a hotel in Gatlinburg.

Along their hikes, Grabeel's grandfather often gives her advice about how to survive in the wilderness. As an experienced hunter, he has taught her how to identify different types of trees, recognize animal tracks and navigate cardinal directions.

Grabeel's grandfather also advises her on navigating her life, encouraging her never to take the easy way out.

"It'll teach you more about who you are as a person rather than just sliding by," Grabeel said.

Grabeel said this is her favorite piece of advice her grandfather has given her because it challenges her to live to her full potential. One of her goals is to someday hike the Rocky Mountains — a challenge her grandfather has already conquered.

Being 70 years old is not enough to stop Jade Grabeel's adventurous grandfather from hiking, running and participating in 5K races. Grabeel said the memories she has made with her grandfather bring her joy.

Don't wake me up yet

poem by **MANZAR RZAYEVA**
photo by **GRACE ALEXIEFF**

I stepped out of my shoes
and put them aside gently
looked around the surroundings.
They looked familiar, but partially.

I turned on the lights, hoping
to see the things more clearly.
My pale feet were touching the ground
but it wasn't a carpet that I thought.
It was wet grass, leftover of spring rain.
I took a deep breath, closed my eyes.
It wasn't the smell of leftover pizza,
it was smell of fresh air and a bit of rain.
I opened my eyes and what I saw
wasn't undone laundry or unread books.
It was a picture that I longed to see
where butterflies danced with each other
the trees spoke through their green leaves
and cherry blossoms were flying around.

I started to walk around to explore
to name the feelings I was experiencing,
to find out where exactly I was at.
Instead of worrying and being filled with anxiety
I let it all go and started running to the distance
while laughing and smiling and breathing,
while forgetting about past due homework,
while clearing my mind from over-stressing,
while not caring about overflown dishes in the sink
or the emptiness of the fridge, or the fullness of the desk.
I was where I have been meant to be at,
I was careless, free, optimistic, full of laughter.
I was at my happy place.
The place I haven't visited in a while
the place I almost forgot about.
I was at my happy place.
I was at my own bubble of paradise.
and I'm not leaving very soon yet
even though I know they will be gone
as soon as I wake up.

Poet's statement: "This poem is about a view of paradise or a happy place that hasn't been visited in a long time by a narrator who appears to be a student overwhelmed with everything happening around them. The happy place hasn't been visited in a while, and even though it all might be a dream, it is something to hope for."

MEET THE PARROT HEADS

story by **GRIFFIN FLETCHER** *photos by* **LILY THOMPSON**

With only a rented RV and road to burn, five friends set out to cover almost 1,000 miles in five days.

The group began in Louisville on Wednesday, June 16, 2008, then took a stop in Cincinnati and ended up in a small town in southern Wisconsin. With the music of singer-songwriter Jimmy Buffett on their minds, the friends attended two Buffett concerts during the trip and returned home with the tail end of Sunday to spare. One of the group of five was WBKO weeknight meteorologist Shane Holinde. Holinde, who's also a WKU alumnus and part-time broadcasting professor, said such trips are commonplace for fellow fans of Buffett, whose concerts often serve as "a mini vacation without necessarily being at the beach."

"It's the next best thing to being there," Holinde said about the concerts' similarity to a nice day by the ocean.

Shane Holinde began listening to Jimmy Buffett's music on cassettes in high school. A friend of his introduced him to the artist, and he has been listening to his music since. Holinde is a meteorologist for WBKO, and one of his favorite Buffett songs is "The Weather is Here, I Wish You Were Beautiful," because of its references to weather.

ONE FAN'S BEGINNING

Initially introduced to Buffett's music through his late '70s hits "Margaritaville" and "Cheeseburger in Paradise," Holinde didn't become a true fan of the Mississippi-born musician until 1992.

Holinde said it all happened in his hometown of Owensboro during a high school lunch break. A friend played him a cassette tape of Buffett's fourth studio album, "Living and Dying in 3/4 Time," and he never looked back.

"That's how it all got started," Holinde said.

Since then, Holinde has attended 22 Buffett concerts everywhere from Boston to Indianapolis and Alpine Valley, Wisconsin. He plans to attend two more concerts by the end of 2019.

When he's not crossing the country in search of his next Buffett fix, he said he's able to keep the spirit alive through

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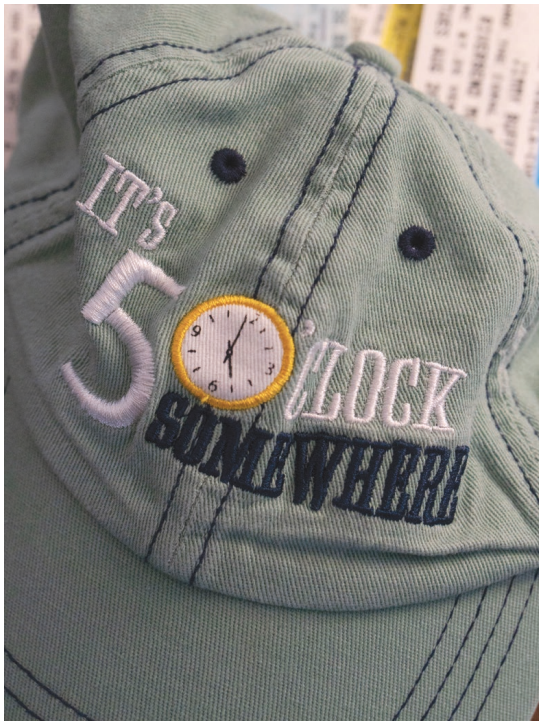
Buffett fan Richie Mix hasn't kept much Buffet merchandise. He only has a coconut bra with pineapple tassels, a parrot head hat and a lei. "The underlying theme of Buffett is this not fitting into society," Mix said. "It's just not knowing where your place is."

Holinde (left) and Randall Parmley are pictured at a Buffett show in Nashville, Tenn., in a year neither remember. Holinde and Parmley have been friends for years and often go to Buffett shows together. The two met while in college. (Photo courtesy of Randall Parmley)



Holinde said that after he first got into Buffett's music, he went on a "spending spree" and didn't really stop until he owned all of Buffet's music on either cassette or vinyl as well as other memorobillia. Now, he owns all of Buffett's music on CDs, vinyl and DVDs.

his vast Buffett memorabilia collection, which includes various CDs, live DVDs and an original vinyl copy of Buffett's "Coconut Telegraph" his college roommates gifted him while he was a student at WKU. Holinde said he treats the record as one of his most special items of Buffett memorabilia.

"It's still in its seal, and it's not coming out," Holinde said.

He said he hopes to one day shake hands with Buffett and have him sign the record.

"It would mean a heck of a lot," Holinde said. "I wouldn't know what to say other than just, 'Thank you for the music. It's almost like a soundtrack to my life.'"

Holinde's friend Randall Parmley said he believes Holinde's interest in Buffett extends beyond anything else he's seen from other Buffett fans. Parmley is sports director at television stations WEHT and WTVW in Evansville, Indiana. The two met while studying at WKU and working for student-run news station News Channel 12 in the late '90s and now regularly attend Buffett concerts together. Despite owning all of Buffett's CDs himself, Parmley said his knowledge of Buffett can't compare to Holinde's.

"He is filled full of worthless Jimmy Buffett trivia," Parmley said.

Holinde said he identifies as a "Parrot Head," a title bestowed upon Buffett fans around the world. Much like the famous "Deadheads," a name adopted by followers of psychedelic-rock band the Grateful Dead, Holinde said Parrot Heads are similarly loyal to Buffett and his music.

According to the website of Parrot Heads in Paradise, Inc., an organization that arranges community events for those interested in Buffett's music, Buffett accrued this fanbase by way of "the tropical lifestyle he personifies."

The organization sponsors more than 200 fan-led chapters across the United States and Europe, Australia and the Caribbean, according to the website.

FINDING 'MARGARITAVILLE'

Prior to his days as a legend of trop-rock music with more than 40 years of touring and metaphorically treating his listeners to the soft-rock equivalent of a piña colada under his belt, Buffett was just another Nashville hopeful, according to his 1998 autobiography, "A Pirate Looks at Fifty."

According to the book, after his 1970 freshman record, "Down to Earth," flopped, Buffett was left broke and jobless. Only after he met Jerry Jeff Walker, a fellow musician based in an area of Miami known at the time as Coconut Grove, did things start looking up.

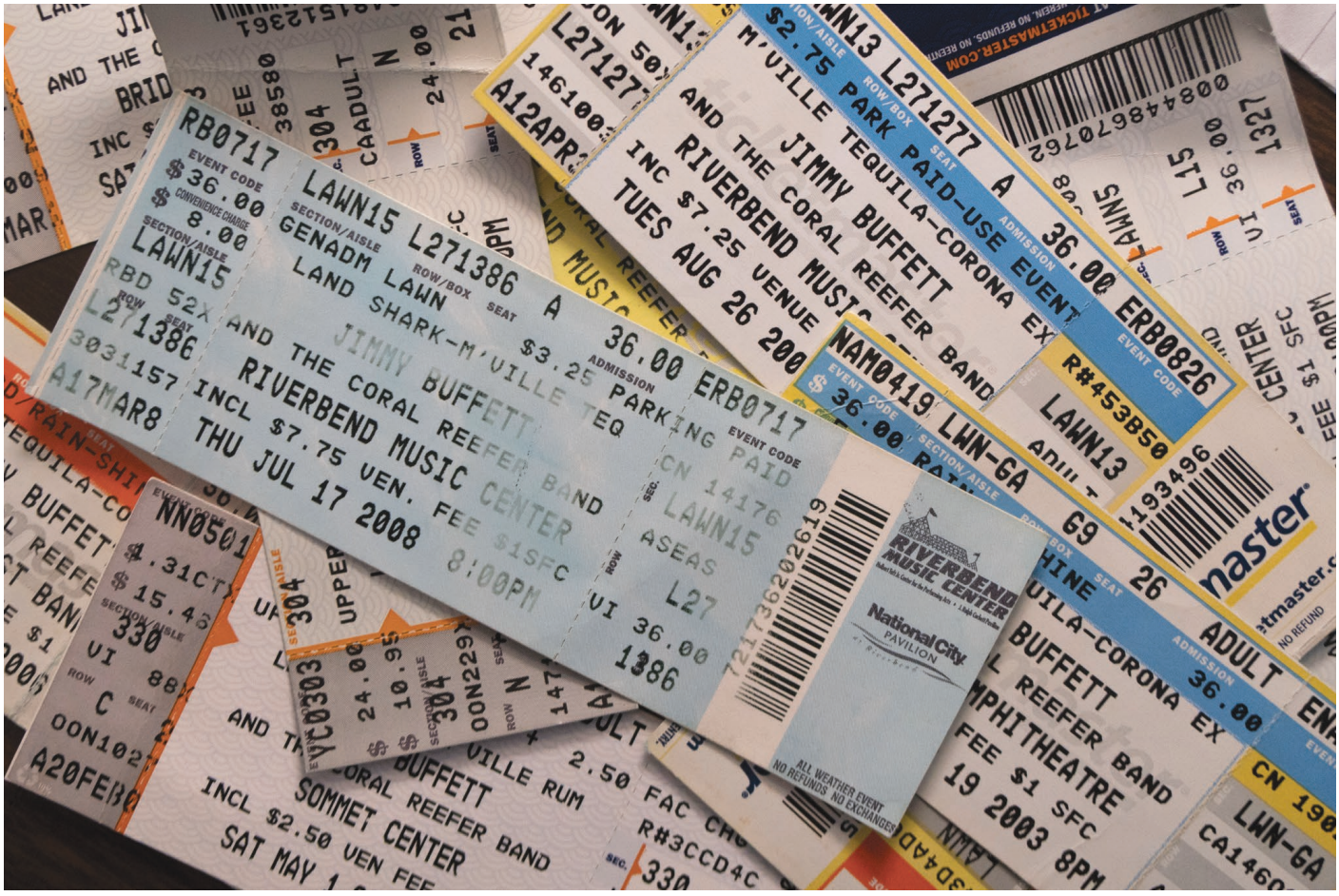
Walker invited Buffett to stay with him in Coconut Grove, and Buffett took the offer and took a plane out of Nashville in October 1971, according to his autobiography.

After achieving a number of Billboard top 10 hits and forming his own empire of restaurants and resorts, Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville, Buffett's situation improved.

Buffett opened his first Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville Store in January 1985 in Key West, Florida, according to the Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville website. Buffett has extended the brand across the United States and into Costa Rica and Puerto Rico by way of over 20 restaurants, numerous resorts and hotels and two casinos.

Holinde said Buffett's initial difficulties contributed to his appreciation for the man and his artistry.

"I think there's a lot about his music that speaks to me personally," Holinde said. "I saw him as kind of the underdog of the music industry — the underdog who's done very well."



Holinde has been to 22 Jimmy Buffett concerts and has kept many of the ticket stubs, but not all of them. Holinde often travels to attend Buffett's shows around the country.

A PARROT HEAD'S PARADISE

Parmley said he, Holinde and other friends have kept in touch largely by attending Buffett concerts together.

"When the car fires up, it's Buffett nonstop on loop," Parmley said.

Parmley said he believes the concerts are a lot like family reunions.

"It's turned into a big family reunion-type thing for us," Parmley said. "It's how a lot of us became really good friends."

He said he believes Buffett concerts are a great place to form and strengthen relationships. Parmley said most Buffett concert tailgates start as early as 7-8 a.m. with a parking lot breakfast and end with goodbyes to the various fans met along the way before the start of a concert, which typically start between 7-8 p.m. He said he believes such concentrated pre-concert fervor is unique to Buffett's concerts.

"I've never seen anything like that," Parmley said.

Holinde said one of his favorite times attending a Buffett concert took place during a notable trip he and his friends made in 2015 around the Northeast, which he named the "20 for 40" trip, as it signified not only his 40th birthday but also his 20th time seeing Buffett perform live.

After the group visited Niagara Falls, it headed to Boston to see Buffett perform at the Xfinity Center, then known as the Great Woods Center for the Performing Arts. Holinde said he believes these trips have become a chance to reconnect and enjoy Buffett's music.

"I just love the atmosphere," Holinde said. "The people you meet, the food, the music, the camaraderie with friends, seeing people I haven't seen in a long time — everything about it, I enjoy."

Another Buffett fan, Richie Mix, a motorcycle salesman who has lived in Bowling Green since 2004, has been to about six Buffett concerts himself. He said he has noticed Buffett's concerts attract a diverse crowd.

"You'll see all walks of life there," Mix said. "It's a time "to celebrate Jimmy."

While preparing for a Buffett concert in July 2018 in Cincinnati, —the city where the term "Parrot Head" originated in 1985, according to the Cincinnati Parrot Head Club website — Mix said he and a friend arrived at the concert's tailgating site eight hours before it opened to ensure a spot due to the first come, first serve policy.

"We started at 2 a.m.," Mix said.

Mix believes the often tropical nature of Buffet's music helps make his concerts feel like an escape from everyday stress and worries, which he said many fans look forward to.

"It's a common thread that we want somehow to remove ourselves

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from reality," Mix said. "I think all of us have that desire."

Now a fan for more than 30 years, Mix said listening to Buffett reminds him of his childhood, when he would spend time with his uncle, the man who introduced him to Buffett's music, and ride on his grandfather's commercial ship in Tampa, Florida. That time on the water sparked his love for all things nautical, Mix said, culminating with his Buffett fascination.

"It takes me back to when I was 12," Mix said.

As a sailor's grandson, Mix said he particularly identifies with Buffett's song "Son of a Son of a Sailor." Now a father himself, he said watching his 15-year-old son sprout an interest in Buffett's repertoire has extended his family's connection to Buffett beyond music.

He said he believes that's all a fan could ask for.

"It resonates in my soul," Mix said about Buffett's music. "I think that's really what it's all about."

TRADITION IN NUMBERS

Holinde said he believes a variety of fan traditions that have become a part of Buffett's shows are what make every concert worth attending.

One such tradition takes place when Buffett performs one of his ballads, "Come Monday," and fans come together, hold hands and sway to the music.

Another occurs during Buffett's song "Fins," where fans hold their hands above their heads in the shape of fins and move them left to right.

"When you see them all in unison — 40 thousand people doing it — it's a blast," Holinde said. "There's some kind of magic in seeing all those people doing the fins at the same time or singing every line of 'Margaritaville' off the top of their lungs simultaneously."

He said that "magic" is what has motivated him to try and keep the tradition alive within his own family.

After turning his wife, Brenda Holinde, into a Buffett fan when the two were still in high school by letting her borrow his copy of Buffett's "Last Mango in Paris" album, the two honeymooned in the Florida Keys, a location Holinde said he believes Buffett's music evokes. Holinde said he believes this is most pronounced on his favorite Buffett album, 1974's "A1A."

"When you hear it, you are just instantly transported to the Florida Keys," Holinde said.

Holinde said he has also made a Buffett fan out of his 10-year-old daughter, Nora, who loves listening to Buffett when Holinde drives her to school in the morning.

"I'm making a 'Parakeet' out of her, I guess you could say," Holinde said.

Though Holinde said Buffett's music is important to his family, he said he recognizes certain negative stereotypes, such as the belief that Buffett's concerts serve solely as an excuse to party and drink beer. He said he views those stereotypes as misconceptions.

"I think there is the perception of a lot of people that he is just this lazy beach bum," Holinde said. "There's much more to him."

Though he said Buffett's concerts have a tendency to feel like one big party, Holinde believes they serve a bigger purpose.

"It's escapism," Holinde said. "It's forgetting about your work for a few hours and your cares for a few hours."

As a WBKO meteorologist, he said his work is exactly what he always wanted to do. However, he said he believes it's always good to relax every once in a while.

"When I'm here, I put my heart and soul into my forecast, and I take pride in having those forecasts be accurate," Holinde said at the WBKO station a few hours before going on-air to deliver the evening broadcast. "When I'm at Jimmy Buffett, I can put those things aside for a couple of hours and just have a good time."

With plans to eventually take Nora to her first Buffett concert, Holinde said he hopes to support Buffett for years to come. As Buffett insists he won't "hang it up" until he needs a teleprompter to remember his own lyrics or starts singing too flat, according to a 2004 CBS News article, Holinde just might get his wish.

"He's in his 70s now and still kicking," Holinde said. "We'll see."

Mix has been listening to Jimmy Buffet for nearly 35 years thanks to the influence of his uncle. “My uncle had a huge impact,” Mix said. “He was my favorite uncle, so anything he liked, of course I was going to like.”

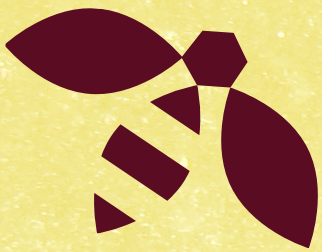
THE BIRDS AND THE BEES

story by **DILLON MCCORMICK** *photos by* **SAM MALLON** *illustrations by* **JB CARTER**

Mom sits you down for a "special talk," and your heart begins to race. Or the entire sixth grade class gets called down to the gym to watch a video you can't stop giggling through. Or you're quietly flipping through a book on the human body, and a certain diagram catches your eye. Most of us remember how we first found out about sex. But learning about anything as complicated as sex takes place over time and in many different ways.

According to the Guttmacher Institute, 37 states require that if sex education is taught, abstinence must be included in the curriculum, while 13 states require that sex education be medically accurate. Kentucky requires sex and HIV education but does not require that sex education be medically accurate. A study published by the Public Library of Science in 2011 found an increased focus on abstinence education is associated with higher rates of teenage pregnancy.

In light of the often fraught nature of sex education and how it varies from state to state, the Talisman wanted to know: How did WKU students learn about sex? Their interviews have been edited for clarity and brevity.



Some students can't recall ever receiving sex education in school. Dylan Calvo, a junior from Hendersonville, Tenn., said that he learned about sex from a movie he watched with his mom.

TOP: Paige McCloyn, a sophomore from Hendersonville, Tenn., was never explicitly taught about sex. “I guess I kind of just figured it out along the way,” she said.

BOTTOM: Karla Perez, a freshman from Clarksville, Tenn., said she remembers her dad basically just telling her “not to (have sex) at all.” Perez wishes she hadn’t had to figure out what sex was all on her own, because everything that she heard was inconsistent.

CARDER VENABLE, PORTLAND, TENN., SOPHOMORE

I guess I formally learned about it in school. I think I was in seventh or eighth grade. This, like, outside guy came in to explain it to us, the crisis pregnancy center guy. He did teach us about condoms, but most of the talk was trying to scare us from sex, showing us pictures of people with STDs and making it seem like if you did have sex you would for sure get one. In church, they had this program called "True Love Waits," where they sat all the teens down without our parents around and taught us abstinence. I don't think I've talked about it with my parents to this day.

PAIGE MCCLOYN. HENDERSONVILLE, TENN., SENIOR

I was never actually talked to about it, and even in school, I remember I had a teen living class, but we didn't talk about it. The first thing I remember talking about that had anything to do with sex was sexually transmitted diseases in sixth grade in my PE class. They showed a bunch of pictures of people that had sexually transmitted diseases, and they were like, "Don't do it!" But nobody actually talked about it. I think if I was taught about it in a different context, in church or even by my parents, they would have pushed me to wait until marriage, but I think that since I learned about it along the way, I thought of it as more of an act rather than a big deal. Just part of life.

RACHEL FALLAHAY, LOUISVILLE, SENIOR

I know I learned about it in school, but I don't think that's when I actually found out about it. Do you ever have those things where you don't remember how you learned it, but you just remember knowing what it is? We didn't have sex education until I was in like fifth grade. I went to an all-girls Catholic high school, so the person that taught it for me was a nun. I think everyone just kind of felt uncomfortable, like how you laugh when anybody says some type of sexual word. People, even adults, just giggle instead of having a serious conversation. If I have kids, and they come up to me and ask something, I'll figure out how to explain it then. I'm not going to straight-up lie to them, but I'll probably just say something stupid and silly to get them to stop talking, and when they're at an appropriate age, then I'll talk to them.

DYLAN CALVO, HENDERSONVILLE, TENN., JUNIOR

I was watching a movie one day when I was like six years old. I think it was about a girl and a guy stranded on an island, and once they hit puberty, they started having sex. Out of the blue, my mom was like "OK, this is what happens." She explained puberty to me and what they were doing. I don't remember ever learning about it in school, and I don't think I would have paid attention. Everyone seemed to know about it already. I think that I'd give my future children the talk. I guess the school could give it, because some people probably don't get it from their parents, so that would be good for them.

KARLA PEREZ. CLARKSVILLE, TENN., SENIOR

It was my dad. I was in middle school, and I was getting into the "Oh, I like boys" phase. My dad was like "OK. Sex." And we had the talk. My dad basically just told me, "Don't do it at all." My reaction was "Oh, OK, I'm not doing that," because I didn't like how I looked at the time. In high school, I learned about sex by myself. Everyone is in your ear telling you something different. I think some people fluffed it up too much, making it seem like a life-changing and magical experience when really it isn't. And then some others gave advice like "if you do it this way it will be really painful." There are no facts when it comes to sex — it's just your personal experience.

The gods aren't dead

story by **OLIVIA MOHR**
photos by **LILY THOMPSON**

Samantha Williams has a tattoo of a grapevine that wraps around her right ankle. Now 32, she got the tattoo when she was 20, and she said it has two meanings. The first is connected to a memory from when she was about 6. Her great-grandmother had a big arch where grapevines grew. She always wanted the grapes from the top of the arch, so her great-grandmother picked them for her. The tattoo's other meaning is to illustrate her connection to Dionysos, the Greek god of wine, and she considers the memory of her great-grandmother's grapevines as her first connection to him.

Samantha, a Morgantown senior, identifies as a Pagan polytheist, more specifically a Dionysian. She incorporates Hellenistic and Hindu gods into her personal pantheon, and her shrine is ever-changing because sometimes certain gods appeal to her at certain times. In early February, Dionysos — sometimes spelled Dionysus — and Hestia, Hermes, Hecate, Ganesha and Persephone were on her shrine. Each was represented by

Samantha Williams's morning and evening rituals involve her lighting incense and reciting an incantation. She says the same words nearly every day, twice a day, and she said she enjoys her rituals for the sake of the acts themselves.

small statues, photos, pottery and other items, which she sets up on a brown wooden bookshelf. Before she identified as a Pagan polytheist, she practiced Wicca, a Pagan religion that involves the belief in the divinity of nature, when she was 12. Between the ages of 13 and 17, she was eclectic Pagan, a form of Paganism that blends practices of various Pagan religions.

"I kind of explored, trying to figure out what kind of fit me, what was good for me," she said.

When Samantha was 12, her friend Josh showed her a website called Spells and Magic. He loaded the site and the screen flashed different colors. The website was full of advice, like how to turn your ex into a toad. Samantha said she brushed the website off, but it mentioned Wicca, which piqued her interest.

"Once I started reading about what Wicca was and got interested in the structure of it all, the connection to nature and things like that, that really spoke to me," she said.

Samantha said she has always been interested in nature. She grew up on a 300-acre farm in Morgantown, so she was always in the woods as a child, and nature felt like home.

She said she believes Wicca also appealed to her because the idea of casting spells made her feel like she had some control over her life. However, she didn't think about the magical side of Wicca much. After about a year, she couldn't shake off the doubt she had about the existence of magic, so she drifted away from Wicca and adopted eclectic Paganism.

At 17, she heard the name Dionysos in a movie. She recognized the name but couldn't remember who he was, so she looked him up online, where she found a group called Thiasos Dionysos that worshiped him. He was her introduction into polytheism, and she created her first shrine for Dionysos in 2004. It was a nightstand displaying a framed photo of Dionysos, a tea light and an incense holder.

Samantha said not many of the Greek gods appealed to her because they seemed too human to her, but Dionysos seemed to have the ties to nature that appealed to her.

"He has, like, that wild nature about him," she said.

Part of what appeals to Samantha is that Dionysos represents change, freedom and a rejection of stagnation, she said. Because she rarely drinks alcohol, Samantha doesn't relate to certain aspects of what Dionysos is often associated with, like intoxication and partying. Nonetheless, he is her patron god.

"It's kind of like meeting someone and you don't have a lot in common, but you click," she said.

Her worship of other gods tends to come and go, she said. Sometimes she just doesn't feel a connection to them, and sometimes she does. At one point, she tried experimenting with saying prayers and leaving offerings for Hera, the Greek goddess of marriage and birth. She said she thought she would connect with her because she is a wife and mother herself, but she didn't feel the sense of connection she feels with Dionysos.

"Dionysos is the god of my heart," she said.

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Samantha's family wasn't very religious when she was growing up. She went to some Methodist and Baptist churches with grandparents and friends when she was young, but her mother and stepfather didn't go to church or talk about religion much.

According to the Pew Research Center, about 70.6 percent of adults in the U.S. identify as Christian, and that number is higher, 76 percent, in Kentucky. Two percent of adults in Kentucky identify with non-Christian faiths, with less than one percent of those identifying as Pagan or Wiccan, and 22 percent are unaffiliated with religion.

Samantha said she tried to be a Christian when she was 11 or 12 years old, around the same time she discovered Wicca, not because Christianity spoke to her but because she wanted the connection other people around her seemed to feel. She was jealous of the "church family" her friends had and wanted a similar community, but she didn't feel a connection to the Christian God.

"I tried reading the Bible," she said. "I tried praying, and it was just nothing on the other end of the line. I didn't feel like anyone was hearing me when I was praying, and I was really sad about it."

Samantha said she doesn't believe in an afterlife. She said it might seem strange that she devotes so much time to her practice if she doesn't

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believe in an afterlife.

"I feel like an afterlife is beside the point because to me, religion has to do with how you live," she said. "Because if religion is your interpretation of the world, then the world is what matters. And I'm OK with the idea that there's no afterlife."

She has also noticed a lot of Christians find comfort in the idea that God has a plan for them, which makes her uncomfortable, she said. Pagan polytheism allows her to pave her own path.

"Ultimately, you are the one who is the driving force in your own life," she said.

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When Samantha was in middle school, she and her friends passed notes that she took home and put in a box. One day when she came home, she found the box open and the notes all over the floor. Her mother had discovered them.

Some of the notes were about Wicca, so her mother asked her about a Wiccan festival mentioned in one of the notes. She told her mother she was Wiccan, and her mother laughed.

"What do you mean you're a Wiccan?" she remembers her mother asking.

When Samantha tried to explain, she said her mother seemed uncomfortable with it. Her mother later researched it and thought Wicca was devil worship. Samantha's mother, Kim Howard, said she was upset about Wicca at first because she didn't understand what it was, and she remembers being more concerned about who was influencing Samantha's views than she was about the actual practice.

"I was basically just more worried about who her influences were, whether it was something that she had come up with or whether it was something someone else was influencing her on," she said.

Though Samantha said her mother disapproved of Wicca, her mother knew where to find her in Barnes and Noble — the New Age section — and her mother never stopped her when she looked at books. Because Kim Howard said she doesn't consider herself a religious person, she didn't feel like she should stop Samantha from adopting her own beliefs, and she feels the same way now.

"I don't know what I believe in myself, so how can I tell her what to believe in?" she said.

Samantha said she secretly stole some of her mother's candles and herbs for her Wiccan altar as a child. She remembers a time her mother was going to clean her room, so she stuffed the items from her altar in an old backpack and rushed them out to the woods to hide them so her mother wouldn't take them away.

"Like stuff that I had gotten at Goodwill — nothing special — but it felt special to me, and I felt like I had to protect it," Samantha said.

Samantha said she still tries to keep aspects of her practice hidden from most of her family and from neighbors.

Before she moved from an apartment in Bowling Green back to Morgantown, her hometown, in summer 2018, she left offerings of food at the end of the sidewalk by a flower bush at night for a ritual performed on the last day of the lunar month. Her family and neighbors asked about the food, and she didn't know how to answer their questions.

"If I say that it has a religious purpose, then I'm afraid they're going to get uncomfortable, so I dodge the question," she said.

"Ultimately, you are the one who is the driving force in your own life."

-Samantha Williams

At her current house in Morgantown, she performs the ritual by a tree at the end of her driveway, and neighbors still ask about her offerings. She still avoids the question and changes the subject.

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Samantha keeps a candle by her bed for her daily devotions and says a short prayer every morning and night. On Sundays, she recites a hymn and makes offerings of wine, water and milk to different deities.

When she gives offerings to the gods, she always burns candles and incense, but her other offerings vary. She often offers decorations for her shrine, hymns, works of art, poems she has written, flowers and anything else she believes represents something about her and how she feels toward the gods. She said her worship has an expressive side to it.

"As a matter of fact, maybe that's how I would define prayer — it's very similar to a journal entry," she said. "It's more about the expression than it is actually wanting your god to give you something. It's more about feeling like there's a safe place to express those things that are in you."

She said she performs most of her practices alone but celebrates some of them with her husband, Jon, and their three children, ages 5, 7 and 9. This includes festivals like Anthesteria, a three-day Athenian festival in honor of Dionysus that takes place in mid-February. She also celebrates other Athenian and Hindu festivals.

"That, I think, is the closest thing to having a church family, is having my actual family," she said.

Jon practices Ásatrú, which means he worships a Nordic pantheon of gods, but he said he is not as active in his faith as Samantha is and doesn't perform many rituals. However, he participates in several of Samantha's practices.

Like Dionysos, Samantha enjoys change, Jon said. The couple balances each other out because Jon said he tends to be laid-back and "fairly stagnant," unlike Samantha.

"She's always introducing change and trying new changes with us, the family, and she really keeps us on our toes and keeps us going and active," he said.

The fact that her shrine is ever-changing reflects her exploratory attitude, he said.

"I think it all goes together very coherently," he said.

Samantha's younger brother, Taylor Howard, described Samantha as forward-thinking and said she has she always been true to what she

Samantha Williams has always felt most at home in nature. When she was younger and exploring her beliefs, she said she often found comfort and solace in the hundreds of acres of land and wooded areas her family owned.

During a festival Feb. 4, the first day of the lunar month, Samantha Williams takes the figurines and symbols of her gods from their places in her shrine and sets them up on the table in her traditional order. Traditionally, Selene and Apollo are worshiped during this festival. Since they are not her specific household gods, Williams acknowledges them with candles instead of figurines.

believes. This, he said, played a role in him becoming more comfortable with his sexuality. Taylor said he identifies as gay, and growing up, he and Samantha watched "RuPaul's Drag Race" and "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" together.

"It's always been something there and accessible to me, and she showed it in a light that it wasn't wrong or bad — that it's OK to be who you are," he said. "She's always done that."

He said because Samantha made him feel more comfortable about who he was, she was the first person he came out to.

When it comes to raising her children, Samantha said she tries to explain to them that everyone sees the world in a different way, and she said they are welcome to participate in her worship, but it's not something she wants to impose on them.

Though Samantha and Jon and their children don't celebrate Christmas, Samantha said she didn't want to take the spirit of Christmas away from her children, so they celebrate winter solstice together. Her children don't believe in Santa, but they still unwrap presents on the day of winter solstice, Dec. 21, and celebrate the sunrise together.

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Throughout her life, Samantha has tried to establish a sense of community. In middle school, she became friends with a group who felt like they didn't quite fit with anyone else. They called themselves "the Amoeba," a name Samantha got from a book called "Blood and Chocolate." They've stuck together ever since, and they kept the name.

One of those friends, Casey Phelps, said that even when they were children, Samantha was always researching anything she found interesting.

"Sam always had her own way of finding things she liked," Phelps said. "When she gets into something, she's all into it."

In middle school, Phelps said Samantha became interested in Egyptian history and lore, and their group of friends formed an Egyptian club.

"That was the first of, like, a thousand clubs," Samantha said.

In an effort to establish a sense of community when it came to her religious practices, Samantha joined the website Pagan Forum when she was in high school, and she stayed active on the site until she had her first child. Samantha said she formed several persisting friendships with people from around the country through the site.

Samantha and her husband gave organized religion a try when they joined the Unitarian Universalist Church of Bowling Green a couple years ago, but they found it wasn't the right fit.

"It was close, but not quite," she said. "I feel like that's the story of my life as a Pagan trying to find a community — close but not quite."

She said her practice is a bit isolating. Though she's part of an online group in which worshiping Dionysos is part of everyone's practice, most of its members live on the west coast, and geographically she doesn't know of another Dionysian for hundreds of miles.

Samantha said her hobbies, how she views the world and what she wants to do with her life tend to change frequently, but being a Dionysian is one thing she doesn't think will ever change.

"That's the only thing that I feel is going to be constant for the rest of my life because it's so a part of who I am," she said.

BEYOND THE REP

story by **HAYLEY ROBB** *photos by* **LILY THOMPSON**
illustration by **BRADEN VANMETER**

With less than five minutes left of the workout, John Michael Huffman stood letting his arms fall to his side, shaking them out. He looked to his partner to signal his fatigue. With people on both sides of him lunging forward, bending to a 90 degree angle, he grabbed his dumbbells to start again.

"We're going to finish this, OK?" Shaunna Mason said to him.

The gym floor resembled a warehouse with its tall ceilings and cement walls. It was only slightly warmer than the 30 degree weather outside, but Huffman had taken his shirt off within the first 10 minutes of the warm-up to show off his muscles.

Shaunna Mason is a co-owner of CrossFit R837 with her husband, Derrick Mason, and was Huffman's partner in the workout. She wore two long-sleeve shirts and knee-high striped socks that looked as if they covered half of her petite body. Her hair was tied up in a dark brown, messy bun.

Huffman fist bumped Shaunna Mason with a 10-pound dumbbell in the same hand and continued pushing the weight directly overhead until time was called.

"Three, two, one," Derrick Mason called out.

Limp bodies scattered the floor as the time was called to signal the end of the workout. Chests of participants expanded up and down looking for a breath they could catch. Groans and defeated cries came from each end of the room, but not from Huffman. He smiled through the sweat and hugged Shaunna Mason. They had finished as many rounds of the workout as possible in 15 minutes.

CrossFit R837 is an official CrossFit gym located in Bowling Green. Derrick Mason said the gym aims to encourage holistic wellness in its patrons by integrating mental health with physical fitness. In the last two years, CrossFit R837 teamed up with the Down Syndrome of South Central Kentucky Buddy House to improve the physical and overall health of individuals with Down syndrome. The two also manage the facility open to anyone in the community.

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John Michael Huffman works out at the gym several times a week in addition to the classes offered through the Buddy House. John Michael Huffman said that he loves to show off his muscles. Other gym members said he will often take his shirt off during workouts.

“That’s bullshit. I think he is like me. He is like you and anybody else.

- Derrick Mason

“CrossFit, I think, has grown a lot because of the popularity of the professional athlete and the competitive part,” Derrick Mason said. “But CrossFit is not and really has never been all about elite fitness. It’s been about wellness across the board.”

Derrick Mason first reached out to Tichenor, the former executive director of Bowling Green’s Buddy House, in an attempt to get more involved with the Bowling Green community. Training adults with Down syndrome was new to Derrick Mason just as CrossFit was a style of training new to the Buddy House adults. Derrick Mason said the intention, however, was never to become a gym that specializes in one population but instead to be one that welcomes everyone.

“We specialize with whoever walks in the door, and these guys have as much of a right and a potential to be healthy as anybody else,” he said. “Why should they be designated as special and why should we be somehow special because we work with them? It doesn’t make sense to me.”

Derrick Mason said it’s “good-hearted but dangerous” to praise athletes like Huffman at the Buddy House for participating in CrossFit workouts because Derrick doesn’t see Down syndrome as a limitation during the workouts.

“That’s bullshit,” he said. “I think he is like me. He is like you and anybody else. He brings to the table what he brings. Our job is to meet him where he is just like anybody else.”

Jane Tichenor of the Buddy House and Derrick Mason discussed the creation of a fitness program to encourage the movement of their adults with Down syndrome. However, Tichenor said the success of the program really depended upon the connection of the instructor with the athletes and for Shaunna Mason that connection and passion came naturally.

“It’s just been something that’s become really important to her and she has a great knack of motivating these individuals to do stuff that none of us can get them to do,” Tichenor said.

The partnership started with only an aerobic portion of the fitness program. The Buddy House held a Zumba class once a week, which was a rhythmic dance class intended to improve the cardiovascular endurance of the adults with Down syndrome. When the WKU student volunteer who was teaching the class graduated, Shaunna Mason began teaching the class under a new name, “Move with Shaunna.” The class now meets every Wednesday at 10:30 a.m. at the Buddy House.

“Get those hips loose because we’re getting ready to move and groove,” Shaunna Mason smiled and called out as she performed high knees in front of the aerobic class one Wednesday. “Come on, John Michael. I want to see you move.”

“Yeah girl, I see you,” she said pointing to someone at the back of the room. “Yeah, sister!”

The aerobic class consists of four or five songs with Shaunna Mason standing in the front of the room facilitating the movements, but the adults get a chance to bust whatever moves they’d like during what Shaunna Mason calls “free dance.”

“Hey big girl, make ‘em back it up, make ‘em back it up…” came through the speakers and a circle in the middle of the Buddy House room formed. Twerking and laughter immediately followed, and each Buddy House adult got a chance to freestyle dance in the middle of the circle.

FINDING FITNESS

After seeing the success of the aerobic fitness class, Tichenor and Shaunna Mason developed an adaptive CrossFit program modified to the individual needs of the Buddy House athletes. The two had to do some research on the specific physiology of the athletes with Down syndrome because their bodies differ in their ability to move freely and limited ability to take in and use oxygen.

The extra copy of the 21st chromosome in individuals with Down syndrome affects their cardiovascular fitness through lower maximal heart rates and aerobic capacities. This could be explained by irregular catecholamine, or hormone release during exercise, according to an article in the International Journal of Exercise Science.

Individuals with Down syndrome also differ in their musculoskeletal systems, which include weak muscle tone, ligaments that are too loose or lax, and instability in the hip, knee and other joints leading to possible dislocation, according to the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons.

Exercise programs, however, have been found to increase the overall health of adults with Down syndrome, including increased bone mineral density aiding them in the prevention of osteoporosis as well as an increase in muscular strength and decrease in body weight, according to the official journal of the American Physical Therapy Association.

Karen Furgal, a professor in the WKU physical therapy department, is currently studying the effect yoga has on individuals with Down syndrome.

The WKU physical therapy department first worked with the Buddy House when the CrossFit exercise program began in 2018, monitoring the athletes’ movements. They are hoping to demonstrate with Furgal’s research project that a community yoga program like the Buddy House will have a positive impact on balance in adults diagnosed with Down syndrome, Furgal said in an email.

Every Tuesday and Thursday, Shaunna Mason works with five athletes from the Buddy House at the CrossFit gym, each with certain limitations she has to be aware of.

Shaunna Mason said she tailors the program according to individual participants’ needs, just like she would do for someone who was dealing with any other health problem.

Kathy Towe, one of the adults with Down syndrome has scoliosis, has to squat until her butt touches the top of a 20-inch plyometric box, similar to that of a 20-inch step. This box stops her from going any further in depth and injuring herself. If Towe performs a deadlift, which is a barbell pull from the floor, Shaunna Mason has to put weightlifting

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John Michael Huffman participates in a dance class at The Buddy House called "Move with Shaunna". The class is offered every Wednesday, and is a part of an partnership between The Buddy House and CrossFit R837 in an effort to keep their members healthy and active.

Shaunna Mason (left) opened the gym with her husband, Derrick. She said she enjoys working with Huffman and the Buddy House, though she was initially intimidated by the challenge. "At first I was scared to death, but now I wouldn't trade it for anything," Shaunna Mason said. "It's my passion that I didn't know I had."

plates underneath each end of her bar so she doesn't have to bend down as far to pick it up.

"I was always afraid that somebody was going to get hurt, and it was going to be on me," Shaunna Mason said.

She said there are still days when movements with a heavier weight than usual will scare her like the "snatch," which is a barbell lift from the floor to an overhead position.

"But I think that now they know how to control it," Shaunna Mason said. "They know how to get out from underneath the bar just like anybody else does."

Denise Huffman, John Michael Huffman's mother, said John Michael Huffman was excited about CrossFit from the beginning. She said he never had any medical problems, so she was never concerned about him lifting weights.

John Michael is now a member of the CrossFit gym, which allows him access to the gym during normal operating hours. He attends the two group classes with the Buddy House and meets Shaunna Mason at the gym when he wants to work out with general population classes.

Denise Huffman said John Michael Huffman is typically at the gym three days a week. She said she doesn't know the names of all of the lifts John Michael Huffman can perform, but after seeing him become so involved with the gym, she wants to start CrossFit now too.

"I think what set him apart was I pushed him," Denise Huffman said.

She said she and her husband didn't let Down syndrome stop John Michael Huffman from doing anything.

Denise Huffman said the hardest part about raising a child with Down syndrome is they are always with you, which she said is both a good and a bad thing.

"It keeps us hopping," Denise Huffman said.

John Michael Huffman is involved in a lot of things around Bowling Green that keep Denise Huffman feeling like a "taxi."

He participates with Best Buddies, a nonprofit organization through WKU with volunteers who create opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. He is also an avid dancer, Shaunna Mason said, and a member of the Rockerz Dance Team, which performs choreographed dance routines to advocate for a better understanding of Down syndrome. He has also worked at Chick-fil-A for the past six years.

"I cook the sandwich and fries and soup," he said.

It's not just John Michael Huffman who has a long list of commitments throughout his daily routine. All of the athletes with Down syndrome are involved in a variety of activities and organizations. Tichenor said by keeping the individuals engaged in various forms of activities like physical fitness, the adults are learning how to practice healthy habits to ultimately lengthen their lives.

"A lot of us that are parents with Down syndrome, we say we hope we live one day longer than they do," Denise Huffman said. "That's just our goal is to be around to take care of them."

COMPETITION DAY

Before Shaunna Mason was able to add weight to any of the athlete's barbells, she progressed the athletes from the ground up, having them lift a PVC pipe overhead from a seated position to now lifting anywhere from 20, 30 or 40 pounds loaded on each end of the barbell.

John Michael Huffman was one athlete who had very few limitations when it came to his movement, Shaunna Mason said. However, he did have trouble learning some of the Olympic weightlifting movements in the beginning due to his hypermobility, like many of the other athletes.

He can now "deadlift" 115 pounds off the ground to the level of the hips. He can "clean" 95 pounds, which requires him to lift the barbell from the ground and catch it on the front of his shoulders in a squat position. And he can complete five "snatches" with 65 pounds, which requires him to lift the barbell from the floor and then catch the bar overhead with his arms extended.

John Michael Huffman has participated in three CrossFit competitions, one being the "Double Date Got Twisted" CrossFit competition, which was held at the CrossFit R837 gym in September 2018. He and his partner won first place in the events.

During the final event of the competition, Shaunna Mason said John Michael Huffman was struggling to finish and needed an extra push in the final run. She said she remembers begging him to run just so he could get across the finish line.

"And he just looked at me and said, 'I'm going to try,' and that's pretty much when I started crying," Shaunna Mason said.

MORE THAN A "BOX"

Criticism surrounding CrossFit has typically been that it is dangerous and increases the risk of injuries including rhabdomyolysis, or a breakdown of muscle tissue, and musculoskeletal injuries, according to the Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research.

However, a 2017 study in the Journal of Sports Medicine and Physical Fitness looked at 117 CrossFit participants for 12 weeks and found the overall injury incidence rate was 2.1 injuries per 1,000 training hours. In fact, the study found that injury rate had more to do with gender and previous injury history. The study concluded the injury rate was low and comparable to other types of fitness activities.

Rod Embry, whose son has Down syndrome was a little concerned with the CrossFit style of training when the Buddy House first got involved with the gym. He said he has gotten over that now but believes the group of five who are attending the workouts at CrossFit R837 are especially "tailor made."

"I think of CrossFit as very competitive and pushing each other," he said. "Well, they cheer each other on, they don't really push. But I think that's kind of the perfect mix."

CrossFit is a style of fitness training, but to many members of CrossFit R837 it is more than that — it is about bridging communities together, Derrick Mason said.

He said he feels his job is to use the tools and gifts he's been given to experience as much life as he can while making a difference in as many lives as he encounters.

"Philosophically, I feel like our responsibility is to do the best life we can do," he said.

Kolbi Edens, a WKU Kinesiology, Recreation & Sport graduate assistant, said she works out at the gym several times a week to stay in shape. Edens said she also enjoys participating in CrossFit competitions. "I joined this gym because all the people are great," Edens said. "It's a great community. I also like to compete — it's fun!"

Derrick Mason coaches and owns CrossFit R837 with his wife Shaunna Mason. Shaunna Mason said it was originally Derrick Mason's idea to open the gym. "He wanted to do something in the community that was different than any gym in Bowling Green," Shaunna Mason said.

poem by **JORDAN FRODGE**
photo by **MAGGIE SMITH**

darkness has enveloped me, save for the glow of
a street that has loved me

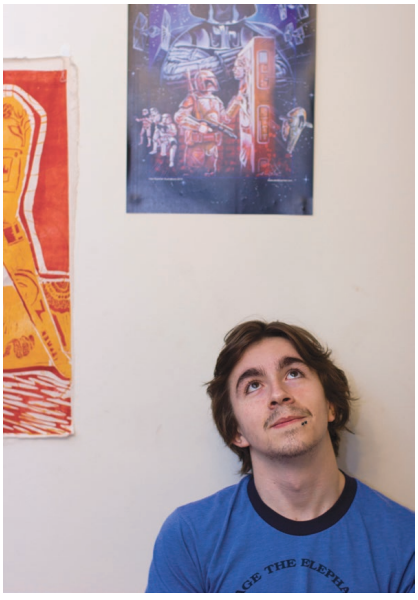
tomorrow we pack up
load the used and the useless into cars to take us far
from one another
we are slow moving
begging the seconds to slow like a morning stretch
this sweet surrender of succor
this quiet closing of a chapter

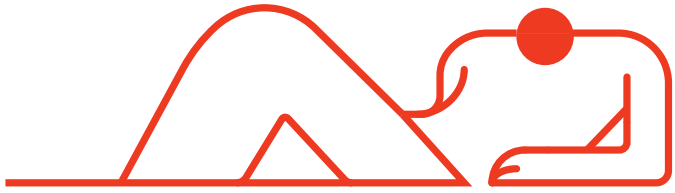
Poet's statement: "I wrote this in thinking about how sweet college has been to me and just how hard it will be to leave some of the people I love most. In a way, this continued youth has been a paradise."

MAKE ROOM

photos and story by **ALEX BAUMGARTEN** *illustrations by* **JB CARTER**

Plants to posters, minimalist to collector, messy or clean, how someone keeps their space can say a lot about who they are. Some people see their bedrooms as their own sort of relaxing paradise, and some see it as just a place to sleep. The following photo series showcases how various WKU students and members of the Bowling Green community have made their bedrooms reflections of themselves.

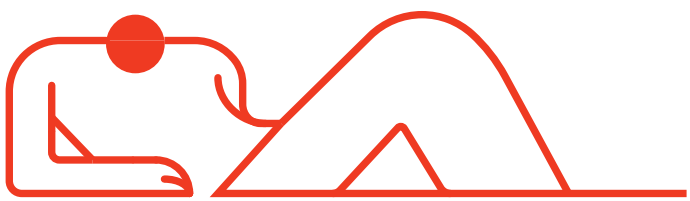




Kai Rogers, a junior from Brookfield, Ohio, is pursuing a major in music with a focus on guitar at WKU. Rogers' life is centered around music, and his room is a reflection of that. Rogers lives in his first apartment with his roommate, Colton Turley. Rogers' and Turley's home is filled with music paraphernalia that flows into Rogers' room. Rogers has posters of various musical artists, such as Morning Teleportation, The Doors, and his own band, The Rift. A few of his favorite pieces of art are a poster from the Starry Nights music festival from 2012 (which was his first time visiting Bowling Green), a Bob Marley poster and a piece of art his girlfriend created. There is also a large bookshelf in his room which holds his alphabetized collection of over 100 CDs. "It makes me proud and happy just looking at it," Rogers said. He spends time in his room practicing guitar, playing video games and watching Netflix, but he mostly sees his room as a place to sleep. "I don't see my room as somewhere where I have to impress people," Rogers said. "It's kind of messy, kind of small, but it's mine."

Julia Adams of Bowling Green decorates her vintage-inspired room with art and small trinkets. The handmade art made by Adams and her friends fills the light blue walls, bookshelves and "secret" corner. Most of her furniture and trinkets were either thrifted or given to her by loved ones. A lot of her favorite pieces are from her grandmother. "My room has classic elements but also a bit of whimsicalness," Adams said. Though her bedroom now, which is located in the top floor an older home downtown, is different from her teenage room, Adams has still kept special tokens from her teenage years. In her current home, Adams' bedroom is her favorite room in the house because she spends a lot of time writing, painting and redecorating in it. "I'm a bit of a clean freak for sure, but life happens," she said. Adams said she gets an overall feeling of tranquility from being in her bedroom and keeps her windows open whenever she can.

Sophie Jones and Maggie Thornton, both sophomores from Louisville, are roommates in Northeast Hall. As students with jobs and extracurricular activities, they knew their lives could get hectic, so they wanted their bedroom to be the opposite. "Our lives are crazy, we're always running around, so it's nice to just come back and have solace," Thornton said. Minimalism is an important aspect in keeping the peace in their room, so the fewer things they have in it, the better, Jones said. They decorated their dorm room with dried wildflowers, potted plants and pictures. The wildflowers, which Thornton dried and tied herself, are on both of the walls above their beds. Pictures of friends and family are also around their room. "Pictures are important for us to have in here because they remind us of people we love," Jones said. They both said they love having friends over. Besides the downside of being confined to a small space, Thornton and Jones like living in the dorm because their best friends live there, too. Whether they are all getting ready together, watching a movie or sharing a meal in it, they said the room is a welcoming and comfortable bedroom for them.



Glasgow sophomore Carlos Gomez, who studies electrical engineering, and Louisville sophomore Nathaniel Hoey, who studies biology, are in their second year of dorm life at WKU. Their typically cluttered room in Northeast Hall has lights strung between their raised dorm beds, and the walls are filled with decorations they have collected over the years. Their favorites are a flag from their fraternity, Sigma Phi Epsilon, numerous red towels and their favorite: a poster with every single kind of pasta on it. They found the lights, which have a few burnt out bulbs, in the front yard of their fraternity's house. They spend most of their time in their room sleeping, but they also do homework, watch movies and play video games. Gomez and Hoey both feel at home in their dorm room and see it as a place to relax, but to them, it is not anything special. "I've never had much of an attachment to my room," Hoey said. "To me, it serves more of a function than anything."

A place to grow

story by **AMELIA BRETT** *photos by* **ESTHER HEATH**

Tree limbs rustled in the wind on a sunny February day at the Baker Arboretum and Downing Museum. Green pine trees dotted the landscape. Light highlighted early blossoms and buds waiting to bloom.

Hidden just four miles from WKU, the arboretum on Morgantown Road is an outdoor garden exhibit overlooking campus. It includes 115 acres of seasonal and imported varieties of plants, such as Japanese maples, that are maintained for science and education.

Philanthropist Jerry E. Baker founded the arboretum in 1992 as a creative project. He employed a friend, landscape architect Mitchell Leichhardt, who later died in 2015, to select and design tree arrangements that provide a rotation of color all year — the colors vary depending on the season and when the trees bloom.

The arboretum's campus also includes the Downing Museum, an art museum that had its first room built in 1995. The first pieces in the museum were two large French barn doors painted by accomplished artist and Horse Cave native, Joe Downing. Downing was Baker's friend and a WKU alumnus. Downing lived and worked as an artist in France starting in 1950 and lived there until he died in 2007. He once had Pablo Picasso attend his first solo art show when he lived in France. Baker combined more of Downing's art with work from other artists to put on display as the museum grew. Baker later died in 2017.

The public can visit the Downing Museum and Baker Arboretum anytime of the year for free.

"This is Bowling Green's best-kept secret and greatest treasure," said Rickman Freeman, a horticulturist at the arboretum.

Freeman, originally from Bowling Green, has worked at the arboretum as a horticulturist for five years. He said he feels very fortunate to be passionate about his work.

Freeman sat in the original room of the museum and pointed out the window to a blue-gray fountain with a sculpted edge of shells and grapes surrounding two children that is modeled after a fountain found in Pompeii. Near the back entrance, two large greyhound statues sat on each side of the stairs. Large windows lined most of the walls, showing the greenery outside. Freeman said he loves the room because it feels like a giant treehouse.

"The four seasons are magical out here, because it's like the most beautiful living canvas," he said. "I get to work with living art."

Freeman said he admires the core values at the arboretum, which focus on education and community. Freeman said Baker showed this through his admiration for local artists and support of an internship program at the arboretum for WKU horticulture students, which still takes place from April to the end of October each year. Local art is also shown in cycles throughout the year. Baker chose to maintain the museum and arboretum for others to show his love for Bowling Green through art and the arboretum design, Freeman said.

Baker also left behind a $10 million donation to WKU for scholarships. The foundation, which is named after Baker, provides funding for maintenance and free admission for the public at the arboretum and museum. Freeman said WKU art classes and others visit during warm weather to draw, which Baker loved.

"We're always going to try to work hard to carry on his good intentions and good name," Freeman said.

Freeman also said he feels there is a chance to keep making the experience special for visitors by maintaining the art and plant life. He said the Bowling Green Convention and Visitors Bureau has helped by attracting people from other states.

Jack LeSieur, director of the Downing Museum, said that on average, the museum and arboretum see a combined number of 200 to 400 visitors each month during the warmer seasons.

Freeman said he believes the arboretum contributes to the community.

"I really feel that this is one of the best places in the world that you have the opportunity to give something back," Freeman said. "Trees do nothing but good for the world."

Freeman said Leichhardt, who helped create the original arboretum arrangement, began mentoring him when he started his horticulture career in 1977. Prior to his employment at the arboretum, Freeman worked as a gardener for Conway Twitty, an American country music artist, for six years. He said gardening can show a personal side of someone. Twitty once spotted flowers from his childhood and asked Freeman to have them planted at Trinity Music City, formerly called Twitty City, Freeman said. Freeman also met Johnny Cash and said he liked roses.

From there, Freeman worked at the Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center from 1986 until 2006, which he referred to as "the golden age." During his work there with tours, special events and floral designs, he met other celebrities, such as Dolly Parton and Bob Hope.

He said he has met a lot of wonderful people through work, which extends to his current job at the arboretum. One of those people is the director of the arboretum, Martin Stone, who oversees the horticulturists three days a week and teaches twice a week at WKU, Freeman said.

Freeman said each person working there has a unique talent, and they all work together as one.

"The unique thing about working here is that we're like a family and take care of each other," Freeman said.

He said his coworkers were there for each other when Baker died in 2017. They check in on each other when someone doesn't show up to work and celebrate birthdays together.

"None of us are as good as all of us," Freeman said.

Dennis Williams has been working at the arboretum as a horticulturist for five years. Originally from Bowling Green and a WKU alumnus, he started as an intern at the arboretum. As a certified arborist, he works with Rickman to order plants and provide care, which can range from testing soil acidity to treating a sick plant.

"We get to work outside, and it's beautiful," Williams said. "I like to see things grow, and I like to see it through the visitors' eyes as well."

He said a lot of people who visit take a nap under a tree, exercise or have a picnic, and the arboretum gives visitors the chance to see something unique, such as ginkgo trees, depending on the season. Williams said

The greenhouses at the Baker Arboretum contain an array of flowers, succulents, cacti and more. "The thing about this job is you get the best of both worlds," Williams said. "You get to see something growing year-round as a horticulturist."

The two greenhouses housed on the Baker Arboretum land are maintained by horticulturists Rickman Freeman and Dennis Williams. Both Freeman and Williams have maintained the arboretum property for five years.

visitors have been inviting friends and family, and the arboretum and museum want to attract a diverse crowd to visit while also providing four educational talks per year about plant care. These teach maintenance and care, like pruning and fertilization, for certain trees. He said he tells people to learn from any mistakes that can happen when caring for plants.

Williams also helps with horticulture interns and works in the greenhouse in the winter. This helps to support the tender plants, which are varieties that can't survive cold temperatures. These plants make an appearance outside in the beginning of April and shift the scenery.

"For me, gardening is cathartic," he said. "It's hard work, but it's really nice."

LeSieur, who is from Brownsville, was working on his master's degree at WKU while interning at the Kentucky Museum when he was called to help load art for safe storage from a fire at the Downing Museum that happened on June 27, 2013. This was his first glimpse of the arboretum and museum.

"I was in awe of its beauty and elegance," LeSieur said.

The Downing Museum still had smoke rising out of it when he arrived. Other Kentucky Museum workers set the large artwork outside the museum to save it.

"It was one of the most interesting and powerful days of my life," he said.

A year later, LeSieur applied to the Downing Museum for a job in conserving and restoring the art collection there, and he was hired to his current position as director. His responsibilities include being in charge of museum operations, including exhibits and events.

"Getting to come to such a beautiful place to work is great," LeSieur said.

LeSieur said the arboretum is like "a zoo for trees." However, the land also has other signs of life. A large amount of wildlife can be seen on the property, including hawks and foxes.

He said he works with amazing people, and he was able to meet Baker.

"He knew artistic excellence for both art and horticulture," LeSieur said.

The museum is free, which makes it accessible to everyone, he said.

"Downing mentioned this as a chip of Eden," LeSieur said. "I think we definitely have one of these."

LEFT: Dennis Williams has been a horticulturist at the Baker Arboretum for five years. "It's not like sitting behind a desk," Williams said. "It's kind of nice to be able to be mobile and do different things. One day you might give a tour, or one day you might teach, or one day you're planting a garden."

BELOW: Rickman Freeman is a horticulturist at the Baker Arboretum in Bowling Green. "These are our first witch hazel blooms of the year," Rickman said.

BACK YARD ATTRACTIONS

story by **ZORA GORDON**

Bowling Green was founded in 1798 and has since evolved from a transportation hub for the South Central Kentucky area via railways and steamboats. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Bowling Green ranks as the third most populated city in Kentucky with several industries and tourist destinations represented within the city limits.

Chad Singer, a tour staff supervisor at Lost River Cave, shines his light on a ledge that guests have to duck under at the beginning of the tour. Singer began with the company as a tour guide and then moved his way up after several internships and years with the company. (Photo by Lily Thompson)

LOST RIVER CAVE

Located along Nashville Road, Lost River Cave is one of Bowling Green's oldest attractions, approximated to be thousands of years old. It provides several walking trails open to the public lined with wildflowers and streams, creating a natural oasis away from the business of daily life.

Rho Lansden, executive director of The Friends of Lost River, Inc., said Lost River Cave became a nightclub in the '30s.

"Back in the 1920s and 1930s, people were having picnics in the valley around the cave," Lansden said. "Eventually, due to the traffic in the area, the cave became a nightclub."

Chad Singer, the tour staff supervisor at Lost River Cave, said because the cave was along the Dixie Highway, which connected the northern and southern parts of the U.S., traffic went past Lost River Cave, which drew visitors to the nightclub.

Lansden said the nightclub quickly became one of the most popular places in town and gained national recognition, and the club was able to hold large crowds and had popular jazz and blues performers of the time as entertainment.

Singer said the cave's naturally low temperature kept the club at a cool 55 degrees year round. However, in the '50s, the club closed due to the construction of I-65 and because of the lack of adaptation to the rise of rock and roll music.

After the nightclub closed, Lost River Cave became a dumping ground for local residents, Jonathan Jeffrey, head of the WKU department of library special collections, said.

"People would throw anything you could imagine down there — tires, car parts, small furniture and appliances," Jeffrey said.

Lansden said that decades later, in 1990, The Friends of Lost River, Inc. was established as a nonprofit effort by volunteers, including some WKU students, to clean and protect the cave for future generations.

Singer said during the cleanup of the cave and the valley, volunteers pulled out 55 tons of trash, approximately 14 African bush elephants worth of trash.

Lansden said that finally, in 1995, Lost River Cave opened to the public as a park. In 1998, boat tours began in the cave as a way to help fund the conservation efforts. Lost River Cave has since expanded its vision from conservation to include education and outdoor experiences.

On average each year, Lost River Cave provides educational programs to approximately 4,000 students from the Bowling Green area and 26 surrounding counties and hosts 60,000 tourists for boat and walking tours, Lansden said.

Lost River Cave has continued to evolve by serving as a venue for weddings and birthday parties, and in March 2018, added a zip line course in the valley surrounding the cave.

"Our programs revolve around the uniqueness of the land," Singer said. "Our goal is to help visitors learn more about their backyard, which in turn allows them to learn about themselves."

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Josh Ellmon helps his son, Jelian, get some candy out of a candy dispenser. Ellmon said he and his family come to Flea Land about twice a month to get different things they need and have a family day out together. (Photo by Lily Thompson)

Nancy Absher sells customizable, mostly handmade jewelry. She travels around to different shows and events, but made a home at Flea Land during the last month of winter as she waited for the weather to warm up. Absher has been selling jewelry since she retired. "I ran into it in a store and Gatlinburg and loved the concept," Absher said. "I taught myself how to do it, and I've been doing it ever since." (Photo by Lily Thompson)

FLEA LAND OF BOWLING GREEN

Flea Land of Bowling Green was established in 1994. Jonathan Sweeney, manager of Flea Land, said it is the largest indoor flea market in Kentucky at 85,000 square feet with over 300 vendor booths. Outside of the building, in the parking lot, there is space for outdoor booths to be set up for additional vendors. The indoor and outdoor flea markets are open Saturday and Sunday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Flea Land consists of a large building that houses various vendors and the antique market, which is open Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday during the indoor and outdoor flea markets' hours of operation.

Since Flea Land's opening in 1994, there have been a few renovations to increase the size of market spaces and to add a covered awning to the outdoor area, making it easier for vendors to sell their goods year round.

Sweeney said Flea Land attracts diverse shoppers each weekend during their hours of operation.

"We attract every kind of shopper whether they are trying to stretch their dollar as far as it can go, or if they are looking for some unique vintage goods," he said.

Inside Flea Land of Bowling Green, there are several hallways, each one containing an assortment of booths. Some vendors sell soaps and shampoos, and others sell live animals such as hedgehogs and chinchillas. Around Flea Land are the smell of fresh popcorn, music coming from various booths and low-hanging signs from the ceiling that help navigate shoppers through the corridors.

On the left side of the main hallway sits a booth called Rugs at Flea Land, which is owned by Angie and Isaiah Mayes. The Mayes family has had a booth at Flea Land for about seven years.

"This was originally a hobby," Angie Mayes said. "Our son ran the booth, so it was a way for him to have a part time job."

Angie Mayes said over the years, the Mayes family has seen their business grow and eventually expand to the approximately 3200-square-foot space they have now. She said more tourists than locals visit the booth.

"I think that people in Bowling Green forget about Flea Land, so we see a lot of people from out of town," she said.

Angie Mayes said she and Isaiah Mayes enjoy selling their rugs at Flea Land because the booth is able to have enough business in the two days it is open each week, and Flea Land has been supportive of their business. She said that a couple of years ago, Rugs at Flea Land did a TV commercial with WBKO, and Flea Land offered to finance half of the cost of making the commercial. She said she and her family don't see themselves leaving Flea Land anytime soon.

"It's one of those things where if it's not broken, don't fix it," she said.

Couples attend the Romance at the RailPark event at the Historic RailPark and Train Museum on Feb. 16. Couples were served a meal at the Valentine's Day event, which was held to raise money for the museum. (Photo by Maggie Smith)

THE HISTORIC RAILPARK

Bowling Green has a long history with trains stemming back to 1859 when its first railroad depot was built, said JonathanJeffrey, the library special collections department head at WKU.

According to the book "Bittersweet: The Louisville and Nashville Railroad and Warren County," written by both Jeffrey and Michael Dowell, what is now the Historic RailPark Train Museum and L&N Depot was the third depot in Bowling Green.

Jeffrey said it was built in 1925 and replaced the two previous depots. The first depot burned down during the Civil War, and the second was made out of wood, had low-lying water and was ultimately unsafe for its visitors.

According to "Bittersweet," the new building was luxurious for Bowling Green. It was grandiose with hexagonal tiles paving the lobby floor, a sanitary drinking fountain and a dining room, and visitors thought it was beautiful. At the height of its time, over 20 trains departed from the depot each day.

The depot served the community for 54 years until 1979, when the last passenger train departed from the station. Over the years, the depot remained vacant, occasionally changing ownership and being used for storage. In 1993, fundraising and efforts to restore the depot began.

"The depot being restored is one of the best things that has happened here," Jeffrey said. "So many people in the community had ties to the building."

In September 2007, the railpark opened again to the public as a train museum.

Jamie Johnson, the executive director of the railpark, said several events have been held annually at the railpark in the last few years, such as Valentine's Day dinners and Easter bunny brunches. The railpark can also be rented out for birthday parties, corporate events and weddings.

"The goal of these events is to, of course, raise funding for the depot, but to also give the visitors a different experience that isn't found anywhere else," Johnson said.

Something in the Water

story by **DELANEY HOLT** *photos by* **JED CHRISTOPH**

According to the National Park Service, the Green River is one of North America's most biodiverse rivers. Chris Groves, a cheochemist and hydrogeologist, said pollutants have slowly disturbed the Green River's natural, biodiverse ecosystem.

From the banks of the Green River, sun beams glimmer atop green-tinted waters, warming the scales of bluegill and perch as the river's current flows eastward into the cave's mouth. Overhead, a blue heron dives, breaking the current's surface as he scrounges for dinner. Across the water, a turkey toddles to the bank for a midday drink.

According to the National Park Service, the Green River is one of North America's most biodiverse rivers. It sustains 82 species of fish and 51 species of mussel, hosting a variety of visitors — both human and animal — at the water's edge.

The 384-mile-long body of water is central to Kentucky's limestone-based karst region and is a vital natural resource to southcentral Kentucky. The river's core carves the Mammoth Cave system, shapes the underground caverns and feeds the local water sources, according to pamphlets published by the National Park Service.

"The Green River's water and our groundwater have an interconnected relationship," said geochemist and hydrogeologist Chris Groves. "Peoples' contributions — whether positive or negative — are carried along through the water."

As a university distinguished professor of hydrogeology at WKU, Groves has studied and explored Mammoth Cave National Park's caves and surface landscapes for almost 30 years.

Groves said animal waste runoff, fertilizer traces, herbicides and soil erosion have slowly disturbed the Green River's natural, biodiverse ecosystem.

These pollutants' effects radiate throughout the river, threatening both the region's diverse species and the highly-soluble limestone, especially within the 16-mile stretch of water flowing underground through Mammoth Cave National Park, Groves said.

As a result, the park's rangers and scientists have been making concentrated efforts to protect the water's health.

By implementing new conduct codes and less invasive filtration systems, Mammoth Cave National Park employees have noted measurable improvements in the water quality.

Groves said although there have been improvements to the groundwater's drinkability standard, pollutants still exceed 10 to 12 times the drinkable limit.

"We want to continue to see reversed deterioration, and Mammoth Cave researchers' efforts have been working," Groves said.

Since a hydrogeologist typically studies underground and above-ground water systems, Groves has taken a specific interest in Mammoth Cave's groundwater systems. Throughout his research, he and his colleagues have uncovered the breadth of the relationship between the underground water supply and the surface overhead.

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"A buddy of mine once flushed a dye down his toilet just to trace the water's source," Groves said. "But not even an hour later, he called me with news that the dye had come back to his house, flowing right out of the showerhead."

Residents of the karst region live in an intimate loop, consistently using the same recycled sources of water. The cave system acts as a natural piping system.

"People don't even think about the direct connection that has formed between their actions and the reactions occurring underground," Groves said. "They're all interconnected."

From an aerial viewpoint, Kentucky's karst landscape looks like the surface of a golf ball, said Rickard Toomey, a cave scientist who currently works at Mammoth Cave National Park. Each collapsed pocket or "sinkhole" represents a location of dissolution and soil erosion.

Oftentimes, these collapsed sinkholes are naturally-occurring, but human interference can exacerbate negative effects. Groves said any type of interference with a sinkhole could eventually contaminate the underground water systems, leading to enhanced toxicity levels and lowered drinkability standard ratings.

"Sinkholes are the throats into the cave system — the entryways into the groundwater reserve," Groves said. "They will swallow anything we pour down them."

Until conduct codes were implemented in the early 1990s, sinkholes were popular dumping sites within Mammoth Cave National Park.

Groves said civilians notoriously left a variety of non-recyclable, destructive materials within the dimensions of the park. Anything was dumped, from cattle carcasses to bicycle frames.

"Since working for the park, the weirdest sinkhole dump that I ever saw involved 30 7Up vending machines," Groves said. "That was a wild find. Imagine how that impacted the groundwater."

These sinkholes also collect runoff waste from mechanical influences like wrecks on I-65 or oil leaks on parking lot pavement.

"The only pure solution to cave pollution is to gather everyone who lives in the region and make them move to Tennessee," Groves said. "And, we all know that mass movement is impossible."

A 16-mile stretch of the Green River flows through Mammoth Cave National Park. "The Green River's water and our groundwater have an interconnected relationship," Groves said. "Peoples' contributions — whether positive or negative — are carried along through the water."

Therefore, the park's improvements have been the result of a conglomeration of contributions, ranging from local and state governments to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the United States Geological Survey.

"It's these partnerships that make water protection possible," Toomey said. "Over the last 40 years, institutions have worked to better the water quality, and that work has made a world of difference."

When not researching topics like white-nose syndrome, a disease that affects bats, and other cave curiosities, Toomey is armed with maps, handbooks and anecdotes, prepared to detail any significant changes made to the park's system of operation.

Specifically, in 1995, the USGS released a handbook called "Groundwater Hazard Map of the Turnhole Spring Karst Groundwater Basin." It is a "worst-case scenario" guide that pinpoints exactly where waste runoff would be deposited in Mammoth Cave National Park and the surrounding rivers if a hazardous spill occurs on I-65 or a nearby railroad track.

The handbook was initially crafted through multi-faceted dye runoff tests during which scientists dropped a certain type of dye on every possible spill location. They then followed the dyes' complete paths, discerning the exact cave water deposition location so spills could be contained prior to intense environmental impact.

"As the years have progressed, we've become more adept at utilizing the hazard map handbook," Toomey said. "There isn't a park ranger or cave scientist within the radius who doesn't have one of them in their trucks. We are more than prepared to use it when necessary."

In addition to the USGS Handbook, which has been used as recently as 2014, Mammoth Cave National Park has implemented its own filtration system to protect the Green River's underground waters, according to the National Park Service.

"It's incredibly expensive to build huge mechanical drainage systems," Toomey said. "So, park officials brainstormed a septic tank-styled system that was much more cost effective, incorporating natural resources and natural processes to limit mechanical influence."

Located in areas of the park where vehicle numbers are elevated, 10 oil-and-grit separators collect and filter parking lot runoff materials. Each separator contains 120 canisters filled with a perlite, zeolite and activated charcoal mixture. The mixture filters out heavy metals and chemicals that could taint the water supply.

During rain showers or thunderstorms, water pours onto the pavement, washing pollutants into strategically-placed grates that then filter the runoff and release clean water back into the cave system. Mammoth Cave's filtration system promotes a ground-to-cave relationship in an effort to maintain efficiency.

The Green River, which runs through Mammoth Cave National Park, is susceptible to animal waste runoff, fertilizer traces, herbicides and soil erosion, Groves said. Park employees have implemented new conduct codes and less-invasive filtration systems to improve the river's water quality.

"The most dangerous type of rainstorm for the cave's water system is generally called a 'gully washer,'" Toomey said. "That first flush of intense waterfall can immediately impact the surrounding environment by quickly rinsing all of the pollutants in one swoop, and we worked to intervene in that reality."

As the water's health improves as a result of these conduct codes and filtration systems, ideas for modification continue to surface. Information technology developers are designing a phone application that will connect to the filtration system, alerting of any malfunctions or emergencies.

Ultimately, Mammoth Cave National Park employees — whether mappers, scientists or rangers — are dedicated to advancing the entirety of the cave system's preservation for the next generations.

Elizabeth Winkler, an English professor at WKU, has explored and mapped the Mammoth Cave system for more than 25 years. While exploring for the Cave Research Foundation, she met Toomey. They eventually married.

For Winkler, working in the cave system and preserving it became a lifelong pastime and responsibility.

"It has not only consumed my life here, but I found a husband underground," Winkler said. "Anyone who can still like you filthy, wet and cranky after 15 hours underground is a keeper."

As Mammoth Cave's conditions and overall health improve, successes continue to transfer to other cave systems and countries. Winkler has already transferred her refined skill sets to other cave systems around the world.

"The skills I have acquired there have gotten me onto research trips to Mexico, Dominican Republic, Brazil and Ecuador, including mapping lava tubes in the Galapagos, Barbados, and Tonga and other fun places," Winkler said.

Water pollution will never completely cease in Kentucky's karst region, Groves said. However, the pivotal changes — from sinkhole conduct shifts to filtration system introductions — will continue to encourage opportunities for research and education regarding pollutant filtration, both locally and globally, he said.

"If we continue to reach younger children and speak about the importance of taking care of the karst region, we will continue to see trends of improvement in the region's environment," Groves said.

So, as the water of the Green River leaves Mammoth Cave National Park in search of Munfordville, its waters glimmer a bit brighter, inviting all to witness the changes taking place. The bluegill and perch swim in clearer waters. The blue heron dives for well-defined prey as the turkey stares at its own mirrored reflection.

Sinkholes in south central Kentucky's karst landscape are naturally occurring, but human interferences, like throwing waste in them, can exacerbate negative environmental effects. "Sinkholes are the throats into the cave system — the entryways into the groundwater reserve," Groves said. "They will swallow anything we pour down them."

Even good boys steal blankets sometimes

poem by **MARA LOWHORN**
photo by **CHRIS KOHLEY**

This is what we talk about when we talk about us.
There and this and only.
Just.
The weekend our parents don't know about.
Rumblings of banana pancakes,
foiled plans of crawling through the vegetable garden.
Tiptoeing only because the floor is cold.
Bath water that turns
green
and us wrinkly.
Arms like parentheses,
closing in
and explaining the unsaid.
Everything's nuclear,
and we don't know these people.
Sit next to me.

It started that way—
flush thighs
and fumbling
and three months of
just.
Red-rimmed apologies
forgiven in the backseat.
Jokes smothered
in sorghum,
sticky like hands brushing
against back pockets.
An older woman
and a guy with glasses.
The proof is in the handprints—
movies about who we used to be,
streets that tell your lips to roam.
And a sign that tells us
this place is for the birds.
Poet's statement: "This poem is a reflection on a romantic weekend spent alone with a partner, which I like to think of as a type of paradise."

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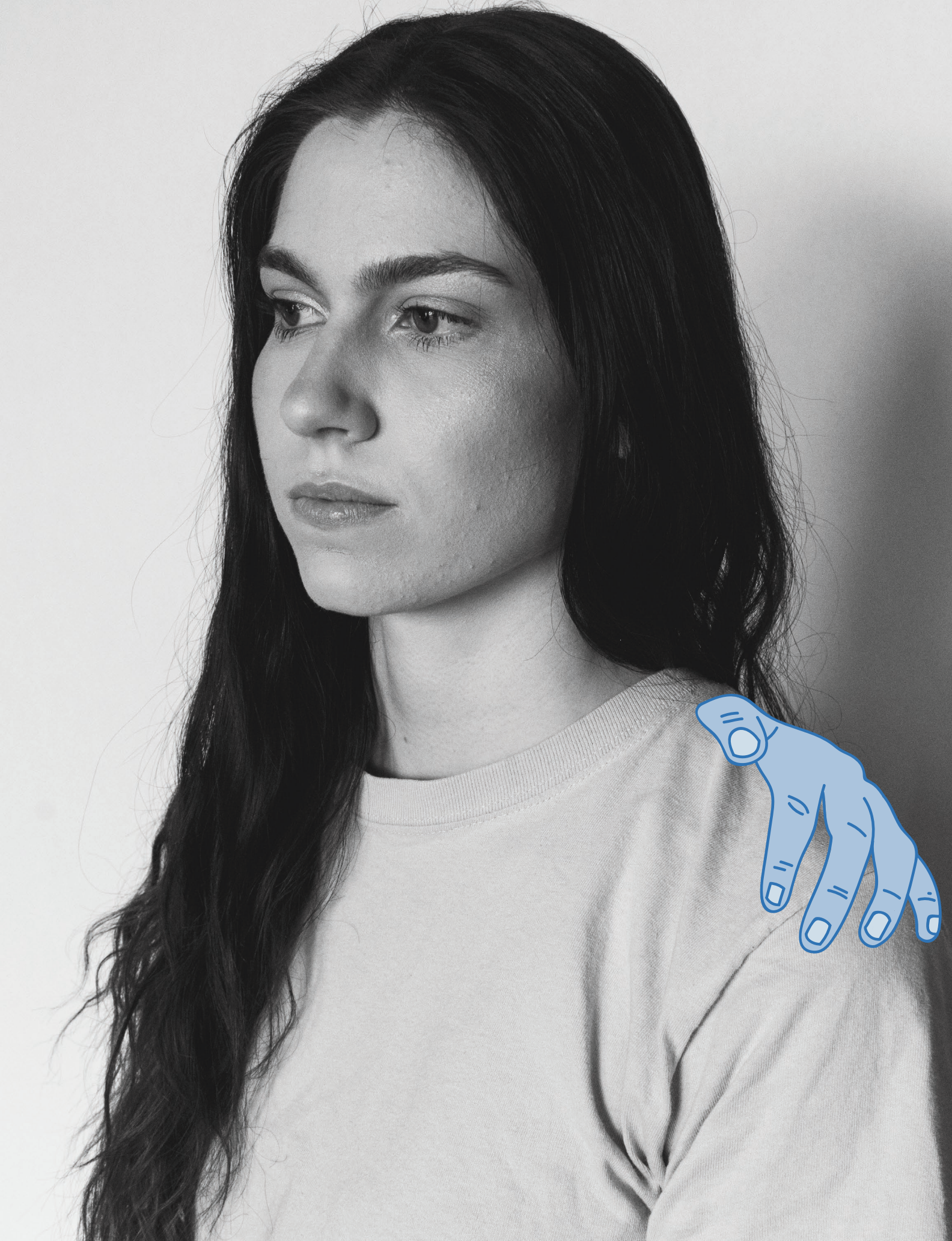
DEATH DO US PART

From the physical preparation of burial to accepting the reality of departed loved ones, death is an unavoidable constant. Death promises finality on earth to those who are dying but the living are left with the aftermath. The following three stories explore processing, coping and healing in the inevitable end to life.

photo by **CHRIS KOHLEY**
illustration by **BRADEN VANMETER**



Life before death

story by **BOBBY BURT** *photos by* **CHRIS KOHLEY**

A terminally ill patient walked around her home without any idea of where she was going. She stared off into space and tried to communicate but the only sound she could make was gurgling noises in the back of her throat. She had not been responsive in over three years.

Chaplain Greg Wilson at Hospice of Southern Kentucky was present in late 2017 when this Alzheimer's patient was in the center's care. To care for her, Wilson asked the woman's husband if he could sing to her.

"You can, but I haven't seen anything out of her in over three years," Wilson said he remembers the husband saying.

Wilson said singing the little children's song "Jesus Loves Me" normally resonates with his Christian clients.

Sitting in his office at Hospice of Southern Kentucky in February 2019, Wilson said he got cold chills remembering the reaction he got out of this woman.

The patient seemed to be alert, as if she finally understood what was happening to her, Wilson said. The woman's husband thought he'd never have another moment with the person she used to be because of the Alzheimer's, but in that moment he saw her one more time.

"She looked and she looked, and she looked at her husband, and he saw something in her that he hadn't seen in years," Wilson said.

Hospice of Southern Kentucky is a non-profit organization that provides relief and resources for the terminally ill and their caregivers and allows the patients to spend the rest of their lives in a home-based environment, according to the Hospice of Southern Kentucky website. Within that home-based environment are the people who provide that care to the patients and their families.

"Ninety-nine percent of the time, it ends in death," Wilson said. "But we don't look at the death part."

"We look at the life before death," said Sheri Pearson, a social worker and grief counselor for Hospice of Southern Kentucky.

Wilson has been a chaplain at Hospice of Southern Kentucky for five years. Before that, he was working as a chaplain for the Rhea County

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Anita Coursey (right) comforts her father Stephen Downey during the Hospice of Southern Kentucky grief class held once a week. During the classes, participants are encouraged to share stories of their loved ones and perform exercises to express their emotions.

TOP: Registered nurse and the director of nursing Candace Covington (from left), social worker Sheri Pearson, Chaplain Greg Wilson and volunteer coordinator Andrea "Andy" Tanaro are among the staff members of Hospice of Southern Kentucky.

ABOVE: Social worker and bereavement educator Sheri Pearson shows an example of the "difficult feelings" exercise to the grief class she leads. Pearson lost her father three years ago and illustrated her feelings in her example.

RIGHT: A grief class participant comforts another participant during a session at Hospice of Southern Kentucky. The class is held once a week and contains various exercises to allow participants to share their stories and grieve.

“It’s about living the best you can for whatever time you have left,”

- Andrea Tanaro

Sheriff’s Office in Dayton, Tennessee, until 2014.

Wilson is one of two chaplains at Hospice of Southern Kentucky and serves patients regardless of their religious beliefs or lack thereof.

“This is the most fulfilling work I’ve had an opportunity to do because you are able to help and encourage them in one of the hardest times of their life,” Wilson said. “It’s like being a servant.”

Pearson said she feels rich because she gets to help people everyday. She said death is going to happen whether she is caring for them or not, so she would rather be there to help them.

Pearson has been working at Hospice of Southern Kentucky for eight years and received a master’s degree in social work from WKU.

“After eight years working in hospice care, no matter how many times I witness someone passing or see them after, there is always a need — or longing, if you will — to provide an atmosphere of dignity and comfort for them and their loved ones,” Pearson said.

Pearson said she values being able to help patients and their families however she can.

“The hope shifts from a cure to having the best day possible every day,” Pearson said. “You have to redefine your mission to have hope that every day will be the best it can be.”

One glimpse of hope for Pearson came in the form of a young woman’s wish to marry the father of her children. She was bed-bound and battling cancer.

Hospice workers and volunteers organized a wedding in her room at the Hospice of Southern Kentucky house. The woman couldn’t stand, so her dress had to be cut up the back to be laid on her body. Cake and punch were served and her room was decorated with twinkling white lights. Her two children sat on her bed throughout the ceremony, and members of the community donated wedding rings and a wedding cake.

“The entire community came together for her ceremony,” Wilson said.

Pearson said the woman stayed up all night after the wedding looking at herself in the mirror, smiling at her dress. She told Pearson she felt like she was in a dream.

The team of social workers, medical aids and chaplains will either care for patients at Hospice of Southern Kentucky, the patient’s home, a nursing home or an assisted living facility, Pearson said. The team will start out by interviewing the patient if they’re responsive and if not, the patient’s caregiver to obtain all necessary information, whether it be learning where they used to work when they were younger, what activities they enjoy now or what they enjoyed in the past.

The team also obtains information about the patient’s illness and basic demographics. Wilson said the Hospice team asks about the patient’s spirituality, and if they’re not comfortable with where they stand in their faith, the chaplain and social workers strive to get the patient to a comfortable point.

From there, Pearson said the team’s goal is to make sure the patient and their family are relaxed. Staff members take on the role of caregiver, which includes bringing the patients food, washing their clothes and bathing them on a daily basis. The team also includes cooks who prepare the meals and nurses who give the patients their necessary medication and administer daily check ups.

“I come to work every day loving my work,” Wilson said. “It’s honorably intimate here.”

Andrea Tanaro, a part-time social worker on the Hospice of Southern Kentucky team and graduate student at WKU, said she has been through a lot since she joined the team but it has benefited her in strengthening her relationship with God.

“I’ve recently lost a granddaughter to a horrible car accident,” Tanaro said. “And things like that can either make you or break you and then dealing with death every day at work — it was a lot to deal with.”

She said she tries to look at death in a different way and tries to focus on the things she does have in her life.

“Being at Hospice and watching other families go through the pain of losing someone or the joy of having them for so long in their life makes you appreciate what you have a lot more,” Tanaro said.

While Hospice of Southern Kentucky doesn’t have a music therapy program, Tanaro volunteers to sing to her patients. One patient Tanaro asked to sing to was an elderly woman close to 100 years old at the Hospice house suffering from cancer but still communicative.

The woman agreed and asked Tanaro to sing “How Great Thou Art” since she loved gospel music. As Tanaro sang, she said the woman threw her head back and prayed with her.

Tanaro said she could tell the woman enjoyed the song and hoped it was what she needed at the time because, ultimately, the team’s job is not all about death.

“It’s about living the best you can for whatever time you have left,” Tanaro said.

Editor’s note: The print version of this story misattributed a quote to Greg Wilson and inaccurately stated the roles of social workers at Hospice of Southern Kentucky. The Talisman deeply regrets these errors, and they have been corrected in this online version.

Tending to death

story by **PHI CHU** *photos by* **DALTON PUCKETT**

Dwayne Lawrence has more than 30 years of experience as an assistant manager and funeral director at J.C. Kirby & Son Funeral Chapel. Lawrence is also the chief deputy coroner for Warren County. Lawrence said respecting families in their time of loss is crucial to his practices.

Deputy Coroner Dwayne Lawrence said a mother of a deceased child averted her eyes when he walked into the room. She stared at her feet when the elevator door opened and shifted uncomfortably. "I'll just take the next one," he said to her.

Lawrence said he understands that he is initially regarded as a family's grim reminder of loss and is therefore treated coldly.

"It is a road we walk by ourselves sometimes," he said of people who share his profession.

In the wake of death, grief and heartache follow. The difficulty remains among the living, Lawrence said. Though death care workers spend significant time with various types of deaths and bodies, it's the grim effects on loved ones who are left behind that requires the care and focus of these workers. Lawrence and other professionals serve and comfort these bereaved families as their loved ones are prepared and taken to the grave for final farewells.

However, working so closely with death for a profession doesn't separate Lawrence from the significance death possesses. Lawrence saw his first cadaver at 16 years old. He wanted to become an undertaker when he was in the third grade. As a baby, the doctors told his family that he wouldn't survive due to problems with his kidney. Now 58 years old, Lawrence said he understands the range of emotions that seep from deaths. He has seen them countless times.

"People think we're immune?" he said. "No. No."

Now, he uses his experiences with death to assist families during their time of mourning. He works with them directly with tasks including filing paperwork, choosing caskets and monuments and planning funerals.

"It's not just a business to me or a way I make my living," Lawrence said. "When they look at you in the eye, they trust you."

Lawrence said he remembers his father lying close to death on a hospital bed, telling him not to worry about what comes next. As a Christian, Lawrence said he believes he was meant for this profession. He said his faith has only grown stronger while working with these families, and he is comfortable with the idea of his own mortality.

"Grief is for our loss, not for the person that died," Lawrence said. "They are in a better place."

After he is gone from this world, Lawrence said he hopes people will say he was there for them during their darkest hours, when they needed someone they could never hold again.

"I close my eyes in death, and open them in glory," Lawrence said. "I'll see my friends and family that were gone before me."

Most of all, he said he hopes God will take his hand and say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant. Come home."

For now, Lawrence will continue to provide his assistance and compassion for these families, he said. He'll continue to investigate and pronounce deaths and order autopsies if needed. He'll continue knocking on doors, collecting the deceased and holding dear the trust that these families have placed in his hands to guide them in their own journey of finalizing death.

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The embalming room is stark, sterile and smells like a nursing home. The room is where Brian Gugler, funeral director at Cone Funeral Home, embalms, rebuilds and prepares the bodies to look presentable for the loved ones of the deceased. A sign on the door warns of the presence of formaldehyde, a carcinogenic chemical compound.

One of Gugler's first cases involved a Japanese-American woman who had killed herself with a shotgun blast to her face. He said it was difficult. Gugler used clay to rebuild the face and wax to resemble skin. Makeup and lighting were also integral in the process, he said, but they can also be challenging to work with due to different skin tones and deteriorating conditions of the corpse.

"You don't want to see somebody right after they die," he said. "It's not a pretty sight. We're not making them lifelike — we're making them presentable so the family has a good remembrance of them."

Growing up, Gugler and his mother visited art museums along the East Coast, he said. His mother was an art teacher, so he followed her classes and teachings and learned about colors and familiarized himself with their spectrums. His father was a chemical engineer. As a funeral director, he gets to combine working with chemicals with art.

"I use the best of both worlds," Gugler said.

When Gugler prepared and restored bodies early in his career in the '80s, he said he was afraid to make mistakes because he wanted to prepare the bodies to accurately resemble how loved ones remembered them.

"There's no in-between," he said. "You can see it on the people's face when they walk in, whether it's right or wrong."

Because of the many cultures in Bowling Green, sometimes Gugler has to provide or modify different services, he said. For instance, some people don't want screws in the casket, and others don't believe in embalming.

He said his experience working with cadavers has not significantly affected his belief in the existence of an afterlife.

"I'm working with the shell of the person — the spirit's already gone, as far as I'm concerned," Gugler said. "I'm trying to make it easier for the family that's left to move forward in their life instead of being stuck in one spot."

Gugler said he believes some people he's worked with had to see their loved one's bodies to come to terms with their deaths and be able to let go. Though he said he has come to excel at making the body ready, he is not immune to the effects death has on families, especially when it comes to a death of a child.

He also must be able to empathize with families to let them know he wants to take care of them, that he understands their pain and wants to make sure they don't feel alone in their pain, he said.

When Gugler has time away from the dead, he likes to be away from people, he said, particularly by hunting and fishing in the woods. There is solace there that encourages self-reflection. He said that at social gatherings, people are often surprised and fascinated when he tells them what he does for a living.

"But this is my place," he said of his profession. "I'm comfortable here."

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ABOVE: Cathy Maroney is the Division Manager of the Fairview Cemetery. Her job consists of helping families find the final resting place of their relative and maintaining the cemetery. "It makes me feel good to provide a service with dignity for the families," Maroney said. There are only about 1200 plots left to sell in the Fairview cemetery, and Maroney said they could sell out in the next five years.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Brian D. Gugler is a contracted funeral director at the Cone Funeral Home in Bowling Green. Gugler spent a lot of time as a child playing in his friends' father's funeral home in Wisconsin.

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When a funeral procession arrives at Fairview Cemetery, Cemetery Division Manager Cathy Maroney leads them to the burial site. She said the cemetery maintenance workers decide beforehand on the best route through the cemetery's winding paths.

Four cemetery maintenance workers stand by at a respectable distance, Maroney said. They watch and wait until all of the attendees have left the funeral. She said they want to make sure they are considerate of the loved ones of the deceased.

"We don't want them to feel like they're just another job, because they're not," she said. "We want to make sure that we are reverent to the family."

By this time, loved ones of the deceased have gone through the actual death, meeting with the coroner and visiting the funeral home, Randel Cochran, a cemetery maintenance worker, said.

"This is it, their final resting place," he said.

Cochran said the maintenance workers dig graves, mow the grass, bury bodies and set up for burials, and their attention to detail at funerals is impeccable so loved ones don't have to worry about anything else and can focus on their deceased loved ones. The workers try not to miss the smallest things, like straightening out and removing leaves from the carpets, he said.

The maintenance workers dress the grave with a green blanket, set up a tent and arrange felt chairs and flowers around it.

"When the family arrives, they don't see a scary, muddy hole," Schmidt said. "It's a place where they can sit down for a few minutes and say their last goodbyes to somebody."

Anthony Cooper, another cemetery maintenance worker, said it is a selfless, dignified ordeal that demands respect and compassion, and he focuses only on the families.

"It's as simple as noticing that little puddle of water that we could throw a carpet over to keep them from stepping on it," Cooper said.

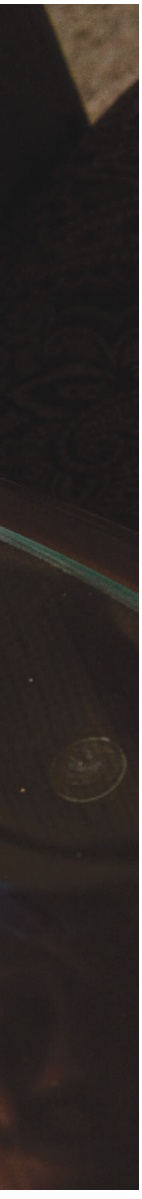
When the funeral is over, the workers descend on the burial site. The tent, chairs and carpets are removed, and the grave is filled and raked. Any flowers that were left are placed on the grave, Maroney said.

"It's routine to them to the point to where it's almost quiet," she said of the workers. "They know what they're doing."

Often, she said, they will continue to the next funeral. At the end of the day, their boots are stained with dirt from multiple graves.

“We don’t want them to feel like they’re just another job, because they’re not,” she said. “We want to make sure that we are reverent to the family.”

- Cathy Maroney



When a family first meets with Gugler, they are given a packet like this one containing information about their deceased family member. It is what newspaper reporters use to write obituary sections, and Gugler said it functions as a person’s last message.

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The idea of death seeps into loved ones and workers who tend to the dead, all in different ways.

Every morning around 7:30 a.m., a man enters Fairview Cemetery to visit his deceased wife. He sits down with her headstone in silence for about 20 minutes, and sometimes Jeremy Owens, another maintenance worker at the cemetery, sees him rest his head in his hands. The man has been coming for about five years, Owens said.

Owens said he feels sad for those who struggle with moving on, and through his own experience helping these families, he has learned to value what he has.

“Why would you ever have a bad day?” he said. “Seriously, you’re above ground. You see what’s waiting for you.”

Yet even with his 18 years of experience, death can still be upsetting. Noticing names of the deceased has made him particularly wary.

“First year I started, Ann Catherine got killed in a car wreck,” Owens said. “She was 10 then. She’s got a big white stone buried in plat one, site two. That’s why you’ve got to not remember their names, because I’ve known that girl for 18 years and have never seen her alive.”

Joe Schmidt, who is also a cemetery maintenance worker, learned there is a Muslim man buried at Fairview Cemetery named Dawud. He is buried in a manner that faces Mecca. Schmidt said since he is also Muslim, Dawud’s presence at the cemetery has made him want to thoroughly learn the Islamic prayer Surah al-Fatiha, the first chapter of the Quran. Schmidt said he wants to be ready when death arrives.

“I think you can prepare yourself to die, to go back to the source of things,” he said.

Schmidt said working at the cemetery has assisted him in his own religious path.

“No matter your beliefs, dying and mourning is a universal human experience,” he said. “That’s something we’re working with here every day.”

After work some evenings, after the deceased are laid into the earth with their loved ones’ farewells, Schmidt would think of Dawud and recite the al-Fatiha prayer for the friend he has never met.

Cochran said it is a privilege to be a part of such an important moment of someone’s life because it’s “the final resting place, the ultimate equalizer if you will.”

“It’s somber, but I feel fulfilled and good inside,” Cochran said.

Cooper said he and the other maintenance workers are all at the cemetery to serve the community.

“No matter how diverse our lives are and whatever we do in life, we come here in one agreement, and that is to serve,” he said.

Schmidt said he has noticed the parallel between his experience at Fairview Cemetery and taking care of his daughter — he both provides life and works with people whose lives have ended.

“In some weird way, there’s a kind of symmetry in that,” he said. “Birth, life, death. Over and over again. This is part of it. I get a feeling of peace doing this work.”

The Butterfly Effect

story by **KRISTINA FRANCIS** *photos by* **MAGGIE HAUN**

Growing up, my family was never very religious. We didn't make a point to go to church or say a prayer before meals. I don't even think we had a Bible in the house. If we did, it was in a box packed away or layered with dust in the top of my parents closet. My mom's mom, who I called Nanny, saw church as an everyday activity. She loved church not just because she was intensely faithful, but because of the connections she had with the people in her hometown of Shelbyville.

She could tell you most people's names, their kids' names and their grandkids' names. But she could go deeper and tell you where they lived and what was going on in their daily life like knowing when her cousin Wanda had a doctors appointment. This was especially true for the people she went to church with. To her, they were considered family.

Olive Branch United Methodist Church is interwoven into my family's history. Nanny grew up going there with her family when she was young. Nanny's brother, Chester, got married there in 2014, and then we all returned in 2018 to say our final goodbyes and "I love you's" to my Nanny.

Following months of health issues, Nanny was diagnosed with stage four colon cancer on June 13, 2018 and on July 7, 2018 while at work I got the hard phone call from my dad. I heard his voice crack as he said he didn't want to tell me over the phone but Nanny had passed away. After hearing this I went to the bathroom gasping for air, trying to hold in my tears. I left work early that day to make the 40-minute drive to Shelbyville to say my goodbye.

Soon after Nanny's death, my mom began going to church regularly for the first time since she was 17.

Every Sunday, she gets up, puts on her nicest clothes and drives to the church where Nanny spent most of her days. She's never asked my dad, sister or me to join her because she does it for herself. I think she goes to church because she finds a piece of Nanny there, and that makes her feel at home. At church, she is known as Marva's daughter.

Every day since Nanny died, my mom gets up in the morning and she slides Nanny's wedding ring onto her left index finger. I put on my necklace strung with Nanny's engagement ring dangling from it. My sister puts on a necklace with Nanny's original wedding ring on it. And we begin our days taking a little piece of her along with us both in Bowling Green and in Louisville.

When Nanny was first diagnosed with cancer she took chemo pills for a week, which caused her extreme fatigue.

My mom spurred the hard conversation with Nanny at her PET scan appointment about what she wanted to do if the treatment did not result in change. At first, Nanny said she did not want to hurt the people around her by stopping treatment. My mom reassured her the family loved her too much to see her in that kind of pain. After talking they decided if the results from the scan showed Nanny's condition had not improved, they would end treatment.

Not long after their decision, my mom got a phone call on July 3 from Nanny's doctor. Nanny's liver had been consumed by the cancer and was not functioning properly because of a tumor.

Four days later, she passed away while lying in bed surrounded by her family and friends.

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Tammy Francis goes through her mother's pictures to find younger pictures of her mom. "I have had to do a lot of organizing," Tammy said. "It was easy at first because it was just the routine of doing everything. But as time progressed, everything just hits you."

“At one point while she was lying in bed at the nursing home she said, ‘I’m ready to go home.’ ”

There is no doubt Nanny’s family was her whole world. She had four children, 11 grandchildren and 15 great-grandchildren. Her motherhood was such a big part of her identity that the word “mother” was stitched into the interior of her casket with elegant, light-pink thread. She was so proud to be called Mom, Grandma and Nanny that she wanted those identities to be with her for the rest of time.

There were lots of unfamiliar faces to me at Nanny’s visitation and funeral, and everyone had their own unique story about her. What stuck with me, though, was her friend Judy’s story.

For years, Judy and Nanny would ride to church together and sing songs at the top of their lungs on the way there. Judy said she knew when she picked up my Nanny, who she called “Miss Marva,” that she better have music ready because Nanny wanted to sing. Hearing this brought tears to my eyes, reminding me of the person Nanny was. She had a light in her that radiated through others in the smallest moments.

My family and I are still grieving. We’re trying to grasp the idea that she is no longer with us. Even though I got the privilege to spend 20 years with her, it still does not feel like enough. The day she passed, my sister realized Nanny would not get to see her graduate high school or see either of us graduate college. Trying to find happiness in life without her is something I think we all struggle with, but my mom especially. Even after selling Nanny’s house, my mom’s childhood home, things have not seemed to get much easier.

The thought never crossed my mind when I was younger and running though Nanny’s yard searching for Easter eggs, that one day, I would not be able to return. We began to clean out her house over the summer. We spent hours sifting through everything she accumulated in the 48 years of living there. I could tell it was hard on my mom. She had grown up there.

While cleaning out the house, my mom came across a personal testimony Nanny wrote about her for the church.

“So I call Tammy my miracle baby,” Nanny wrote, referring to my mom. “She was born at healthy 10 lb. baby.”

This was the first time my mom saw Nanny refer to her as a “miracle baby.” Sitting at Nanny’s dining table, my mom broke down in tears from being able to sense her mom’s voice one more time through this testimony.

My mom was there with Nanny through it all. She stayed almost every night at the hospital and then the nursing home for a little over a month only returning home to shower, grab lunch and return to her bedside each night.

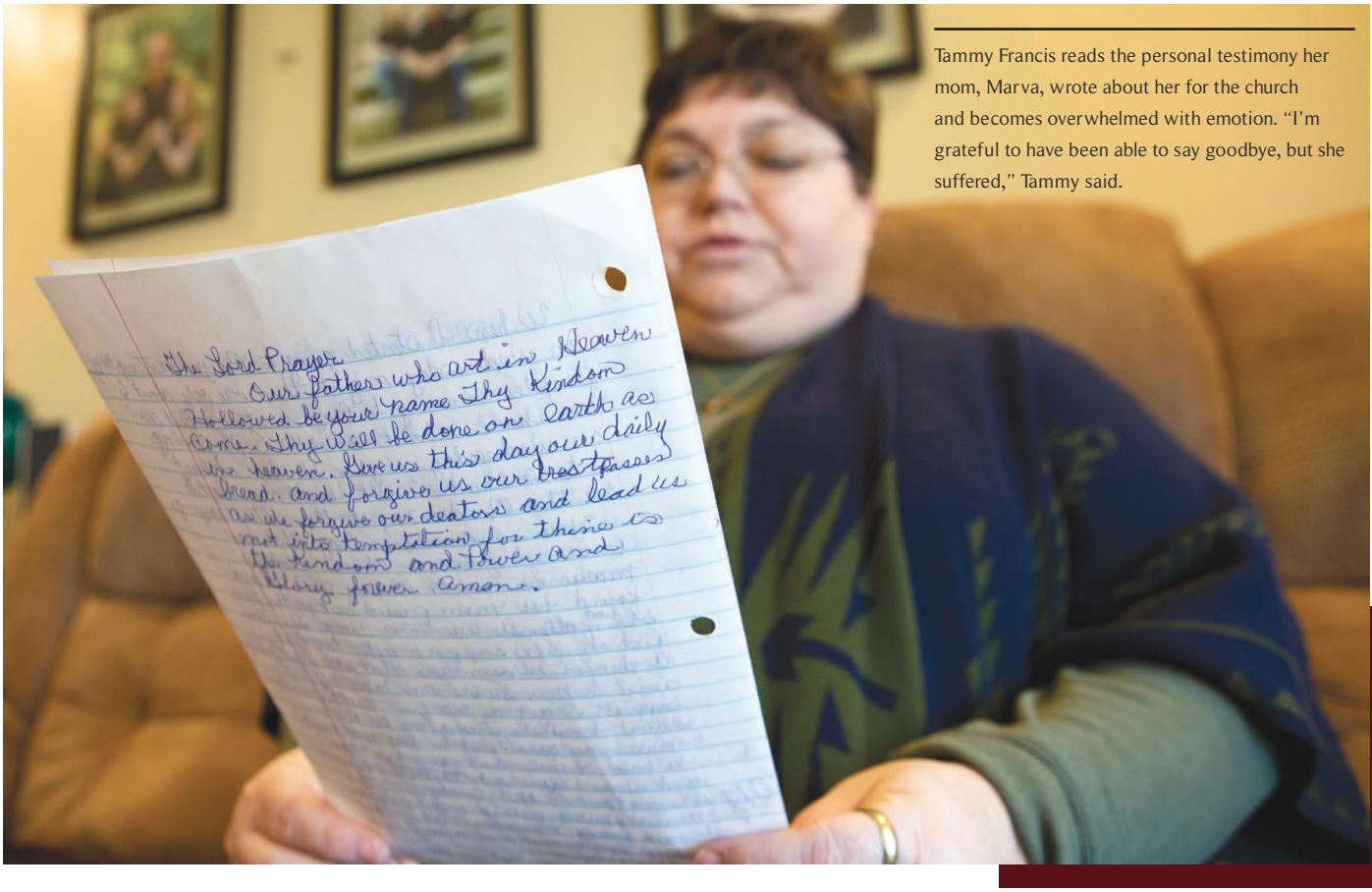
Outside of the nursing home, there was a butterfly bush and every day white butterflies would play outside of Nanny’s window while my mom watched them. Nanny’s spirit, along with the single white butterfly my mom saw the day Nanny died, floated away into the universe that day.

I don’t know exactly what I believe about the afterlife, but Nanny was certain that she was going to be in heaven with God. At one point while she was lying in bed at the nursing home she said, “I’m ready to go home.”

No one said a word, but I think we all knew she did not mean she was returning to her house. She was going home to heaven.

I hope she made it home and found her paradise through it all, and I hope my mom finds paradise through the heartbreak.

Kristina Francis (from left), her mother, Tammy Francis and her younger sister Allison Francis all wear pieces of jewelry in memory of Marva Dunaway, Tammy's mother and the girls' grandmother. Tammy has her mom's wedding ring; Kristina has her nanny's engagement ring and Allison has an older wedding ring that they each keep.



Tammy Francis reads the personal testimony her mom, Marva, wrote about her for the church and becomes overwhelmed with emotion. "I'm grateful to have been able to say goodbye, but she suffered," Tammy said.


"... It is a sight to shock the desert-seared eyes and awaken the mind ..."
MEAD

There is no way to say anything new about Paris

poem by **JESSICA MCCORMICK**
photo by **SAM MALLON**

Does this look like the kind of place
you would fall in love with a blind date?

Say they find the river Seine gutted
from its inside out, turned upside down, decayed
like a parasite, reeking of tar and lost dreams.
I'd be all right,
another pathway to humanity shut down.

Humanity? I exist in a busy place with nothing to do
even though I am
surrounded by everything
when I'm sleeping.
Paradise.
Why do I try?
Why do the macarons break crisp but not rock solid?
Something smooth, champagne and glory,
like a birdsong that echoes across the room as I
daydream
on a swollen mattress and a pickpocketed blanket.

The wind at the top of the Eiffel Tower changes
mood like a queen
on a warpath.

There is a reason yoga balances our bodies
the way nature calms us down,
simply by being.
There is a reason why the word nature
makes us think of humans and not trees.
Why do I try.

Poet's statement: "Paris is my paradise, but it can also be lonely and dirty, and sometimes you have to work hard to make it magical. Everything lovely has already been said about Paris, so this is the grittier side of the city."

BAD TRIPS

story by **CLAIRE DOZER** *illustrations by* **TAYLOR FRINT**

Editor's note: The Talisman granted subjects in this story anonymity because it discusses their use of psychedelics. Psychedelic drugs have been illegal on both the federal and state level since 1966.

Michael Devyn (not his real name) began to breathe aggressively with a terrified gaze glossing over his eyes, making it clear to his friends this psychedelic trip would be different from the rest. Devyn doubled his usual single dose of an LSD tab that he had been taking for years. Paige Wilson (not her real name), a friend of Devyn who also uses psychedelics, said she witnessed his aggression start to form.

An hour into his trip, Devyn began to feel agitated and paranoid there was a nameless "someone" threatening his life.

"I was banging on doors, screaming 'I know they're in there!' and I still don't know who I was talking about, but I know I was scared," Devyn said.

Wilson said she attempted to calm Devyn multiple times, though the calm state only lasted for five-minute spurts. He repeatedly flung his body across floors, punched walls and countertops until his knuckles were covered in multicolor bruises and hurt one of his friends as he flailed his fists at anything he could reach.

"It was terrifying seeing him as this animalistic beast when I know how good of a person he really is," Wilson said.

During the trip, Devyn came to believe he was bartering with a devil-like demon for his and Wilson's souls. He felt something he described as evil taking over his thoughts and movements, making him feel like he had no control.

"It was either my soul or hers, and I was preparing myself to give my soul away," Devyn said.

Psychedelics are a type of hallucinogen that alter perception, thoughts and feelings, according to the National Institute of Drug Abuse. However, they are used by about 24.6 million Americans aged 12 and older or 9.4 percent of the U.S. population, according to NIDA.

Short-term effects of these drugs can include increased blood temperature and panic, while long-term effects can consist of memory loss and anxiety, according to NIDA. Although rare, persistent psychosis, which is a series of consistent mental problems, and hallucinating persisting perceptual disorder (HPPD), in which users experience hallucinations while not under the influence of a hallucinogen, may also occur in heavy users, according to NIDA.

"I knew I wasn't dead, but it was the closest thing to death I have ever felt," Devyn said. "I told my friends the next day that I was sorry, and whatever they saw last night was not me."

Psilocybin is the active hallucinogenic chemical found in magic mushrooms, or shrooms, that induces psychedelic experiences. They are found in specific plants or mushrooms, along with their extracts, and are also made by humans, according to NIDA.

Watching Devyn experience his bad trip didn't stop Wilson from continuing her own use of psychedelics.

She said witnessing Devyn's experience reminded her of a bad trip she had experienced with shrooms a year before.

"When I walked outside, I felt the darkness consume me," Wilson said. "I needed to get out of that situation."

Wilson began to see glimpses of faces from classic horror movie's, including "A Nightmare on Elm Street," "The Grudge" and "Halloween." The stars she was lying under in her small town of Walton seemed to move to form these pictures. She ran to her room, hoping the familiar place would bring her comfort, but she said the torture followed.

"I laid in bed for four hours after going inside and I was convinced the girl from 'The Grudge' was waiting on the other side of the door," Wilson said. "I didn't move the entire time."

Wilson first tried shrooms at 16 with friends and continued to use them for four years.

Wilson said her biggest mistake was taking the psychedelics, by herself. She said in her previous experiences with psychedelics she was in the company of friends who that made her feel loved and cared for.

"If you feel a bad trip start to happen, you need to have people there who you trust to keep you sane," Wilson said.

About 17 percent of people between the ages of 18 to 25 have used hallucinogens and about nine percent have used LSD, according to NIDA.

“I knew I wasn’t dead, but it was the closest thing to death I have ever felt.”

Despite the horrific images and feelings Wilson experienced that night, she said she continues to take psychedelics around eight to ten times a year because of her appreciation for the state of mind they can put her in. She said she believes she is her most “wholesome self” because of the positive energy and the connectedness she feels with others while under the influence of the drug.

“I am grateful for my knowledge and experience with psychedelics because my friends know they have someone to come to when they don’t know what to do while on these drugs,” Wilson said.

According to NIDA, hallucinogens such as LSD, psilocybin, peyote, DMT, and ayahuasca can distort a user’s perception of time, motion, colors, sounds and self.

After taking three and a half doses of acid, Chance Ross (not his real name) began to lose his sense of self and reality.

“For about 45 minutes I didn’t know exactly who I was, or really where I was,” Chance Ross said.

Chance Ross went into a gas station and asked for help from workers. He didn’t tell them he was under the influence of a psychedelic. He said he rummaged around the drink machine believing he was in Reno, Nevada, in the ‘80s.

Soon after midnight, Chance Ross’s brother, Drew Ross (not his real name) received a call from a police officer asking if he knew Chance Ross. The police officer asked if he could come down to the scene.

“It brings you to conscious and awareness real quick when being questioned by proper authorities,” Drew Ross said.

Chance Ross has been taking psychedelics for 12 years, although he said he does space out his usage and leaves months in between his trips. He said psychedelics allow him to spend time in introspection, reflecting on who he is as well as on his past, present and future.

Drew Ross has taken psychedelics recreationally and, he said, medically since 2016.

After being pronounced dead for more than 60 seconds following a nearly fatal car accident in 2016, he recovered. During his recovery, he refused the opioids and other medications doctors recommended and took psychedelics instead.

He self-medicated through microdosing, or taking a small fraction of a regular single dose, of psilocybin and marijuana. With two collapsed lungs, he was unable to smoke, so he infused the marijuana with the psilocybin in his tea, which took away the physical pain and kept thoughts of the accident from hindering his mental state.

Drew Ross said he remembers the doctor saying, “If it helps you, it helps you. Just keep it confidential.”

However, Drew Ross has not always had good luck with psychedelics. During a bad trip, Drew Ross once saw repeating mental images of scarring moments in his life and said it felt like a visit with the Ghost of Christmas past. At the end of the trip, he saw a death of his former self, which he described as an “ego death.” This is also known as a loss of sense of self and reality, according to the Frontiers in Human Neuroscience journal.

Ultimately, Chance Ross said it is important to be in a positive state of mind when taking psychedelics because stress and negativity can be enhanced when combined with the drug.

“If you don’t have a sound mind, you’re kind of fucked,” Chance Ross said.

Going the DISTANCE

story by **ADRIANNA WATERS** *photos by* **IVY CEBALLO**

When Florence senior Ireland Hill was a junior in high school working at a Sonic Drive-In, she roller-skated an application over to Joshua Finley. At first, she was not impressed by him, the quiet high school senior whose friends worked at the fast-food chain.

Over time, Hill said she became intrigued by Finley's quietness. Hill said she is a talkative person, and while Finley was never rude, he did not talk to her.

To break the silence, Hill hatched a plan.

She was about to attend the Governor's Scholars Program in Murray, and she needed a fridge to take with her. She said she asked her coworkers if anyone had a fridge for her to use, hoping Josh would offer to let her borrow one.

Finley told Hill his sister had a fridge, and when Finley texted Hill that she could borrow it, he kept texting her because he wanted to continue the conversation. Hill and Finley stayed in contact while she was at GSP.

When she returned to Florence, Hill had 15 days with Finley before he left for the University of Louisville. They made the most of the time by going on their first date to a Cincinnati Reds baseball game, driving around and talking as much as they could.

Hill said she no longer thought of Finley as cocky, and Finley became more talkative with her.

"The rest was history," Hill said with a smile.

Up to 75 percent of college students have been in a long-distance relationship while at school, according to a 2013 Cornell University study.

Finley said he was "definitely hesitant" to pursue a long-distance relationship, but he wanted to be with Hill.

"I was really crazy about wanting to be with her," Finley said. "At the end of the day, I was too excited to not take that chance."

Hill considered U of L a month or two later once she started her senior year because she loved the campus and opportunity for financial aid. In hindsight, the fact that Finley was there probably influenced her the most, she said. Regardless, Hill decided to attend WKU because she loved the environment and would receive more scholarship money.

The romance between Hill and Finley continued to blossom, as did their individual experiences at college. In spring 2017, Hill studied abroad at Harlaxton College in Grantham, England, for a semester. While Hill was exploring different countries in Europe, she was also navigating her relationship with Finley.

Although he was supportive of Hill studying abroad, Finley said the time zone difference was a difficult adjustment. He said most days, they only texted each other good morning and goodnight. Hill traveled on the weekends, and Finley said he usually did not hear from her during those trips because she was busy sightseeing.

When Hill was abroad, Finley's grandmother died. Hill said they were able to talk and FaceTime, but seeing Finley sad was a rough experience.

"His granny was just the nicest person ever," Hill said. "It was hard because I couldn't do anything about it. I think he tried to be as strong as possible. If I could have just flown in for a weekend, I would."

Despite its difficulties, Hill and Finley both said their long-distance relationship has increased their independence.

"We don't feel drawn to want one particular path because that's what the other person wants," Finley said. "We're doing what we individually want and supporting each other."

Hill said that attending WKU instead of U of L benefited

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Joshua Finley and Ireland Hill decide on where to go for dinner in Hill's Bowling Green apartment Feb. 1. The couple maintains a long-distance relationship with weekend visits as often as every two weeks or monthly depending on their schedules.

Hill and Finley catch up during their dinner date at Blaze Pizza Feb. 1. Finley drove from Louisville after an eight-hour workday to spend the weekend with Hill.

Leah Johnson sends her boyfriend a Valentine's Day package on Feb. 21 with candy and a painting she made.

her personal growth.

"We both have been able not only to be together and have great times, but grow by ourselves," Hill said.

If Hill had attended U of L and been closer to Finley, she said she probably wouldn't have branched out or studied abroad. However, in the future, their relationship might not have to be long-distance.

Although her plans are not definite, Hill said she is looking into a U of L master's program, and she said this time, her interest in U of L is because of the program.

"It's really neat that life is potentially putting us in the same city," Hill said. "It's going to be the biggest four-year-and-eight-month reward ever."

Whether they end up in the same city or not, Hill said she believes long-distance relationships can work out.

"I just really believe if two people really love each other and want to be together it will work out because it has for me," Hill said.

•••

Louisville sophomore Leah Johnson met Shawn Sullivan in sixth grade through choir and classes. In seventh grade, they had more classes together and began to bond.

When Johnson became interested in "The Hunger Games" book series in seventh grade, she created a Facebook group for her and her friends to revel in the fandom.

Johnson's friendship with Sullivan deepened when he joined "The Hunger Games" group after she asked him if he wanted to join. Johnson said she had a small crush on Sullivan at the time, and she suspected he had a crush on her too. Asking him to join the Facebook group with her friends made her more comfortable around him.

While no middle-school romance blossomed between Johnson and Sullivan, they started to connect in eighth grade, becoming and remaining best friends. It was not until their junior year of high school that their relationship became something more.

Sullivan and Johnson lived near each other, so he often drove her home. When she was getting out of the car one day, he asked her if she wanted to go to a dance with him. Sullivan, who was in JROTC in high school, had gone with Johnson to the dance as friends during their first two years of high school.

After Johnson said yes, he dropped the bombshell: Did she want to go with him as his girlfriend?

Johnson said she really liked Sullivan, but she had never had a boyfriend before, and she did not want to ruin their best-friend relationship.

Johnson told Sullivan no.

A few days later, she changed her mind and said yes.

The next day, she changed her mind back to no.

The day before the dance, Johnson talked with her mom, who told her dating Sullivan would be better than being best friends because they could love each other. However, the idea of a romantic relationship still scared Johnson.

Johnson said she remembers thinking, "I don't know how to do that! I've never been in one of those before."

Despite her fears, Johnson decided to give the relationship a chance and go to the dance as Sullivan's girlfriend. About a year and a half later, she had another hurdle to overcome: long-distance.

Johnson said she knew when they started dating that Sullivan wanted to be in the Marines. Sullivan enlisted in the Marines his senior year of high school, and he left for boot camp the following June. About two years later, he is now stationed at Camp Allen in Norfolk, Virginia.

During boot camp, Sullivan was not allowed to have his phone with him. Sullivan and Johnson went from seeing each other nearly every day at school to communicating only through letters.

"The most difficult thing would be just not being able to see the person you love whenever you would like to," Sullivan said.

To cope with this difficulty, Johnson painted a box to put her letters in.

"It was kind of cute to send love letters and receive love letters," Johnson said with a smile.

These love letters may have brought a smile to Johnson's face, but it was still a relief to her when Sullivan finished boot camp and was allowed to have his phone again. They couldn't go on dates or hold each other's hand, but they could at least hear each other's voices and see each other's faces by calling, texting, or FaceTiming. However, they have trouble staying as connected if they are in different time zones.

From June to December 2018, Sullivan was in Bahrain, which is eight hours ahead of Bowling Green. If Johnson woke up nervous for an exam or sick with a stomach ache, she did not always have the luxury of seeking comfort from Sullivan because he could have already been fast asleep for the night. However, Sullivan said that being in Bahrain also helped their relationship.

"It was one of those things that helps build confidence with the relationship," Sullivan said. "There's a distance between her and I, but we still make things work."

Although Sullivan will eventually return from the Marines, Johnson is currently pursuing an undergraduate degree in theater.

She does not know now what her future holds, but there are multiple possibilities that could move Johnson around the country. She might have to constantly move whenever she lands a new acting job, or she might find herself permanently living in New York, she said.

Johnson said she also realizes that acting is a competitive field, and there is a chance it won't work out for her. If she becomes an actress, she may have to sacrifice some time with Sullivan, but if that career path does not work out, she could be with him more often.

"You can't have both," Johnson said. "I just have to trust that God will put us where he wants to put us."

Whatever the future holds for them, Johnson said she is confident about their relationship.

"If two people really love each other, and they want to be with each other, then they can make anything work and overcome anything," Johnson said.

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Santa Clarita, California, graduate student Daniella Izaguirre and her boyfriend Trace Stenz are also in a long-distance relationship. Izaguirre said they both value quality time and physical touch in relationships, so the distance can get difficult.

Izaguirre met Stenz in July 2017 when they were both graduate assistants working at the Preston Center at WKU, and they were friendly with each other her first semester as a graduate assistant. They were on good terms, but they did not see or talk to each other much. Izaguirre talked to Stenz more her second semester because her roommate was dating one of his best friends.

One night in January 2018, they went to a bar with some friends, and after Izaguirre left, Stenz texted her that she was really pretty.

"And that's when it kind of all started," Izaguirre said with a laugh. "Me and my roommate were freaking out, like 'Oh my gosh, what does this mean?'"

From then until April, Izaguirre and Stenz flirted with each other, but they had yet to start officially dating.

"I think both of us were just too scared to admit that each of us were feeling some type of way toward each other," Izaguirre said.

Their flirting finally progressed into a relationship when a group of their friends went to Nashville for Stenz's birthday. Izaguirre spent the trip trying to be close with him, but they ended up riding in different cars on the way back to Bowling Green.

The transportation mishap did not hinder their romance. On the way back, Stenz texted Izaguirre that he really liked her.

"Then from there, it took more time," Izaguirre said with a laugh. "It took about another week for us to finally bite the bullet and make a real move."

Izaguirre and Stenz officially started dating in June 2018. After Stenz completed his graduate studies, he moved to Martin, Tennessee, to be the intramural and club sports coordinator for the University of Tennessee at Martin.

To make a long-distance relationship work, Stenz said they talk at least once a day through texting, calling, or Skype.

"It really makes you appreciate that person," Stenz said. "You have to make a commitment to that person. It's very easy to give up."

Leaving each other after visits full of cuddling and catching up is difficult because they sometimes go five or six weeks without seeing each other.

"I absolutely hate it when we have to do that," Izaguirre said.

There are also instances in which plans to see each other fall through because of work. As frustrating as this is for Izaguirre, she said it has made her more patient and adaptable.

Stenz has been in long-distance relationships before, and with those relationships, the difficulties made the relationships not worth it, he said. While this has not happened in his relationship with Izaguirre, their busy schedules make communication difficult. Izaguirre and Stenz cannot always visit each other for romantic weekends because they are sometimes working on weekends, and Stenz works long hours.

To make up for their busy schedules, Izaguirre said she and Stenz fill each other in on the details of their lives, even if it is something small like going out to dinner.

"I feel like if he's not letting me know what he's doing, I'm sometimes missing out on his life," Izaguirre said. "I want to let him know what we're doing so I can fill him in, kind of like he's here with me."

Izaguirre said when they are together, they balance their interests. Izaguirre likes nature and physical activity, and Stenz likes sports, so in the morning, they may hike or walk and then watch a sports game such as football or basketball on TV later in the day.

Their time together is filled with special moments, like the first time Stenz told Izaguirre he loved her, Izaguirre said with a smile. It happened while she was on a trip to Stenz's undergraduate college, the University of Alabama.

The couple spent the day with Strenz's friends at Izaguirre's first real tailgate. They stuffed their faces with junk food and enjoyed the frenzy of tailgating games. They broke away from the craziness of the football-season crowd for a stroll down the streets where Stenz spent his university days, exploring the town's shops and restaurants. As night approached, they headed back to Stenz's friend's house where they were staying. While they were alone, Stenz told Izaguirre he loved her.

Izaguirre will graduate in May, and her job may move her farther from Stenz. One job she is applying for is in North Carolina, 13 hours away from Martin, Tennessee. Izaguirre said the plan is to not remain long-distance because she and Stenz eventually want to work and live in the same location.

Stenz has had people question if the long-distance relationship is worth it, given that Izaguirre could move farther away after graduation, and he responds that it is.

"My answer has always been with her, that I am absolutely sure with this," Stenz said.

Daniella Izaguirre and Trace Stenz attend a showing of "What Men Want" at Regal Cinemas Feb. 10. The couple shared a large Sprite. "He's obsessed with Sprite," Izaguirre said. "I'm trying to get him to quit." Izaguirre said she once heard Stenz order a Sprite with his breakfast at a drive-thru.

ABOVE: Leah Johnson decorated a letter box filled with keepsakes from her boyfriend, who serves in the United States Marine Corps. The necklace, which shows her first name engraved in hieroglyphics, that sits on the box was a gift from the time Sullivan spent deployed in Egypt.

LEFT: Leah Johnson remembers reuniting with her boyfriend the day before he graduated from boot camp. The photos on this page in Johnson's scrapbook are from that visit. "I was really proud of him," she said.

#nofilter

story by **NICOLE CHRISTENSEN**

Haley Wheeler's most successful Instagram post was a photo of her on her 21st birthday — an important day in anyone's life, she said. The post received 2,384 likes.

To Wheeler, however, her most successful post is of her in a bikini.

"It sounds like I'm being like conceited," Wheeler said. "In that moment, I felt like I was at the pinnacle of my being."

Wheeler had her first run-in with an eating disorder at eight years old.

"As somebody who's dealt with an eating disorder in the past, me being able to be wholly confident and happy and to actually feel sexy for the one time in my life was incredible," she said.

The most important moments in people's lives tend to get the most likes and make for the most successful posts, said Wheeler, a Clay City senior who has 20,000 followers on Instagram under her handle @haleybwheeler.

Social media platforms like Instagram allow people to stay in touch with greater frequency across a greater distance, said Sam Ford, co-author of the book, "Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture," which challenges some of the definitions used to describe contemporary media today.

"The drive to want to connect with other humans about things we're interested in and stay in touch is not new," Ford said. "Technology didn't create that. The platforms that have become popular have done so because they facilitated what people want to do."

In 2018, 31.8 percent of the U.S. population used Instagram, and 18.8 percent of the individuals who used Instagram were between the ages of 18 to 24, according to eMarketer.

Ford said a social media influencer is somebody who has a following and makes money from the content they produce.

Wheeler said she considers herself an influencer, but being an influencer is not determined by the number of followers someone has. She said it is determined by what they do with their platform.

"I took to social media very well because I saw it as a platform to spread positivity and influence people to do the right thing," she said.

Since overcoming certain challenges like eating disorders in her own life, she aims to use social media as a vehicle to reach out to her followers who might be going through the same thing.

"It really took a toll on my self-esteem and my ability to see myself in a positive way," Wheeler said.

Through social media, Wheeler said she was able to find people who encouraged and proved to her she was making an impact.

Wheeler once received a direct message from a high school girl who turned to an eating disorder after being made fun of about her weight. The follower told Wheeler she helped her realize her worth wasn't defined by her weight, Wheeler said.

She appreciates knowing there are people who want to know what she has to say and value not only her opinions but also her as a person.

"Sometimes I don't always see the value in myself, but having this presence on social media is a way for me to get my own reality check," Wheeler said.

Wheeler said she seeks to use her platform to aid people in appreciating their inner selves, focusing largely on positivity and self care in her posts.

Going back to her first posts in 2012 of smiling selfies and heavy filters, Wheeler said she got picked on constantly and "felt like crap."

Wheeler said people should not search for their value in what people think on social media. She said realizing people loved her at any size completely changed her mindset on Instagram.

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OPPOSITE PAGE: Hayley Wheeler, a Clay City senior, gets ready on March 1, to volunteer at the Wine Women and Shoes charity gala in Louisville. She often volunteers at events like these as a part of her work as Miss Louisville Metro. (Photo by Grace Alexieff)

“Sometimes I don’t see the value in myself, but having this presence on social media is a way for me to get my own reality check.”

-Haley Wheeler

Wheeler has built an Instagram following of 20,000 followers in the past few years. Wheeler often posts photos of herself participating in beauty pageants and working out. (Photo by Grace Alexieff)

“You don’t have to have 20,000 people to support you,” Wheeler said.

Wheeler said it only takes one person to care to make an impact. “And, as an influencer, it’s really cool to have that opportunity to be that person who cares in somebody’s life.”

Wheeler said she thinks of herself as being a “billboard.” Her reach on Instagram began when people asked her where she bought her clothing. She began tagging clothing brands she wore in posts. Adorabelles Boutique in Richmond eventually reached out to her and said they loved her personality and style.

Ford said an influencer is “a word of mouth advertiser” either making money off their own content or selling somebody else’s product.

Wheeler became a brand ambassador for Adorabelles Boutique just before the start of her freshman year of college and got a free product each month in exchange for posting about the brand’s products.

Wheeler’s hometown, Clay City, is in Eastern Kentucky and has a population of 1,102 people as of 2017, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. There’s a McDonald’s, a Dairy Queen, one high school and one middle school.

Wheeler said although she grew up in such a close-knit community, people used their ties to betray each other . She said that’s the one bad thing about small towns — everybody knows everybody, which she compares to social media, where everyone wants to know what everyone is doing.

She now promotes small businesses like Essence Cosmetics and Simply Dresses instead of taking brand deals from large companies but does not make any money from the endorsements. She only receives free products. She said she focuses on local businesses because Kentucky is a small-business state.

She said she wanted to “be something more than a girl from a small town.”

Steel Mill & Co. is a clothing and gift boutique in Bowling Green that uses social media influencers and brand ambassadors to promote their brand. The company uses Instagram and Facebook every day as the “biggest platform for growth,” said Steel Mill & Co. marketing manager Paige Calvert.

Steel Mill creates their social media posts surrounding the image of the “Steel Mill babe,” which is based on Chandler Rogers, the owner of the company, Calvert said. Rogers opened Steel Mill at the age of 23 after she took out a $50,000 loan. Calvert described Rogers as confident, daring, authentic and uplifting, which are characteristics they look for when selecting a Steel Mill influencer or brand ambassador.

“We love reaching out and making more girls who may not just work for the company feel like a Steel Mill girl too,” Calvert said.

Steel Mill posts often on their social media pages. They post twice a day on Facebook and three times a day on Instagram, once in the morning, once at lunch, and once in the evening, in order to get high traffic and engagement from followers, Calvert said. They also post stories every day on Instagram and live posts on both Facebook and Instagram twice a week.

“If you’re constantly putting content out there on Instagram, then you’ll see the return in it,” Calvert said.

Calvert said another factor businesses have to consider is the quality of the content and how visually appealing the posts are, since that creates more engagement as well. However, Calvert said it’s difficult for businesses to generate content like that consistently because it requires lots of time and multiple photo shoots.

Steel Mill and Co. is a women's clothing and home decor store located on the U.S. 31 W Bypass in Bowling Green. The boutique uses social media influencers and brand ambassadors to promote their brand. (Photo by Chris Kohley)

When choosing influencers, Steel Mill takes into account how many followers each person has and how many likes and comments they have on each of their pages. Calvert said the company does not want influencers who constantly sell products. They want influencers who still post about their personal lives.

Steel Mill invites the brand ambassadors to events at the store, like meet and greets with the owner, and gives them discounts as perks for representing the company. The influencers pick out free outfits from the store to promote on their Instagram accounts.

Steel Mill has had Instagram and Facebook accounts since the business opened three years ago, Calvert said. Their number of followers has grown from 4,000 to over 28,000 on Facebook and increased from 4,000 to 11,000 on Instagram.

"Instagram has been very difficult for us to grow our followers," Calvert said. "We did find a much slower growth than we did with Facebook."

This slow growth on Instagram is due to the constantly tweaked algorithm, Calvert said. A post is shown to a percentage of followers, and if they do not like and engage with the post enough, the post stops being shown on their feeds.

She said it is harder to get more engagement on Instagram because people are unable to share posts to their entire following like they can on Facebook.

This algorithm can work against businesses. Users often think of business posts showing up as "an interruption" on their Instagram feeds, Calvert said.

Steel Mill combats this by posting content that allows them to tell their own story, much like most users on the platform do, Calvert said. Their posts include portraits, detail photos of clothing and group pictures. Calvert said they also try to post inspirational content to engage with their followers. They analyze engagement on each post to gauge what kinds of content the consumers like the most to affect future posts.

This analysis has worked well for Steel Mill.

CUTTING CORNERS

story by **BROOKE WRIGHT** *illustrations by* **JB CARTER**

Nick Beasmore heard the news from his fraternity brother last year when he was living in Lexington. Beasmore's fraternity brother had kept close ties with WKU while Beasmore, a former WKU civil engineering student, only kept in contact with few people in the department after he graduated in 2015.

He remembered thinking it was some sort of joke. He wondered if someone was just spreading a rumor about his professor.

"Once I saw more reports of the incident, I was let down to hear one of my college mentors had done something like this just (to) get an extra buck," Beasmore said in an email.

In October 2017, Matthew Dettman, a former civil engineering professor at WKU, was placed on leave for diverting funds from payments for soil and concrete testing performed by engineering students.

Dettman was sentenced to 52 weekends at the Warren County Regional Jail on Jan. 9, 2019, by federal district court judge, Greg Stivers, after pleading guilty to wire fraud in September 2018, according to federal court documents.

Dettman must pay $236,000, equal to the amount he used for his personal use, in restitution to WKU due to funds misappropriated from his department. In addition, he will serve three years probation after his incarceration.

According to court records, Dettman stole the $236,000 by diverting payments to personal accounts instead of transferring the money to the university between July 2006 and October 2017. He was placed on unpaid administrative leave in October 2017. He resigned on Dec. 1 of that same year.

The Talisman made multiple calls to Dettman and his current wife, Amanda Dettman, for comment but both refused to speak on the topic of Dettman's situation. Amanda Dettman said lawyers advised them not to speak to anyone and then put her husband on the phone for comment.

"Like my wife said, we're just trying to move past all of this," Dettman said.

The Talisman also contacted several civil engineering professors by phone and email for comment, but these requests were not returned. The sourcing in this story stems from court records, letters of support from those court records, Dettman's personal statement submitted to the judge and former students whom the Talisman interviewed.

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Former WKU engineering professor Matthew Dettman kept $236,000 in consulting fees over the course of 11 years that should have been transferred to WKU. He was sentenced in January 2019 to serve 52 weekends in jail. (Photo illustration by Chris Kohley)

THE PRELUDE

The youngest of four siblings, Dettman was born in Sturgis, Michigan, to Eunice Dettman, a nurse, and Harold Dettman, a doctor, according to one of Dettman's personal statements.

"We had a comfortable childhood," Dettman said in his personal statement addressed to Judge Strivers. "My parents divorced when I was little, but from my memory of growing up I had a fairly normal childhood."

His main interest during school was sports. He played a variety including football, baseball, golf and tennis. Dettman said in his personal statement that any sport he tried, he could play "fairly well." He said competing with his older brothers made him work to be even better.

His love for sports carried through to high school, where he also developed a strong interest in math and science. Dettman played football, wrestled and ran track, where he excelled the most, setting Sturgis High School records and receiving state honors.

Dettman decided to attend Albion College, a small liberal arts school in Albion, Michigan, after he graduated.

"My father attended Albion College," he said in his personal statement. "And none of my siblings had chosen that school, so there was a little bit of pressure for me to go there, so I did."

Dettman spent his freshman year at Albion and transferred to Clemson University the following year when he became interested in civil engineering. He joined the track team as a walk-on for two years but had to give it up to focus on his studies.

After obtaining his undergraduate degree, Dettman attended his top choice for graduate school, Stanford University, where he pursued a single-year master's degree in geotechnical and earthquake engineering.

In his personal statement, Dettman said job offers rolled in until he decided to join a medium-sized engineering firm in Alameda, California. He worked in Alameda for a year before joining a larger firm in Glendale, California, where he worked for another year.

While he worked for these firms, Dettman realized his true passion was teaching. A colleague advised him that his master's degree could land him a teaching position at a small university and he should look into pursuing that passion.

After a few months, Dettman was hired at WKU — the start of a 25-year teaching career.

“They gave me energy and a feeling that I could do just about anything.”

-Harold Dettman

FROM THE GROUND UP

Dettman joined what was then called the Engineering Technology Department at WKU in 1993 teaching civil engineering technology.

Dettman was responsible for creating the civil engineering program at WKU, he said in his personal statement. After the creation of the program, Dettman had to receive approval from ABET, the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology.

The program would not be accredited until at least one student graduated from the program. WKU produced its first class of civil engineering graduates in 2004. The accreditation took roughly 10 years.

“Professionally, it was and probably always will be the achievement I am most proud of,” Dettman said in his personal statement.

Shane Palmquist, who is still an associate professor of civil engineering, worked with Dettman when Palmquist was hired at WKU in 2004. In his letter of support from court records, Palmquist said Dettman was a diligent professional, a friend and someone he still has a “great deal of respect for.”

“The amount of time, dedication, and commitment he showed in not only getting the program accredited, but also maintaining that accreditation since that time, was admirable,” Palmquist said in the letter. “Because of his efforts, WKU has produced over 100 graduates that have achieved professional licensure and many more that are on the path to licensure.”

THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL

Kyle Parks, a former student of Dettman’s and a civil engineer working in Louisville said in an email interview that Dettman had a lot of experience in the engineering field and really applied that to his teaching.

“Classes were very interactive, and he was more than willing to help any student, both during class time and outside of class,” Parks said in an email. “He was always very approachable.”

Parks said Dettman influenced his life in many ways.

“Professor Dettman’s insight into the practical aspects of civil engineering and the day-to-day operations of construction definitely helped my ability to manage complex construction projects,” he said in an email. “There are many lessons from his classes that I find myself falling back on often.”

Palmquist said Dettman always went above and beyond to provide learning opportunities for students.

Several former students wrote letters of support to the court to describe Dettman’s dedication to teaching and his concern for how they were doing outside of class. These were found in the many court records before his personal statement.

Allyson Alvey Jones, a December 2015 graduate, said Dettman gave her the best advice on the process of obtaining her master’s degree.

“He gave me advice on the best ways to prepare, which schools were best for which fields, and names of professors he knew at each of those schools,” she said in an email. She said in her email that Dettman had many connections in different career opportunities, and he was always willing to use those to help with student success.

Dettman said in his personal statement shortly after the first accreditation of the engineering programs that he started experiencing some back pain caused by aging and a lifetime of sports. He said in his personal statement that he treated things “the easy way” with pain medication.

“Most people take opioids and feel tired, groggy and a little sick from it, but that didn’t happen to me,” he said in his personal statement. “They gave me energy and a feeling that I could do just about anything.”

Starting in 2005, Dettman took opioids regularly to assuage his pain and cravings. This lasted for about a year until a doctor told him he was getting too many prescriptions and stopped prescribing them.

Dettman said in his personal statement he learned of the places that were more lenient in what they prescribed. He said he knew the right things to say and how to act to get what he wanted. Over time, the databases improved and made it harder for Dettman to get his medications.

After having a drink at Buffalo Wild Wings one day, the bartender, who Dettman described as a good friend in his personal statement, introduced him to another man who said he could get him all of the pills he needed, which would send Dettman spiraling downward into further addiction and debt.

LOST IN ADDICTION

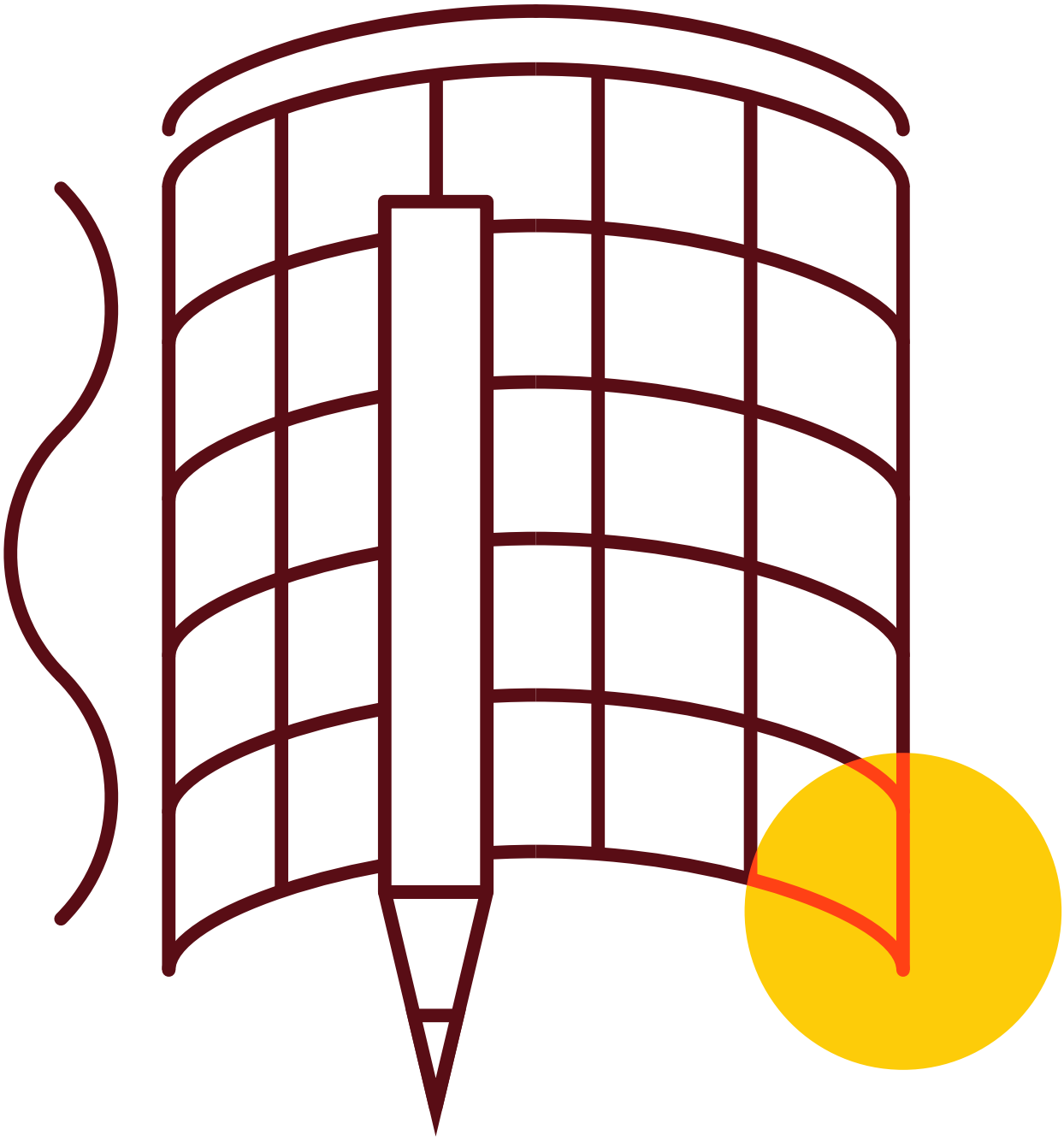
A few weeks after meeting the man, Dettman started taking four or five pills a day, and the pills grew in number each month — peaking at more than 50 pills each day, he said in his personal statement. The pills were $5 apiece, which made for an expensive habit.

Dettman used his savings and credit card advances to pay for the opioids. He started missing work frequently. He was reprimanded by the dean of Ogden College. His wife filed for divorce. He was relying on civil engineering consulting work through local businesses to live.

At that time, Dettman said in his personal statement, WKU had no policy about keeping any portion of the revenue from consulting work because not much money was generated.

Bob Skipper, WKU’s director of Media Relations, said WKU did have policies in place at the time. In 2001, the fee for service contract policies and procedures stated that projects up to $10,000 would be handled through unrestricted WKU accounts, but projects over $10,000 would be processed through the WKU Research Foundation, he said in an email.

The improper consulting work meant Dettman was billing clients directly instead of through the university. In his personal statement, he said he hid those transactions from WKU because he didn’t want to raise any red flags about how much outside consulting work he was completing.



Dettman said in his personal statement that the proper procedure was to process contracts and invoices through the university. The client should have paid WKU, and then Dettman would be paid, he said in his personal statement. WKU changed this policy in 2018 after Dettman's situation surfaced and the university increased the retainment to 30 percent of the revenue.

Dettman said in his personal statement that because there was no formal way to handle the contracts, he and the student workers would be paid the entire contract amount.

"I figured that I was going to get paid the money anyway, so where was the harm?" Dettman said in his personal statement.

In his personal statement, Dettman said he spiraled into more debt when his divorce became final and required him to pay two-thirds of his WKU check in child support and maintenance.

Dettman's father died from addiction, but even that didn't stop him from his own, he said in his personal statement. Dettman saw a commercial about a doctor who offered an opioid addiction recovery program through the use of Suboxone. Dettman reached out to Dr. Bruce Fane, a psychologist in Elizabethtown. Despite the hour-long drive, Dettman asked for help.

The recovery process required 24 hours without the use of opiates, which Dettman managed to do. However, Dr. Fane filled Dettman's first prescription in Bowling Green, which forced him to go one more hour suppressing the cravings.

"It was the longest hour of my life driving back, but the medication helped immediately," he said in his personal statement.

Sometime around 2010, Dettman said he was off opiates and Suboxone and trying to help others find sobriety too.

"I discovered successful recovery from drug addiction is rare, and there is more failure than success, but it is possible," Dettman said in his personal statement.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in 2016 that health care providers across the U.S. wrote over 214 million prescriptions for opioid pain medication, a rate of 66.5 prescriptions per 100 people. More than 11 million people abused prescription opioids in the same year.

Palmquist said Dettman came to him around 2010 and explained he had been struggling with addiction and was now clean, working to better himself.

"I know it took a lot of courage to admit that to us, and ever since that time he was a hard worker and never had an issue again," Palmquist said in his letter to the judge.

However, Dettman's financial debt continued to be a problem. He continued to incorrectly report the billing from his consulting work. He owed several thousands of dollars to his ex-wife, an ex-girlfriend and a credit card company.

MOVING PAST IT

Several students and colleagues, among others, were surprised to hear about Dettman's crimes.

John Sewell, a 2004 graduate of WKU, said in his personal statement that Dettman was his mentor and a knowledgeable professor with a big heart.

"Despite his transgressions, I will continue to turn to Matthew for advice and solutions," Sewell said in his letter to the judge.

Benjamin Matthews, a student of Dettman's in 1994, said Dettman influenced many aspects of his life.

"I cannot describe enough how much emphasis on real life work and engineering experience coupled with a quality education helped propel me to be the professional I am today in my work and home life," Matthews said in his letter to the judge.

Beasmore said it was a total shock to hear the news about his former professor.

"I hope with this current sentencing, he learns from this life-changing mistake, and is able to let it be a lesson in how you can never cut corners like he taught us in senior design, and that being ethically responsible goes beyond your job or career, but that it can affect your whole life," Beasmore said in an email.

Patricia Harper, a former colleague and former department secretary, explained in her letter of support the many things Dettman did to make her feel welcome at WKU and in the engineering department.

"Matthew is a good person who simply let things get out of control and made a bad choice," she said in her letter to the judge. "None of us are perfect, Matthew included, but I write this letter in full support of him."

In his personal statement, Dettman said he talked at length with his son, Dr. Fane and a priest at St. Joseph Church about why he did what he did. Each of them gave him the advice he needed to get through addiction recovery, he said in his statement.

Dettman said in his personal statement, after his sentencing, he would spend that time trying to better himself and helping others. He said he may help others obtain their GED diploma or use his skills some other way.

"I can and will be a productive member of society and work every day to practice honesty and good virtue," he said in his personal statement.

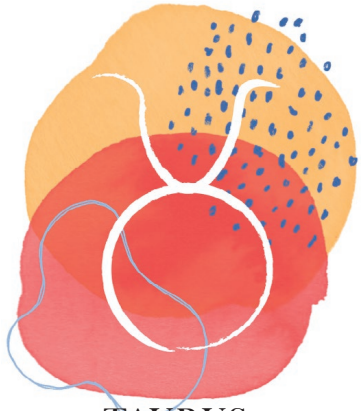
HOROSCOPES

horoscopes by **DILLON McCORMICK** *illustrations by* **LINDSEY DANGERFIELD**

ARIES

March 21 - April 19

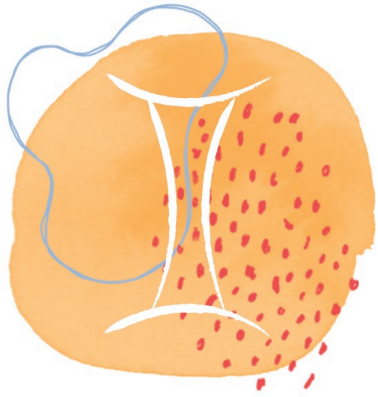
Big changes are coming for you soon, and you've got the right mindset to take advantage of all the good things on their way. However, ambition and a positive attitude aren't always enough to translate opportunity into success, so make sure you pair that fire with knowledge and purpose. Take a trip to the beach.



TAURUS

April 20 - May 20

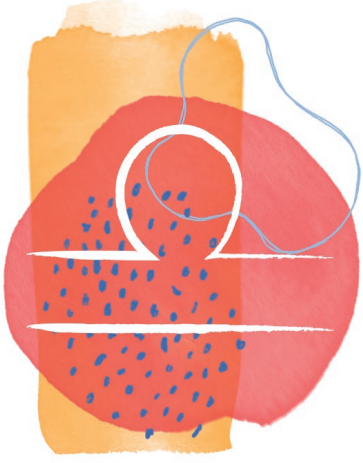
Society tells us to always be pushing the boundaries of our comfort zone, but you function best when you are comfortable and can rely on the familiarity of your surroundings to restore your energy. Don't push yourself too hard — it's better to move at your own pace. Take a staycation and catch up on all your half-finished shows.



GEMINI

May 21 - June 20

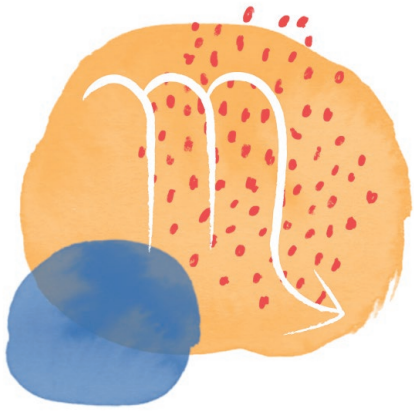
You are a smart, capable and fun person to be around, and you're pretty certain of yourself. Try to stop worrying so much about how others see you. Most people will see your light and be drawn to it. If somebody doesn't vibe with you, that's their own problem. Visit a city you've never been to before.



LIBRA

Sept. 23 - Oct. 22

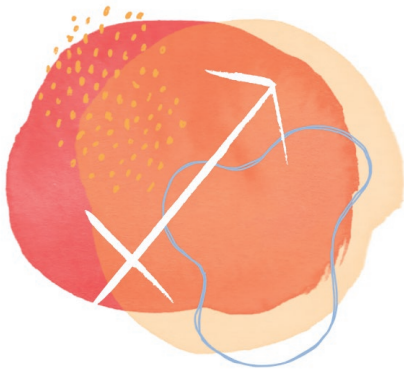
You're very good at mediating between other people in your life, and that's a valuable skill to have. Try to direct some of that energy inward because giving too much of yourself away to fix other people's problems is a recipe for pain and resentment. Be kind to yourself so you can be kind to others. Go to a concert.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23 - Nov. 21

Your intuition is usually pretty spot-on, and that makes it easy for you to understand things deeply and quickly. However, this doesn't mean you're always right, and it's important to open yourself up to other perspectives so you don't get trapped in your own head. Don't let pride or stubbornness get in your way. Book a cabin in a state park.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22 - Dec. 21

Few people can match your passion, and even fewer can match your ability to get results from that passion. However, there's more to life than achievements, and it can be hard for you to reckon with your more tender emotions. Try to let the important people in your life know that you love and appreciate them more often. Go somewhere completely new.

CANCER

June 21 - July 22

It's great that you're so in touch with your emotions, but it's important to remember those emotions are pliable. If you don't like the way your feelings about something affect your life, you can work on changing your reaction to those emotions, your thoughts surrounding the topic and the emotions themselves. Host an elegant party.

LEO

July 23 - Aug. 22

Sometimes you feel as bright and powerful as fireworks in the sky, and sometimes you feel as dark and insubstantial as the smoke left over afterward. Try to seek balance between those two extremes by focusing more on the goodness in your surroundings and grounding yourself in the moment. Visit an old friend who lives far away.

VIRGO

Aug. 23 - Sept. 22

It's no secret that you like stability and consistency, and you've made a good life for yourself built on those principles. However, the world is too chaotic for everything to go the way you wish it would. It would be better if you didn't waste energy trying to bend the world to your will and tried to see the good in unpredictability instead. Explore a local art gallery.

CAPRICORN

Dec. 22 - Jan. 19

Your life is always moving forward, and you've had a lot of great successes. In light of this, make sure you carve out time for reflection and processing because otherwise you might find your life's most profound moments can slip by without your notice. That way, you can live a fuller life. Hike in the mountains.

AQUARIUS

Jan. 20 - Feb. 18

You know a whole lot about the world around you, and that makes you a great person to go to for guidance. Don't be afraid to ask others for guidance if you start to feel lost. It can be humbling and uncomfortable to admit you don't know everything, but the best way to improve yourself is to get an outside perspective. Ride a roller coaster at an amusement park.

PISCES

Feb. 19 - March. 20

You know what you want out of life, and you do a good job living authentically. Be careful not to become too self-centered and overly focused on your own problems. You are smart, kind and understanding, so make sure you share those gifts with the world instead of focusing all your energy inward. Go whitewater rafting.

Louisville senior William Mbumba, a member of the Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity, rides a mechanical bull on South Lawn on March 22. The Lambda Chi Alpha and Sigma Nu fraternities charged $5 to ride the mechanical bull as a part of a fundraising effort for the St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital. (Photo by Esther Heath)

PLAYLIST + ART BY HANNAH GOOD

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