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A safe haven for the LGBTQ community

The Rainbow Center Community Center remains committed to its goal of assisting the LGBTQ community, whether it be providing services to victims of hate crimes or gathering the community together.

By GARRETT YAEN
News Editor

The UWT Gender and Sexuality Alliance isn't the only resource for the LGBTQ community in the South Puget Sound. For over two decades, the Rainbow Center in Tacoma has served as a hub of support for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, two-spirit and allied community.

The Center has daily open hours where those interested can utilize their resources such as libraries and computers as well as Wi-Fi access. In addition, they help support advocacy services for victims of crimes, provide outreach and education programs and offer a safe space for those who wish to be a part of a community with like-minded individuals. Through this base, they find ways to advocate for members of LGBTQ2SA to the outer ward.

"The mission of Rainbow Center is to educate, advocate, and celebrate with and for the LGBTQ2SA Community of the South Puget Sound," said Executive Director Troy Christensen. "We accomplish these goals by having

three departments that focus on our priorities — education, advocacy and celebration."

When it comes to helping educate others on LGBTQ cultural competency, they provide formal training to thousands of people each year on how one can be to be an excellent ally to LGBTQ2SA people. This is usually done through employers who want to raise their awareness and skill levels of their employees.

In terms of advocacy, the center provides services to help people who have been victims of bigotry, such as hate crimes, discrimination or harassment. They also advocate policies for the LGBTQ2SA on a legislative level.

"We provide services to help people navigate the legal, healthcare, and other systems to find justice," Christensen said. "We also perform legislative advocacy at the local, state, and federal levels to ensure the rights and protections of LGBTQ2SA people are in place."

Christensen then explained that the RC was established in 1997 to provide a gathering space and safe resource referral. 24 years later, they continue to work together to create a community that embraces a safer and happier culture

for the LGBTQ2SA community and their allies.

"It was started by a group of people, 24 years ago, who could see a future where every LGBTQ2SA person can live as their true, authentic self, without the fear of harassment or discrimination," he said.

Despite all the services they provide, they remain a non-profit foundation, funded mainly by those who think the RC is doing the right thing.

"Rainbow Center is a non-profit, social service and civil rights organization that is supported by individual and corporate donations, foundation philanthropy, and government grants," Christensen said.

"People donate because they believe in our mission. They see the injustices that continue to occur, and envision a community where these injustices no longer occur- or at least no longer occur without consequence," he explained further.

Over 100 people make use of the RC every week. With most visitors coming from Pierce, King, Kitsap and Thurston counties, each year they provide direct services to 1,000 individuals and greet around 4,000 visits.

The RC also provides meeting spaces for

several community partners and usually hosts the annual Tacoma Pride Festival. This year, taking place in the middle of summer per usual, the Pride Festival will occur on July 10. However, like most large in-person gatherings as of late, the event's details will be changed to match the Washington state governor's health mandates.

"This event usually sees 15-20,000 people at a street festival downtown," Christensen said. "Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, however, we will not have the large celebration this year. Instead, we will have 50-60 smaller events throughout the community."

Anyone wishing for more information on the Pride Festival may get their info at www.tacomapride.org

Those who want to learn more about the RC or are interested in a work or volunteer opportunity may check out www.rainbowcntr.org




PHOTO COURTESY OF TROY CHRISTENSEN

Throughout its 24 years of existence, the Rainbow Center isn't slowing down its mission of making the world a better place for the LGBTQ community.

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Autistic and neurodiverse support: Square Pegs at UW Tacoma

Founder, Organizer, and Event Host Heather Dawn Swanson speaks about the importance of Square Pegs on campus.

By **ROSIE MENDOZA-BAUTISTA**
NEWS REPORTER

The Ledger spoke to founder, organizer and event host of Square Pegs, Heather Swanson. Square Pegs is a social group for those who are Autistic or neurodiverse. She spoke about the group coming into fruition after seeing the lack of support for Autistic and neurodiverse individuals over 18.

“The struggles that my child faced while transitioning from insurance-covered Autism services during childhood/adolescence to no available insurance-covered Autism services during adulthood showed me the glaring gaps in our medical and social model systems,” Swanson said.

To Swanson, this was not only evident in our healthcare system. When she became curious about Autistic or neurodiverse-specific services or resources available to students on the UW Tacoma campus, she was disheartened by her discovery of finding none.

With these disappointments in mind, an online venture helped Swanson find an adult Square Pegs meetup group in Tacoma. This finding gave her the idea to create a Square Pegs group at UWT.

“I introduced myself to Zack Siddeek at the UW Tacoma Autism Awareness and Acceptance Day Colloquium. Then, I met up with Zack on Dec. 26, 2019, to discuss my passion and goal of establishing Square Pegs at UW Tacoma,” Swanson said.

Now established at UWT, the Square Pegs group is open to all Autistic or neurodiverse students. Their meetings are currently online due to COVID.

“The main purpose of these peer groups is to provide a nonjudgmental space for Autistic adults to make new friends, socialize, share lived experiences, and be part of a community,” she said.

Although this is the first group on campus, Square Peg groups reach far beyond the bound-

aries of Tacoma located in King, Pierce and Thurston counties. Here, these groups are equally open to all Autistic and neurodiverse people.

The basis of this group is to provide social support. Swanson emphasizes that this support is vital to interpersonal life.

“We want to improve inclusion, sense of belonging, equity, acceptance, and academic and interpersonal success of all Autistic students/students on the Autism spectrum, self-diagnosed or professionally diagnosed,” she said.

Swanson also emphasized the importance of recognizing those without an official diagnosis due to issues like lack of health insurance, sexism and/or other barriers.

“Due to barriers, not all Autistic students have received an official ASD diagnosis, which is a requirement for receiving academic accommodations. So, there are Autistic students not receiving important accommodations while attending UW Tacoma,” Swanson said.

Currently, a barrier that Square Pegs faces is the impact COVID-19 has had on the group. The inability to meet in person, and navigating an online space, can be challenging. However, after figuring out how to set up and utilize Zoom as a meeting space, Swanson saw the positives from the transition, which has allowed members without prior access to transportation to be able to attend.

Furthermore, Square Pegs groups were able to expand to many people outside of Tacoma; another additional benefit of implementing the online space into their agenda.

“Since the beginning of the pandemic and Square Pegs expanding to virtual meetings, individuals living in other states [for example] Maryland and Pennsylvania and countries [such as] Canada and the UK have attended Square Pegs,” she said.

These were all accomplishments in the eyes of Swanson. However, her personal accomplishment comes from what Square Pegs provides for those who attend it.

“Square Pegs brings together individuals

from different backgrounds, ethnicities, ages, genders, classes, beliefs, etc. They finally experience feeling like they belong, are accepted for who they are, and can be themselves without the need to ‘mask’ their authentic self,” she said.

With these positives in mind, Swanson looks toward the future. Specifically, a future outside of the online space they have had to use along with more frequent meetings and events within the community.

However, coming back to campus means interactions with students, staff and faculty that may not or choose not to understand Autistic or neurodiverse students. Swanson spoke about the misconceptions that Autistic or neurodiverse people face.

“Autistic and neurodiverse people are people. I have been included in numerous conversations that revolved around the misconception that Autistic and neurodiverse people do not like or want to socialize, or they prefer keeping to themselves,” she said.

Furthermore, Swanson discussed how these misconceptions don’t reflect reality. She emphasized the importance of not looking at Autistic and neurodiverse students in a monolith but instead seeing how we all relate to one another and spoke about the harm neurotypical students, staff and faculty can have on Autistic or neurodiverse students.

“Autistic and neurodiverse people have feelings and emotions (many have intense feelings, emotions, empathy) just like neurotypical people. When a neurotypical person excludes, bullies, or makes fun of us, that person is causing harm,” she said.

So, Swanson recommends not taking the typically skewed media portrayals of Autistic or neurodiverse people literally for neurotypical readers. On a personal note, Swanson spoke about specific Autistic or neurodiverse characters on television, that although she enjoys the content of the shows, don’t reflect reality.

“I personally do not know anyone who speaks or behaves like Shaun Murphy in ‘The

Good Doctor’ or Sam in ‘Atypical’ on Netflix. These shows and the inaccurate portrayals have been the focus of conversations during Square Pegs meetups,” she said.

From acceptance and understanding to awareness and education, there are various ways that neurotypical students, staff, and faculty can support Autistic or neurodiverse students on the UW Tacoma campus.

To Autistic or neurodiverse students at UWT, Swanson, and Square Pegs at large, extend an invitation to join their group online and in-person when events occur.

“We look forward to meeting people on all parts of the spectrum, including neurodiverse people,” she said. “Supportive adult family members and friends are welcome to accompany Autistic and neurodiverse members if invited by the Square Pegs member.”

Square Pegs Resources:

Square Pegs meetings take place on the second Wednesday of each month from 6 to 7:30 p.m.

Zoom Meeting ID:

945 2550 5629
<https://washington.zoom.us/j/94525505629>

Questions:

hdswan@uw.edu or hdswan2000@gmail.com

Square Pegs Adult Autistic Meetup Group (Seattle, WA):

<https://www.meetup.com/Squarepegs/>

Square Pegs On-Campus - UW Tacoma, Wed, May 12, 2021, 6:00 p.m.:

<https://www.meetup.com/Squarepegs/events/dpftgsycchbqb/>



Square Peg amongst a sea of round holes.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SQUARE PEGS

Chile Protests: Organizing for a better world

Known as the Estallido Social or Social Outburst, the massive protests in Chile originated in response to a raise in the Santiago Metro's subway fare, but soon escalated into a larger social critique.

By **ANDREA NADAL**
OPINION EDITOR

FOURTH ARTICLE IN A SERIES ON PROTESTS AROUND THE WORLD

****TW: POLICE BRUTALITY, POLICE KILLINGS, ARREST, TORTURE****

A 4% increase in subway fares in Santiago, Chile, the nation's capital and largest city, sparked a resistance that escalated into a sustained movement against longstanding and increasing injustices in the country.

In her article, "18 Killed as Hundreds of Thousands of Protestors Take to the Streets in Chile. Here's What to Know," Rachael Bunyan explained that the initial hike in subway fares led to "high school pupils and university students jump[ing] over ticket barriers to evade paying the increased fares. The local police took action and confronted the students in metro stations and violent clashes ensued."

This, we would come to find out, was only the beginning as the students "were joined in a mass demonstrations by many other Chileans who are frustrated with rising living costs, low wages and one of the worst rates of inequality in Latin America," said Bu-

nyan. Across the country, people began to take to the streets in solidarity with those in Santiago to defy government curfews and demand change.

According to Amanda Taub in her article, "Chile Woke Up: Dictatorship's Legacy of Inequality Triggers Mass Protests," within the first few days, the subway fare increase was scrapped. But when that proved ineffective, President Sebastián Piñera "deployed the military in Chile's streets for the first time since the country's transition to democracy."

"When that didn't quell the protests, Mr. Piñera went on television to ask for forgiveness and promise higher pensions, better health coverage, higher taxes for the rich and pay cuts for politicians," Taub continued, "Later, he asked his cabinet to resign." But this did not stop the demonstrations.

Open confrontations with the Carabineros de Chile — the national police force — and the military led to increasing levels of violence at the demonstrations. Faced with a barrage of rubber bullets and tear gas, protestors refused to disperse. Even the use of water cannons would not dissuade them.

With increasing levels of violence at the hands of the police leading to

arrests, injuries and even deaths, there was a desperate need for improved tactics in order to preserve the movement and protect each other from harm. Some protestors formed shield lines to protect others from the water cannon blasts along with other projectiles — such as rubber bullets and tear gas canisters. While others set up burning barricades or launched projectiles back at the police.

Aside from standing toe to toe with police, other forms of resistance were also taking place. Cacerolazo, a form of protest where people make noise by banging pots, pans and other utensils together in order to call for attention, was commonplace. More extreme forms of protest included the looting of supermarkets and other stores.

Santiago Metro stations were seized and vandalized, some were even burned down. Petrol stations were set on fire while truck and taxi drivers brought the highways of Santiago to a halt. Diversity of tactics is key when it comes to creating a lasting movement that inspires real change.

Since Oct. 2019, protestors have not given up their demands for justice. Thousands have been arrested and

faced arbitrary detention and even torture while in custody. Thousands have been injured due to the increasing levels of violence. Over thirty have died, with some being directly linked to the actions of police.

Ultimately, the state's efforts to silence the voices of those that would demand justice failed. And in 2020, almost a year after the initial protests began, a referendum was held which saw Chilean voters overwhelmingly approve writing a new constitution by a convention.

"Overhauling the constitution could address some of the disparity, many protestors hope," said John Bartlett and Rick Noack in the article "Chile braces for constitutional referendum in the wake of violent clashes."

As Bartlett and Noack pointed out, one 26-year-old protestor, Fabiana Carvajal, spoke to this hope. "We need to show that we still want to change this country, we need to send the message that the system is unfair and tied to the Pinochet dictatorship — Chile needs a fresh start under a system that considers all of us."

Power is in the hands of the people, and when we come together in solidar-

ity we can begin to recognize this power and act on it. Sustained mass protests are an effective way to accomplish this. Disturbing the status quo and creating unrest on our terms is what forces those that have consolidated power in their ivory towers to actually care about what happens down here on the street.

Autonomous, organic movements sparked from everyday occurrences, such as increased subway fare, can be signifiers of the larger structural changes needed to create lasting prosperity. These spur-of-the-moment protests have the power to turn into something far greater, as is evident by what was seen in Chile, along with many other places around the world.

It is important to see these small movements for more than just what they seem to be on the surface level. We must instead look to the potential of these events. We must build upon the momentum that already exists and make clear connections between seemingly separate issues.

There is often a driving force of injustice that manifests itself as many different things, but treating the symptoms will not cure the illness.



Chilean Protests on Oct. 25, 2019 in Puerto Montt (North Patagonia).

PHOTO COURTESY OF NATALIA REYES ESCOBAR



The beautiful Mecca.

PHOTO COURTESY OF KONEVI

Ramadan during a pandemic

This is Ramadan's second time around during the pandemic, what does this mean for us?

By **BENGISU INCETAS**
OPINION COLUMNIST

Ramadan is the holy month of fasting for the religion Islam. Observers of the religion fast for the month from dawn to sunset. This is where we refrain from food, liquids, smoking and sexual intercourse. We also focus on controlling our gaze toward the opposite sex, backbiting, excessive consumption of food, excessive sleep, lying, overspending, wasting time and getting excessively angry.

Basically, this is a month in which we take time to observe our actions, knowledge and connection with Allah. This time is meant to increase our spiritual and mental growth where we can spend time healing, working on ourselves, getting closer to our religion and being grateful.

Throughout this month, some things that we can do and focus on are: giving charity to those who need it, reading the Quran and understanding its meaning, taking care of ourselves, praying our five daily prayers in addition to attending our local mosque to pray taraweeh which is after the fifth prayer of the day and focuses on the recitation of the Quran in the rakats prayed, being kind to others as well as fasting!

Not all observers of the month participate in the fast. Pregnant women, women who are breastfeeding, women who are menstruating, the

elderly, children, travelers and people who are mentally challenged are all a few examples. Fasting is only one part of Ramadan, and with so many different ways we can earn deeds, refraining from food and water is not necessary nor required for everyone.

Here in the United States, we fast between 14 to 17 hours. Refraining from food and water can sometimes be challenging during the first few days. It depends on how each of our bodies react to fasting for long periods of time for 30 consecutive days. What I do to overcome this is refraining from food or drink during iftar and sahur that will make me thirsty or more hungry, such as salty dishes.

Soon, that desire of hunger or thirst is replaced with what we choose to indulge ourselves in for the day. This could be any of the various ways to fulfill our deeds or from other activities, such as studying or spending time with friends and family.

"Ramadan is one of the most beautiful and spiritually uplifting moments in the year that I have the honor and privilege of experiencing," said Zaineb Aboud, an Irvine Valley College student and Co Executive Director of Free Uyghur Now. "This month has taught me and so many others to put kindness, love, family, community building, charity, and discipline as key permanent aspects of life."

Ramadan means enlightenment,

healing, spiritual and mental growth, kindness, charity, tawakkul (trust in Allah), peace, living in the moment, doing good deeds, helping others and self love for me. I see how much Allah cares for us that he reserved a month out of the year for us to earn even more good deeds, get closer to him and our religion, take care of ourselves and improve our character.

"Ramadan for me is a spiritual reset. It's as though throughout the rest of the year, there is this constant white noise of chaos, but in Ramadan - the din silences, leaving only the quietude of the natural world, and the soul. Like the world internally has finally gone tranquil, and that peaceful feeling emanates. An intense, almost secret solitude, where I feel closest to God, and myself," said Mennah El-Gammal, an Egyptian-American graduate student at Duke University.

This month is important to me because out of all 365 days in the year, this is the mark where we can change ourselves and have the actions we take during this month continue for the rest of the year, and even the rest of our lives. There is a different sense of peacefulness and love that serenades the earth during this month.

"Unfortunately, there are many Muslims around the world like the Uyghurs who have been severely denied their human right to observe Ramadan with their brothers and sisters," said Zaineb. "For this reason,

it is imperative we uplift and help them fight for their rights and dignity, not only during this holy month but forever and always."

As we are able to observe Ramadan here in the U.S. and many other countries, we must also think of Muslims who are prohibited to fast or otherwise observe the holy month.

Meryem Sultan, an Uyghur Turk from East Turkistan who is now in Turkey, gave a testimony in Turkish appeared on the Youtube channel "IHH Insani Yardim Vakfi" titled "Being A Muslim Was to Choose Death / The Testimony of Meryem Sultan for East Turkestan."

Meryem describes her childhood in Aksu, East Turkistan to be great, but only at home where there was love. In school, she said there was abuse and political education. She said they fasted in secret as children in their home, with only a candle for the pre dawn meal because lights were forbidden at that time of night. At school, they would feed them food and water, and whoever was caught fasting would be suspended.

"My family and I have spent many years among a Sunni Muslim people, the Uyghurs, who are in the midst of a genocide in NW China. Part of the tragedy of the genocide is the theft of many Ramadan traditions. Ramadan has been special for my Uyghur friends as a time to discipline themselves to focus their attention on God,"

said Bill Clark, a Christian peace-maker and the Northwest Director for the Peace Catalyst International.

As Uyghurs abroad are able to observe Ramadan, the reality for Uyghurs in East Turkistan is nonexistent. The beauty of Ramadan is observing it with loved ones, eating traditional foods, being able to read or listen to the Quran and learn more about Islam. This right has been taken away unjustly from Uyghurs in East Turkistan, and their identity as Muslims and Uyghurs is being erased.

The more I listen to testimonies of Uyghurs and Muslims who are unable to observe Ramadan due to oppression, the more I focus my time and energy on goals that will have permanent effects and not the temporary pleasures of the world, I am able to see how blessed many of us are. The privilege we have to fast and practice our religion safely without being harassed or thrown into a concentration camp is a privilege I want to emphasize.

Time is temporary, and these 30 days given to us are a chance to reflect, cherish, fulfill, nurture and flourish as Muslims. No good deed is little, and a small act of even a smile can go a long way to having a lifelong impact. I hope we all have a happy and blessed Ramadan, may we see the positive outcome of it throughout the year and may we reach next Ramadan.



COURTESY OF PIXABAY.COM

A single bullet casing laying on the ground.

Has COVID had an effect on mass violence and shootings?

With states slowly going back to normal in America it could cause mass shootings to increase.

By Madi Williams
OPINION COLUMNIST

It has almost become normal to hear about some type of shooting occurring, or having occurred, somewhere in the country while tuning into the news or scrolling through social media. In the methodology section of their website, Gun Violence Archive states that a mass shooting is classified when “four or more people are shot or killed in a single incident, not involving the shooter.”

With the country slowly opening up due to COVID vaccines becoming more available, why are we seeing a sudden spike of shootings on the news?

Being in quarantine the past year people have become accustomed to an isolated lifestyle, but even while in quarantine violence still ensued. And in his article, “Why Has Gun Violence Increased in the United States?” Rich Barlow points out, “[a]s COVID-19 spread across the United States last

year, murders spiked 21 percent, a one-year record.”

Now, with states and counties slowly moving out of the quarantine stage, we could be seeing issues relating to gun violence going back to the way it was before. That, with the additional built-up anger due to everything that has happened in the last year, people are at their breaking points. For some individuals, the way that they are dealing with this is violence.

Barlow continues to note that the

With the country slowly opening up due to COVID vaccines becoming more available, why are we seeing a sudden spike of shootings on the news?

“gun homicide rate in US cities is likely to have increased by 35 to 40 percent from 2019 to 2020, which would be the biggest single-year increase on record.”

“The US has seen at least 147 mass shootings in 2021, according to data from the GVA, a non-profit based in Washington,” said Madeline Holcombe in “The US has reported at least 45 mass shootings in the last month.” From March 16 on, there have been 45 incidents involving shootings in the country.

This might come as a surprise to some because only recently have the news stations been reporting the shootings that are occurring. This might be because, as a society, we have gotten so used to these happening that we don’t need coverage on all the shootings, just the ones that are getting the spotlight because they were taken to the most extreme or a prominent figure was involved.

If we think back on all of the men-

tal issues that COVID has caused individuals, such as heightened anxiety in social situations and depression, the sudden change in lifestyles could be very hard for some.

Joan Stephenson states, “More than 2 in 5 US residents report struggling with mental or behavioral health issues associated with the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, including anxiety, depression, increased substance use, and suicidal thoughts, according to new findings from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,” in her article “CDC Report Reveals ‘Considerably Elevated’ Mental Health Toll from COVID-19 Stresses.”

If the country was more concerned about its peoples’ mental health, then there’s the possibility that these shootings would diminish in frequency.

There are people who do use guns for hunting purposes and for a last act of self-defense. These individuals are using the guns the way that they were

intended and are storing them correctly. No matter how much control people want to put on guns when it comes to purchasing them, if people want them they will get them one way or another.

What the country really needs to do is start taking mental health seriously and stop making these tragedies into big news stories.

What the country really needs to do is start taking mental health seriously and stop making these tragedies into big news stories. If U.S. media outlets stopped making these shootings into week long stories, then it will take away the fetish of violence that our country seems to have.

“Friends” reunion

Six iconic characters get together to discuss favorite memories and episodes in this long awaited HBO Max special.

By **MADELINE HILLER**
A&E EDITOR

“How you doin’?” The reunion of an all time favorite and iconic sitcom, “Friends,” is officially wrapped and finished with production. What can we expect from this long awaited event?

“Friends” first aired on Sept. 22, 1994 and ended on May 6, 2004. The show became popular due to the diverse lives of this group of good friends — Monica, Ross, Chandler, Phoebe, Rachel and Joey — in New York City. All told from the perspectives of these six infamous characters, the series is about their journey through the adult world.

The reunion was announced early in 2020 with production slated to begin in March. Unfortunately, like many things in the past year, it got delayed due to the beginning of COVID-19. The actors and actresses were excited about this reunion and posted all over social media for the months following the delay to assure their fans that the show will still go on.

“It’s happening ...,” Jennifer Aniston — who portrayed Rachel on the show — posted on Instagram.

Could we BE any more excited? Aniston tagged all of her castmates along with HBO Max. The rest of the six stars posted the same thing on their Instagrams. They definitely wanted to make sure we knew it was happening, but what should we expect in this reunion?

First and foremost, this is not a new “Friends” episode. This will be purely a reunion between the actors while they share memories with each other and walk around their old set. Other shows have done reunions during this pandemic as a way to provide a dash of extra joy to the darkness.

This will be purely a reunion between the actors while they share memories with each other and walk around their old set.

“Parks and Recreation” held a reunion where the whole cast met on a Zoom-like platform and checked in with each other from their homes. What made this

different was the “Parks and Recreation” actors were in character, while the “Friends” production team can’t stress enough that this is not like that.

As for the release date, no one knows an official date.

As for the release date, no one knows an official day or month. However, we can expect it to be relatively soon since they announced the wrap of production on April 10. What we do know for sure is that the reunion episode will be released on HBO Max, where the series has been located after it was taken off of Netflix at the beginning of 2020.

While there is not much solidified information out there for us right now, we can be assured that the reunion is still coming. We will get to see the beloved group again and in a new light. For updates on the release date and other information regarding the reunion, keep an eye on the social media pages of the actors and HBO Max, as they will likely be the first to let us know.



COURTESY OF WARNER BROS. TV

Our favorite NYC group of friends reunite for a special night.

The Mariners allow 20% capacity at their games: Here’s what you should know

I was able to attend my first live sporting event since January 2020, but was the experience the same and how safe did I actually feel?

By **BROOKS MOELLER**
SPORTS COLUMNIST

It was a bittersweet moment for me when I was able to walk into T-Mobile park for the first time since September 2019 to watch my beloved Seattle Mariners. It was also bittersweet because it was simply my first live sporting event since January 2020, which feels like years ago. Finally being able to watch a game in person again is a moment I will never forget.

Around two weeks before the beginning of the Major League Baseball season, many of its 30 teams — including the Mariners — announced that they would be allowing a limited capacity at their games to start off the season and slowly allow more as local restrictions are lifted. Working with local government and health officials, the Mariners were able to receive the go-ahead to allow 20% capacity for the month of April, which is around 9,000 fans.

As a fan of the Mariners, I was ecstatic when I heard the news that I was finally able to go to the ballpark and experience a game. Last season not only were there no fans present at any of the games, but the season was also shortened from the six months it usually is

to a meager two. Everyone was itching for a full and normal baseball season.

The Mariners offered several different ticket pricing options and spread fans out amongst the whole 47,943 seat stadium so everyone could have their space. They sold tickets in two, three, four and six seat pods that remained a safe distance away from the next closest pod.

Other than the seating pods and a few policy changes, the experience felt about the same as it always did. You would be surprised how much noise a 20% capacity crowd can make; there were moments at the game that felt like a normal opening weekend night where the stadium was typically sold out. Mariners pitcher Marco Gonzales recognized the difference the fans made on opening night.

“It felt like a lot more. You could feel the intensity, you could feel the anticipation that people have getting out here,” Gonzales said in his postgame interview.

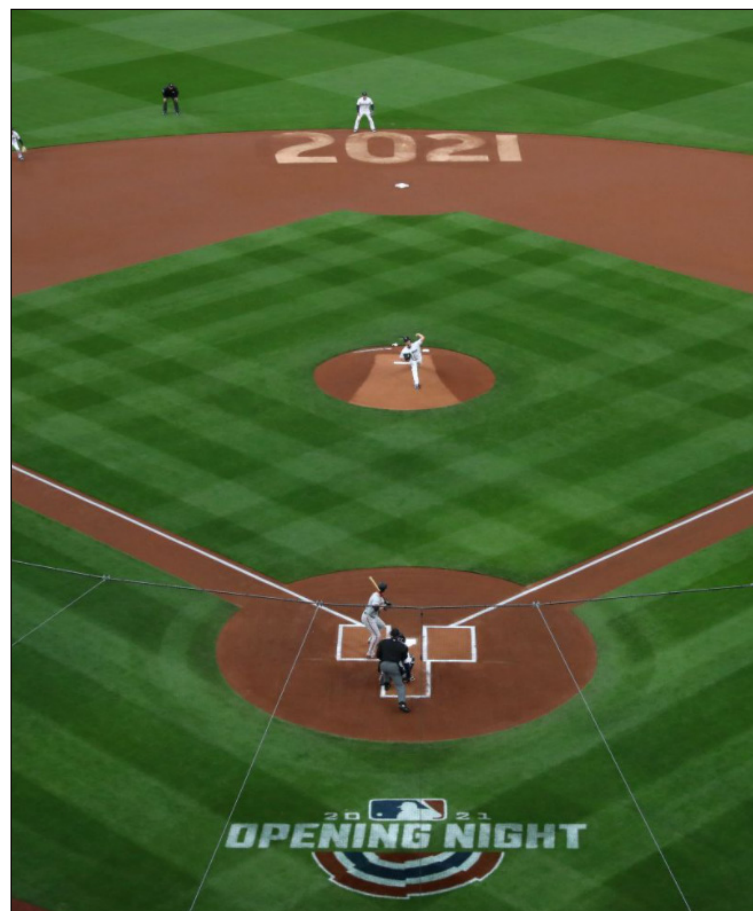
In addition to the game experience itself, I also felt safe in the general sense. It can be scary for anyone to go out to an event with 9,000 people during a pandemic that put a pause on for over an entire year, but I can safely say that every fan should try to make their way

to a game because the Mariners did a great job with limiting any possible COVID exposures.

Every fan is required to wear a mask for the entirety of the game once they enter the stadium, other than when they take it down to eat or drink and most people were following this rule very well. No bags or outside food and beverage were allowed into the stadium which also made the security lines go much quicker, limiting the amount of time people had to stand in line.

As people continue to be vaccinated and local restrictions are lifted, the Mariners will continue to raise the capacity and we will hopefully be at full capacity by the summer. These games can be an example for other local sports teams as well, including the Seahawks and Huskies, who begin games in September and are also hoping to welcome back fans.

We are so close to traditionally attending live sports again and if all it takes is wearing masks and abiding by a few new rule changes, then there should be no reason to not go to a game again. Sports are finally returning to normal and I highly encourage everyone in need of a mood boost to go attend a ballgame this spring.



COURTESY OF ABBIE PARR/MLB PHOTOS

Marco Gonzales throws a pitch in front of an excited crowd of Mariners fans for the first time since 2019. They would go on to win the Opening Night matchup with the Giants 8-7.



COURTESY OF LIONSGATE

Anthony Hopkins at his best in this heartbreaking new drama.

A fleeting mind in “The Father”

A man who refuses any care or help starts to experience the effects of aging.

By **HENRY NGUYEN**
FILM CRITIC

Every once in a while, you get a film that completely changes your perspective on what it means to be a person living in the present time. “The Father” is one of those films. Directed and written by Florian Zeller — a French novelist and playwright known for his novel “La Fascination du pire.” “The Father” is a drama/thriller, adapted from Zeller’s French play “Le Père,” about a man at the end of his life. The film follows him as he slowly comes to the realization that his memory is fading along with his perception of reality.

The film starts off with a woman

The film starts off with a woman named Anne, played by Olivia Colman, visiting her father Anthony, played by none other than Anthony Hopkins.

named Anne, played by Olivia Colman, visiting her father Anthony, played by none other than Anthony Hopkins. Due to his stubbornness, Anthony has a hard time letting people help him. And since she is soon leaving for Paris to follow a French man, Anne has to hire someone else to take care of him.

After some confusion and opposition regarding her decision to move away, Anthony comes across someone he’s never met before who claims to be married to Anne. Wait, isn’t Anne moving away to Paris? And how did this man get in his apartment? Later, Anne comes home, however, this time Anne is played by actress Olivia Williams and Anthony doesn’t recognize her at all and has to convince himself that she is Anne.

This marks one of the main important themes and recurring motifs in the film; dementia and Alzheimers. Having the film presented in a way that is purposely disorienting through Anthony’s point of view depicts the effects of aging. This film is through Anthony’s eyes instead of his family members’. There are moments in which we do see what Anne is thinking, but only briefly to fore-

shadow events and build tension.

In this way, the film does not hold your hand through its narrative. It requires the viewer to pay close attention to certain key moments that repeat, which key you in, little by little, as to what is actually happening. With that being said, I found some moments to be perplexing and definitely disorienting on the first watch.

In these moments of realization, I really enjoyed the accompaniment of the soundtrack that helped clue me in on important moments. The entirety of the soundtrack, consisting of soothing symphonies and swooning orchestras, is very pleasant to listen to.

Either way, I have never seen storytelling like this before. The closest films that I could compare this one to would probably be Charlie Kaufman’s “Synecdoche, New York” (2008) or more recently “I’m Thinking of Ending Things” (2020). These films delve deep into the human psyche and “The Father” is no exception, exploring these concepts as well.

However, I argue that this film has a more obvious, less confusing reason as to why things happen the way they

do compared to films directed or written by Kaufman. “The Father” is a bit less surreal and more realistic.

Anthony Hopkins gives one of the best performances of his career. His character is both charming and subversive. He adds a magical feeling in each scene within every strange and disorienting interaction.

Anthony Hopkins gives one of the best performances of his career. His character is both charming and subversive.

There is, however, some dialogue that was a bit surprising. Anthony uses antiquated, ableist language. Not sure if that was left in to showcase the character’s age and personality, but nonetheless it didn’t sit too well with me. Anthony is by no means a good person, which is also reflected in his repeated memories of his son in law calling him out on him being rude to everyone.

This film was truly heartbreaking,

REVIEW

“The Father”

★★★★★

The Good:

- Incredible and innovative storytelling
- Performances are very well done
- Really good soundtrack

The Bad:

- Slow at moments
- Can be very confusing and disorienting
- Antiquated language in the writing

and the more I think about it the more meaning that I pull out of it to translate into my own life. It will especially be devastating for those who have family members who are also going, or have gone, through this with a loved one. If you are looking for a film that is dramatic in its storytelling and successfully creates tension and drama in innovative ways, then “The Father” definitely deserves your time.