



Life After Hate -issue 1

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Published: 2010

Categorie(s):

Tag(s): racism anti-racism skinhead "white power" "social justice" "basic human goodness" peace love compassion discrimination empathy sociology progressive education "peace education" equality non-violence

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...from the Editor

“As I have walked among the desperate, rejected, and angry young men, I have told them that Molotov cocktails and rifles would not solve their problems. I have tried to offer them my deepest compassion while maintaining my conviction that social change comes most meaningfully through nonviolent action.”

-Martin Luther King, Jr., April 4th, 1967

Life After Hate.

Indeed there is. 20 years ago, I would have cursed the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on his birthday, as I was wholly convinced that his message of peace and brotherhood threatened the future of my race.

I've come to understand that it is only *racism* that trembles before the kind of compassion Dr. King still inspires. The only race I recognize today is the human race. Every single human being on the face of the Earth is ultimately descended from Homo Sapiens who emerged in Africa a mere 200,000 years ago.

What events transpired to convince a white power skinhead that he was as African as anyone else?

Read *Life After Hate* to find out.

How did former leaders of the white separatist movement come to publish a magazine celebrating basic human goodness?

Who was it that rescued a child as her family crumbled?

What do sisters and saboteurs have in common?

How does a tune change from hateful to hopeful?

You'll discover answers to those questions and much more within these pages.

Life After Hate is a publication dedicated to the theme of basic human goodness. The belief that within every one of us there is the capability for unconditional compassion for all living things. The truth of this is confirmed every time strangers share a smile. Every time we put ourselves in someone else's shoes. Every time we think of others before we think of ourselves.

Everything in our world begins with an idea. Once the illusions foisted upon us by fear and hatred are exposed, it becomes naturally easy and incredibly fulfilling to craft our ideas with joyful empathy for life. In this manner, every one of us has the ability to make the world a better place.

We hope that *Life After Hate* helps dispel animosity, creating an environment where people can treat each other with love and respect.

To do this most effectively, we need your help.

In addition to the writing of Christian Picciolini, and myself, future editions of LAH will feature works by others who have put racism behind them. We'll also be proud to present writers like Angie Aker, who never fell into the trap of racism but nonetheless have great lessons to both teach and learn. If you have a story of your own to tell, be it as a former racist, a victim of racism, or simply from the perspective of a human being who cares about their fellow humans, we want to hear from you!

Life After Hate will always accept submissions from writers, poets, artists, and musicians who express their creativity promoting peace. Or feel free to join the discussion on our Facebook page. Download our free e-book edition and distribute it non-commercially to your heart's content. Together we'll bring a testament of peace to the world on a quarterly basis, and enjoy watching it iterate from person to person.

"We still have a choice today: nonviolent coexistence or violent co-annihilation."

Because the stakes have never been higher, the choice presented by Dr. King in his 1967 speech *A Time to Break the Silence* has never been more relevant. Our planet and thus the very life of every human being is under dire threat from fear, greed, and hatred that can all be conquered beginning with a simple smile.

...which I hope you do when you read this.

Thank you for bringing your attention and energy to us.

We love you all.

-arno

Let the Song You Sing Be One That Embraces, Not Disgraces, Humanity

by Christian Picciolini

The April 2008 issue of Alternative Press magazine, which hit the streets on March 7, 2008 featured an Op/Ed piece written by me. After many years of leaving behind a life I no longer associate with, I felt it was necessary to make it known to all what my past entailed, how it affected me, and how proud I am of the man I am today.

My hope was that this piece will give any young people struggling with a similar situation a real-life example they might identify with and decide to make a change in their own lives.

Alternative Press

Op/Ed Piece – April 2008 issue

At eighteen, I stood on stage in a cathedral in Germany, cries of “Heil Hitler!” blocking out the roar of 3,000 European skinheads shouting my bands’ name, “Final Solution! Final Solution!”

At that very moment, I was responsible for the electricity in the air, the adrenalin in veins, the sweat pouring down the shaved heads.

Absolute devotion to white power pulsed through the crowd on that foggy March day in 1993. I imagined this is how Hitler had felt when he led the Germans on his mission for a pure race. He was dead—persecuted and misunderstood as far as I was concerned—but I was more than ready to step in and undertake his mission.

Laws favoring blacks were taking white jobs and we were overburdened with taxes used to support welfare. Neighborhoods of law-abiding, hard-working white families were being overrun with minority gangs and their drugs. Gays—a threat to the very propagation of our species—were demanding special rights. Our women were being conned into relationships by minorities. Clearly the white race was in peril.

Or so I believed. What began as an affinity with punk music had grown to encompass the hate lyrics and messages of white power oi! music.

The truth was that my parents never lost jobs to any minorities. I didn’t even have a job, so I surely wasn’t supporting anybody on welfare. I’d never been the victim of racial bias, although I’d certainly perpetuated hate violence myself. Nevertheless, I pushed the punk rock

subculture to the limits and embraced the racist skinhead mentality, and soon was so heavily indoctrinated into a world of hate that it blinded me.

I was convinced that being a soldier meant hating the enemy, battling anyone unlike us at any given moment, and spreading the seeds of hatred throughout the white community. A natural leader myself, it wasn't long before I was also relaying the vicious messages to anyone who would listen.

And that message brought me to Weimar, Germany, when I was 18. The band I sang for, Final Solution, was one of a half dozen white power bands that performed at this worldwide skinhead concert. In fact, my band was the first ever American white power skinhead band to play anywhere in all of Europe.

On that day, swastika flags littered the old German cathedral. They glistened on skin, covered clothes, hung on backpacks.

I was up there on stage to make sure nobody forgot why we were gathered there. Never mind that I was just a teenager from a lower middle class Chicago suburb. I was one of the powerful voices here and I had no doubt that the conviction of my words would have a lasting effect.

What power.

What ignorance.

Sometimes when I look back on that trip I can barely breathe. How could I have been so misguided? So insensitive to the horrors that had been perpetrated? So unfeeling about innocent people butchered? All in the name of racism and hate and blind faith?

Some of my ignorant behavior was nothing more than the natural rebellious nature of a teenager looking for a way to be heard. I looked around me and saw people like my parents working hard and not really enjoying life. I didn't want that to be me some day.

I also didn't want to be ordinary. I was sure I was destined for something greater. I wanted power and recognition. I wanted something that made me feel my hot blood coursing through my veins.

Music had that effect. And through white power music I met people who I thought cared about me, who I thought were like me. I liked being an outcast, flaunting authority. I was no longer a kid without much of a future. Instead, I was a soldier leading others on a mission.

I confused hate and intimidation with passion, fear with respect.

My involvement lasted far too long, and while it's difficult to pinpoint one specific event that made me question my beliefs, in time I realized

that what the world really needed was people who could actually care for one another despite their differences. While attending DePaul University I was part of a United Nations conference focused on the Millennium Development Goals. I saw how much work there was to be done to make life fair for people of all races, religious beliefs, genders, and sexual preferences. I learned about the horribly common exploitation of women and children, hunger, AIDS, the ravages of poverty.

The more I learned, the less personal power mattered. Instead, what became clear to me was the importance of helping others. So I left my hate and racist music in the dust and made a video devoted to the Millennium Development Goals (www.youtube.com/watch?v=ReRx12QUv54) to try to inspire others to help correct some of the real problems facing the world. Now all that mattered was reaching people with the message to help.

While I am still very active in the music industry, I would never again consider working with anyone that spews hatred or prejudice. I simply will not tolerate it and neither should you.

One thing that allowed me to feel such hate in my past was that I refused to see the humanity in others, so I challenge you to take that step. Find a cause you believe in—the environment, gender equality, anti-racism—and do something to make a difference. Organize a benefit concert, design and sell t-shirts promoting a cause, support positive change in the world.

Make music. But let the song you sing be one that embraces, not disgraces, humanity.

Christian Picciolini is an entrepreneur, artist, writer, father, and husband living in Chicago, Illinois USA. More examples of his work and writings can be found at www.christianpicciolini.com.

Lena, Love, Loss, and Laos

by Angie Aker

I met her on the playground in the 2nd grade. Lena was shorter than me with luminous skin the color of mahogany, wide, almond shaped chocolate eyes, the cutest little nose with a bridge that barely rose above her cheekbones, and impossibly glossy, straight black hair. There was no one like her in my little idyllic town of perfectly homogenized Rockwellian families, and she was beautiful to me. We instantly became friends and I learned that she was from Laos, recently immigrated when she was 4 with her parents and two siblings, of which she was the middle child (there were more back in Laos).

She'd sleep over at my house and learn that I had a mom and a stepdad who drank and fought, and she was my best friend when we were told that my 2 yr old little brother had cancer.

I'd sleep over at her house and try to decipher the Lao that she and parents and siblings would speak to each other. I never heard her parents fight. Though the tones and cadences of their native language could sound sharp, I quickly interpreted that it wasn't indicative of what they were saying. Often when I thought things were getting tense they'd end their sentence with a smile and a laugh and I'd realize that I had no chance of trying to figure out what they were talking about.

I called Lena when my brother died. As in, 1 hour after I had told him goodbye while cradling his dead body as I sat in my mother's lap. I was 11. It went like this.

"Alan died."

"What?"

"Alan died."

"Are you serious?"

"Yes."

"Oh my god. I'll be right there."

She and her brother rode their bikes to my house and collected me. I wanted to fly away and leave that house of death and grief and my mother's misery, but riding my bike to their house was the next best thing.

I walked into their little apartment with them and their dad looked at me with kindness and the wistful look of having things to say that he didn't know how to convey. He just gave me a hug and let us head up to the girls' room. Over the years, there would be many times that Mr. or

Mrs. Hanesakda would offer empathy over my situation, amusement at my strange ways, or disapproval of what I was wearing, with just a gesture or look on their face. I had to ponder all of the possible things they could mean with a look and decide which one I thought it most likely to be. No matter what the situation, the love they shared with me remained constant. My perceptiveness, awareness, and empathy was born largely in this home.

The next few years were survival. My mother was elsewhere, lost in her grief and the bar and drudgery of the 3rd shift job she hated but was resigned to accept. She vacillated wildly between loving me too ardently as her only living child, and seeming to hate me and compete with me and resent me. I often wondered if she'd have rather it had been me who died instead of my brother. I blamed her and said awful things to her.

But I always had refuge at Lena's. They had saved up enough money to buy a little house in the country, and I spent all my time with them even though I lived in town and couldn't ride my bike there like I used to when they lived in the apartment. I would just ride the bus home with Lena, Nora and Alex after school. At some point in middle school, Nora and I had become best friends, though I was still friends with Lena, too. It was a lot like having sisters, and just being closer with Lena at one phase in life, and finding more in common with Nora in a different phase.

Our town was filled with children who were privileged yet unworldly. They were sheltered and fed but never pushed beyond the limits of their little town or their little ideas. One thing my Laotian friends and I had in common was not being understood by these kids. They didn't understand people with squinty eyes or children who didn't have fathers. Rage surged through my veins when I would overhear someone call my best friend a "chink". I couldn't understand how anyone could say unkind things to or about my wonderful friends. My fierce loyalty led me to say equally unkind things back to whichever ignoramus had uttered it, and privately almost to tears. I saw what my friends were up against, and the unfairness of it branded my soul with a prejudice against privileged, sheltered white kids...an equally unfair prejudice that I still struggle with at times.

For a picky eater like me who couldn't even stand onions, being immersed in a Laotian household was the ultimate irony. I was strangely fascinated yet repulsed by new textures and smells, and once in awhile would venture a taste. Some things I found I really liked. I learned how to make spring rolls en masse for parties when they would have all

manner of extended family and friends over. The first time I rolled one Lena's mother said something in Lao and they all laughed. I asked Lena, and she translated. "She said that your rolls are long and skinny, just like you!" I learned how to clean squid and remove its cartilage. I watched Lena's mother chase a chicken in the yard and break its neck before plucking it and preparing it for dinner. They had a stool with a half-moon serrated metal attachment- you would sit on the stool and run a coconut half back and forth over the half-moon, collecting the coconut meat in a bowl underneath. The stool was angled to maximize every motion, making the work easier. It was basic and brilliant, all at once, like the compassion that their family naturally gave to a child in need

Life in their world was full of oddities that I sometimes could make sense of, sometimes not. I managed to navigate it, and learned to not be intimidated by things I couldn't immediately understand.

After my freshman year in high school, my mother moved to a new school district and I moved with her. I stayed mostly with my grandfather and made new friends. I kept in inconsistent touch with Lena, Nora, Alex and their family over the years, but have never forgotten the kindness they shared with me during the time when I was simultaneously everyone's child and no one's child.

Looking back, I suppose I've always been my own. In the tumult of my difficult childhood, I had a lot of emotional work to do that no one could help me with. But this immigrant family, who was tenaciously working to provide themselves the basics, opened up their home and their hearts to give me what they could. It made *the* difference.

Sometimes, it's the people who know what true hardship is that are the least afraid to give of what little they have. They couldn't fix my life, but they kept me safe and warm and fed, and were my *friends*. They couldn't always understand me, and I couldn't always understand them, but to see a little girl in need of family was something that transcended any linguistic or cultural barriers.

This is the America in which I grew up.

My Life After Hate

by Arno Michaels

(chapters 1-4 of 11)

dolor

Pain is an essential cog of life's mechanics. Each one of us is brought into being through our mother's exquisite anguish. From our first minutes to our last, continuous discomfort of one degree or another is a fact of life.

Human beings will never be free from pain, nor should we ever be. Pain is an invaluable teacher as well as a builder of character and vehicle of spiritual growth. But not all pain is necessary, or necessarily constructive. We, as human beings face a choice: to acknowledge the painful nature of life and embrace the opportunity it presents by learning to sort the "good pain" from the bad and helping to soothe the pain of others, or to remain in constant and futile flight from pain with no regard for who gets trampled along the way.

This project involves channeling voices from my past. As I speak in my present voice, I have to focus diligently to keep the tone positive. Discussing the horrible things I've done is a painful process, and when I feel pain, I'm prone to lash out. Early drafts of this were rife with jabs at people who really had nothing to do with the story of me being a skin-head. That's something I'd prefer not to admit, but I feel obliged to do so because it reveals that I'm still struggling with my anger.

I have so much to learn in order to heal. I need people to listen to me and I need to listen to them to facilitate such learning, and damn the scabs if tearing them off is part of the healing process.

But how much of that discomfort is caused by the lens through which my past is examined? Do I have to respond to the pain in question—the kind that I feel when I relive things that I'm horrified I've done—by passing it on to someone else?

It would be a more constructive process if I could learn from the pain itself. Perhaps by tweaking the focus of the lens, I can learn how to recognize the occasions when pain is even necessary and how to make better choices in the future. So often I find myself getting upset about things that really aren't important, then the situation worsens as ire saps available energy for things that are—vital things like thought, love, and empathy that gird against pain, making it much easier to endure and examine.

That's one of many crucial lessons that are finally starting to take root for me: that when we are hurt by whatever, we should be patient and thoughtful and learn from the experience instead of simply making other people hurt. So easy to say yet difficult to deliver—at least at first. Once the nourishment of constructively coping with pain is realized, the

process becomes consistently easier and more rewarding. *Life After Hate* isn't necessarily a how-to—I recommend a good yoga class and meditation practice for that—but it certainly is cathartic, and I hope thought-provoking and conversation-inspiring.

Please talk about the dumb things I've done with your friends—or better yet, perceived enemies. We've all done dumb things and smart things and amazing things. Let's share our experiences and see if we can help each other out in the process.

why

Why *Life After Hate*? To help people learn to set aside their prejudices and get to know each other.

Being a bigger guy with a lot of tattoos, I face more prejudice than most white people do. I realize that I'm a bit of an eyesore, but beyond the surprised first glances my presence tends to flush out, sometimes there are vibes of fear, disgust, disdain. Some people corral their young children at the sight of me, as if I'm liable to eat them. The other day an old man stood glaring at me and shaking his head as if I were a mangy stray dog who had just shit on the floor of the grocery store. Even though all of my skinhead ink has been well covered by now, there are those who still pre-judge me as a racist. Within a span of seconds, many people make up their minds that the world would be a better place if I wasn't in it.

But I volunteered for my tattoos.

You can't volunteer for a skin color.

I'll never truly understand what it's like to be anyone but a white man in the United States. For all of my self-imposed distance from the status quo, I'll never be able to get my head around being the product of generations of hardship that began in the most brutal chattel slavery in human history. I'll never comprehend being penned up in an impoverished reservation on land that was once the sovereign domain of your people. I'll never know how it feels to be denied because of the color of your skin or because of where you came from and to have to watch your children suffer the same fate.

But I still try to understand—by studying the history that the victors didn't write, and interacting with my fellow human beings. Finding out what their favorite color is. Asking what they daydreamed about as a child. Sharing laughs. Discovering the person.

I hope that after someone reads *Life After Hate*, maybe they'll think twice before pre-judging people for whatever reason. If you would have had the misfortune to cross my path 20 years ago, I likely would have garnered an instant and condemning pre-judgement. But I changed for the better.

If there can be hope for me, there can be hope for anyone. And considering that I have over a dozen brothers and sisters who personally made the journey in and out of hate along with me, I know my story isn't a fluke. Each one of us got in, and out, for our own reasons. Some of those reasons were similar, but each story is unique.

Why? Because I need to learn how to best tell my story.

My original idea was to speak in the voice of the time, the voice of a hate-crazed zealot who was perpetually in the process of convincing himself and others that all outside his race must die to save his own. Speaking in that voice, I intended to describe scenes that in the moment were downright good times. Scenes that make me wonder how the same person who acted in them could be the one writing about them today. Did I ever pause for a second then to think that someday I would vomit once I knew what I was doing? That I would cry? I faintly recall whispers of “don't do this”... “don't hurt them” coming from somewhere long ago in my soul. But each plea was literally drowned in suds of Huber and Miller and Old Style until the junk thrill of combat thundered once again.

Between benders I immersed myself in racist dogma, taking in only information that supported the tenuous premise that the white race was at once mighty and fragile, and in dire need of conservation by any means necessary. And there is plenty of such information out there if you choose to spin it that way; blacks and Latinos commit crimes, Jews make movies and own banks—you do the math.

It seems simplistic to the point of absurdity to even type such statements now, even though they are technically facts, because now I understand that there is so much value in looking beyond just face value. But back then those were talking points that I would employ to either fire you up to the point where you wanted to knock someone's teeth out or alternately knock yours out for you if you didn't like what I had to say.

It is extremely difficult for me to open the crypts of my past and parade the fucked-up things therein in a way that gets the feeling of those dark times across. Nightmares of smashed skulls and straight razors plague what little sleep I get when I'm immersed back in the days of boots, beer, and blood—utterly horrified by things I used to find glorious comfort in and then horrified again by that. If I can barely write the stuff, who the hell is going to want to read it?

I'm that guy who doesn't know how to act. Who doesn't understand why people run screaming in terror when he thinks he's doing something nice. The image of Frankenstein's monster trying to give the little girl a flower comes to mind, as does the observation that what is intense and scary to most people seems normal and comforting to me. So be advised that all of my stuff in issue number 1 of *Life After Hate* is the toned-down PG-13 stuff. I've decided that for now I'm going to shelve

the uber-authenticity for everyone's sake and anyway, it hurts me even more than it hurts you. What that means is that my portion of *Life After Hate* is basically reflection on my past in my present-day nice-guy voice. There are a few brushes with the old Arno in the mix to keep it interesting.

Maybe someday I'll write a proper memoir...

Most of all, *Life After Hate* is my apology to the world.

In 1988, I was a founding member of what went on to become the largest skinhead organization on Earth. In 2007, over a decade since I came to my senses, I was approached by a German skinhead who said that although he knew I was no longer active in the movement, I was still "in good standing." He offered me a trip to Europe where he had musicians who would serve as my band for a few Centurion shows. Centurion, my former "hate metal" group that sold over 20,000 CDs worldwide by the mid-nineties and who knows how many more since then, was apparently still quite popular with the disgruntled-European-white-kid demographic. Popular enough to make it worth their while to fly me over there.

As nice as it would be to just forget about who I was, Centurion alone implores that I make an effort to counteract the damage I've done. People all over the world are inspired to fear one another by my bellowing voice as I type this. I can hardly fade into my successful career as an information technology consultant when the Arno of two decades ago is still busy causing harm.

It's time to break the silence.

It's time for everyone who listens to lyrics I wrote and shouted telling them to hurt innocent people to know that I've somehow lived to regret everything I said.

I don't want them to suffer the same regret. I know where racists are coming from, and I pity them as much as I pity their victims. Hate takes a terrible toll on life. Fear is indeed the mind-killer. We all have the option of living a life of love and compassion, and I'm here to say that the world really is as beautiful a place as you care to envision.

You will find what you're looking for, so think deeply about what it is you seek.

That's why.

Riverwest Interview 1

In the beautiful late summer of 2008, a friend introduced me to a sociology PhD candidate who was working on her dissertation about Milwaukee's Riverwest neighborhood. Sandwiched between the perpetually fashionable East Side and the severely depressed North Side, Riverwest was the setting for my descent from lowly angst-ridden punker to even lower racist skinhead. Sandy and I hit it off and she did a great job of leading the interview, which turned out to be a condensed if not necessarily concise telling of my story.

Sandy: So I would just like to get to know you a little bit. Are you from the area? Where did you grow up?

Arno: I grew up in Mequon, which is a far cry from Riverwest.

Sandy: I grew up in Whitefish Bay.

Arno: Alright. But you can still catch a bus in Whitefish Bay though.

Sandy: Important distinction, I like the way you think.

Arno: As a teenager, I despised Mequon and I despised Homestead High School. I was always a kind of iconoclast and I would go against the grain at every opportunity, even if the grain made sense to me and even if I kinda liked it. It was just counter-intuitive for me to go with the flock, and Mequon is very much the flock [laughs] of society. As early I could I started going to Milwaukee. In middle school I was an early adopter of hip-hop culture and fashion before it was a popular thing to do. I hung out with a lot of black kids, and I went to Starlight Roll-Arena by Northridge Mall to do breakdance battles. I was really immersed in the mid-eighties hip-hop explosion a little bit before it happened. My younger brother and I went to see Run-DMC at the Eagles club in 1984 and it was awesome. We were probably the only white kids there and we were completely comfortable. My mom was a bit nervous but ultimately brave enough to drop off her two sons downtown to see Run-DMC at a time when it was kind of unheard of for white kids to be doing such stuff—unheard of in Mequon at least.

Sandy: What was the initial pull? What got you started on this path because in Mequon—

Arno: The skinhead thing?

Sandy: No, the hip-hop thing.

Arno: People who don't live in Mequon don't get this, but there are areas that are relatively poor compared to Lac du Cours, the Villa du

Parks—the really snooty subdivisions. There are some areas that are much more middle class, and that’s where the black kids lived. I have—

Sandy: So you are connecting with kids in your neighborhood?

Arno: Yeah. I had a group of friends that was me and couple other white kids, a Filipino kid, and then a bunch of black kids. Jason was probably the richest of the bunch and every weekend we would be in his basement rec-room renting VCR copies of *Beat Street* and *Breakin’* and just rolling them over and over again trying to learn the moves, teaching ourselves to breakdance. My mom, who had done some ballet in her college time and was—and still is—very sincerely interested in anything multi-cultural—she thought the whole breakdancing thing was great. There were these kids on Mitchell Street (Milwaukee’s South side) who—I should remember the name of their crew—they had a b-boy crew, and they would give breakin’ lessons and it was in the back of some dilapidated store and seriously on cardboard and super old school—and my mom brought us down there and paid them 20 bucks or whatever and we were taught some back-spin moves and floorwork stuff—it was the most awesome thing ever.

Then Andy—one of my black friends in Mequon—his older sister went to Starlite all the time, so when we could—and she really didn’t want us hanging around with her—but when we could finagle a ride we would get out there and we loved it. When we first started going to Starlite people still roller-skated but after a year or so they opened up the entire roller skating floor to breakdancing because that’s all that was going on there. But at the same time there was a lot of gang problems and violence and I think that’s what ultimately caused Starlite’s demise—just people getting out of hand and not being there to breakdance.

There was kind of a defining moment that was basically the end of my whole breakdancing career in 7th grade. For most of 6th grade and 7th grade, I was really into it and I thought I had a pretty tight-knit group of friends. My whole life I have been really extroverted and never had a problem meeting friends. I was fairly popular but I was also a really cocky prick and a lot of the jock-type guys absolutely hated me. Even though I played football with them and was as good as they were—but I was obviously not a jock. And being the kind of rebel breakdancer guy, I was pretty popular with the girls, which made them like me even less. Later on in 7th grade I had the breakdancer trademark of the time, which was the long rat-tail hairdo. You gotta have that. So one day at recess—in the middle of the playground with all the teachers watching—20 or so jocks came and tackled me, beat me up, held me down, and cut off my

tail. And while this happened, all of my homeboys pretty much just stood there—they certainly weren't jumping in on my side, and I felt like... I don't like making this comparison because I don't like to cheapen what a rape victim would go through, but it was a similar experience on my end. I mean, that's kind of how it felt.

Sandy: And public. Like public violation and humiliation.

Arno: Yeah. Exactly. It was pretty rough, but I was a pretty rough kid. I mean I could handle myself but I couldn't fight off 20 dudes—so that was the other thing too, the element of being defeated—regardless of how many of them there were, I just couldn't deal with that. That was a really traumatic thing and I was really disappointed that all my guys didn't do a damn thing to help me out. If one or two of them would have made some kind of resistance, I'd like to think the teachers on the playground could have stopped it. It just kind of went down and it seemed like nobody wanted to help me. After that I still hung out with some of the same kids, but I wasn't really into the breakdance thing anymore—also coinciding was the downhill slide of Starlite. So all these factors kind of merged to create an environment where I got out of the b-boy scene.

Sandy: You phased out.

Arno: Right. And I got into the whole punk thing by the time I was in high school and sophomore year marked a very obvious difference. Up until freshman year I always got pretty much straight A's without putting a whole lot of effort into it. But the summer before sophomore year I started hanging out with much older—sometimes guys in their 30's—punks who had bands going and I started doing DIY shows.

Sandy: Where did you find them in the first place?

Arno: The bands?

Sandy: No, just the people to connect with.

Arno: At shows. Yeah. I think the first punk show I went to was at Echo Bowl [laughing].

Sandy: Blocks from my house.

Arno: Heh! The band was called Earth Shoe. [laughing] And they were awesome. I remember I was like "yeah! Earth Shoe!" ...and what the hell is an "Earth Shoe?" My mom said it was some kind of shoe in the 70's, something hippies wore.

Sandy: I still think they exist actually [laughing].

Arno: I'm sure they are quite stylish. So that was my introduction. I loved the music. I loved the attitude. I loved the rebellion and it really spoke to me. I immersed myself in it as much as I could. I feel like I am a

lot more introverted now than I used to be, but throughout high school and up into my 30's I was always so gregarious and in some cases obnoxious, that whatever the scene, when I was there everyone knew it and everyone knew who I was—so I made a lot of friends quickly.

I also made a lot of enemies. There were always people who were like “I hate that guy!” [laughing]. I don't blame them, I am sure it was justified. But that's kind of how I got into the punk scene. I got in tight with a whole crew of punks from West Bend and their band. I would go to all their shows and parties up there. I also got in really tight with the punk scene in Kenosha and Racine. If anyone would ever do a dissertation on the Wisconsin or even Midwest punk scene, the Kenosha scene from the early 80's was an integral part—it was huge. There were all kinds of bands and there was hundreds of punks and it was really crazy times. It was a dysfunctional family atmosphere—we're gonna to go smash society together and do a ton of drinking and drugs and everything else. So as a 14 year-old kid, I was hanging out with all these people and loving every minute of it. I was dragged reluctantly kicking and screaming back to Homestead High School for sophomore year and that's when my grades plummeted, because I stopped doing anything at all.

Sandy: Right, no investment in that world.

Arno: Exactly. None whatsoever. My grades all went to shit. I was getting into as close to physical confrontations with teachers as I could. I was always pushin' them and asking them to take a swing at me and they wouldn't. After sophomore year I organized a tour for my band friends from West Bend. The band was called N.O.D., which stood for Nuclear Overdose. Through Maximum Rock n' Roll and other kinds of... looking back I don't understand how any of this worked without the internet but apparently it did somehow [laughing]. It's kind of a shame now because kids today will never experience what it was like back then. They try. There's still punk stuff that goes on, but I can't look at it and say “it's punk” ...but I am digressing.

I set up this tour for N.O.D. I was dating a girl from Indianapolis. I met her while she was up here for a show. The tour was supposed to play in Chicago, Indianapolis, Muncie, Dayton, and then all the way out to Pennsylvania. I had probably—I don't know—6 or 7 gigs set up. I think at the time I really didn't understand the nature of setting up a gig—but I talked to club owners and would say, “Yeah, I got this band...” I sent them tapes, I said “we'll come out and play this day” and they were like, “ok cool, we'll see you then”. Honestly, I don't think they

really gave a rat's ass if we showed up, they were just shoos us in on a punk night or whatever.

The whole thing ended up a disaster. The Chicago show fell through. We got down to Indianapolis to my girlfriend's house. Her mother was Mexican and didn't speak any English and her dad was points unknown. So me and these two vanloads full of punk-rockers show up at her mom's house and moved in for a couple of weeks [laughs]. Every day she would be going off on us in Spanish and we would like [laughing]—let it flow over us as we would drink and do whatever.

The rest of the shows fell through and I forget the particulars of how, but I am sure it was due to my shoddy promoting. We were stuck in Indianapolis because we went down there without any money. We were planning on making money at these shows for gas. The whole tour turned into a two-week couch trip for 14 people at this poor girl's mom's house [laughing]. We finally, by hook or by crook, scraped up enough money to get back to Wisconsin and when we did, my mom, dad, and younger brother were all out of town. I had just went off on tour with this band saying, "I don't know when I am coming back" and they were like, "alright whatever." At that time they had completely lost control of me, and they had kind of given up on trying to reel me in. We happened to get back the day they left, so—

Sandy: Left where?

Arno: Left our house to go and visit my relatives in California. They were all gone and I had the run of my parents' house in Mequon for two weeks. Of course we had a two week-long rager with all the bands from Kenosha coming up and playing in the basement. I was renting out my parents bedroom [laughing really hard] and I mean the house just got absolutely demolished. My brother, to this day, has not forgiven me for it. My parents kind of have, but my brother is like "I can't believe you did that to your own house! I mean it was our house!" He is still pissed at me about it, that's how messed up it got. There were guys with the lawnmower out in the middle of the night and messing with the deck so it was carving big swaths of dirt in the lawn [laughing]. Broke every dish, ate every piece of food. What we didn't eat ended up on the walls or ceiling. Knee-deep in beer cans and whatnot. This was all going on and I'm just loving it, and finally it dawns on me that they are getting home the next day. And I'm thinking, "we have to get the hell out of here!" —so I took off to Racine where I kind of squatted in this biker's basement with one of my punk-rock friends.

I was there for a month or so when my mom finally tracked me down. She drove down there to get me, and I basically said, "I'm not going back to school. I have had it with school." So my mom being practical said, "well I will get you a job, since you are not going to high school", and I got a job printing t-shirts for a friend of hers who printed bootleg rock shirts—unlicensed—he was raided by the feds all the time [laughing]—that's a story onto itself. And that's when I moved to Riverwest.

Sandy: Why Riverwest?

Arno: Some guys I knew from the punk scene had all gravitated to a house on 700 E. Wright Street, which is still on the corner today. It looks much nicer now than it did back then, and I am surprised there is anything left of it—because we literally tore that house down. We tore the doors off, smashed through the walls—we absolutely gutted it. But that's when I first moved to Riverwest, and I don't know why they originally chose that location—but looking back, the diversity of that neighborhood was pretty much lost on me. I was like whatever, it's a place to party. It's where all the punks are going. That's where I wanted to be. There were two older guys (from my perspective) in their early 20's who were going to UWM—they got the lease, and I would imagine the reason was it was cheap.

Sandy: It still is. And it's not as cheap as it was, but it's still a factor in what brings people.

Arno: Exactly, it's kind of the poor man's East Side. It's cheap. It's in a cool part of town. There is kind of an artistic element to it, and I think that's what led the older guys who got the house to the neighborhood. As far as I was concerned, I was just elated to be striking out on my own. When I should have been going to my junior year of high school, I was printing tee-shirts full-time 3rd shift and living with 5 roommates in this tiny little house and it was the best thing ever. I just worked and I drank, and I went through my normal impact on the scene as I was crashing around.

Sandy: Can I just ask what did it mean to you to be in this scene? What did this scene mean to you when hanging out with punk kids in this house? What was punk to you at this point?

Arno: I was actually on the tail end of my whole involvement with punk scene, and it was the tail end for a number of reasons; one of which is I had made as many enemies as friends so there were whole divisions of the punk scene that hated me. There was a group of kinda proto-skin-heads on the South side called the South Side Pride. The band The

Crusties, who were the godfathers of Milwaukee punk, were really tight with these guys. And none of them liked me. I mean I was really obnoxious, they didn't like that I just showed up and all of a sudden everyone knew me and everyone liked me and so they all wanted to kick my ass pretty much at any given time.

That's also when I first met Pat O'Malley. I was at a show at the Odd Rock and it was just a really bad night. It was all South Side Pride guys and they were all eye-balling me and waiting to jump me outside and I was getting kinda nervous. Then I met Pat there and we kind of hit it off. I was just starting to get with the whole skinhead thing, too. I was shaving my head but I wasn't officially a skinhead at that point. Pat just said, "so what's up?" and I was like, "yeah, all these dudes are after me" and he said, "yeah, I got your back man, we'll see what they really want to do." Pat then, as he is now, was a really intimidating guy. He's not the hugest guy but he's really intense—he starts barking in your face and you don't want to get involved with him in an adversarial fashion. And he could back it up too. He was a wrestler growing up and he was just really, really tough. So that's where I first met Pat when I was at odds with these guys.

I also had arranged a number of DIY shows that were fairly successful. We would always pack the places. I always took whatever money I got after we paid the place and gave it to the bands and bought beer and rocked out. That's how I first started hanging out with the Kenosha guys—we did a show on New Year's Day—which they were all griping about, as you can imagine—but they came out anyway and it ended up being a huge show. It was at the OddRock and we made a lot of money by teenage punk-rock standards.

After the show, I jumped in the van with those guys and went down to Kenosha, and what money I had—which was a couple hundred bucks—was all beer for everybody and we had a big raging party. For a long time, that's kind of how I was involved with the punk scene, but then I got a little distance from the Kenosha guys and I started hanging out with Pat more often and some of the guys on the Eastside who were more skinheady. I think as I started hanging out with them more, I would hang out with the Kenosha guys less.

Another big factor about leaving the punk scene was that at that time, there was a good chunk of the punk kids who were real left-oriented "peace punks", as we called them—really activist people. It's ironic that now I agree with a lot of what they said, but at the time, they really irritated the fuck out of me. I mean—

Sandy: Both them and their politics?

Arno: Yes. Because of them, I came to despise the politics. I was always the kind of punk that was more anarchist—just break stuff, just destructive, good-for-nothing punk—that’s what I was into. So when I saw these people saying, “Don’t buy Coors beer because they don’t hire black people”, I would be like, “Really? O.K.” and I would buy Coors beer exclusively, and I would wear a Coors hat to shows just to be a dick. These people obviously didn’t like me any more than I liked them, but it was really getting more and more prevalent. It is hard to put my finger on what I hated so much about it. I think, again, it just goes back to because it was popular. It seemed like the popular thing to do amongst punks was to get all political and to start giving a rat’s ass about something [laughs], and that just really bothered me. That’s one of the things that kind of wedged me away from the punks and more hanging out with the skinheads.

Sandy: What was the appeal there, at that time. What are we 15 now?

Arno: Um, 17. Yeah. I was sort of on my own just railing against the peace punks, and at the time in New York there was a kind of spin-off skinhead movement from the original skinheads in Britain. The New York crews all revolved around a couple of bands like the Cro-Mags and Agnostic Front. They weren’t by any means racist but they were mildly nationalist, and they were sort-of right wing—I mean to the point of not being left, at least. It’s funny now when I grow up and understand that right-wing is really old rich white guys who would have absolutely nothing to do with skinheads from New York.

Sandy: Here. That isn’t where right-wing means everywhere.

Arno: That’s a good point. I guess that’s from my Mequon perspective [laughing]. I wasn’t really attracted to the politics really, but I liked that these New York guys were huge and covered in ink and really mean and scary looking. I wanted to recreate that in a style of my own, and that’s how that kind of started. I would run into these other kids who had gotten into the skinhead thing on their own in one way or another.

A girl I marginally knew drove a van for some punk band all over the country and she ended up in New York where she was really getting sick of how dirty punk rockers were—they were just disgusting to her. Then she met these kids wearing nice shirts that they would button-up and tuck-in their pants. They had Fred Perrys and their boots, and it was just more stylish. So she was initially drawn to the whole skinhead thing because they were stylish, [laughing] and attractive. I think she was dating one too—that was a big part of it. She worked her way back to

Milwaukee and along the way she went through Chicago where the Chicago Area Skinheads (CASH) were one of the first, if not THE first, racial skinhead groups in the country. Through some transient skinhead friends of hers she was introduced to them and it really struck a chord with her. She felt that National Socialism made a lot of sense and these people really have something to say—that there is something to them. Then she came back to Milwaukee, brought Pat back down to Chicago, and her and Pat got into it.

Soon after that, there was another defining moment; I remember being outside of a show and she flagged me down, “Hey Arno, come listen to this!” and she had a walkman with Screwdriver on it. Screwdriver is the legendary granddaddy skinhead band from England. A really good band actually. They started out as kind of a punk band—I still listen to the punk stuff, it’s fantastic—but real quickly they got involved with the overtly racist National Front over there and their music, lyrically, went to all stuff about blood and honor and race and nation. They covered “Tomorrow Belongs To Me” which was a Hitler youth song.

The power of music cannot be overstated. When she put the headphones on me and I heard Screwdriver, I had this feeling of, “...yeah.” It was like a light bulb went off and from that moment I was really, really into it. The Chicago guys at the time had a record label where they would import Screwdriver because it was really hard to get otherwise, and it was all a network of P.O. Boxes. The record label that they were called Romantic Violence, which to this day I think is an awesome name. I mean, it’s pretty scary.

Sandy: It’s pretty powerful.

Arno: Yeah, powerful is the right word. It’s just, wow...

Sandy: But if you think about it, is violence that far from here [points to heart]?

Arno: Well right, exactly. That’s where it all comes from. That’s how I felt about the music. Another appeal of the skinhead thing—the whole idea of nationalism, especially national socialism and racialism was absolutely despised in the punk scene [laughs]. So while I was joining one crew and following in that sense, at the same time I was still railing against the one I didn’t like. It was a real natural thing to happen because you know of course my old punk rock friends wouldn’t talk to me anymore—and my skinhead friends would say, “that’s because they are communists and we have to fight against the communists.” And then I figured, “yeah, yeah we do” and it seemed to make a lot of sense to me at the time. That’s how I went from a punk to a skinhead.

I should say—this has been illuminated more and more as I'm in the process of writing—that my initial attraction to become a skinhead was purely the need to lash-out at the world. At the time I could really give a shit about black or white or whatever. I was just overjoyed when I realized the impact that running around with swastikas had. I loved how it really pissed people off. I had no consideration for the Holocaust and the real horrors that happened in Nazi Germany. I had no understanding of it and it never really crossed my mind. All I knew was that now it was me and my friends against the world and that's how I liked it.

Sandy: The symbolic power of repelling the masses.

Arno: That's a good way to put it. Absolutely. And it's a self-fulfilling prophecy; when you put a t-shirt on with a big swastika on it that says "WHITE POWER" and go walking down the street and everyone hates you, you are like, "See! See! They all hate the white man!" [laughing] and especially—

Sandy: So that just feeds the fire.

Arno: Sure, yeah. And in Riverwest, being a pretty diverse neighborhood, you know there was plenty of action. My whole life I have always gotten in fights. I have always liked getting into fights. In grade school I would get in school-yard fights, fight the jocks. As a punk, we would fight jocks all the time. In Madison, we would get in brawls with entire fraternities. It was something that I just really got a charge out of doing. If you are really getting into the psychoanalysis bit, I am sure I was trying to fill some void in my life with it, trying to empower myself via physical violence or whatever.

Sandy: Taking away other people's power.

Arno: Yes. So there I was walking down the street with a white power shirt and—surprise—the black guys in the neighborhood don't like it too much and then there are fights with them. That's a self-fulfilling prophecy. So then everywhere I went, any time I saw black people there was tension, if not actual violence.

Sandy: Were you still living in Riverwest at the time?

Arno: Yeah.

Sandy: Were you still on Wright Street?

Arno: Yep.

Sandy: Were you the odd man out at that house?

Arno: Well there was a bunch of us. There was a kind of transition that went on at the 700 Club. When I moved in it was all punkers. I think I was the only skinhead type in there. As things went on, Pat started hanging around more often and a lot of the West Bend guys got into the

whole skinhead thing and they shaved their heads and wore flight jackets, it's a bunch of skinheads at the house. That alone kind of drove some of the punk guys out. And the ones that didn't get the hint initially were—

Sandy: Escorted?

Arno: Yeah, we would just be dicks until they wanted to leave. Some of the things were kind of comical. Everybody that lived there was absolutely ass-broke. Everyone was penniless and one of the punk guys—his name was Mike McQueen—does that ring a bell?

Sandy: No, I just think that's just a really great name.

Arno: It is a great name. He was actually a cool guy—there are so many people in the punk scene that I miss and I feel bad about because I really betrayed them all. I went and just totally changed my colors and all these people who I had been really close with I just said, “fuck you, we aren't friends anymore.” That's just one of many things in a huge load of guilt that I carry around with me... but anyway—the funny part: so Mike McQueen was a vegetarian, and while penniless, he would spend 4 bucks or something ridiculous to get a pack of vegetarian hot dogs while the normal disgusting ass-n-lips hot dogs were 79 cents a pack. He did not have the money to buy that kind of food but he would anyway because it was so important to him. You can probably relate, having been a vegetarian for years. We would take his veggie hotdogs and throw them out or give them to the cat or whatever and then when he came home he would be like, “Who ate my vegetarian hotdogs?!” and we would say, “Oh, were those yours? The ones in the can? I'm sorry buddy, but we ate every last one of them”. We would take their tofu and put it in the pockets of their jackets, and just terrorize them until they didn't want to live there anymore. As they moved out, Pat moved in, then more and more skinheads would move in. A good chunk of the whole skinhead movement were these transient ones who would stay all over the country and this was all arranged via P.O. box communication.

Sandy: But when in Milwaukee the 700 Club was it?

Arno: Exactly. These people knew who to go find and they would turn up at the 700 Club—and so much happened there. I could talk about the 700 Club all afternoon, but the reality was I lived there from September of 1987 until maybe February or March 1988, so I mean we weren't even there that long. All this took place in a fairly short time span. By the time we were leaving there were nightly, rager—like how much drunker can we get compared to last night, how much crazier can we get—type parties. We would rip the doors off the hinges and we were sliding

down the stairs on them and we were kicking holes in the wall—we literally tore the house down. I really have to figure out what the moment was when we realized we better get the hell out of there, but that day came. We all kind of dispersed and just disappeared and the poor guy who owned the house came to find it completely gutted.

Sandy: Do you remember during that time who your neighbors were, or what they were up to? Was there confrontation, or were you guys in your own “fuck you” universe?

Arno: There was a lot of confrontation. I used to walk down to the Polish Falcon because they would serve me there. I got served a lot when I was 17 and I don’t know if I looked old but a lot of times I would tell them I was in the military with the shaved head. I would go drinking at the Polish Falcon and usually while I was there I would try to keep things pretty low key, but at the same time we were making so much ruckus and being such a disturbance in the neighborhood that anywhere we went, somebody would see us and say, “You are one of those assholes who live on the corner at Wright Street!” And then some shit would go down...

Sandy: What does that mean?

Arno: Um, verbal arguments and usually our response was, “Yeah, what are you going to do about it? You wanna go outside!?” Then there would be a fight, and sometimes there was ten of them and two of us and sometimes it was vice versa. There was a fairly good range of people who didn’t like us—pretty much everybody didn’t like us.

Sandy: Diverse yet united in their dislike of you [laughing].

Arno: Heh!. Interesting point. There were the black people who didn’t like us, the kind of strange older middle aged white people who didn’t like us, and uh—the strange younger people in Riverwest who didn’t like us. In any combination, those groups would be there to, you know—provide us what we were really looking for. And when it comes down to it, if we would have been embraced with open arms and people would have bought us beers and been nice to us—despite what kind of assholes we were—it would have really diffused the whole damn thing. We would of had to go find our conflict somewhere else, because the whole skinhead way of life—it requires conflict as a gasoline.

Sandy: That’s what I was thinking—fuel.

Arno: Yeah. It operates on conflict and if you don’t have it, you don’t go anywhere—nothing happens. It just stagnates and the real world starts creeping in and the whole appeal of the “us” against the world thing starts to crack and fade away then what’s the point of doing it?

Sandy: So it was kind of understood that you were always looking for it. To create it if it wasn't going to be created or started?

Arno: Yeah. There were a number of times—and these people really annoyed me—but looking back, I can tell they were wiser people who would see us all and would obviously disapprove, but they were smart enough to know that—

Sandy: Confrontation was your food?

Arno: Right. Exactly. And they didn't give it to us. That would really aggravate me [laughing], "What do you mean? We're Nazi's, come on, you don't wanna fight?" and they'd be like, "Whatever... little kids." But they wouldn't even go that far, because they wouldn't spur us on, they would turn the other cheek and not give us what we wanted.

Sandy: And what about cops? Were they ever called? This is before my time in Riverwest.

Arno: Good question. It's actually interesting; I don't recall a single incident where we had any police problems for anything that happened in Riverwest. Any beatings, fights we got into in Riverwest—and there were some really violent ones—nothing ever came back to us cop-wise. There were a lot of arrests but they all stemmed from when we crossed the river to the East Side. When we went to Downer Avenue—when we would cause trouble over there. Whenever that would happen, that's when the cops came looking for us. And yeah...

Sandy: That says so much.

Arno: It totally does. I know exactly what it says. At the time I didn't. As we were taking over the 700 Club, there were some skinhead-types who weren't into the racial thing at all, and they kind of gravitated together and hung out on the East Side on Downer a lot. They called themselves "Brew City Skins", and we called them "Baldies". According to us you couldn't be a skinhead if you weren't white power.

Sandy: What were you guys?

Arno: We were just skinheads.

Sandy: I mean did you have a name?

Arno: Yeah, we were the Skinhead Army of Milwaukee.

Sandy: Wow.

how

It's going to be very hard to understand that everything made sense to me back then. It all made sense as it was happening—for the most part I guess. But what about the nice old black lady at McDonald's who asked about the swastika tattoo on my hand and I said, "Aww... it's nothing", inspiring my roommate to bust me out when we got back home? What about the black and Latino guys I worked with printing t-shirts? What would my skinhead friends have said if they saw me laughing and joking with them on coffee breaks? So there were moments when the good in me was dragging my feet. It happened pretty much whenever I'd have extended contact with people who I shouldn't have according to racist dogma—non-white people. If I spent any time with them—even the lady at McDonald's who always seemed to be the one taking my order for the weekly payday Big Mac feast—then I would start having trouble being mean to them. Hating them. So I would go back to my blinders and close my world off, limiting my experience to pro-white whites only, and input to racial information only.

Did I always know in the back of my mind, at the bottom of my heart, that I was wrong? Or did I truly believe in racial holy war? How about a little of both? Is that possible? Can you be so committed to something so fucked up and go about that business with passion and fervor (for years) while having doubts?

There were so many who dabbled. People who got a glimpse or three, then wussed-out or wised-up. Why couldn't I have moved on? I'm so fucking transient in other aspects of life. Can't work the same job, have the same girlfriend, hobbies, look, etc, for more than a year or two. How did I come to be such an asshole for 7 years? Maybe because I was good at it. Because people followed me and approved of me.

The thing is, I would have been good at whatever I got into. I know that now—not sure if I knew it then. I know I was a cocky jerk who knew he was exceptional. But there wasn't a whole lot of sense of self-preservation. There was plenty of self-destruction though, and I was mostly laughing while it went off. The typical self-centered goals of a young Midwestern white man were absent. I had no interest in McMansions, Rolexes, or Range Rovers. I just liked to get fucked up and fuck things and other people up.

Maybe I was looking for something to believe in when the planets aligned to set me down that path. I was drawn to racial ideology because I felt like white people were getting shafted. We were the underdogs. It

was us against the world in an epic battle for forever. Such romance! Yes, I have a tendency to make it sound that way, which I guess is really just getting back in that moment, because the taint we cast upon reality definitely had that saga feel. And that was by design. Hitler did it with the torch-lit ceremony and iconic swastika. It felt like you were Beowulf, Siegfried, and Conan all rolled into one. Just a big fucking game of Dungeons & Dragons till death and prison inevitably show up. Then the shit is real. Then comes the real challenge, the true test of will. Do you back down then? Are you a coward? Or just a fool? That's when you gather all the suffering you can endure and produce and you devour it, because it's the only thing that nourishes you anymore. And you let that fire rage on till it's all you can see. You damn well can't see how burnt and disfigured it makes you—how it scorches your life. It's impossible to see how the hurt you emanate feels on the receiving end, because you have no empathy for other humans. Even your own crew, whom you truly love, is barren of empathy for each other. You would die for your brothers and sisters, but you are unable to put yourself in their shoes. You don't really care about or understand their individual hopes and dreams, because like you, they have none outside of the movement. Your feeling for them is one of primal pack-mentality. Survival melded with a perverted sense of honor that won't permit you to suffer insult to them any more than to yourself.

Yeah, there were issues at home; dysfunction that paled in comparison to the billions of people on this planet with real problems that was nevertheless catastrophic to me. But looking back I don't see any valid excuse for how fucked-up I turned out.

In the movies I would have been physically beaten up by parents and/or ghetto thugs while clawing out survival from an impoverished hovel, like many of my comrades were to one degree or another. But in real life I grew up in a nice house in a nice neighborhood and never went hungry or took a beating. My parents loved me dearly, but that made my dad's drinking and their subsequent fighting a constant hurt that drove me to lash out, denying their love for me and filling that void with hate.

In the absence of love's light, hate can be exciting, seductive. It beckons you and sends torrid, empty power coursing through your veins. At first you think you can dabble. Just for kicks. Just a bit of entertainment to ripple the excruciating monotony of your disdain for the world. You blink, and you're covered in someone's blood. Another blink and the doors of your cell are slamming shut. A blink later and the image of your best friend's mannequin-looking corpse as cold and wooden and wrong

as the open casket it sits in is seared into your brain forever. You rub your eyes in response to the blinks and the tears of your family run down your face. The tears of the parents of the people you battered beyond recognition. The tears of people who feel their children torn from their arms and their parents murdered all over again at the sight of you.

That's how it happens...how it happened to me, at least.

Once when I was a kid some friends and I were playing with matches in a parched summer field. We set an anthill on fire and found ourselves hypnotized by the ruthless spread of the flame, then dancing and whooping as the entire meadow was engulfed. The damage and consequence of our actions didn't occur to us until the roar of a fire-truck doused our revelry with that panicked realization of, "Holy shit. What have I done?"

The United Nations, the MDGs, and Me

by Christian Picciolini

On September 8, 9, and 10, 2004 I was fortunate enough to be able to attend the 57th Annual DPI/NGO conference at the United Nations in New York City. The theme of the conference was based upon the mantra, Millennium Development Goals: Civil Society Takes Action. Initially, the thought of being a part of the conference was intimidating; however, once the initial nervousness subsided I was certainly glad that I was a part of this unforgettable conference. The following account aptly describes what I felt as I approached the goliath known as the United Nations, on the morning of September 8th, 2004.

The sight of the United Nations headquarters building in New York City was stark and daunting. The sheer size of the campus made me feel as though I were walking into the belly of a large antiquated beast. The cold, dated core of this creature made my whisper reverberate as if I were standing in a colossal valley and the languages that echoed that day were alien to my ears. A sea of cold, stagnant anxiety engulfed me that morning, and it wasn't until the initial moments of the opening session in the General Assembly that I finally felt the warmth fill the space between those barren walls.

I'm not quite sure what I had expected. In fact, I had attended many previous conferences for my job at IBM and had overcome those without much trepidation. However, this seemed much larger and looming, filled with an aura of the unknown. I had wholly expected my visit would be remarkable. What I hadn't expected, was that it would unwittingly alter my perception of the world as I knew it.

Key Lessons Learned

The United States is not the center of the universe. That's right, I said it. God forbid that phrase fall on the ears of the thundering masses of blue collar, less-than-worldly Americans I had been accustomed to. Had they wandered into the UN that week and felt what I had felt, they would join in my chorus, "the United States is not the center of the Universe!" Today, at the epicenter of this home we call the globe was, however, the warmth, passion and spirit that echoed inside the cold façade of these austere gray walls. With vibrancy and tenacity, voices proclaimed freedom – freedom from poverty, from hunger, and independence from the centuries-old malignancy of inequality and despair. Seemingly in unison, the voices proclaimed, "People are the epicenter! It

is our birthright!" What was said was felt, and how it was said was not in words, but in faces and in indelible memoirs of the soul. Everyone in this room meant what they believed and they believed in people. And I believed in them.

That first day I learned that poverty, hunger, inequality, desperation, indignity, fear, death, and most importantly hope existed in places I never knew existed. It was no longer tucked away safely in corners never to be found. It was there right in front of me, exposed nakedly, not waiting for a Samaritan to clothe it, but simply hoping for someone to observe the nakedness. There were no outstretched hands, only hands cupped around mouths yelling for someone to notice.

My Rapporteur Task

Acting as a Rapporteur during the workshops allowed me to get comfortable in and of myself. I was joined in every workshop by friendly, welcoming faces. The mood was always upbeat and the liveliness and energy was undaunted. People spoke passionately about their successes in order to share them with fellow collaborators of spirit and task. The message was not one of victory, but one of hope. Hope that if only one more person was infected by this virus of goodwill, it could spread to enough people to make a difference. If 189 bureaucrats could agree to envision this great undertaking we call the Millennium Development Goals, perhaps the meek that were gathered here could implement that vision.

As Rapporteur I listened, not only with my mind and my ears, but with my heart. Person after person sharing experiences of valor; villages in Kenya designed by college students; young people in Holland traversing desert miles to minister to AIDS-stricken children in sub-Saharan Africa. And here I was a part of it. The friendships made and the alliances forged on this trip will be everlasting. They are consummate reminders of a future that can be realized should we be willing to give of ourselves to our quietly screaming, tucked away brothers and sisters.

Most Favorite

While it is difficult to pinpoint any specific aspect or person that may have been the most interesting to me while attending this conference, I must simply say that it was the passion and energy coursing through the UN building that day that lingers with me the most. I enjoyed being a part of a working group that was alive with enthusiasm. It was amazing to be a part of a collection of people set out to change the inequities of the world. The enthusiasm was contagious and I came home with a severe case of "save-the-world" syndrome. While I realize I cannot

accomplish this task alone, it is inspiring to know that, in fact, I am not alone.

Final Comments

As Secretary-General Kofi Annan has said, "Our chances of success depend in great part on the degree to which [we], the individuals and groups that make up civil society, mobilize around this [MDG] mission." It is our duty as citizens of this world not to turn our backs.

It is with the deepest sincerity that I wish to extend my gratitude to Instructor Pat Szczerba and DePaul University for giving me the opportunity to experience this. Without the hard work and the vision behind this course, I would not have had the occasion to reach deep inside my soul and find the tenacity to make a difference. As a result, the goliath has been struck down and been replaced by hope and resolve. For that, I thank you and will be forever grateful.

Author's Note: I'd like to state that while I am NOT necessarily a supporter of the United Nations organization per se, I do see some benefit to the "idea" that all world leaders vow to sit at the table to discuss possible solutions to problems before they invoke sanctions, war, or other actions that have tremendous ramifications to the citizens of the world. This event did, however, open my eyes wider to the notion of greater good and a world community.

Of Sisters and Saboteurs

by Angie Aker

"If all of us acted in unison as I act individually there would be no wars and no poverty. I have made myself personally responsible for the fate of every human being who has come my way".

-Anais Nin

"How did you hurt yourself, honey?" she asked with a concern that would have been touching and tender had I not been smart enough to see the thinly veiled, insulting trap.

Incredulous, indignant, shocked, sickened, saddened; I spun this kaleidoscope of reactions around internally in less than 10 seconds, realizing her game. Sometimes I wished to be a little less smart. Maybe certain things wouldn't hurt so much if I just didn't get them so quickly and clearly. After a pause to decide how to counter her play, I looked up at her and replied, gently, as if to a five-year old, "I didn't hurt myself. Keith tackled me to the ground and I have fractured vertebrae." Those were details she already knew, but hearing them again, in their stark, naked clarity, left her with nowhere to hide in that conversation. My tone of kindness and sympathy and yes, even guilt (for having to expose her to truths she didn't want to face) left her no excuse to react angrily to me or dismiss my words as accusatory. She didn't know what else to say. Her subtle attempt to enlist me as her accomplice in denying her son's behavior had been forthrightly and swiftly snuffed. I had nothing more to say to her, either. I felt more pity for her than myself.

Subtlety is the artful tool that keeps many a woman in her place. Conversations like this one play out every day in families everywhere and are why I often say that what keeps women down more than any other force is, horrifyingly, other women. It's popular to blame men for the fact that women often get paid less money for the same jobs, or that still in most marriages the woman works as hard as the man at the office yet is still the one responsible for most of the household management. It's easy to blame men for the fact that women are objectified and sexualized in the media, that women who do happen to wield their femininity with joy are automatically hated and underestimated, that young girls are victimized and then marginalized and then railroaded into a pipeline of futility. The sorry fact is that the only reason misogyny, subtle or overt, ever took root in the first place and continues today is because women have

allowed it, even encouraged it, often times for their own selfish and weak reasons.

The fairer sex, my ass. I love women, but I'm about to expose why we do this to each other. It's time.

Why would a mother let a man rape her child and then blame and be jealous of her daughter for being more desirable to him? Why would a man's mother reject and deny the incontrovertible proof that her son is terrorizing his girlfriend just as his father did to his mother? Why would a stepmother give her husband the ultimatum to reject his child from a previous relationship or lose his family? Why would a young, insecure, troubled girl who was taken under the wing of an older, confident and accomplished woman at work decide to shoot gossipy barbs about her? We always chalk this up to insecurity and then wave it off. That's too simple of an answer, and it doesn't get to the root of the problem.

If you scratch a fingernail over the tarnished veneer of insecurity, you'll find beneath it an amalgam of fear and powerlessness. The big secret is that underneath that, in every human being, is the strength and grace to love perfectly and to heal, if just a little, everyone whose paths they cross.

What are we afraid of? Winding up alone. Being socially unacceptable. Getting taken advantage of. The depths of our own power and the inherent accountability once we accept it. Losing something. Losing.

Why are we afraid of it? Because we don't recognize our power. Period.

Once you know how powerful you really are, none of the things you hide behind matter anymore.

Once you know how much of a difference you make or fail to make in every interaction with every person you encounter, the less afraid you are. You realize that you cannot lose. Strip away everything. Friends, money, status symbols, religion, a boyfriend, a girlfriend, a husband, a wife...drop all of your weapons, all of your safety nets, and what do you have left? Yourself. And it's enough.

If the mother knew that she was enough, that she didn't need a man in her life to complete her, if she recognized the power she had over the situation, that little girl wouldn't get alternately raped and blamed as a way of life. If the man's mother knew that she was powerful and that it was within her control and duty to make sure her son got help and developed coping skills beyond violence, his family might still be together. If the stepmother knew she was powerful and instrumental she may have healed her whole family and gained an ally in her stepdaughter

rather than creating a chasm that nobody can get across and regrets that tear her husband and, ultimately, her family apart. If the young girl in the office knew she was powerful she would never have waged a social battle with her mentor and she may have created a career for herself rather than winding up in the unemployment line.

Equality can only flourish when everyone is empowered and when everyone stops doubting that they are empowered. It only happens when we view every instance that we are afraid of losing something as an opportunity to gain something.

Each of us is responsible for stopping misogyny when we see it, and each of us is responsible for not perpetuating it with our own insecurities. The only way to do it is by infiltrating the societal psyche in the circle you influence. Decide that you will be the salve in your circle, the example that will show other women and men another way. Plant the seeds and it will grow. Here are a couple of examples of how I battled misogyny in my circle of influence.

My 6 year old, Gianna, was in a new school this year. She loves clothes and spends a lot of time and thought putting together outfits of all different styles. A little girl in her class, Jada, decided that she hated Gianna for traipsing into class cutely and confidently and wanted to take her down a notch. She started making fun of Gianna's shoes and clothes on the playground, which for a girl who wants to be a stylist is potentially dream-crushing. Gianna told her teacher but her teacher ineffectively dealt with it by telling her not to pay attention to it; that Jada was just jealous of her. I heard this and said with controlled conviction, "Bullshit. Jada being jealous is Jada's problem, not Gianna's, and Gianna shouldn't have to come to school and deal with it. Somebody needs to help Jada not be jealous." I called the school guidance counselor and explained the issue. She spoke to both girls separately and together. Not only did the teasing stop, but now both of the girls are friends. Gianna got one of her first lessons in refusing to accept misogyny in any form. Each girl got lessons in making an unlikely ally by shedding fear and talking to her directly. Jada got a chance to regain her power and dignity and Gianna didn't have to be stripped of hers.

Once, years ago, a very young woman that my then-boyfriend had a fling with during the beginning, non-exclusive phase of our relationship began to send me messages, intending to expose their tryst. Already knowing of her and the situation, my first instinct was to put her in her place, but I held that instinct in check. She was 18. My favorite little cousin was her age. She is a woman-child and my maternal instinct took over.

Feeling rejected and empty-handed from her dalliance with him, she didn't know what else to do, and I had it in my power to give her back her power and her dignity- to change her trajectory. So, I was kind to her. I told her I knew he was struggling with commitment but that for the time being, I was working with him. I apologized on his behalf that he had treated her like a "booty call" and told her she was very obviously worth much more than that. She told me that she couldn't believe what a nice person I was and that he was lucky to have me. She said she knew he really did love me and wanted to make it work and agreed that he had some deep issues about commitment. She agreed to keep me in the loop if he tried to connect with her again now that we were exclusive.

She walked away from that conversation with more self-worth than she came into it with, with a model of how it is possible for women to treat one another, and I came out of it with an ally. Eventually, I did break up with him and he did contact her. She copied and pasted the entire instant message thread and emailed it to me. She declined the opportunity to be treated like a sex object (yes!) and I gained an inside look into what this man's self-destructive behavior manifests itself as. With that insight I was able to convince him to join a support group for sex addicts. This was an experiment in my commitment to goodness and empathy, and I think it turned out more productively than I could have imagined. I knew that I was going to come out of this with at least not less than I went into it with. I looked at my fears and realized that I was not going to lose anything...and that I could afford to use my power to help these two people whose paths had intersected with mine. I avoided coming out of the situation feeling powerless or victimized.

I don't always do this so well.

I almost didn't invite a woman in my social circle out dancing with us girls tonight. She's always been perfectly nice to me and honestly, strikes me as very similar to myself. So why did I almost not invite her? Because she is every bit as pretty as I am, if not more, and is a better dancer, too. I sense she, like me, is a little different, a little more aware...I simultaneously love it and shrink away from it. I scratched my fingernail down the side of that insecurity, through the fear and powerlessness, and found enough love in my heart to want her pleasure at being invited and welcomed more than I wanted my "rightful" place as top bitch. The truth is, there is room for both of us on that dance floor and I am now looking forward to having her there. I have been excluded, dismissed and denied because of others' insecurities before. Why on Earth would I

keep that cycle going? Why on Earth would you? We're women and we are so much more wonderful than that.

Coming Attractions

Issue 2 of Life After Hate is due March 15th!

You'll find it online at lifeafterhate.org of course, and as a free-download e-book just like this one.

Featuring chapters 5-9 of Arno Michaels' *My Life After Hate*.

Skinheads by no means hold a monopoly on hate and violence. Life After Hate is a venue where anyone concerned with racial and social issues can speak their mind and contribute to the overall theme of peace.

We are overjoyed to include the brilliant writing of a woman whose first two decades of life were shaped by domestic violence. Violence in the true sense of the word. From her perspective, life after hate isn't about being perfect but is about making a daily choice to respond to people angrily or compassionately. We're all aware of what hate can do but what about compassion? Compassion is balance. Hate is chaos. We all deserve balance. Even the chaotic.

Beautifully complimenting the ex-skinhead material is an essay by a teacher from a non-profit educational organization dedicated to help students resist and confront racism, antisemitism and prejudices through a study of history while exploring moral and ethical choices and decision making where individuals and groups could have made a difference in times of crisis or collective violence.

Submissions for future editions of *Life After Hate* are always welcome, by not only writers but also socially conscious artists and musicians.

Submissions are only accepted via e-mail to submissions@lifeafterhate.org. For lengthier written pieces, a summary is preferred to the entire bit. For artists and musicians, a link to your work is best. Shady attachments will be intercepted by lethal and ruthless anti-virus mechanisms.

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love,
-the LAH crew



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