

STEVEN LANE/The Columbian

Hudson's Bay football player Cody Torgrimson has thrived in life and school despite losing both of his parents at a young age.

LONE EAGLE SOARS

Hudson's Bay senior succeeds and endures amid difficult youth

By PAUL VALENCIA
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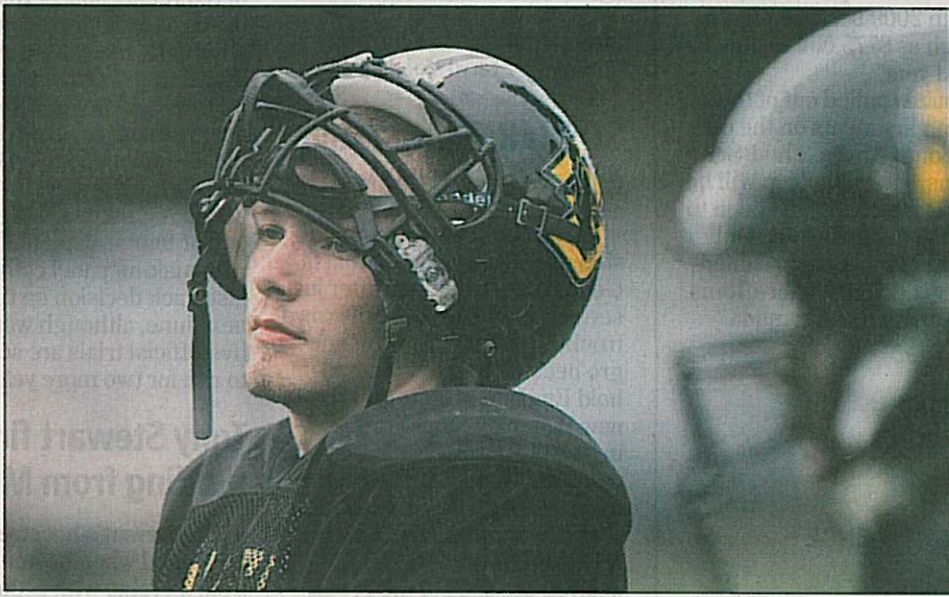
Cody Torgrimson's story suggests he should have fallen through the cracks of society's foundation, into the abyss of a destructive lifestyle. He could have been just another statistic by now, another lost soul, a victim to a series of tragedies throughout his young life. "I get down sometimes. I feel I have the right to sometimes," said Torgrimson, a senior at Hudson's Bay. "But it doesn't help when you look at it as 'Poor me, poor me.' You have to change your perspective on things. People don't like to hear that things will get better with time, but it's true."

While death and rejection surrounded his upbringing, Torgrimson is now thriving, determined to honor the father who died when Cody was 6 years old, to express love for his grandparents, who died a few years later.

He is intent on making a positive impact to show gratitude toward all of those who have helped him endure.

And he wants to excel in order to prove to his late mother that she was wrong to abandon him when he was a toddler.

Through his studies at Hudson's Bay



Football provided Torgrimson with 'a place to vent' from his life's troubles. It also provided him with fatherly figures for support.

and as a Running Start student at Clark College, with his job at a retirement center, and even through competition on the football field, Torgrimson is making good on all of his promise.

"I try to show my appreciation through my work," Torgrimson said.

"No one is pushing him to do all this," said Kory Kanekoa, a student advocate at Hudson's Bay. "It's all inner-self. He

pushes himself, and that's amazing." Kanekoa works with students who are at risk of failing in the classroom — which means he has never officially worked with Torgrimson "because his grades are so good."

But they met in the hallway one day as Kanekoa tried to convince Torgrimson to

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wrestle for the Eagles.

Later, Kanekoa heard Torgrimson's story.

"To be around that much death at that young of an age is remarkable," Kanekoa said. "I was just impressed with the way he's handled himself and the way he's dealt with everything."

Torgrimson's parents broke up when he was a toddler. He lived full-time with his father, Bob Torgrimson, in Lewistown, Mont. When Cody was 6, he found his father on the ground, "in a heap" with a broken neck. His father had fallen out of a tree during a family hunting trip and died that day.

Cody moved in with his grandparents because his mother wanted little to do with him.

"I've never had a great feeling for my mom. I have resentment for her," Torgrimson said. "She chose drugs and alcohol over me. That's how I feel about it."

He remembers seeing his mom one day in Lewistown.

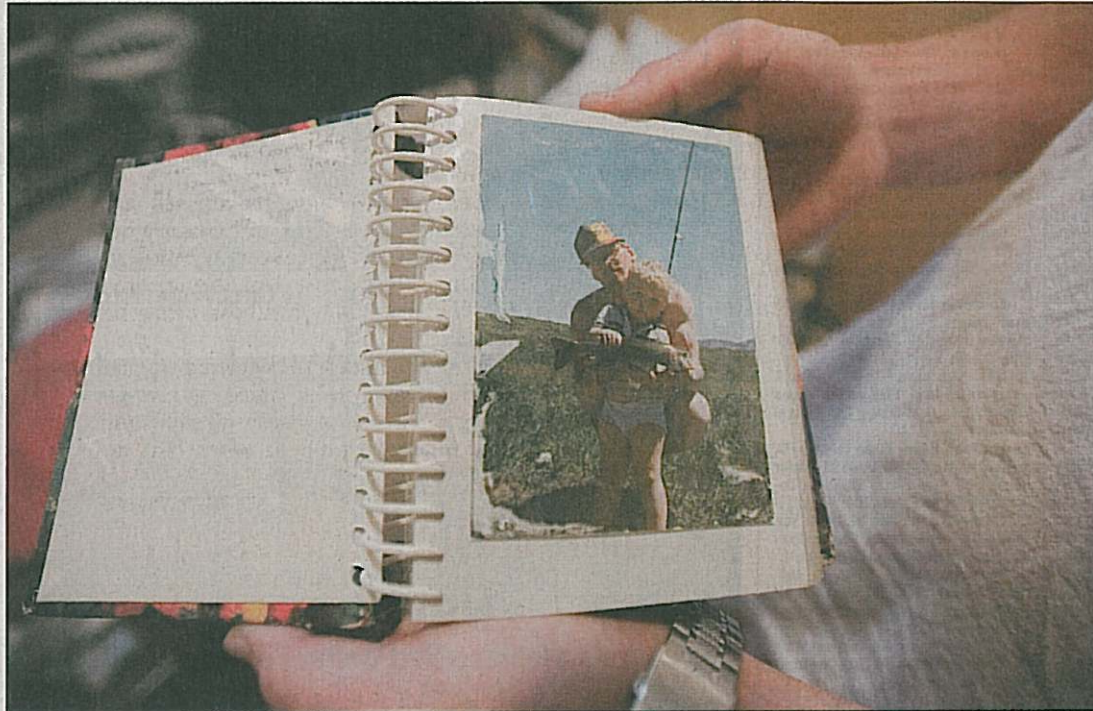
"I said hi. She didn't know who I was until I said, 'Mom,'" Torgrimson recalled.

She did make it to his 8th birthday party. It was the last time he would see her. Three years later, his mom was murdered.

Torgrimson lived with his grandparents until he was 10, when his grandmother was diagnosed with cancer. His grandfather, who was disabled, could not take care of a dying wife and a grandson.

That's when Cody's cousin, Lance Eppers, and his wife, Brittany, took him in to their home in Vancouver. A year later, a few months after his mom had died, his grandmother was gone.

There are moments that can



Cody Torgrimson holds a photo his dad and him fishing in Montana, when Torgrimson was a toddler.

Photos by STEVEN LANE/The Columbian



Torgrimson, center, sits around the dining room table with his surrogate family, Noel Carr, left, and Nathan Mortenson, 16, and Andrew Mortenson, 17.

affect the rest of our lives. It was during this period when Cody Torgrimson was most vulnerable to taking the easy way out. It is easy to fail at school. It is easy to find trouble.

"I started down the wrong

road, I'm not going to lie," Cody said. "Grandma and Grandpa were easily fooled. 'Got any homework?' 'No.' On the edge of succeeding or failing, Lance and Brittany kind of whipped me into shape.

"They kept me on the right path instead of the wrong path."

At first, they motivated Cody with a money-for-good-grades program. It worked.

"But as I grew older, I quit caring so much about the reward and started doing it for myself and doing it for all the people that I've lost and all the people who are still here," he said.

Yet within any family, there can be issues. When Torgrimson turned 18, he made another big decision. He left his cousin's home "on good terms" and moved in with the family of his best friend, Andrew Mortenson.

"Cody's always been a real special kid," said Andrew's mom, Noel Carr. "I didn't even have to think about it."

Cody said he tries to help out with groceries, but Carr just wants him to enjoy his senior year.

"I wanted to give him a place where he could be a kid, finish up high school and become the

amazing man he's going to be," she said. "I feel we're the lucky ones because he chose us."

Now, instead of two boys in her house, she has three teenagers. Andrew is 17, and Nathan Mortenson is 16.

"He's just part of the crazy family we have here. Cody keeps them in line," she said with a laugh. "He's the enforcer."

Satisfied with the decisions he has made in recent years, Torgrimson is savoring the good times of high school life.

He goes to volleyball matches after football practice to hang out with friends. He also is doing his best to make a positive impact with the football team.

The Eagles are struggling this season, but the coaches say Torgrimson's work ethic and leadership are important, especially to the younger players who hope to one day turn the program into a winner.

Excelling on the field is another one of Torgrimson's duties — just like getting good grades for his family. After all, he owes football, too. The game was there for him, when he was hundreds of miles from his home in Montana, when he was missing his dad.

Playing Clark County Youth Football, he found coaches — fatherly figures — who constantly supported him.

"Football gave me more people to look up to," Torgrimson said. "I've had positive influences in coaches. Nobody belittled me or put me down. They always encouraged me and pushed me to go down the right path."

The game also is an outlet of sorts.

"It has been, since I was little, a place to vent," Torgrimson said. "You can knock the living ... out of someone, and you feel better."

There is another benefit, as well.

"Sports has taken up so much

of my time. It has given me no time to get into bad things," he said.

Torgrimson's typical schedule this fall is school from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m., then football practice until 6 p.m. He works Saturdays and Sundays as a server at a retirement community.

Torgrimson said he likes working so he does not get too reliant on the Social Security checks, which will stop coming once he is out of high school.

By then, Torgrimson expects to be the recipient of grants, based on being an orphan, and scholarships from his grades. He carries a 3.4 grade-point average, which includes the more difficult college courses. He hopes to be close — a class or two — to an associate's degree when he graduates from Hudson's Bay.

He has several interests, plus a major goal, to pursue during college. He enjoys cooking, is intrigued by business, and would love to be a personal trainer. But right now, he is thinking about becoming a counselor.

"A lot of the kids who are being bad, they need someone to talk to," Torgrimson said. "They just want to vent their frustrations."

Kanekoa said Torgrimson would be perfect in that service.

"He's lived it. You can read books and learn, but he's lived it," Kanekoa said.

Carr agrees.

"Many of us, children and adults, could learn a lot from Cody," she said.

Cody Torgrimson said the turmoil of his younger days is no reason to throw away the future. He still gets down from time to time, but for the most part, he is at peace with his life and the decisions he has made.

He wants others to see that peace of mind is possible, too.

"Making other people happy is my biggest thing," Torgrimson said. "I really want people to be happy."