

NATE SANFORD: Just a quick heads-up, the first part of this episode contains swear words that are uncensored.

LAUREN GALLUP: The second half of this episode contains discussion of sensitive topics including violence against women, sexual assault, and harassment.

[Intro Music Plays]

SANFORD: Hi, I'm Nate Sanford.

GALLUP: And I'm Lauren Gallup.

SANFORD: It's Tuesday, April 20th. And you're listening to The ForeFront. It's the new weekly podcast about the stories you need to know this week. It's produced by The Front, an independent student newsroom covering campus, Bellingham, and Whatcom County.

GALLUP: This week, we're joined by opinion reporter Torie Wold. We'll be talking about her recent article about a string of serious threats of violence against women in the Bellingham area. We'll also talk about who bears the responsibility for fixing that problem.

SANFORD: But first, here's what else is going on.

[Club Music Plays]

SANFORD: That music you're hearing isn't from a pre-COVID party. It's from The Underground Nightclub this weekend.

GALLUP: If you were a first year at Western during the before times, there's a good chance that you know what The Underground Nightclub is. The club's central downtown location and frequent 18 plus events made it a hotspot for Western nightlife- before the pandemic. It wasn't uncommon to find the place packed to the brim with a mob of partying students.

SANFORD: And for obvious reasons The Underground has been closed for the past year. But now it's coming back. The Underground Nightclub reopened on Friday April 2nd, but they still have to adhere to Governor Jay Inslee's phase three guidelines. And that means the club goers are still gonna have to keep their distance for now.

GALLUP: We're entering this weird in-between period where the world is starting to reopen. But the pandemic isn't quite over yet. Assistant producer Kyle Tubbs went to The Underground this past Friday to see how people feel returning to the nightclub after more than a year.

NIGHTCLUB GOER A: The last time I was here was probably in February of 2020. Right before the shutdown. It was fucking crazy. We were underage and we used to go hard here every single night.

KYLE TUBBS: And how does it compare to the last time you were here?

NIGHTCLUB GOER A: It's very different. It's more chill. Usually the stage was crowded full of people like just getting nasty all night, but it was very tame compared to that.

TUBBS: It was very tame tonight?

NIGHTCLUB GOER A: Yes. Oh yeah. It feels amazing. It feels fucking good. But it's very different. I feel like the atmosphere is more chill now. Like everyone used to go so crazy back before Corona.

NIGHTCLUB GOER B: The vibe was good. People were dancing. People were singing. But honestly, it wasn't the same as how it used to be. I don't think it will ever be the same.

TUBBS: How did you like it tonight?

NIGHTCLUB GOER B: I loved it. I had a great time.

NIGHTCLUB GOER C: It's my birthday!

NIGHTCLUB GOER B: Yes, it's Lindsay's birthday!

TUBBS: And what precautions were they taking and did you feel safe?

NIGHTCLUB GOER D: I felt very safe. Um, honestly, I don't know what precautions they were taking, because I wasn't really paying attention. But I felt good. I felt safe.

TUBBS: How does it feel going to- going back to clubs and bars after a year of them being closed?

NIGHTCLUB GOER E: Well, I just turned 21 a couple months ago. So this is my first time experiencing any of the bar scene. But I'm excited to know what it's like after we don't have to have restrictions and our masks. I like it has good vibes. The bartenders are really nice. The people are nice. I would definitely come back here.

SANFORD: Did you ever go to The Underground Nightclub before the pandemic?

GALLUP: I didn't?

SANFORD: Really?

GALLUP: Did you?

SANFORD: I went twice.

GALLUP: Really?

SANFORD: Yeah.

GALLUP: What was it like?

SANFORD: It uh, it wasn't really my vibe, you know, but it was- it was this just packed sweaty mass of people, you know? And it's hard to- it really makes you nostalgic for the for the pre-COVID world.

GALLUP: That's what- I whenever I heard people talk about it, they always talk that it was like a small space with a lot of people. So, to me, it seems like one of the hardest spaces to reopen right now during the pandemic. And I know that they have so many social distancing restrictions, so I can't even imagine what it would look like in there.

SANFORD: Mhm. And it sounds like, you know, besides social distancing, it's the hours are limited too because it's only open from Fridays and Saturdays nine to midnight. And the co-owners of The Underground, Julie Rofkar car and Brian Tines, they told The Front that they were reluctant to open the club again. Rofkar said they were concerned about the fact that it's a dance club, but you're still not supposed to dance. And then Tines said that the restricted hours are cutting into their peak business.

GALLUP: Right. Because nine to midnight is just, that's like nothing in comparison of when you would go out at night to a bar or to a club.

TUBBS: What were the precautions you were taking? And did you feel safe in there?

NIGHTCLUB GOER F: Um, precautions I tried my best to stay as far away from people as I could. I hand sanitize a lot. And no, I did not feel safe.

TUBBS: You didn't feel safe? Were they not taking very many precautions?

NIGHTCLUB GOER F: No, they're- I mean, people are drunk, man. Doing this kind of shit. You know what I'm talking about? Where it's on the chin or it's below the nose. It's like what the fuck is the point?

TUBBS: So like, what were people doing in there? What was the general vibe?

NIGHTCLUB GOER G: The general vibe was like, cool guy. You know, like really low buttoned-down shirt. No, people were not spread out. But I tried my best.

SANFORD: For some people, the toll of the human suffering of the pandemic are still weighing pretty heavily on a return to near normal. And there's this sense of unease and guilt. It's tricky to navigate.

NIGHTCLUB GOER H: Dude, I feel guilty. I'm not even gonna lie. I feel kind of guilty about it myself. I don't know. I uhh. Oof, this is weird. I carried my grandfather's coffin, because he died of COVID. And I, I don't know, I feel bad about it. But it's like, I don't know, I've been pushed to a point where it's like, there's no point in even trying anymore because I know nothing is going to be changed. But I- I wanted

to and I really fought for it. But at this point, it's like, I don't even care anymore. And it's just like, we're all gonna die anyway, so.

TUBBS: Are you worried because of like COVID stuff?

NIGHTCLUB GOER H: I don't know. I love old people, and I don't want them to die. And I love- I love everybody. You know.

[Transition Music]

SANFORD: There's a new national sensation coming to Western's campus. About the size of a thumb, it's highly toxic, and if too much of its poison gets in your bloodstream, you will literally die. No, it's not a Juul. It's actually an Asian Giant Hornet, more colloquially known as the Murder Hornet.

And Western didn't actually go out and capture the Hornet themselves. It was given to the school by 92.9 KISM, a classic rock radio station in Bellingham, that hosted a Giant Hornet giveaway contest. As radio stations do.

The Giant Hornet specimen, which is thankfully deceased, is going to be joining nearly 60,000 other bugs in the WWU insect collection. Merrill Peterson, a biology professor at Western told The Front that the insect collection is used to promote teaching and research in the department.

The Asian Giant Hornet is an invasive species that made national headlines last spring when it was spotted in Whatcom County. The Hornet's venomous sting can be dangerous to humans, but the main threat is to honeybees, which the Hornet is famous for decapitating. The Hornets' arrival last year coincided with COVID. And something about the name "Murder Hornet" really helped cement the insect into the year that already felt apocalyptic.

The Hornet that's going to be added to Western's collection actually came from the first Giant Hornet Nest to be eradicated in North America. The nest was discovered in October in a wooded area on private property, about half an hour north of Bellingham and Blaine.

[Low Humming Sound with Rhythmic Thumping]

SANFORD: And that noise you're hearing now is video taken by the Washington State Department of Agriculture. It's of scientists trying to eradicate the nest.

There are these two people dressed head to toe and these white astronaut-like protective suits. And because the hornet's stinger is six millimeters long, the suits are pretty bulky. They also have these face coverings to protect them from spitting venom. It's early in the morning and the woods are lit up with this fluorescent red light. The whole thing is very alien. The Nest is inside of a tree and the scientists have wrapped the tree in cellophane to stop the hornets escaping.

One of the scientists has stuck a vacuum in the tree and is using it to try to suck the hornets out. That thumping noise that you keep hearing, that's the other scientist. They're smacking the tree with a two by four plank of wood. After hitting the tree for a few minutes, the scientists pump it full of carbon monoxide to kill any Hornets that remain. It's not very elegant, but it appears to have worked. Scientists captured more than 500 hornets that day, including the hornet that went on to become a Viking.

[Transition Music]

SANFORD: Reporting for the Killer Hornet story was done by Cameron Martinez. And Clay Wren wrote about The Underground reopening. You can read more about their stories and others on our website, WesternFrontOnline.com. There are also links in the episode description.

GALLUP: Up next we'll be speaking with opinion reporter Torie Wold about her recent article on gender violence in Bellingham and why men need to be doing more to prevent it.

Just a quick warning. This next part of the episode discusses sensitive topics including violence against women, sexual assault, and harassment.

[Transition Music]

SANFORD: All right, so we're heading With Torie Wold, who is a reporter with The Front's opinion team. Torie, thanks so much for joining us.

TORIE WOLD: Thank you so much for having me. I feel so grateful to be here.

GALLUP: For sure. So, Torie, your story this week focuses on harassment and violence against women. And before we get into the recent string of incidents in Bellingham that I think motivated some of your reporting. We were wondering if you could just help us define exactly what violence against women is.

WOLD: The UN recently released this statement that defines violence against women. And they define it as "any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or mental harm, or suffering to a woman, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life."

SANFORD: Yeah, so it's kind of like, it's all these sort of physical and mental abuses. But it can also be kind of broader cultural things like harassment, or catcalling, or sort of other forms of harassment.

WOLD: Right, yeah. So, often when we talk about violence against women, we often think of the more intense forms of it, such as like sexual assault or domestic violence. But I think it's also important to address the more nuanced forms of violence against women like catcalling, and like locker room talk. So that we can really get down to the root of the issue and stop the normalization of objectification of women and violence against women in general.

GALLUP: That's such an important point. And I guess, to I'd like to say, the timeliness of this article is- is important, I think, partially because April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month. And I'm just curious, you

know, The Front is a student newspaper, what do you think the importance is of talking about this in a setting for students?

WOLD: Right, so specifically, on college campuses, acts of violence against women can typically be amplified, or there can be more examples of this that we see. Just because party culture and just- just young adults, and also not everyone has access to proper, like sex education as they're growing up. So not a lot... Some people are not as educated on topics like this. So, it's important to address it in college settings, just to make sure that everybody's on the same page, and make sure that everyone is educated on such an important and prevalent issue.

SANFORD: Definitely, and it- it feels especially pertinent because there have been kind of these recent incidents in Bellingham. I guess I was wondering if you could tell us when- when did you first kind of hear about that? And more broadly, what's- what's been going on in Bellingham recently?

WOLD: Yeah, of course. So, um, recently, what kind of prompted just me thinking more about this issue, obviously, as a woman, this is an issue that's constantly on my mind. But, um, what recently started my reporting on this issue is originally Western's Alert that came out about an attempted abduction that occurred on Sammish Way. Um, and I just, me and my roommates, like we just had a lot of conversations about safety, and about keeping each other safe, and ways that we personally protect ourselves. And I just thought that this was an issue that a lot of women in Bellingham would be aware of and have issues with. Given it is so current right now.

GALLUP: Certainly.

SANFORD: Yeah, yeah.

GALLUP: I would say it was really terrifying to get that Western Alert when that happened. And I think, you know, as a woman in college, it's something that I've thought about a lot in my time, so it makes sense that you would write about this.

SANFORD: Yeah. And this- this Western alert. It was? No, it wasn't very much preparation, but it sounds like it was this kind of silver- silver SUV that approached this woman on the street- a student- and tried to force him inside the vehicle. And it sounds like it wasn't kind of an isolated incident either.

WOLD: No, and I mean, a lot of women have taken to social media recently, to kind of share their experiences in Bellingham. I've seen a lot of threads circulating on Twitter, and even on Instagram, just of woman informing other women about their experiences or, you know, creepy men that they've seen on the street or creepy cars that they've seen. So, it's definitely not an isolated incident. I mean, these are issues that women face constantly on a daily basis for sure.

GALLUP: Right and like you're talking about those social media postings that we've been seeing with, you know, women talking about other instances or harassers in the community. I also want to talk about a letter that we got written to us to The Front about this issue and how that informed your reporting.

WOLD: Yeah. So, when I initially read that email, I mean, I think it summed up a lot of my thoughts. I mean, she called, she called incidences like this more than frightening, in that they're alarming and paralyzing, because we know as women that these things can happen to us.

GALLUP: Yeah. And that email was a letter to us, The Front editors, but then you actually reached out to the woman that wrote it. Is that correct?

WOLD: Yeah, I did.

GALLUP: And what was that conversation like? What did she have to say?

WOLD: Yeah, so she just kind of touched on and reinforced. I mean, her- her point that, you know, this is something that goes on constantly in the world around us. And she just touched on how important it is for Western to be focused on this issue and aware of this issue, and kind of work towards solutions.

SANFORD: And I don't know, is Western focused on the issue, because you also spoke to the sexual violence prevention coordinator, who works for Western. Did they have anything to say about what's been going on?

WOLD: Yeah, Western, they currently have online sexual violence prevention training. And all students are required to take at least three years of this, or three trainings of this. But they do also offer like in-person interactive, sexual violence prevention training for all its student athletes on campus. So, something that I'm definitely hoping to see in the future that Western takes on is making these interactive in-person trainings available to all students, because I feel like in online learning, it's hard to sometimes grasp such complicated concepts. So having that available for in-person, I think, would be a great benefit, and definitely help with the issue of violence against women.

SANFORD: Yeah, definitely.

GALLUP: And then, you know, I think you're already starting to touch on this, but as an opinion reporter, you get to do all this reporting and research and then present an opinion to readers. So, I'm just curious, you know, what do you think about what's been going on in the community, and further, what Western can do to address these issues?

WOLD: Right. So personally, I feel very strongly that men need to become a part of the movement against violence against women. Um, I don't think women should be responsible for solving an issue that is mainly perpetrated by men. And there was a study released and a survey that was released that showed that 90% of perpetrators of sexual violence against women are men. So, I think it's really important for men to be aware of this issue and educate themselves on issues having to do with gender inequality, because men hold a lot of power in our society, and their opinions are very highly valued. So, by joining this movement, I think there could be some real progress that started.

GALLUP: I guess I would say to, you know, to male identifying people that are listening to this podcast, and wondering ways they can get more involved in prevention, and also supporting women in the community. What would you say to them? Like, what's, what's some steps they could take?

WOLD: Yeah, so to all of the men out there, I think it's just important to educate yourself and take a moment of your time, a moment of your day to just talk to the women in your lives, about the struggles and the fears that they go through on a daily basis, and ask them how they can create more safe and comfortable spaces for them.

GALLUP: I think that's a really good point, though, Torie. And if it would help, I would just like, you know, further ask, cause I think that this is an ask we make of like, men in the community to shoulder some of

the responsibility for educating themselves and preventing this violence. And what does that look like in male interactions with each other?

WOLD: Yeah, so I think men just need to start holding the other men in their life accountable for the things that they say, the way that they treat women. Um, don't let actions or words go unnoticed. Make sure that if someone is saying something that is derogatory towards a woman, or is hurtful towards a woman, it needs to be addressed right away. Letting things like this be swept under the rug is what perpetuates stuff like this and normalizes it in our society and allows these men to think it is okay to keep doing this stuff.

SANFORD: Yeah, absolutely. Um, well, Torie, thanks so much for talking with us today and for writing about such a, you know, sensitive and important issue.

WOLD: Of course, thank you so much for having me. I'm so happy to shed some light on this issue. And hopefully, people can rally around the idea of equality for all.

GALLUP: For sure, thank you Torie. And I want to mention too you at the bottom of your article that you listed resources that men can check out to educate themselves on the issue of preventing violence against women.

WOLD: Perfect, thank you so much.

SANFORD: Yeah. Thank you.

GALLUP: Take care.

[Ending Music]

SANFORD: Torie is an opinion reporter with The Front. Her article was called "Is Violence Against Women Really a Woman's Issue?" You can find it on our website, WesternFrontOnline.com You can also follow us on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook for breaking news and live updates.

This episode was written and hosted by me, Nate Sanford. I'm the editor in chief of The Front.

GALLUP: And me, Lauren Gala. I'm The Front's managing editor.

SANFORD: Nolan Baker is our chief audio editor and producer. Emily Bishop and Kyle Tubbs are the assistant producers. Nolan Baker and I also wrote and recorded the music for this podcast.

GALLUP: Thanks so much for listening. We'll be here next week.