

West

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The other catch is contestants only get 30 seconds to sing. Why don't they just shove bamboo spikes under my fingernails? Thirty seconds isn't enough to accomplish anything. As the Emerald photographer — my so-called moral support — put it to me before I sang: "You've only got one shot, man. This isn't like three strikes. You'd better not screw up."

Thanks a lot.

When did I start taking this seriously? I was doing this for a laugh and a good story, but my pride kicked in somewhere along the line, and now I was envisioning myself drinking cosmopolitans in a hotel room with Avril Lavigne.

Maybe that's what got me to the Wild Duck Music Hall on Wednesday night for the auditions. It certainly wasn't courage, because I was shaking more than a Chihuahua in Alaska. The contest-

ants were called on stage in random order, so I sweated it out while the other hopefuls performed. "Wow. They're all really good. How am I going to answer that question? I think I'll leave the mic in the stand. She's only 17?!"

My turn came up somewhere in the middle. The stage lights basically blinded me to everything but the judges, which made it easy to ignore the insane number of people staring at me.

I begin my abridged performance of "California" by Rufus Wainwright. I had timed the first verse at exactly 30 seconds. But most of the contestants were going over so I chose to sing the chorus as well. Here's how that went:

"Ain't it a shame that at the top... man, I so just forgot the words."

I'm sure my face was rapidly approaching the color of my bright purple shirt. But I just smiled and said, "Well, I got in my 30 seconds, right?"

Speaking of my shirt, it elicited the first comment from one of the

judges from abc Model/Talent/Sport Management: "What made you decide to wear

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that shirt? I mean, who wears purple shirts?"

It's not bad enough that I forgot my words, now they're going to make fun of my clothes. Fantastic. I

stumble out some shyly defensive response and she said, "It makes a statement, and I like that." Oooo-K.

Well, that wasn't enough to get me into the finals. The last male performer, who thankfully sang after me, was phenomenally good, and he carried the male representation into the next round. My elimination was actually a relief because I don't need that kind of stress to induce the ulcer my coffee intake is already working on.

Though it was just for fun, getting a remote chance at stardom was a nice thought. I guess I'll have to settle for my picture in the paper twice a month.

There is a brief epilogue to my story: After the show, some guy came up to me, handed me a piece of paper and said I should call him if I wanted to go out for coffee. I guess that was the statement the shirt was making.

Contact the Pulse columnist at masonwest@dailymerald.com. His views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

Vote

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don't care."

The last day to mail ballots was Nov. 1. For ballots to count, they must be dropped off in person by 8 p.m. today.

Democratic candidates Peter DeFazio, Bill Bradbury, Tony Corcoran and Vicki Walker will be at the University today encouraging students to vote. The Democratic Party offers a shuttle from the University to the Lane County Elections Office from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. for students who have misplaced their ballots and need to get replacements.

The Republican Party also arranges transportation to the Elections Office for those who need it, spokesman Bob Avery said. Registered Republicans who need a ride can contact the Republican Party of Lane County at 342-4166.

Contact the senior news reporter at kenpaulman@dailymerald.com.

Week

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be even higher.

"By the latest census figures, 38 percent of all college students are over the age of 25," she said.

The University also classifies as "nontraditional" those students who are married or live with a lifelong partner, are in charge of caring for elderly parents, have children or are returning to college after taking a significant break to work or raise a family.

Along with all of the regular pressures college students face, Hachten said nontraditional students often feel alienated in the college world.

"It's a real culture shock for students who have been in the workforce for a long time to come back to school," Hachten said. "They have so much life experience that they feel it develops a chasm between themselves and regular students."

Brenda Tuomi, coordinator of nontraditional student programs, said it took her five years to complete her bachelor's degree with a husband and two children, while also working full-time. Tuomi was excited when she first started attending classes at the University, but she also experienced a lot of self-doubt.

"The first class I ever attended it looked like I was the oldest person in there and I wondered if I had anything of value to say," Tuomi said. "I was very unsure of myself."

Sayaka Mimura, a senior sociology major, said the most difficult part of being a nontraditional student is having less access to campus resources and feeling alienated from the college community. Unlike Hachten and Tuomi, Mimura does not have a spouse or children. After working for six years as a bank teller, Mimura decided to return to school and get a degree, so she left Japan and began attending college in the United States.

With all the demands on their time, Hachten said nontraditional students often feel overwhelmed because they experience so much pressure from outside sources. For regular students, college is their whole life, but for nontraditional students, attending the University is just one responsibility they have to deal with.

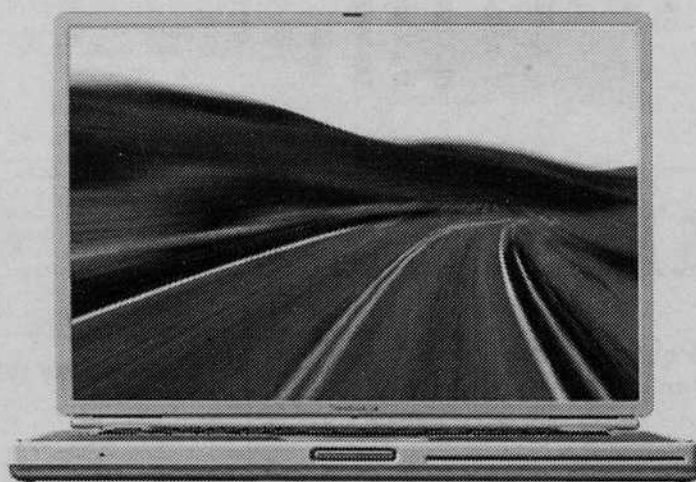
"For nontraditional students, the rest of your life doesn't go on hold just because you're a college student," Hachten said the Nontraditional Student Union has several events planned for students this week, such as a coffee hour at 8 a.m. in the NSU office and brown bag lunches at noon to tell nontraditional students about campus resources. Students can call 346-4305 for more information.

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