

my life after hate

The background is a textured, painterly illustration. At the top, a dark blue night sky is filled with a dense field of small, bright blue and white stars. A bright, glowing light source, possibly a sun or star, is positioned in the center of the horizon, casting a warm, orange and yellow glow. Below the horizon, a vast, flat landscape stretches out, rendered in shades of yellow and green. In the foreground, a dark, layered structure, resembling a cave or a series of steps, is visible. A small, dark silhouette of a person stands on the edge of this structure, looking up towards the light source. The overall mood is contemplative and hopeful.

arno michaelis

forewords by **angie aker** and **tanya cromartie**

“...what the world needs to know about hate. But what's even better, is that there is life after hate! I highly recommend this book!

—**Frank Meeink, activist, actor, speaker, and author of *Autobiography of a Recovering Skinhead*.**

“*My Life After Hate* is for anyone who thinks that change is impossible or too difficult. Arno Michaels’ honest look into his past as a white power skinhead and his long journey out of hatred is proof that change is possible in the unlikeliest places. This book is for anyone who underestimates their own power to transform their life or feels they lack the courage to reach out to others they once feared.”

—**Lisa Kaiser, Journalist, Shepherd Express**

“Society discusses hate and diversity in sterilized language; this book tells the story first hand. Be prepared to be riveted, intrigued and shocked. An astonishing ride through a dark world of violence and the process of rehabilitation.”

—**Amber Miller, M.B.A., Wisconsin Women’s Business Initiative**

“It's not so uncommon for those who have gone astray in ways that harm others to eventually get onto a more humane path. What's extraordinary about Arno Michaels is his dedication to the larger enterprise of fighting bigotry and the destructive violence that often grows from it. *My Life After Hate* is an illuminating window into the origins of this repentant man's mission.”

—**Will Fellows, Author of *Gay Bar*, Co-Creator of the Shall Not Be Recognized project**

la prensa de **lan**

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Life After Hate is a monthly online magazine found at lifeafterhate.org that promotes peace and compassion through open and honest dialogue.

Leveraging our magazine as a foundation for intergenerational outreach, such as nonviolence theatre, creative writing, and holistic fitness, Life After Hate demonstrates that all human beings have an innate need to both give and receive compassion. This core truth serves as the root of peace as it is common to every world religion and transcending of ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, and any other sort of difference that seems to sort human beings.

People involved with Life After Hate in all aspects,—from writer to reader to teacher to student—develop their ability to take personal responsibility for the effects of their actions on each other, their communities, and the Earth.

Brought into being as an apology to the world on behalf of former white power skinheads, Life After Hate was conceptualized in October of 2009 with our first issue published on the 2010 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. holiday, and has since blossomed to become a collective peace engine fueled by basic human goodness.

My Life After Hate is this book.

All proceeds from the sales of *My Life After Hate* go towards expanding the audience of Life After Hate, delivering content, and peace education programs.

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forewords:

Asked to contribute a foreword to Arno Michaels' *My Life After Hate*, my first thought was to sing his praises. To tell the world what a wonderful person he has become. Thankfully, it dawned on me instead to share what I have gained from Life After Hate (LAH). Naturally, the reader of this book will have an appreciation of Arno's story of transformation and his discovery of basic human goodness. However, the true power and purpose of his story lives within Life After Hate, the magazine, for it is a vehicle of compassion in action.

For over a decade I have worked to turn the tide of violence, oppression, and ethnic exclusion in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Through my organization, The Summer of Peace Initiative, I have worked to the point of exhaustion to empower and train teens and young adults as community advocates and agents of peace. It wasn't until I stumbled upon lifeafterhate.org that I realized my passion was lost and my strategy shaky and weak.

We had been fighting for peace. What hypocrisy. What contradiction. I commented on one of Arno's articles in the first issue of LAH, never expecting a response. I had become used to people not responding to me and my internet inquiries. Arno responded. We talked on the phone for a long time. I listened. I doubted. I hated. I stereotyped. Yet, I felt a deep curiosity about the mission of his organization, so I set up a meeting with him.

I was nervous about meeting an ex-white supremacist. As a black woman, I experienced apprehension and fear as a matter of course. Never mind the fact that I had been teaching diversity and tolerance to my students. Before our meeting I researched him. I googled him. I studied the magazine. I

obsessively stared at his photos, searching his face for information. What information? I did not know. I told my daughter I had a meeting with a former racist. She responded with concern and doubt. “Mom, what if he isn’t really reformed and he is just setting you up to hurt you or something.” That thought crossed my mind also. But the content and tone of the magazine dismissed the thought, as I had come to feel the genuine apology coursing through its pages.

Life After Hate has spent the last year working with my organization. Through LAH’s Community Outreach programming, The Summer of Peace Initiative has become stronger and deeper in pursuit of our goal. Life After Hate has enabled me to re-ignite the fire which burned so fiercely when I founded Summer of Peace Initiative ten years ago. My students have come to love Arno Michaels and his mission, as he loves them. It warms my heart to see our black and brown youth high fivin’ with Arno as he walks through the door. They listen to his words and understand the goals of Life After Hate, the magazine, and the curriculum. They experienced peace in themselves through LAH’s yoga workshops. They gained teamwork and communication skills through LAH’s Rock Climbing workshops. Initially, as a director of my own program, I was jealous to see how engaged my students were with Arno. Over time I learned to appreciate the gifts LAH has blessed my program with. Most of all, I embrace whole-heartedly the gift of contributing to LAH and its mission.

After attending LAH’s workshops a few times, my daughter said something so sweet. She asked, “Is Arno going to be at the next leadership meeting?” I replied with a tinge of jealousy, “Why?” “Because I like being friends with somebody who used to hate me!”

The following is an affirmation I created for myself. It was wholly inspired by my journey with lifeafterhate.org, its contributors, staff, and readers.

I have the power to do something different. Feel something safer. Think something better. Be genuinely nicer. Live my day brighter. Because hope is in my heart. The knowledge is in my mind. And compassion for my human family is in my soul.

-Tanya Cromartie

Director, Summer of Peace Initiative, Milwaukee

In January of 2007, I was about 8 months out of a five-year long abusive relationship. In my painful emotional state, I was trying desperately to move on and move forward. I found the feelings and self-reflection and aloneness alternately unbearable and necessary. I struggled to remain still in those sensations, as if it were bondage meant to keep me from some addictive substance. In my weaker moments, I thought I could no longer endure being alone with my thoughts and self, and the reality of the hard work I would have to undertake to change my world. I looked through websites like Yahoo! Personals and Match.com. I man-shopped. Because having a man would fix this for me, right? Cognitively, I was smarter than that, but behaviorally, I can't deny what my instinctive reactions reflected about my secret beliefs. I was still quite

capable of bullshitting myself in those days. Those of us who get caught up in any self-destructive behavior, whether it is drugs, alcohol, hate, or relationships with people who hurt us, must keep a constant vigilance over our thought patterns.

What I found on those websites wasn't that impressive. Mostly men in mid-life crises who were fresh out of marriages that they got into without thinking about it too deeply in the first place, men who were still in the throes of their newly rediscovered freedom yet also longing for the comfort of a steady woman to care for them. Men at the mercy of their drastically shifting whims and emotions who could not or would not take the first step in understanding themselves. Nobody to whom I'd trust my vulnerable heart and tenuous position in life. As much as I secretly wished for a man to save me, I also knew all too well that the wrong man could make life hell.

After months of finding nothing to get my panties in a twist over, I came across the profile of a guy who was cute in an off-beat way and had the best-written, most unique and compassionate profile I'd ever seen. He listed his turn-ons and they had nothing to do with sex. They had everything to do with life and love and humanity. I wrote to him and we found a lot in common; our sense of the world, our sense of fairness, and our sense of possibility. He shared openly about his past as a white power skinhead but was afraid I would condemn him for it. As a person who tries to understand every kind of person, I welcomed the process of learning from his experiences. We were very excited about our connection and each intoxicated on the awesomeness of the other.

After a week or two of this, we decided to have a date. On Cinco de Mayo, we met for Mexican food, a walk by Lake Michigan, and then headed back to my apartment to make a tres leches cake (which was awful, but in my defense, I'm only part-Mexican). As much honest-to-goodness, wholesome fun

as we had in each other's company, the romance aspect of it wasn't gelling, even though it seemed we were both willing it to. I didn't understand, so I tried to ignore the issue and focus on the fact that I wanted someone who was so good and so fun in my life.

A few days after our date, he called and confessed that it wasn't the right time for him to have a relationship. He was still heartbroken over his previous girlfriend—struggling with a rollercoaster of emotions and he liked and respected me too much to subject me to it. It felt like a rejection and I was disappointed, but I put on my best smile and with a smiling voice told him I understood. I thanked him for being upfront enough to not take me on that emotional ride. Then I hung up the phone and cried, just a little.

My girlfriend called to ask about it all after I'd had enough time to formulate my official stance on the outcome. I said, like a big girl, "Just because I'm ready for an Arno doesn't mean the world owes me one."

Over the years, the nature of our relationship and love has become clearer. The path we took lead to something bigger than anything it could have become had we continued to date each other. An attempt at a romantic relationship probably wouldn't have amounted to anything other than a disappointing mediocrity, because it would have been a forced and pathetic coupling of two broken people trying their best to not break each other or themselves any further—and inevitably failing. We always kept in touch and kept tabs on each other's projects and changes in life, once in a while meeting for dinner as friends. It was true that I had never met anyone like him, or him me, and the same has been true since. Arno has a viewpoint on things that I can't get from anyone else.

Last year I was contemplating leaving a cushy job that I had upended my life to land to start my own business in an unstable economy. Everyone was telling me, quite logically,

that I was insane. People were genuinely afraid for me. I needed someone who would tell me it was a great idea and go balls to the wall with it. So I called Arno. He did not fail me.

In fact, he sweetened the deal.

He told me about his new endeavor: a monthly online magazine dedicated to promoting basic human goodness and diversity appreciation. He invited me to write for it and I gladly accepted. As the project progressed, it was clear he was going to need all hands on deck, so I threw myself into it with love not only for Arno but also for the mission. We put out our first issue as co-editors on January 18th, 2010, the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday, and are fast approaching our first anniversary issue. As I've seen the sincerity behind every decision he makes for the organization and the complete calm with which he approaches every person who doubts his change of heart, I've come to realize just how special a person Arno Michaels is, and just what an important role he has in the future of race relations in America and abroad.

Since launching the online magazine, opportunities to reach out to people affected by violence have zoomed at us from every direction. We get e-mails from people touched by the magazine content who are looking to change their lives as well. Arno mentors teens in the Summer of Peace Initiative, a Milwaukee-based movement to instill in kids a sense of self-worth and community engagement, whose founder Tanya has become a friend and mentor to our organization. He does public speaking, sharing his story to persuade others to walk away from violence and toward love for the human race. Through my SpeakUP & SpeakOUT project, Life After Hate has touched the lives of many women by providing them a forum. They use their voice by sharing writing about domestic violence. Some just come and listen. We have writing workshops and many other collaborative projects in the works also.

As a result of falling into each other's lives and having the grace to recognize how we could most be loving and useful to one another, Arno and I have not only figured out how to love ourselves and other people, and to change our own destinies, but also how to invite each and every one of you to do the same.

In the years since that Cinco de Mayo date, I mastered the impulse to fall back on a man, acquired the new impulse to run from all of them, and then mastered that impulse, too. Arno moved past the self-doubt that stood in his way and now we stand, shoulder to shoulder, as kind warriors teaching others how to love others by loving themselves. We encounter people every day who find the courage to pull themselves up and out of dark, desolate holes because we have the courage to talk about how we got out of ours. We come together for family suppers with our significant others, children, and Life After Hate brothers and sisters and marvel at how those tentative first steps turned into next steps, and how each subsequent footfall brought us miles from where we started. Our hearts thrill to think of where the next steps will lead.

You're invited to join us on our journey. ..

-Angie Aker

Co-Editor, Life After Hate

for my mom
my dad
my little brother
my aunt Geri and uncle Bob
my grandparents

and most of all
for my daughter

my life after hate

by Arno Michaels

(In the interest of privacy, names and identifying characteristics of some individuals have been changed.)

1: dolor

Discussing the horrendous things I've done is a painful process. When I feel pain, I'm prone to lashing out. Early drafts of this were rife with jabs at people who had nothing to do with the story of me being a skinhead. I'd just as soon not tell you this, 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. 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? The pain in question flares when I relive things that I'm horrified I've done. Hurt that hurt made can propagate if we're unable to let it pass.

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 can acknowledge the painful nature of life and embrace the opportunity it presents. The "good pain" can be sorted from the bad. The pain of others can be soothed. Or we can remain in constant and futile flight from pain with no regard for who gets trampled along the way.

It would be a constructive process if I could learn from the pain itself. By tweaking the focus of the lens, I can learn how to recognize the occasions when pain is necessary and how to make better choices in the future. So often I find myself getting upset about things that aren't important. The situation worsens as ire saps available energy for things that

are vital. Thought, love, and empathy 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. 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 in the beginning. Once the nourishment of constructively coping with pain is realized, the process becomes consistently easier and more rewarding. *Life After Hate* isn't 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.

I had lost my mind for a good long stretch. Compassion brought me back as it was given to me and as I learned to give it back. Please talk about the mindless things I've done with your friends—or better yet, perceived enemies. We've all done mindless things, but also smart things, and amazing things. Let's share our experiences with honest openness and see if we can help each other out in the process.

2: why

Why Life After Hate? To help people learn to set aside their prejudices and embrace differences.

Being a guy with an imposing presence and a lot of tattoos, I face more prejudice than most white people. I realize that I'm a bit of an eyesore. But beyond the surprised first glances, my appearance tends to evoke vibes of fear, disgust, disdain. People have corralled their young children at the sight of me, as if I'm likely 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, there are those who still pre-judge me as being a racist. Within a span of seconds, many people make up their minds that the world would be a better place if I weren't in it.

But I volunteered for my tattoos.

You don'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. The most brutal chattel slavery in human history. I'll never comprehend being penned up in an impoverished reservation on land that was once sovereign domain. I'll never know how it feels to be denied because of the color of your skin or because of where you came from. 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*, they'll think twice before pre-judging people for whatever reason. Had you the misfortune of crossing my path 20 years ago, I probably would have garnered an instant and condemning prejudice. But I changed for the better.

If there can be hope for me, there can be hope for anyone. And considering that I have 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 *My Life After Hate* is merely a glimpse of the monster that I was, and that it hurts me even more than it hurts you. *My Life After Hate* is basically a 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 though, *My Life After Hate* is my apology to the world.

In 1988, I was a founding member of what went on to become the largest white power skinhead organization on Earth. In 2007, over a decade since I came to my senses, I was approached by a German skinhead online 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. I never replied. Until now.

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. Everyone I hurt.

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.

3: 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 have 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 racist 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 racist 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 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 survivors 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?*"

4: lead pipe

“I've had it with that fucking mouse.”

“It's a rat, dude. ...I'm pretty sure it's a rat.”

I sat on a dilapidated couch in-between Clayton and Pat, forming a trio of shaven heads further uniformed by steel-toed Doc Martin boots and flight jackets. In front of us was an old-school, dresser-sized console television. The TV only had one channel, which was whatever the rodent in the terrarium that had taken the place of the picture tube was doing at the moment. There was a time when we had cable, but it was shut-off when beer money was deemed a priority over paying the cable bill. Just to make sure Time-Warner Cable knew I wasn't fucking around, I had kicked-out the tube sometime in the preceding blur. That was great fun at the time, but when the dust and shards of glass settled, we realized how much we missed having something utterly meaningless to stare at, hence the rat-cage.

I had just returned from the sand-nigger-mart on the corner where I had procured a pack of Newport 100s and a 40-ounce bottle of Red Bull malt liquor for myself, and a pack of Winstons and a can of Coke for Pat. Clayton was somehow more penniless than Pat and me and was thus left to scavenge butts from the ashtray and hope for some kind of beer windfall later in the evening. The stale ingrained stench of beer and tobacco freshened for the moment as I cracked my 40 and fired up a niggerette, making sure to cut a celtic cross into the filter first in a mindless ritual of defiance. Any time I got shit for smoking menthol, which was constantly, I would point out that any commonality with blacks was nullified by

my thumbnailed brand of white pride. There wasn't anything I could do to purify the malt liquor, but that particular contradiction was lost in wanton drunken violence along with everything else.

The rundown house we were sitting in at 700 E. Wright St. was nicknamed “The 700 Club.” We all derived great amusement at the idea of our rapidly deteriorating den of debauchery sharing a moniker with that shitbag Jesus-nut scam on TV—the ones that still had picture tubes at least. Visitors were assailed upon arrival for heartfelt donations in our namesake's honor, but we felt we were more forthright about the future use of such monies (beer), than 'ol Pat Robertson was.

Pat O'Malley and I lived at The 700 Club with Clayton and a dwindling number of punk rockers who were systematically being driven out via plagues and horrors such as the thoughtless eating of their vegetarian hotdogs. As the punk rockers fled, we would shoe-in one of a long list of hovering transient skinheads to take their place. The rat/mouse/whatever-it-was that lived in the TV belonged to Mike McQueen, one of the last surviving punk rockers we were hellbent to displace. On Pat's lap was a kitten that my crazy cat-lady aunt had just given to me. We had lovingly named him “Bully”, after learning that British skinheads sometimes referred to themselves as “Bully Boys.”

“How fast do you think Bully would kill the rat?” Pat wondered.

“Shit, one minute and it gets its neck broke.” I said.

Clayton begged to differ. “I dunno. Bully's just a kitten.”

Pat was unimpressed. “He's gonna fuck up the rat like I'm gonna fuck you up!”

“Heh! Only one way to find out, huh Paddy O?” I chuckled, amused by the prospect of changing the channel so-to-speak..

“You know it bro...” and Pat got up to put the cat in the mouse cage. The three of us watched intently to see Bully catch the rat in his mouth, then shake it in an efficient neck-breaking motion. Howling in approval and focused on the aftermath, we were surprised by the door opening as our roommate Brian walked in with John, a bunch of his West Bend crew, and a wicked-cold blast of Wisconsin winter air.

Brian wasn't necessarily a punk rocker, but he wasn't a skinhead like we were either. He was one of the original members of our 700 Club, a bit older than we were, and more than a bit jaded and elitist about his personal history in the Milwaukee counter-culture scene. He had this fucked-up notion that you could be a skinhead and not be white power. That was the root of more and more disagreements as Pat and I changed the complexion of The 700 Club from a punk-infused collective to a swastika-flying skinhead headquarters. We had outlived our own punk phases over the past year and were busily involved in the transition to a nationwide white racist movement without really understanding what we were getting into. All we knew was that beloved fights happened when walking down the street sporting white power t-shirts and a closely-shaven #1 crop. Blind-drunk on 150-proof hostility, we had finally found the ultimate expression of our hate for society, and we strove to inspire a like hatred in all who would listen.

John and his boys were also a bit on the fence, but seemed to lean toward Pat and me for old-times' sake, since I had been drinking and street-fighting alongside them for a few years by then.

Brian, who liked Bully and didn't really like the rat, got a kick out of the new TV channel. “What the fuck are you guys doing?!” he guffawed. “Holy shit, Queenie's gonna go

ballistic! Haha! How long have you been drinking Arno? Jesus Christ.”

John was a bit disgusted with our newfound bloodsport but grinning nonetheless. “In other news, apparently there's a hippie house party tonight.”

My ears pricked up at the mention of the hippie house. It was a lower flat a few houses north of Pizza Man restaurant on Oakland Avenue, known for its parties. Parties that featured relatively large amounts of beer to drink, pretty girls to bother, and hippies to beat up. A veritable skinhead shangri-la if there ever was one. But we had been summarily banned from setting foot on the property after a window-breaking incident that went down a few weeks earlier.

“They'll call the cops the minute we get there. It's too cold for that shit.”

Brian replied, “We just saw Cindy on Downer, and she said it's cool and that they're gonna have a few barrels. We just can't break anything.”

“And they're gonna have barrels.” John added.

Pat was already lacing up his boots. “That Cindy wants my cock. You assholes should all be glad I'm such a fucking stud or you wouldn't have anything to drink tonight.”

I slammed the rest of my 40 and belched as I coaxed another Newport from the pack and fired it up. Clayton freed Bully from the late rodent's abode and set him on the couch to savor his meal.

John had brought a 12 of Meister Brau with him that we felt obliged to finish before we left, but only after verifying that we collectively had enough money to get more beer on the way for later on. The 9 p.m. beer curfew in Milwaukee had ingrained upon us the necessity of planning ahead for beer, if nothing else in our lives. Over the short time we had been lacing up and downing the Meister Brau, our crew had swelled to almost 20, and the witching hour of 9 p.m. was upon us.

I let rip another robust burp and called the mission to order by calling shotgun in John's Chevette.

“You ain't outside yet punk!” Pat laughed as he checked me into the door on his way past.

We piled as many people as possible into John's car and the rusted-out VW Fox belonging to the chubby girl who we let hang around only because she had a car and would occasionally cough up some beer money. There was a brutal wind whipping through the city that December night in 1987, the kind that tears at every area of exposed skin and stuffs a large number of skinheads into two smallish cars in a matter of seconds. Pat and I traded blows as we scrambled for the car door. We settled for both squeezing into the front seat after the back had been stuffed with our comrades. A hand poked out from the pile in the back holding out a battered cassette marked “Oi!” in black magic marker. A muffled voice, presumably that of the hand's owner, said “Pop this shit in man—” and Pat maneuvered his torso enough to oblige.

Following the clack into the tape deck was a banging of bar chords and simple yet frenetically powerful drumbeats that conjured the thickly accented voice of some very pissed-off British guy who proclaimed “...*get out of our way or get took for a ride...we've just got violence, IN OUR MINDS!!*” John's car shook and rolled as we all rocked out to the extent that the cramped quarters would allow and shouted along in agreement. The combination of body heat and car heat took the bite off the chill by the time we had traveled the six blocks out of Riverwest and crossed the bridge over the Milwaukee River to the East Side, where the college bars and generally more interesting scenes existed.

“Goddammit John, it's almost NINE!” I didn't even have a watch or really know what time it was, but my drunkysense told me that NINE O'CLOCK was treacherously near, and the prospect of not having a case of beer to drink later on loomed heavy on my soul.

Screeching to a halt outside Open Pantry, John admonished me, “Settle down man! Look, your boyfriend’s even working tonight. I bet he would totally sell you beer any time for a shot at that fine ass of yours.”

Raucous laughter erupted from the peanut gallery as I reached around Pat’s head to slap the back of John’s, then fell out of the car as Pat opened the door. The gay guy was working. He never knew what to make of me when I went in there with pockets full of nickels and dimes to exchange for cases of Huber (The Skinhead War Beer). I was openly hostile to him, as I was to any faggots I came across, but I always stopped short of really fucking with him as long as I got my beer. I think he just didn’t want any trouble and thus put up with my blatantly underage alcohol purchases rather than find out what would happen if he carded me. Or maybe he just wanted me to drink myself to death, which I was clearly doing at the tender age of 17. Just to keep the queer in line, I glared at him as I passed the counter and bee-lined for the beer coolers. In a flash, and with my eyes on the Marlboro clock that indicated a time of 8:57 p.m., I plunked three twelve packs of Huber in front of the register and began the arduous process of hauling enough change and tattered singles out of my pockets to settle up.

“Not AGAIN,” sighed the faggot clerk.

It seemed like he was being extra-femmy on purpose. I really wanted to just reach across the counter and belt him one but knew that a reliable source of beer purchasing was way too valuable to endanger by such trivial but tempting violence.

“It’s all money.”

“And who has to count it?”

“You, if you wanna get paid for this beer.”

“Well, I guess I need the change anyway, when the crackheads come in for the single smokes.”

That almost made me crack a smile, which made me shudder to think that I was standing there having a dialogue with a homo. After snowplowing a mountain of change over the counter, I gathered my alcohol and tobacco and hurried off for the door, which was blocked by a couple of entering gangbangers. I paused long enough to catch their eyes and simply said “Nigger” as I stared them down. I figured they must have been aware of the two carloads of my buddies outside, because they just shook their heads and proceeded into the store. I pivoted for a moment, arms full of beer, to make sure they knew that I was happy to oblige if they wanted to fight.

John honked his horn, and I looked out to see Pat shrugging in front of a back seat stuffed with hands, all gesturing for me to go. My thoughts turned back to the hippie house and the possible trifecta of beer, pussy, and knuckles that awaited me there. Getting drunk(er) and getting in a fight would do if I had to settle for 2 out of 3.

I wedged myself back into the front seat, and we drove the remaining three blocks to the hippie house, which was close enough to a very popular intersection to make parking a royal bitch. After circling a few times, John finally gave up on any sort of decent parking place, which left us with another two blocks to sprint to our destination. We might as well have parked at the damn Open Panty. I left the beers in John's car, intending to drink all the hippies' beer and return home to drink mine later on. The rusty VW had parked about as far down another street, and our two half-crews collided to form a whole one and stampede the final half-block to the hippie house itself.

“Holy SHIT, it's cold!!” someone lamented as a platoon of boots and shaven heads thundered onto the front porch.

I was first to the door, so I did the honors of banging on it almost hard enough to break it down in tribute to our common freezing status. Nicole, Cindy's roommate—who not

only did not want Pat's cock but who didn't want anything to do with any of us whatsoever—opened the door a crack and peered out from behind the chain.

“Fuck you guys!” she said. “You better leave like fucking yesterday, or I'm calling the cops!”

Pat turned on the Irish charm as best he could while his teeth chattered, “Hey Nicole, Cindy invited us. We'll be cool, I promise! We're turning blue out here, can't we come in for one just to warm up?”

Nicole wasn't having any of it, “Fuck that, Pat; Cindy's not here, and you Nazi scumbags better leave NOW or I'm calling the cops!” And with that, the door slammed shut in my face.

There was a demonstrative securing of the door lock, and we were left on the porch. Not ready to give up our dream of free beer and smutty women despite being firmly shut-down by Nicole, we kept beating on the door as if that would somehow sweeten the deal for them. For a split second, it seemed as if the cop-knocking actually had inspired a change of heart when the door opened a crack. But instead of naked drugged-out hippie girls with multiple frosty mugs of beer in their arms, a lone lead pipe flashed out in a swooping arc that ran perpendicular to my forehead, which instantly busted open as the two objects met. I remember a reverberating “*DONNGGGG!*” sound, like a church bell ringing, then seeing the pipe bounce off my head in slow motion.

Instinctively, I reached up and caught the pipe, forcing my way through the door at the same time. The person who hit me was a little hippie guy. He was quite surprised to find me coming at him, and desperately trying to pull the pipe and himself as far away from me as possible. Holding the pipe in my right hand, I grabbed him by the collar with my left and used his body to force my way into the living room. My boys piled in behind me as the party attendees withdrew. There was a glass coffee table in the living room that I already had my

assailant backpedaling toward, so I kicked out his legs and sent him smashing through the table, following him down to land my elbow in his throat with a crunchy thud.

Coughing and gasping, he scrambled up, both hands still on the pipe, refusing to let go. I didn't know if he thought he was going to get another crack at me or if he knew that if I got the pipe I was going to return the favor with it. I was much bigger than him, and consumed with adrenaline and bloodlust, so it took almost no effort for me to throw Little Hippie Guy over the couch and pounce after him. He ended up on the floor, still gulping for air like a displaced goldfish and curled up in a fetal position around the pipe, as if not letting go of the pipe was going to save him somehow. Before he could scurry away, I straddled him, holding his head down by the hair with my left hand and pistoning punches to his face with my right. He was trying to curl his face into his torso to avoid the blows, but I kept yanking his head back by the hair to allow my fist unabated access to his nose, jaw, and eyes.

I had his arms pinned with my right leg and the rest of his body secured by my weight. It took me a few punches to get the optimum range dialed in, but once I did, his nose flattened, along with the rest of his face, which began to give way from the mechanical pounding of my fist. Blood was everywhere. I wasn't aware that the first blood spattering around his face got there by pouring from the gash in my head, but the sight of it propelled me into further frenzy, and soon his blood and my own became indistinguishable. It pooled around us and splashed across the room. I had forgotten about the pipe, effectively blind to all external stimuli, focused on nothing but repeatedly burying my fist deeper and deeper into his head.

Time stood still. I didn't know if 30 seconds or 30 minutes had passed since the church bell rang, but I didn't really care. There was no pain, just delicious rage and the feeling of omnipotence as I exacted revenge. I could feel the

pipe-swinger's body squirming in a futile attempt to free himself that grew weaker with each punch I landed. My right arm continued to autonomously fire at his face, long after it was clear that he was no longer a threat. Now my attention turned to what the fuck else was happening to identify any other possible threats. I realized that it wasn't just me and the guy who hit me; there were a bunch of terrified hippie-house denizens shrieking about the house, and my crew of skinheads took great pleasure in inspiring that terror as they took in the righteous beating I was administering. My boys didn't realize how badly I was hurt until they circled around. The laughter of my friends turned to rage as it became apparent that at least half of the blood that painted the room came from the gaping wound in my forehead.

Pat was the first to jump in. "*LOOK WHAT YOU DID TO MY BROTHER, MOTHERFUCKER!*" he roared, planting a steel-toed kick to Little Hippie Guy's face with all the force he could muster. Nobody fucked with Pat's family, and he and I were closer to each other than we were to our actual siblings. Pat's seventeen years were rife with violence, and all of it went into every kick landed on that sorry son of a bitch.

I adjusted the angle of my own blows to allow Pat's kicks access to his face. The focus of my fist moved to throat and jaw, while Pat's boot punted squarely again and again. The rest of my crew swarmed around and fought among themselves for suitable openings to deliver kicks of their own. Skinheads react as a pack in violent situations. The rest of the guys fed off the fury that had leaped from me to Pat to them like wildfire. We could all feel the group attack; it was as if a single murderous entity had been formed by the initial big bang of the pipe striking my head.

As the intensity of the retaliation peaked, its object had resigned himself to his fate. He had stopped squirming, crying and pleading. But my fist and the boots of my boys kept on

going. Little Hippy Guy's friends were powerless to intervene beyond huddling in the corners and shrieking for us to stop. I didn't know if it was too late. The thought occurred to me that the man I was sitting on was going to die. The notion had a clinical detachment to it at first, then zoomed in to a panicked thrill. The guy shouldn't have hit me! *What the fuck was he thinking?!* Everyone on the East Side knows who we are and what we do. Why would he think that there would be any other outcome? As he went limp, the pipe rolled from his grasp, unnoticed by any of us, to his great fortune.

Nicole, however, did notice the pipe. She picked it up, and in a lone showing of hippie courage took a girly, ineffective swing at Pat. The pipe thunked off Pat's back harmlessly, and he turned to address her, grabbing the pipe himself and swinging her around by it.

Finally someone bellowed, "COPS!!" which initiated our withdrawal.

First the flightier members of our squad broke off; the guys who were always on the periphery, never starting or ending fights themselves, but always happy to throw a boot in once it was on. Those guys snapped out of the communal bloodlust pretty quick when alerted to the possibility of police involvement.

John clarified, "*THEY'RE CALLING THE COPS!!*" Not actual cops on the scene just yet, but impending cops. Nonetheless, he saved my assailant's life with his alert.

Most of my crew had fled, leaving Pat and me winding down over the quasi-carcass of the Little Hippy Guy. I was still pounding away, unable to stop.

Finally Pat had to catch my arm and drag me up and off what was left of the pipe-swinger. "We gotta get the fuck out, bro—"

O'Malley was cool and collected despite the preceding chaos, even having the presence of mind to avoid saying my

name during a crime-time. Pat had the strange combination of a very short fuse yet uncommon level-headedness under pressure. I snapped out of my berzerk as Pat hauled me up, taking in the scene. The hippie house people were still lamenting, but beginning to de-huddle themselves out of the corners as my guys cleared out. My attacker-turned-victim was a destroyed heap in the center of a sparsely decorated bedroom off of the living room. I noticed the obligatory stench of patchouli mingling with the iron musk of blood, which was everywhere. Radiating from the former guy-with-the-pipe was a bloody supernova, thick and swirling around the area where he lay, becoming more nebulous as it spiraled outward and dispersed about the room in splashes and spatters. The taste of blood was so strong that I felt like I just chugged a big stein mug full.

I turned to Pat as we trotted out “Man, I think I got that kid's blood in my fuckin mouth—” spitting a mouthful on the door.

“It's probly your own blood, dude. Don't worry about it. We gotta get the fuck outta here.”

It wasn't until we were piling into John's car to make our getaway that I truly realized my injury's existence. Being a lifelong head-wound collector, I instinctively looked for some sort of material to use to apply pressure to stop the bleeding. My flight jacket would do nicely. The short ride back to The 700 Club was filled with laughter and excited retelling of kicks and punches. As the adrenaline wore off, my own blood loss began to take its toll, and I was pretty woozy when we got back to the house. I wobbled as I led the way in, a blood-covered illustration of the gory tale that was enthusiastically related by multiple guys to everyone who had missed the action. I was concentrating on getting to the bathroom to wash up and assess the damage to my skull. Our other roommate Pat, who was a bit of a hippie himself and thus proclaimed “Hippie Pat” in distinction from Pat O'Malley, had

a girlfriend who was some kind of med student, and she was getting all bent out of shape about me looking in the mirror.

She cried, “Don't let him look in the mirror, HE'LL GO INTO SHOCK!!” which we all thought was hilarious considering that we wallowed in violence regularly.

A flip of the bathroom light revealed my grim countenance in the filmy mirror. There was a gash approximately two inches long and maybe half that wide that had eased bleeding enough to reveal the white of my skull.

“Hey guys! I can see my own skull!!” I announced to the house in much the same manner as a kid announces the discovered contents of a highly anticipated Christmas present.

With a grin that complemented my wound, I emerged from the bathroom to proudly display the bone-showing laceration to admiring compatriots, who rewarded me with an ice-cold Huber that was accepted with true gratitude. There have been countless moments in my life when I was absolutely floored by just how great a beer tasted, and this was certainly one of the top 10. The beer was so delicious, in fact, that drinking about 20 to 30 more of them in succession became a necessity, but the aforementioned girlfriend of Hippy Pat, along with my skinhead brother Pat, prevailed on me to get to the emergency room for some repair. Once they agreed to the condition that I was allowed to bring a supply of Huber along for the ride, I got in Hippy Pat's girlfriend's car, and we headed for St. Mary's Hospital. I think I managed to down two or three more beers along the few miles there. I walked in the ER and went up to the reception desk where a nurse asked my name without looking up from her paperwork.

“Arni Nelson,” I replied, dusting off my trusty alias from reserve for occasions such as this.

“And what can we do for you?” she said, still not looking up.

“Well, let's see— For starters, I got this problem with my head—” which prompted a look up from the papers and a subsequent “OH WOW!” from the nurse, who scurried off to bring back a gurney and some ER jockeys to roll me into a room. I'm not sure if time flew because of the pleasant combination of alcohol intake and substantial blood loss or if they were just really on their shit that night in the St. Mary's ER, but the whole process of getting sewn up and sent on my way seemed to whiz by with an impressive quickness. I was back to the car and into another beer in relatively short order.

Back at our house, a full-blown party of our own had manifested. I spent the rest of the evening inhaling beer and alternating between relating the earlier events myself and showing off my stitches while other boot-party attendees related their versions. Miraculously, there was no visit from the police that night or at any other time in regard to the woeful pipe-wielding Little Hippie Guy. Most likely due to drug-related police-wariness on their part, I suspected. In the days that followed, we heard from here and there that the pipe-hitter survived but ended up spending a considerably longer time in the hospital than I did.

The next morning, which for me came in the afternoon, seemed eerily familiar as I sat between Clayton and Pat on the shitty beer-soaked green couch. This time I was a little more hung over, my headache was considerably worse, and now there was literally nothing on TV. It was even shittier without the rodent. I looked over to Pat, who had the cat on his lap again.

“I feel kinda bad about feeding that mouse to Bully . . .”

5: Ann Arbor

Apparently I pissed on Tina and her boyfriend the night before. The armored and barred Detroit bungalow was so packed with skinheads that the kitchen floor was the only place left for them to sleep. According to the testimony of multiple eyewitnesses, I had passed out crumpled in a corner after consuming every last drop of beer in the place, then later arose and took my dick out to swerve about the darkened house as if it would somehow point me to a toilet. Stubbing my boot on Tina's bleach-blonde head, she and the guy (Chris? Eric?) woke just in time to see me standing over them semi-conscious and proceeding to relieve myself in their faces. The testimony continues to reveal that strangely enough, Tina and (Carl?) didn't take kindly to being peed on and were in fact agitated enough to attack me, which they were about to do when Pat awoke to inform them and every other not-from-Milwaukee motherfucker in the house that I piss where ever the fuck I want to and if they didn't like it, we'd beat them to a bloody mess and piss on them again.

There were no takers among the 30 or so other skins who converged in Detroit that weekend to attend the annual rock-throwing festival known as the "Ann Arbor Nazi Rally". All of them instead chose to join Pat in laughing at Tina and whats-his-face as they shed their pissed-up clothes and sleeping bag. Meanwhile, I had stumbled through the basement door and tumbled down the stairs unscathed as only the blind-drunk can. Upon righting myself at the bottom, I shuffled over to the dryer, opened it, and pissed some more on the clothes it contained before collapsing alongside in a pile of lint and empty generic detergent boxes. I awoke sometime

when the sun was shining through the heavily barred basement window to the not-so-gentle nudge of Pat's boot.

“Good morning sunshine! Get your drunk ass up. Jane's cooking eggs, you better get some before they piss in yours! Hahaha!”

I grumbled something barely coherent about more beer then allowed myself to be summoned to the kitchen. I didn't remember pissing on Tina and didn't really give a shit when she confronted me about it, shrugging the whole incident off and suggesting that she get to the fucking liquor store to replenish the beer supply.

Our comrades from Detroit, Chicago, and various parts of Ohio had been subjugated by the combination of my drunken barbarism and Pat's strong-armed endorsement of it. They would have followed us to raise a flag on some meaningless numbered Iwo Jima hill amidst a hail of machine gun fire had we chose to lead them there. But instead, after a breakfast of eggs and potatoes (ham, bacon, and/or other meats were foregone to purchase more beer), we piled out of the house in an almost comical clown-car stream to pack into a few vehicles and head for our rendezvous with “The SS Action Group”.

As we travelled cross-town in Detroit, I noticed that the vast majority of houses and buildings had plywood or bricks where windows were supposed to be—the ones that weren't burnt-out husks that is. The few places that did have windows were barricaded like Fort Knox in the manner of the house I had just pissed all over. I pointed this out to my crew, explaining that that's what niggers do to a neighborhood and that it was our job to stop them, like an exterminator purging a roach infestation. Everyone nodded and vocalized their agreement as we affirmed our particular brand of activism and it's superiority to that of the crusty old-school white supremacists like the guys we were on the way to meet.

Dave Mentsoyan, the leader of DASH (the Detroit Area Skinheads), called them the “SS Acid Group” in sarcastic homage to their affinity for LSD. Dave was only able to tell us this and other things after a lengthy explanation of his Armenian heritage and corresponding swarthy skin-color. We were still wary of keeping company with someone who would look so at home wearing a turban, but gradually warmed up to him after witnessing his valor in the coming confrontation and hearing other respected skinheads vouch on his behalf. Dave also claimed that his grandfather had personally rounded up Jews while serving in an Armenian SS group during WWII, so if Armenians were good enough for Hitler I guess they were good enough for us.

Our opinion of Ken Dunn and his SS Action Group headed in the other direction, and faster as we spent more time with them.

Arriving at Dunn's ramshackle house in the Western Suburbs, we were greeted by one of his toadies who was dressed in a full-blown SS uniform. He was the type of dork who I shook down for lunch money every day in high school, emboldened by our presence and his swastika armband. Pat and I looked at each other and exchanged smirks and eye-rolls as we returned the salute given by the loser who would more likely have been smashed by the real SS rather than recruited. We followed him into the house, where we met all 6 of the other SS Action Group members, all of them in full regalia. Ken Dunn himself rose to welcome us wearing the meticulously pressed and adorned uniform of a high-ranking SS officer, which produced a kind of gay S&M effect when teamed with his neatly trimmed beard and ponytail. My first thought upon seeing him was that if he dared to display a condescending bent-arm salute, the kind reserved for only Hitler and his inner circle, I was going to knock him the fuck out and lead my boys in a vicious stomp of his unconscious body. But Dunn knew better, this day not being his first picnic

with skinheads, and shot up his right arm in a crisp, full salute which we again returned.

“Hail Hitler my *white brothers!* Thank you for traveling to *join our struggle!* You men look like you can *handle yourselves.* Are you ready to *smash some reds?*” He spoke with an uncomfortable quasi-monotone that wavered towards the end of each sentence.

A small dusty TV looped a VHS copy of *Triumph of the Will* in the living room behind him. I got the feeling that Ken and the other 6 members of the Fourth Reich spent the bulk of their leisure wearing out Leni Riefenstahl's work of Hitlerama while spun out of their gourds on robust biker acid. Dunn had the fucked-up demeanor of a life-long loser with zero public-speaking ability who nonetheless spent hours in front of a bathroom mirror desperately trying to channel the intense manner of Adolph Hitler. His dwindling handful of followers remained so only because they were somehow lamer than him.

“Reds and anyone else who wants some.” I casually replied, noticing the hollowness behind Ken's shifty blue eyes. I saw a man who had nothing to offer the world. Someone who had failed time and again since a most likely shitty dysfunctional childhood and now, in his mid-life, had nothing but silly costumes and Hitler footage to cling to. Yet my brothers and sisters and I had travelled 8 hours to take part in his shindig. Why was that? Well, for starters, our DASH boys were the ones who invited us, and it was great to meet them in person after a series of post-office-box correspondence. And the idea of an epic brawl with Jews, communists, queers, and all manner of non-white filth was too tempting to pass up. Prior to that day, none of us had first-hand experience in an actual public white power rally. So there we were, reluctantly allowing ourselves to be led into battle by a pathetic long-haired druggie.

Pat was right beside me and also staring down Dunn. “You just show us where they are and we’ll take care of shit Milwaukee-style.” He said with an assured confidence.

“Excellent! That’s what we *like to hear!* You’ll see that aside from going to *different barbers*, the SS Action Group has much in common with *skinheads*; we both prefer *action over words!*” Dunn’s eyes remained emotionless as his face pantomimed what I think was supposed to be a smile to match Pat’s sincere one.

Ken Dunn made my skin crawl, and I could feel the remnants of my blood-alcohol unpleasantly metabolizing, so I left him to Pat and went to talk to Dave about the beer situation, which we got sorted in short order. About 5 of us made the trip to the beer store and back, bristling at the countless blacks and arabs we saw along the way. Every day was a rally when you were a skinhead. We didn’t play dress-up one day a year and then fade back into mundane society when the dust settled. As much as Dunn liked to portray his motley bunch as akin to ours, we all knew that the bold brotherhood of skinheads heralded a new dawn for the white power movement. Not to mention we were simply that much cooler than everyone else.

A 26’ U-Haul sat outside the house upon our return. The rear door was open and the skinheads that were piling in raised a rousing cheer at the sight of the beer we carried. As we were loading the cases of Milwaukee’s Best, the SS Acid Group was raising a cache of what looked like shields from Ken’s basement. Upon closer inspection, they were indeed shields, fashioned from stolen stop-signs spray-painted black, with neatly duct-taped swastikas on the business side and handles made from bits of garden hose bolted on the other. I grabbed one and hefted it. It felt good. Doing my best to conceal a glimmer of respect for the SS Action Dorks, I said to Ken, “These are pretty cool. What do we need them for?”

Then noticing the motorcycle helmets he and his bunch toted, I deduced the answer before he replied, “Oh, you'll be glad to have those! The reds will be assaulting us from afar with rocks and bricks and *whatever else they can dig up!* They are cowards who are terrified to engage in close combat with *Aryan Warriors!* Teddy will also be around to *hand out the batteries.*”

“Batteries?!”

“Yes sir! We of The SS Action Group save our dead batteries all year long *for this occasion!* You can *throw them at the reds!*”

“Heh! Right on. I'll take a bunch.”

With flight jacket pockets full of corroded C and D cells, I climbed up into the U-Haul to settle in sitting on my shield with a beer in each hand. Over the course of the hour ride to Ann Arbor, we inhaled beer while trading glorious war stories. Dave's boys proudly told of his signature move, “The Mentsoyan Stomp”, which involved jumping off the hood, sometimes roof, of a parked car to land boots on a downed opponent's head. Dave himself just smiled sheepishly in response. I made a mental note to try that technique myself the next time an opportunity arose. Not to be outdone, Pat skalded the tale of our recent hippie house boot party, elaborating on my juggernaut performance after being clocked with a lead pipe. Illustrating the story with my still-healing scar to prove it, I was interrupted by Tina, who quipped, “. . .let me guess, then you pissed on him?”

The excited drunken laugh shared by the lot of us was rudely interrupted by a deafening THUNK that shook the truck. We felt the truck slow down and were shaken by more thunderous banging from outside, in increasingly rapid succession. It sounded like it was raining bowling balls. Pat and I gave each other a pre-fight check-in glance and looked around to our crew to make sure everyone was ready. The small window to the cab slid open to reveal Ken's helmeted

mug. “Welcome to Ann Arbor comrades!” He beamed, this time sounding quite authentic.

The muffled roar of a huge angry crowd accompanied the booming impact of whatever heavy objects were barraging the U-Haul, a roar that rose to suck up all other sounds as the rear door was slid open to reveal a double-line of riot cops between us and a seething rainbow mob that clamored for our blood. Ken had a bullhorn in one hand and his shield in the other. “ARYAN WARRIORS: *MOVE OUT!*” he droned through it, as we poured out of the truck and proceeded in the only direction available—a narrow causeway between walls of police that led in front of a huge glass-walled Federal building. Glass-walled?! Did the cops under-estimate the protesters?

Pat and I each got to either side of our Milwaukee crew and raised our shields to protect them as well as ourselves, even though they had shields of their own, as we hustled to the designated spot; a smallish raised area better suited to guitar players with slowly but steadily growing piles of coin and small bills gracing their open guitar cases than a besieged lot of skinheads and dipshits in SS get-ups.

We ultimately formed a line in front of a banner held up by the SS Acid guys that said **WHITE REVOLUTION IS THE ONLY SOLUTION** along with their P.O. Box. The banner was canvas, and stretched tight enough to bounce the hail of rocks that hit it to land on our backs. The relentless assault of bricks and rocks coming from the front was much more of a concern though. I hopped as a chunk of asphalt beamed my knee. They were literally tearing up the fucking sidewalk and throwing it at us!

I peeked to either side of my shield, looking for a target to sidearm an Energizer at. The mass of protesters stretched as far as I could see, at least in the quick glimpses I dared to take. They carried banners of their own, saying things like **DIE NAZI SCUM!** and **NEVER AGAIN!** along with rainbow flags and of course red ones with hammers and black

fists and things about WORKERS written on them. Best of all were the numerous peace signs that prevailed amongst the bloodthirsty black, white, yellow, and brown mob. A white guy about my age with stringy whipping blonde dreadlocks and a tie-dyed Grateful Dead shirt was screaming so hard it looked like he was about to have an aneurysm. Just as he fired a sidewalk-chunk that narrowly missed Jane, smashing into the glass building behind us, I zeroed-in on him and whipped a battery that flew wildly off-target to land somewhere deep in the crowd.

Dunn paced back and forth between us and the banner, yelling through the bullhorn about race-mixers and Jews. That inflection at the end of his phrases remained throughout, amplified and distorted and even more irritating. “WHITE PEOPLE OF *ANN ARBOR*: THIS IS THE *SS ACTION GROUP*! WE ARE HERE TO EXPOSE THE JEWISH CONSPIRACY *AGAINST OUR PEOPLE*! YOU CAN JOIN WITH US OR BE CRUSHED BY THE COMING *WHITE REVOLUTION!*!”

The mob became somehow even more enraged as Dunn rambled on, surging against the police line. There's no doubt in my mind they would have torn us limb-from-limb if given the chance. The SS Acid Batteries we brought began to fly back at us, as we gathered stones and cement from the ground and recycled likewise. The sound of shattering glass highlighted the din of the confrontation as more and more of the windows behind us became casualties. More than a few of our shaved heads were marked with blood from flying broken glass, batteries, rocks, bricks, you name it, as were the faces of our adversaries. I was beginning to wonder how much longer the cops could hold the commies back when they began to corral us back towards the U-Haul.

I was exhilarated! The drunken self-destructive part of me was itching to go wading into the crowd of blacks and Jews with my shield and a D-cell fortified fist despite the

overwhelming odds, but considering that we had Jane and Tina and a bunch of other girls with us, not to mention the desperate pleading of the elusive self-preservation part of me, I helped clear a path for withdrawal instead.

Our escape route was rapidly collapsing as the peace-loving protesters clawed their way past the cops. A Jewish-looking man slipped through and took a swing at one of the SS Acid guys. Dave jumped between them and swung his shield to catch the Jew in the mouth with the edge of it, knocking a bunch of his teeth out. He turned to put himself between us and the mob. Pat and I joined him, alternately throwing punches and rocks and we backed into the truck. The three of us were the last ones in, jumping up as it pulled away. Something heavy skipped off my head and I kicked back at hands grabbing for my boots as my crew hoisted me to safety. The truck accelerated and we hung out the back, saying goodbye to our new friends with defiant salutes as the last rocks sent us off.

After we shut the door and got underway, I cracked a beer and gave myself a going-over to assess damage. I had a mean knot on my right knee and another on the back of my head, along with a bunch of small cuts in various stages of bleeding. Nothing serious, especially considering the hundred-to-one odds. Everyone was busy telling their version of the melee in frantic but relieved voices. I was slamming beers as usual, but unusually quiet as I contemplated the hypocrisy I had just witnessed.

Holy shit did those people hate us! So much for free speech. These motherfuckers were screaming for our blood while waving rainbows and peace signs in the air! Peace and love as long as you behave. As long as you conform and accept the multi-racial dogma. If you dare to think for yourself and stand up for your folk then they'll peace and love you all the way to a prison cell, or a grave. Anyone with the audacity to question the status quo was portrayed as a monster. We

enraged them because we had the guts to stand up. To fight back. It made me think that everything I was reading about race and the Jews was spot-on.

During the 6 months leading up to that day, I had devoured an intense regimen of streetfighting, studying racial ideology, and obscene alcohol consumption. It was almost eerie how the further down that road I went, the more society would seem to vindicate my burgeoning racial awareness.

I felt an ominous sense of my coming role in this struggle.

6: Martyr's Day

Facing a massive bonfire, I stood with my arm raised in a crisp Nazi salute. My crew of Northern Hammer Skinheads and our Confederate Hammer comrades mirrored the salute as we formed a ring around the fire.

The date was December 8th, 1988. We were celebrating Martyr's Day in a forest about 50 miles outside of Tulsa, Oklahoma. I watched the stout muscular silhouette of Jim Denko pace around the fire as he spoke with a determined fury about the man we came to pay tribute to.

In 1983 Robert J. Matthews founded the Brüder Schweigen, or “Silent Brotherhood”; a small cadre of hardened men also known as “The Order”, who declared war against the United States government in the name of the white race.

The roaring flames of the bonfire reflected in our eyes as we stood sweltering in its heat that drove back the cold damp night. Denko gestured in a grandiose arc as he described the men of The Order gathered around one of their infant daughters, raising their arms as we were as they swore an oath to protect her and all white children from the horrors of the mud races.

A year before this night I was just a hooligan, in it for the drinking and fighting. That night a surrogate of Robert Matthews burned a searing love for my race into my soul, amplifying the torrid romance with exponential violence. I spun recollections of the senseless brawls and beatings that bloodstained my hands, until they became glorious acts of heroism. Just like the Brüder Schweigen, I was a valiant warrior defending my race against the Jews, who tirelessly sought to bury my people under a stinking tide of mud-races. I

convinced myself that I cared about that symbolic white baby, in order to fuel my thirst for violence.

As Denko passionately elaborated on the Jewish plan for our genocide, my brow furrowed and nostrils flared. Adrenaline surged through my body at the thought of tearing the Jews and niggers limb from limb with my bare hands. Hearing of Robert Matthews being burned alive by federal agents, each of his charred hands still on the triggers of assault rifles, evoked an overwhelming need to avenge him and ultimately join him in Valhalla after dying in battle myself.

With a resounding climatic vigor, Jim Denko spoke the Fourteen Words;

“We must secure the existence of our people, and a future for white children!”

50 of us repeated in a single thundering voice, then spontaneously answered, “HAIL ROBERT MATTHEWS! HAIL THE ORDER!” as our salutes raised up and down in perfect unison.

When the day comes, we will not ask whether you swung to the right or whether you swung to the left; we will simply swing you by the neck.

7: hall · fire · razor

The Hall was a complex of buildings on the corner of 4th Street and Greenfield Avenue on Milwaukee's predominately Hispanic Near-South Side.

I was in an efficiency in the corner-most building, behind that was a cottage that Will Thompson and his girl Dena were renting, and just to the north of them, on Greenfield, was another cottage where Matt Thompson and Brett lived. Since the moment we moved in, there was a collective housewarming party that revolved from host to host and seemed to remain in full effect indefinitely.

After a particularly sloshed Friday night, I was awakened by a call from Will; "Arno: you better get up! That house next door to you is on fire –your fuckin' place is gonna burn down!"

Still in a stupor, I slammed the phone down and wrote it off as Will thinking he was cute waking me up at the ungodly hour of 9:00 am on a Saturday. I was fading back into inebriated slumber when my door shook with a frantic pounding. Stumbling out of the rummage-sale sleeper-sofa I called a bed, I noticed ravenous leaping flames immediately outside my back window. Will, Matt, and Brett piled in as I opened the door and started grabbing my few things worth saving, which consisted of a battered TV and a few milk-crates full of clothes and Dungeons & Dragons books. I was already carrying my shotgun, which I slept with anyway, and after snatching-up the army surplus ammo box full of slugs and 00 buckshot shells, I chased after the guys back to Matt and Brett's to complete the evacuation.

Firefighters were already on the scene, hammering the blaze with a battery of turgid hoses. Beams of pressurized water transfixed the house next-door to mine, while the raging fire angrily fought back from within. Glass rained down as the rear upper window exploded to release boiling steam byproduct of the tangling flame and fluid. As the firefighters pelted the burning house from every angle, stray streams smashed the 2nd story window in Will's house, sending water by the hundreds of gallons to flood it. Fortunately, the bulk of their stuff had been cleared from the house already. We scrambled in for a final sweep of valuables before the place was completely waterlogged. Still being wasted from the night before turned the hurried emergency chore into an adventure.

We had been on a rockabilly kick for the past few weeks, so Brett had a Jerry Lee Lewis tape handy and blasting *Great Balls of Fire* seemed to be the natural choice of a soundtrack. We all sang along, laughing as we settled on to Brett and Matt's back porch to crack the few remaining beers and enjoy the spectacle.

The displaced occupants of the burning house weren't as amused by our choice of music as we were. They were a black family, consisting of maybe 2 or 3 sisters and some ridiculous amount of kids between them. We were firmly convinced that they were a group of welfare warriors commuting between Milwaukee and Chicago for the better Wisconsin benefits.

The truth of our bigoted assumption was never fully established, but they never seemed to go to work and there was a consistent amount of turnover, so there were observations to support the theory. They all got out safely, but they weren't as fortunate as we were to have rescued their belongings. There was much shrieking and carrying-on over lost possessions, and we didn't make the slightest effort to conceal our amusement at their plight, responding to their angry shouts with gleeful raised fingers and beers. A fresh

chorus of cackles erupted each time Brett rewound the tape to keep *Great Balls of Fire* looping in accompaniment.

The enormous black women were easily mad enough to attack us, and I was pondering how to react to that when the white-trash landlady we had dubbed “The Land-Hag” came rolling up in her jacked-up F150.

She was this hideously ugly woman from somewhere up north where we all assumed there was some sort of trailer complex she originated from. Brett would specifically point out every time she was mentioned that the fat of her gut hung down and had this kind of double-chinned pussy effect. It was particularly obvious and all the more-so disgusting and accentuated by the fact that she was partial to stuffing herself into very tight jeans. To top it off, she was very homely, had a horrible complexion, her breath stank, her teeth were yellow, and she had this stringy rat-hair along with a personality abrasive enough to strip paint. She was foolish enough to rent to us, so I guess we did appreciate that, but otherwise she was a typical slumlord who wouldn't have fixed any of the myriad hazards on her properties even if any of us were ever sober enough to notice them.

Immediately upon the Land-Hag's arrival, the ire of the Welfare Warriors turned from us to her. Heated accusations of arson flew, and before the Land-Hag could even plead her innocence, the punches flew as well.

Within moments there was this big raucous ghetto-black-welfare-family on up-north-white-trash-family catfight all over the sidewalk while the fire blazed on full bore. The firemen scrambled to keep the whole block from going up like a pile of barrio matchsticks and were successful in containing the original fire if not extinguishing it. One of them narrowly avoided being incinerated as the ladder he was on melted. He had to be snapped-up by a guy in a cherry-picker seconds before the ladder fell into the flames. With the firefighters thus engaged and ourselves busily drinking and heckling there was

no one to intercede in the Welfare Warrior vs. White Trash melee.

The Land-Hag and her daughter, who was just as ugly, but as scrawny as her mother was bulbous, were pretty much at the mercy of the large and actually pretty intimidating Welfare Warrior matriarchs. According to standard racist protocol we would have been behooved to jump-in on behalf of the white women, but considering our personal distaste for them and the unspoken but mutually acknowledged unwillingness to brawl a bunch of colossal black females, we chose instead to egg the fight on, shouting encouragement to combatants from both camps.

Land-Hag and daughter had been getting their asses whooped up and down the sidewalk for a good few minutes or so, when one of the black ladies ripped out a sizable chunk of ratty dirty-ass Land-Hag hair and waved it about wildly to accentuate the flying curses and charges of arson. We raised a cheer for the partial scalping as if it were a Superbowl-winning touchdown just as the police arrived and set about their perpetual task of fun-ruining. The Welfare Warriors dispersed in bittersweet homeless victory and the Hags fled the scene spitting gravel and smoking debris from 4x4 treads.

It took the firefighters the rest of the day to get the fire under control, and by the time they did, Will's cottage was utterly swamped. My building was quite soggy on the outside, but otherwise unscathed. The unoccupied apartment upstairs was the logical place for Will and Dena to go, while the entire double-digit roster of the Welfare Warriors piled into the 1-bedroom a thin wall away from my efficiency.

The entire place was a rundown roach motel. Everything was broke, everything was old. In my bathroom there was a fucked-up light fixture clawing its way out of the yellowed drop-ceiling. Showers of sparks celebrated my arrival every time the light switch was thrown. During rare moments of sobriety I would make mental notes to either leave the

bathroom light on or not turn it on in the first place. Then I would promptly submerge those and any other life-preserving notions in an ocean of beer until the sparks flew once again. The glaring fire hazard was but a tree in the forest of threats to my life that I ignored if not embraced, daring fate to come for me, perhaps in subconscious acknowledgement of the wrong I had become. I was one drunken piss away from immolation.

The lot of the Welfare Warriors stuffed into the rooms adjacent to mine made for quite a ruckus. If I would have been a normal hardworking guy who went to sleep at a reasonable time instead of when the beer ran out, I would have been pretty aggravated by the noise.

But as it was they were doing us a favor by serving as a living exhibit to prove whatever racist point that we were trying to make. Any time that someone would say that we were stretching truths or making unfair accusations about the living conditions of your typical black person, we would point to our kindly neighbors and the 20 of them living in a one bedroom apartment as if they were completely able to improve their situation but too lazy and stupid to do so.

We used them as a device to justify our ideology; not only while proselytizing but also during the constant internal reinforcement that racism requires. If you're going on a premise that the white race is something special and that it needs to be saved from “non-whites”, you need to be able to justify the hows and whys of that—namely the whys. Why your people are superior to their people. Never mind that your way of life is almost indistinguishable from theirs. Never mind that you're a raging alcoholic and that you work a shitty minimum-wage job and that you go around and start fights with honest people on the street. That's all really beside the point, because you are “fighting for your race”, and your race is something worth saving because pretty much anything worth anything was, according to us, invented by white people.

We made a point to overlook any contributions to culture or technology made by ancient Arabic, American, Asian, and especially African people. In our own twisted way we associated any of their accomplishments with that of our own people. They had stolen white technology. All they had was leeches from the white man's unique ability and creativity. When you're thinking that way, it comes in really handy to have someone right next door to you who seems to exemplify everything bad that you seek to stereotypically saddle upon the enemy, and the Welfare Warriors certainly suited that role.

Their tenure at the apartment next door didn't last long, as the Land-Hag soon produced a legal means to evict them along with sheriffs to see it through. Once they were gone, we completed our take-over of the remaining buildings on the corner.

Exploring the place, we found that the attic was actually pretty cool. We cleaned a bunch of junk out of it, exposing the beams, which were actual old-style 2" by 4" 2x4s, joists, and roof-boards. The aged lumber framed a natural setting for us to create "The Hall", in tribute to the Viking long-hall.

Our first priority was to construct a bar, which we built with wood scrapped from the smoldering and/or flooded ruins adjacent to us. We adorned the vaulted attic roof with ill-begotten flags of all the white countries of the world—symbols of our impending conquest. Below each flag hung our individual shields, lovingly crafted and painted with bold swastikas, sunwheels, and other symbols of our folk. A collection was taken to purchase enough cheap folding chairs to seat about 50, which were deployed for weekend meetings and stowed erstwhile in favor of heavy-bags that we diligently beat the hell out of between actual streetfights. The melange of sweat, smoke, alcohol, and blood dry-roasted into a potent waft that accentuated the prevailing sense of Racial Holy War that we sought to promote.

Our disparate members from Racine and Kenosha were up every weekend, if not every night of the week. Booze-soaked conversation looped in regards to how we're going to save the white race and why whites were so much better than everyone else. Our individual failures by prevailing societal standards to make money and consume things other than beer were buried under majestic tales of our collective racial greatness.

A focused soundtrack of white power rock-n-roll inspired our bond to each other and crucial hatred for everyone else. Brutal Attack, a seasoned oi! band from Britain, had just released their 3rd album, *Tales of Glory*, whose title-track quickly became the theme-song of The Hall. Night after night was spent immersed in our own Tales of Glory.

The few years of involvement that myself and the other senior members of our crew had survived were rife with gory true-stories of wanton violence; the hippie-house lead pipe incident, the Skin-fest of '88 and all the beatings that went down that summer, the Downer street riots, and the bravery of Pat O'Malley on Amy Place when he shot a kid attempting a drive-by on our house—all of the particularly violent, and as we viewed them, glorious moments leading up to that time.

The steady stream of new recruits driven to us by integrated schools and street crime were force-fed copious amounts of cheap beer until the Tales of Glory evoked a primal vibe of vengeance and righteousness. They would listen with bloodshot starry-eyes as we told about all the great times we had randomly beating people who didn't deserve it, then mentally superimpose the palpable punt of past boot-parties upon the black guys who beat them up after school or mugged them in an alley.

Our yarns were spun into a kind of mythology that not only justified our positions as leaders of our pack, but also

served to set a watermark of the level of dedication we expected of nascent race warriors.

It was a “by all means necessary” approach. We were at war with non-whites. We were at war with complacent white race-traitors who failed to recognize the gravity of our mission. Because we were at war, there was no such thing as a fair fight. When you are at war, you must make a point of not having fair fights. If you are at war and you find yourself getting in fair fights, you are fucking up. For that reason we felt that any sort of beating was justified. If there were 10 of us and one sorry black guy who was at the wrong place at the wrong time, he was going to feel the boots of 10 guys on him.

That kind of violence perpetuated itself, and regularly brought about situations where we were outnumbered ourselves. From the standpoint of being warriors, we embraced those outnumbered situations and gauged our worth according to our performance against fearsome odds. That was really what split the men from the boys; it was real easy to jump in and be a part of a 10 on 1 in your favor beating, but when it was an entire bar full of people armed with baseball bats and pool-sticks against you and a few of your brothers, you gained a whole new perspective about what it means to be in a streetfight.

We instilled that perspective on impressionable young kids who were emotionally scarred at tender ages by shitty home lives, racial violence, alcoholism, and whatever other dysfunction du jour that moved them to seek us out.

The Hall soon became a violence machine, churning out conscience and empathy-free menaces that roamed Milwaukee assaulting innocent people in the name of a Racial Holy War we had fabricated for them. The street violence that began during the 700 Club days travelled a dramatic upward spike that culminated at The Hall; to the point where the sheer ferocity came to concern we who had initiated it.

It was also at The Hall where the allegiance and nature of our group started to shift from a skinhead crew to that of a more cerebral racial organization. The preceding summer, Will and I had been down to the Church of the Creator (COTC) headquarters in Otto, North Carolina, where we spent 2 weeks studying the ideology of Creativity and paramilitary survivalism.

The COTC was as violent and ruthless as any racial group there was, promoting a vehemently anti-Christian, pro-white agenda that advocated genocide against all non-whites and white race-traitors along the way to a “Whiter and Brighter World”. But it was also much more pragmatic. The far-sighted and comprehensive approach to white victory that the COTC espoused stated that winning the hearts and minds of our fellow whites should be our priority at the time, not simple street hooliganism, which is really all that skinhead action had amounted to.

We loved to drink ourselves into oblivion. We loved to get in fights. We loved to get hit and we loved to hit things. In order to have any kind of longevity in such an environment, you have to have those qualities. The people who were afraid of violence—the people who we felt were cowards—would ultimately be weeded out. The first thing that happens to someone who is obviously not geared for such combat is that they are ridiculed and ostracized from the group. If they don't grow a pair and start instigating violence themselves—if they don't start creating their own Tales of Glory—the ostracization continues and ultimately winds up with the person in question getting the shit kicked out of them by their own crew. This would happen quite often.

That's the kind of mindset that we had begun our racial activism with. Our experience up until then was based around that ultra-violent, survival-of-the-fittest, kill-or-be-killed philosophy. It was really just a desperate extension of teen angst lashing-out at the world. COTC ideology was just as

desperate and explicitly based on the same core belief of might-makes-right, but much more calculated in regards to the means to the end. It occurred to us that our status quo of drunken street-fighting was not really doing anything to further our goal, which was the preservation of the white race. As our ideology became more advanced, as the knowledge-base behind our beliefs grew, it became apparent that we had to change the way we were doing things.

Thus we found ourselves in an ironic position; we would draw those kids to us because we were storied street-brawlers, yet we were evolving to discover that the street-brawling was ultimately counterproductive. The Tales of Glory gained a preface that read like, “Yeah, this is how we used to do it. It was great. It was a lot of fun to go out chasing black people around for the hell of it, BUT, don't you go doing that. What you need to do is get good grades and go to college and get a good education and a good job so you can be a person of influence in the community” ...a person of influence in this society that we had declared war upon. Ultimately people with money and power who could really affect changes toward the end that we were looking for.

We began thinking more along the lines of the big picture, where members of our group would move beyond the destitute poverty that we were all living in, but not for personal gain—strictly to gain capability for the movement.

Ben Klassen was the leader of the Church of the Creator. He was a crusty old codger, and not very impressive in person, but nonetheless a capable writer and racial philosopher. The books of Creativity that he wrote and the organization behind them were all things that happened because he was a fairly wealthy self-made guy. For many of us he was the first rich guy we ever met and talked to in our lives. Meeting someone with means beyond a ghetto apartment and beer money for the evening, and seeing the impact that they could have as far as advancing the racial movement was

concerned, impressed upon us the need for a change in direction.

True to form, we had a debatable degree of success practicing what we preached. We still all drank profusely. We still found ourselves getting in fights all the time. That kind of lifestyle is extremely difficult to just switch off. But we did make a solid effort and results slowly began to manifest.

We had the best of both worlds at our peak in the sense that we were looked upon as a physical force on the streets by the youth who we were most interested in; yet at the same time, as we obtained more sophisticated literature to pass out and as we became more well-versed and well-spoken in the propaganda ourselves, we were also able to increase our contact outside that typical target group and more into mainstream white society, which is ultimately where we wanted to be.

We tried to concentrate on refining our message and increasing our level of sophistication, which involved a lot of “do as I say and not as I did” instruction to the younger guys. The bulk of our crew had enough respect for (and fear of) us to take the new direction to heart, but there were always the fringe-of-the-fringe guys who posed as much of a threat to our organization as they did to the rest of the world.

There were two in particular who were hellbent on making their own Tales of Glory the goriest of all: Floyd Russel and Timothy “Big Mac” McClellan.

Just as it was for me at the beginning, race was simply a convenient excuse to brutalize people as far as they were concerned. Disturbed, outcast kids who had a ton of hate and hurt within them. They were prime candidates for us to wind-up and set loose on an unsuspecting society. And that's exactly what we had done. As Will and I and a lot of the older guys from Racine and Kenosha grew into a more intellectual exercise of our racist beliefs, these guys were still fully engaged with the idea of going on manhunts and piling into some

hunk-of-shit beater car at every opportunity to find someone to assault.

We decided to stop being hooligans ourselves and hope that they caught on. But as we made it plain that there was to be no more mindless violence, they went out on their own to pick up where we left off. As we would gather in The Hall and simmer schemes to get our message to Joe Six-Pack White Guy in the most effective way possible, Floyd and Mac would be out on the town taking the notion of fucking people up to new levels.

As the effects of daily street violence wore off, terrifying questions squirmed from my indomitable human core—a part of me that had been suppressed for years. Were we fighting now so we could kill later? Kill people by the billions? What would really happen when the Whiter and Brighter World came to fruition? Would we—would I—truly have the stomach to pull the trigger on a genocidal scale?

I tried to focus on the facts as I had known them; that *they* were not people, that it was *them* or us, that the future of our children was at stake. Considering the grave circumstances, what choice was there but to fight back by any means necessary? Everywhere we turned in our world, we saw nothing but the insidious workings of the enemy. It was a matter of the most righteous self-defense possible to win at any cost and eliminate any possibility of future threats by wiping every last non-white and race-traitor off the face of the Earth.

That's how we sold the curbing of senseless drunken beatings to our crew, and to ourselves. Neither pitch was entirely successful. The welcome blossom of thought and consciousness first sprouted during those times, even though I wouldn't realize it until I began the self-discovery of writing over a decade later. There was also a palpable wet blanket of exhaustion that weighed upon us elder members. Impending lofty epiphanies or not, we were all simply burning out.

A healthy bunch of our proteges however, were just getting warmed up. Floyd had just read Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*. The Kubrik film had long been a favorite of skinheads, with those of us smart enough to catch the profound social message of the story making sure to bury it in appreciation for a bit the old ultraviolence. Awash in a culture of ultraviolence, doggedly believing in the honor of combat and the future glory of Valhalla, the brutality of both the book and the film was seen as the height of entertainment.

In the novel, the preferred weapon of the anti-heroic Alex was a straight razor, and before he even finished reading it, Floyd had taken to carrying one himself.

“Dude! It was only like five bucks at Walgreens! I been sharpening the shit outta it!”

For a couple of weeks he was walking around with this thing and just itching to carve someone up with it. There were a number of incidents where the straight razor got pulled out and waved around. Fortunately for whoever they were fucking with that night the intended victim got away un-straight-razored for one reason or another.

All of this happened when they were off on their own, as we had made our lack of amusement with the straight razor quite plain. Will and I clearly saw a future where Floyd faced a felony charge and turned state's evidence on us to deal with it.

After weeks of scolding and appealing to a sputtering sense of higher calling, the only progress Will and I had made was to drive Mac, Floyd, and co. farther away from us and closer to running their own mutinous crew. Not that we missed them; we had plenty of more intelligent and thus more valuable comrades to preach to. But we were always concerned about what they knew of our own host of felonious acts that we had gotten away with.

We hadn't seen any of them in The Hall for an unusually long stretch of a week or so when Mac and Floyd

came stampeding up the stairs in a hysterically cackling haze of boots and beer, bringing the Skrewdriver anthem Streetfight along with them:

"... but the skinheads have their own WHITE POWER!"

Will, Matt, Brett, and I had plenty of beers in us as well, but our evening had been spent practicing kickboxing on the heavybag and doling out bundles of Racial Loyalty newspapers for our latest distribution.

"Welly-welly-well! Good evening my droogies!" Floyd slurred in piss-poor attempted Cockney.

Mac shuffled behind him huffing chuckles of "Heh! Heh!" in time with the hauling of his 275 pound bulk.

"Where the fuck have you guys been?! We got a shitload of RLs to put out. What did we tell you about priorities? And quit the Alex routine. It's painful." I said, rising from the bar.

Will looked up from his ale in irritation. "Are you here to help get the paper out?"

Stumbling for the bar, Floyd shot back, "Yeah, well, while you guys were folding newspapers, we were out on some REAL white power!"

We rolled our eyes as he continued, "Fuckin drivin down Wisconsin, we saw this nigger in a bus shelter, so we jumped out and tore the shit outta him! HAHAAAAAAAAHA!!! Fuckin Mac hit him with this flying fuckin Black Belt Theater steel-toe, an then I fuckin took out me razor and got him all the way from like fuckin here (as he pointed at his temple) to fuckin HERE!!! (pointing to the tip of his chin) HAHAAAAAAAAHA!!! Dude! Fuckin nigger blood EVERYWHERE! HAHAAAA!"

Mac's lager-reddened face lit up as he chimed-in. "Heh! Heh! Fuckin nigger was all 'AAHHH!!! AHHH! MAH FACE!"

He was all tryin to hold his fucked-up nigger face together, all 'HEP ME! HEP ME!' Hehhehheh! Heh!”

“Yeah! And so I kept cuttin at him and Mac kept bootin him! He had like 10 jackets on cause he was obviously a bum or whatever, so I dunno if I got to cut the motherfucker any more, but that one I got him was AWESOME! HAAAAHA!!”

A couple of headbanger kids Mac recruited from the factory where he worked as a janitor tagged along behind them, so inebriated that I doubt they even knew what happened.

Mac lurched wildly for the fridge, “So where’s the fuckin beers anyway?! Are you pussies coming out to manhunt some more with us or what the fuck?!”

Floyd was closest to me. I leaned in close to meet my booze-soaked eyes to his and said matter-of-factly, “We fuckin’ told you no more manhunts. I’m gonna hit you now. Ready?”

After giving that second to soak in, I coiled then sprung my torso, whipping up my right elbow to wallop Floyd where his ear met his jaw. He collapsed in a limp heap for a few moments, then dragged himself to scale a distant chair, an imposing task under the combination of concussion and severe intoxication.

Doing something about it briefly crossed Mac's mind, until the Thompson brothers looked at him, at which time discretion became the better part of valor. Will stormed over to where Floyd lay draped over the chair like a bloody bar-rag.

“This ain't a game you assholes! This is the future of the WHITE RACE we're fighting for; and you're jeopardizing our whole fucking crew over some homeless nigger at a bus stop!! We're at war with the Jewish Occupational Government goddammit! What the fuck do you think you accomplished tonight aside from possibly getting us all busted—for nothing!! Did Robert Jay Matthews DIE so you could slash homeless

niggers in bus stops?!” Will's open right hand flew up and bitch-slapped Mac across the face for punctuation.

Matt still sat at the bar. Lighting a cheap cigar and contemplating the flags on the walls, he said, “Get the fuck out of The Hall. Don't come back till you got your shit together. If we catch any heat from you dumb fucks you are both dead.”

The lot of them slunk down the stairs sputtering almost inaudible curses. From the street there was a confused sequence of awkwardly ambulating boots and car doors slamming then the sound of bald tires squealing as they peeled out.

Brett watched them leave from the attic window. “Idiots. What the fuck are we gonna do with them?”

“Whatever. The more excuses I get to sock that dipshit, the better.” It felt good to thunk an elbow on a person again after a couple-month hiatus. But it also felt bad to picture that guy holding his face together. Really fucking bad. I wrestled with the idea of saying so. A strained hush betrayed the possibility of the other guys thinking likewise.

Will was the first to bring us back to our hate. “Not like I give a shit about the nigger...”

8: epiphany

My daughter was conceived in acknowledgement to the shared belief of her mother and I that it was our duty as racially-conscious white people to produce white children.

A core tenet of white racialism is the fact that whites are being out-bred by “non-white” people at exponentially imposing odds. The idea that *there will be none of us left* is one that preys upon the already raging paranoia that prevails among racists and other fundamentalists. Once the fallacy that white people are a race unto themselves and a superior one to boot is bought into, it’s not much of a stretch to link “the future of our race” to an uneducated, dysfunctional, alcoholic couple of 6 months planning a pregnancy they were by no means ready for mentally, emotionally, or economically.

Like fathers of every possible ethnic and socioeconomic background across the globe, I’ll never forget the day my child was born.

Mom was a pro, ours being her 3rd daughter, and the labor portion was over after a relatively speedy couple of hours. Before I could get my bearings my kid was being whisked by a nurse from womb to a hamburger-warmer-looking contraption. Letting go of mother’s hand, I rushed to meet my daughter face-to-face. She squirmed and did some obligatory crying, but her overall demeanor was much more relaxed than mine. Ours eyes met the moment she opened hers for the first time, and I felt a brief but timeless glimpse of the connection that would save my life over and over again.

But first mom would have that honor, a week after giving birth to her.

I wish I could say that looking into the magnificent blue eyes of my newborn daughter set me straight in an instant, but the truth is that I returned to my sophomoric drunken brawling within a matter of days.

My little brother and I had a case of beer down before we even headed out to the bar 6 days after I became a father-in-name-only. By 2am of the 7th day, we had thrown pitcher after pitcher of Sprecher and shot after shot of Cuervo in the mix, which of course behooved us to take a once-friendly game of pool with the locals outside for a full-blown donnybrook. Swerving away just far enough ahead of Port Washington's Finest to avoid apprehension, my brother and I cackled about our respective shiners and the amount of our opponents blood that had ended-up on my jacket as we sped home in his rusty old Bronco.

Bursting into the house with skinned knuckles and a proper testosterone buzz to go with the booze, my brother and I headed for the fridge to refresh our besieged memories as to whether or not there was any beer left.

Before we could find out, an extremely irritated new mother grabbed me by the arm and led me upstairs for a sound scolding. After a solid 30 minutes of expounding upon my worthlessness and utter failure as a father it was clear that there was nothing I could say in my defense. Rather than concede to the very valid and reasonable argument that I was a dad now and I shouldn't be out beating people up for kicks, I, in my inebriated wisdom, grabbed my EK combat dagger from the nightstand and challenged, "*is this what you want?!*" as I damn near took my left hand off with it.

That entire period of my life will remain forever hazed by the sick mist of alcohol, but the sensation of a snapped bass piano wire that sent a fountain of booze-laden blood firing from my wrist sears through that haze to this day. Screams of "*YOU FUCKING ASSHOLE!!*" accompanied by

the crying of 3 little girls aged 4 years, 2 years, and 7 1/2 days faded to black along with the rest of the world.

Minutes later, I came-to long enough to take a swing at the paramedic who was desperately trying to replace the makeshift bedsheet bandage my girlfriend had fashioned in the process of saving my drunk ass from bleeding to death. Like all good skinhead girls, she was accustomed to the sight of blood, and well-versed in emergency first-aid.

Less and less frequent returns to semi-consciousness made appearances as my near-carcass was rushed to the emergency room. The audible chattering of my teeth and the taste of blood from my tongue that was bitten as a result were constant as an eternal coldness drew me away from light and motion.

By that time I had taken countless blows to the head with a wide assortment of blunt objects as a result of my streeffighting habit. I had stared down the barrels of pistols, shotguns, and rifles and laughed even as bullets whizzed close enough to bring the hairs on the back of my neck to attention. In 1989, 3 years earlier, I had made a first drunken attempt at wrist-slitting with a broken Huber bottle after being told that I was 1/16th Native American by my mother. 2 years earlier my close friend Chuck was murdered in a post-bar brawl of his own. But none of those foolhardy moments gave me the slightest idea of what death was all about.

That sequence of images, sounds, and sensations between the snipping of my piano-wire tendons and the surgeon's anesthesia brought me as close to death as I had ever been. And somehow I managed to not learn a fucking thing from the experience.

Waking in the Intensive Care Unit 2 days later with one of my wickeder hangovers seasoned with the exquisite pain of

severed nerves microscopically stitched together, the process of alternately being chastised and embraced by my girlfriend, my brother, my mom and dad, and the guys in my crew began. As it was in the moments prior to getting myself in that mess, I had nothing to say in my defense. Not that anyone was expecting behavior that was remotely logical from me at that point.

I spent a few days in the psychiatric ward per regulations for suicide attempt. After a brief evaluation by someone with a PhD after their name, it was concluded that “alcohol psychosis” and not plain old insanity had moved me to slash my left wrist to the bone with an 8” knife that was sharp enough for shaving.

I made a 30 day attempt at sobriety, the longest by far since I had commenced drinking at age 14. Sobriety that went out the window on my 22nd birthday when “...just one or two” Spaten Optimators were not only approved but encouraged by my girlfriend at the onset of the meticulously planned and successful surprise party she arranged for me.

Our relationship began an appropriately swerving, lazy but inevitably fatal nose-dive once the booze was back. My priorities remained drinking and fighting even as my severed wrist was slowly and painfully healing. I spent more time with my band Centurion, writing and performing vicious songs about how I was ready to kill and die for precious white babies, than I did spending time with the beautiful white baby of my own.

Her mother and I parted ways when my daughter was about 18 months old.

She moved to Key West where the father of her 2 older daughters was living, and made a half-assed attempt to take my daughter with her. It wasn't until faced with the prospect of being physically separated from my child that I realized my

attachment to her. Having had such proximity to my death a year and a half earlier, all parties concerned had no doubt of the seriousness the vow of “over my dead body” I swore carried. With a few thousand dollars scraped together by my entire family, a custody agreement and the lawyer to make it stick was put into place.

I had become a single father at age 23.

1700 miles and dubious lifestyle choices came between my child and her mother. By the time my daughter was 3, even her maternal grandfather agreed that she was better off with her drunken father than her mother, who was busily engaged in the exploration of a new-found cocaine habit.

While this was going on, record-label drama with my band and the rapidly-increasing pace of our crew’s self-destruction had deteriorated my faith in the white power movement. Following a trend among the more intelligent members of our organization, I began to spend much less time fretting over securing the existence of my race and a future for white children and much more time with my child.

Before I had fully shed my racist ideology, I called-off the race war with the realization that my daughter needed me. We were all each other had. Being a Racial Holy Warrior wasn’t going to save my daughter; it would take me from her via death or prison. The more time I spent with her the more it became imperative that I leave the movement.

My band-mates, who were the last remnants of the skinhead crew that had been my family for the the past 7 years, all had families of their own in the works and were moved to cede to their exhaustion as I had.

As time passed I began to allow myself more and more contact with things that were once absolutely prohibited. Packer games. Seinfeld. Books about subjects other than race. By the time I welcomed back the Beastie Boys into my life, it

was all over. However, the ability to enjoy hip-hop and TV sitcoms once again wasn't the true motivation behind my change of heart; that honor goes to my daughter.

By 1996 I was completely finished with the white power movement.

Traveling from one extreme to another, I sought out experiences that involved interaction with people I had once harbored a vicious hatred for. Blinded by bigotry, I had denied anyone who didn't share my skin tone the simple courtesy of conversation. Once that conversation was allowed to happen, I found that the fear that motivated me to hurt innocent people was utterly unfounded. People who I would have attacked on sight only a few years earlier regularly forgave me, accepted me, and embraced me.

As new friends took the place of old ones who were lost to death, prison, and the madness of racism, the positive energy involved inspired me to become continuously closer with my daughter. The pure beauty of her childhood is what ultimately demonstrated just how terribly wrong I had been.

There was one particular afternoon that drove the epiphany home:

I arrived early to pick my daughter up from daycare. No one had noticed me, so I took in the moment, watching with teared eyes as my little girl played with the other kids.

It struck me that the first thing I noticed was that they were all children; not black children, or white children, but the sons and daughters of mothers and fathers.

A young black man about my age walked in to pick up his daughter, who leaped into his arms and hugged him, the same way my little girl hugged me. The smile on his face as he

listened to his child relate her day in a gleeful, excited stream was the same smile my daughter gave me on a daily basis.

I thought of all the people I had hurt, whether with my own hands or by lighting some psychopath's fuse. Those people had moms and dads and brothers and sisters. How did their loved ones feel when they saw this person who was so special to them battered and broken? How horrible would it be to have my daughter exposed to such violence in the slightest aspect?

Love for my child thawed a dormant empathy for humanity that I was never aware of.

9: raver

Paul had been telling me about rave parties all summer, trying to “recruit” me away from the limbo I was in and into the blissful spun-out rainbow family he had come to be a part of.

He kept talking about dancing, like it was this magical thing that took you away from all the world’s ugliness—the ugliness that he and I had contributed to for so many years, and about the music that “. . .transcended ego to reveal a universal oneness”. On a less esoteric level, he also told me about the freely available and really good drugs along with the multitude of beautiful and friendly girls. This all sounded fantastic. So fantastic in fact that I just couldn’t picture it. Dancing? I used to break-dance in my middle-school b-boy days, but since then the only dancing I had done was slam-dancing in mosh pits and a whole bunch of dancing on people’s heads for no good reason. I couldn’t picture myself dancing at the parties Paul described no matter how good the drugs were, and I didn’t relish the idea of being the crusty old wallflower with the scars and swastika tattoos.

But Paul was the only friend I had at the time who I wanted to hang out with. The only guys from my old crew who I still talked to were my former band-mates, some of whom were still caught-up in race and all of whom were not very happy with me after I quit the band and later messed around with their new lead singer’s girlfriend.

Paul lived in a flat almost on the UWM campus with a bunch of neo-hippie kids, some of whom actually went to college. While I still had an aversion to hippies, I found that after a healthy dose of marijuana and psilocybin mushrooms, neo-hippies were much nicer to hang out with than neo-nazis.

As long as I could prevail on them to play the Beastie Boys and Led Zeppelin instead of the goddamn Grateful Dead. All the pot and psychedelics on Earth wouldn't have made that tedious crap any easier to stomach. So it was that I found myself over there every chance I'd get, learning the redeeming quality of a few good beers over the mass quantity of shit beer I had been accustomed to.

It was earlier that year that I had allowed myself to be reunited with the Beasties. I was all over them when License to Ill came out, but obviously had to set that aside along with the rest of my hip-hop past when I got caught-up in racism. I didn't really notice it happening. It was drink-fight-drink-fight-drink and the next thing I knew it was like I had never heard of The Beastie Boys.

Before he moved in with the hippies, Paul was staying at his dad's place in the notorious Meadows housing projects on Milwaukee's Northwest side. One afternoon Paul, Dave, and I were sprawled all over his room after breaking-in a ridiculously intricate bong we had built from Home Depot plumbing parts. Paul threw in *Check Your Head* and from the first line of the first track, *Jimmy James*, I was rocked by the magnitude of my departure.

Well, people how you doing there's a new day dawning

For the Earth Mother it's a brand new morning

Indeed there was a new day dawning—again. Funny how it was Ian Stuart, lead of the primal skinhead band Skrewdriver, who struck me with title track of *Hail the New Dawn* almost a decade earlier. Hearing that song enticed me down a path rife with violence, hate, death, and imprisonment that I had narrowly escaped. Hearing this song was like a warm hug, letting me know that The Beasties forgave me even

if I didn't forgive myself; that I was welcome back no matter where I had been.

By that time I had already lost my taste for saying the word "Jew" with venom, and for saying the word "nigger" entirely. But the irony of lying in a ghetto apartment, stoned out of my mind, listening to a bunch of Jews playing "nigger music" and marveling at how wonderful it felt was not lost on me. For the first time in my life, I thought about how the world was a much nicer place because of black people and Jewish people. And I thought about how one man's dawn was another man's nightmare.

Did I ever really believe in the "new dawn" of Skrewdriver and racist dogma? Now I wasn't so sure. I did daydream about what an "all-white" world would be like, back when the pursuit of such a twisted goal consumed me. But I never analyzed the idea in too much depth, because doing so exposed not just one, but a host of fatal flaws. Who decided who was "white" and who wasn't? Was Hitler-esque dictatorship the only way to govern, or was there such thing as "white democracy"? What happened to the billions of "non-whites" once the "Whiter and Brighter World" came about? Klassen and other racial thinkers had answers for all of that, but none of them really convinced me. I knew deep down that even in a racially homogenous society, people would find a reason to continue hating one another as long as the primal "might makes right" approach to life prevailed.

Up until an odd combination of strength and exhaustion aligned to lower my guard, "might makes right" was all I understood. As elementary as it may be, or as it should be to most human beings, the notion of people of all sorts not only living together peacefully, but thriving in cooperation was completely foreign to me. Until I was schooled by the Beastie Boys that is.

The three of us didn't say a word for the entire duration of the record, soaking in the delicious diverse

harmony of the music. The farther away I was able to get from race, the better it felt. It was a weight not only off my shoulders but off my soul.

The sheer but very welcome strangeness of being around people who accepted me without a blood toll provided a sorely needed spiritual healing. I ached so badly to be away from my past, and Paul, who had already buried his skinhead demons, served as a beacon lighting the way to salvation.

But I was still skittish about the whole rave thing. Yeah, me, the big tough (ex)skinhead, veteran of battles and leader of troops was scared of dancing. As Paul got farther into the rave scene, there were more and more Saturdays when he was off at this party or that, leaving me to sit home drinking alone. I finally broke down on a Saturday afternoon in October of 1996 and asked him when and where the next party was. He answered “tonight” and “Chicago” and off we went.

Paul and as many raver kids that could fit in my dilapidated Ford Escort Pony (the entry level Escort) piled in and we headed for Chicago. “So any place in particular in Chicago?” I asked.

“We don’t know yet.” Paul replied.

“What?!” I wasn’t comfortable with aimlessly wandering around Chicago. My skinhead instincts that equated big cities with dangerous other-than-white people and inevitable combat were still too fresh. I felt old and out of my element. And I didn’t want to fight anymore.

Paul chuckled, “Chill out OG. We’re going to the map point, where they’ll give us directions to the party. It’s a record store with an address even.”

“. . .and why can’t we go straight to the party?”

“Cops. There tends to be less of them to deal with if the exact party location is kept under wraps up until the last minute. At least that’s the idea. Not sure how effective the practice actually is, but it’s kind of a tradition anyway.”

Ah, a clandestine operation! That I could relate to. We made our way to the North side of Chicago and Gramophone Records where a steady stream of kids in ridiculously huge pants was cycling through. Every single one of them looked so young and happy, like they had never been in a fight in their lives. Like they didn't know the meaning of the word "hate". I found myself strangely envious. Just a few years prior I would have been disgusted by them, and inclined to let them know by beating as many as I could catch into bloody pulps. That night though, all I wanted was to be as they were—pants and all! I looked down at my glaringly square high-wasted jeans that fit me and again felt an uncomfortable self-consciousness.

Paul noticed this and reassured me, "Don't sweat anything Arno. No one cares how you look or don't look or whatever. Just relax and have fun!"

I did my best to oblige him and tried not to reveal my continuing wonder as we ran in to get our tickets and directions. Apparently these parties all had names, this one being "Home." There was a long list of DJs on the directions flyer, none of whom I had ever heard of, but Paul and the rest of our group were busy chattering about them as we got back to the Pony.

"Paul Johnson is the SHIT!"

"Have you heard that Justin Long kid?"

"What, no jungle?"

"All house tonight! Duh."

"DOOD! Terry Mullan is at the afterparty!"

"Yeah, like he's gonna show up!"

They spoke the names of the DJs with an odd mix of reverence and familiarity, like these guys were simultaneously best friends and demigods. I was excited to experience the DJ mystique myself, but also fussing about the directions like an old man. As I got my Chicago bearings and realized where we

were headed an involuntary alarm went off. “Holy shit Paul, you know this place is way on the South Side?!”

Paul rolled his eyes. “So?”

“So that’s like the worst ghetto this side of fucking Detroit! We’re seriously gonna spend a Saturday night there?!”

“And we’re gonna love every minute of it. Quit being such a fucking pussy.”

Paul knew me well enough to not only get away with questioning my courage but also to be able to use it to coax me along. I continued to drive and exercised every ounce of will I had to not lock the doors and freak out as we passed block after block of Chicago’s severely depressed inner city. Still obsessed with strength and accustomed to spinning reality to suit my frame of mind, I decided that we were being not foolhardy, but carefree and strong as we penetrated the heart of the ghetto

The directions ultimately landed us in a huge vacant lot that was rapidly filling with cars. The lot was behind a former roller-rink that was now in the long line of buildings awaiting a wrecking ball. A thick queue of party kids gathered length and breadth as it stretched from the battered back door of the building. Normally, the idea of standing in any kind of line didn’t appeal to me, but I was almost fully bought-in to the rave idea at that point, and the people in line—most of them already dancing to the thump that radiated from the venue—had such an interesting, positive vibe about them that I didn’t mind at all.

They were all so different! Not necessarily from each other, but drastically different from the day-to-day Joe and Jane Schmoes that you saw on the way to work, and seemingly from a completely different fucking planet than skinheads. I was so accustomed to uniform; not only uniform dress of shaven heads, boots and flight jackets, but also uniform skin

color, mindset, and actions. I had been to many large gatherings of skinheads, where ridiculous amounts of beer was drunk, mean violent music was churned, and adrenaline surged as swastika flags were saluted and venomous speeches were made. We were not celebrating, but building massive walls around everything that made us the same, and preparing war against everyone and everything outside.

Without signs or speeches or symbolic flags, the common purpose of the rave kids was open, embracing, and nebulous all at once. And in a weirdly passive but irresistible way, so much more powerful than any fist, boot, blade or bullet could ever be.

Not one of the kids in line looked “white” to me. I’m sure many of them were ordinary white kids by day, but that night everyone lit up their own little star with unabashed personality in a race-free galaxy of color and warmth. Everyone displayed a unique incarnation of the same incredible style. They were all so effortlessly fucking cool but not giving a shit who was cool and who wasn’t. Tiny creatures in massive clothes handmade from stuffed carnival animals and carpet remnants were gyrating with blinking-lights goggled alien-looking things amidst tall lithe runway bodies gleaming naked save for strategically placed electrical tape and glitter. Faery wings and devil horns. Brightly colored beads and baubles. Hi-lighted by shimmering rainbows, I noticed the beauty of an Asian eye. Of African lips. Of a Semitic nose. Traits that used to brand targets now smiled at me. With me. The realization that the two brightly-hued boys playfully kissing each other were breathing the same air as I was made my heart skip a beat. Then it occurred to me that they had beating hearts also. A simple biological fact that I would have vehemently denied a couple of years prior.

“Hey Wintage! You coming in or are you so ghetto fabulous that you want to stand around outside in it all night?” Paul was leading the rest of our bunch straight to the

door, ignoring the line and its chromatic denizens. “Lines are for suckers.”

I snapped out of my reverie and followed him to the entrance. A tall black guy with a Peterbilt baseball cap pulled down over his eyes and a face full of silver piercings gave a fond gold-toothed grin of recognition followed by a hug and a fistful of fluorescent pink paper wristbands to Paul, who handed them out to us and jumped through the wall of fog and lasers that designated the gateway to where we were going. I fumbled my wristband on and took a deep breath, feeling as much as smelling the stew of sweat, ghetto, smoke (fake, cigarette, and pot), eucalyptus, and electricity as I went through after him.

Lasers ran like fingers over my body as I stepped in. For a disorienting second I saw nothing but laser-lit fog, then I emerged into the vast oval that once circled with roller-boogied descendants of slaves, now literally thundering to the gigantic soulful bass of Chicago House music and packed butts-to-nuts with ravers, all of whom were moving wildly with the beat. A beat that rang forth not simply from the sound system or the DJ or the records he deftly wielded, but from the holistic tribal atmosphere that every attendee of the party helped to create. I shuffled agape into the dancing crowd, letting it envelope me, moving me through them and the music. A primal need to release myself, to release the grip of a lifetime of anger and hatred came over me. A lone obstacle stood in the way; I wasn't dancing.

Finding myself suddenly directly in front of the DJ, clothes and body cavities rocked by the humming whomp of low frequency sound, the dance issue was reflexively solved as the music physically shook me. I let go of my ego, setting aside thoughts of my past, what I was wearing, how I looked, and everything set in motion. Without consciously raising a foot or lifting a finger, I was swept up in the primal dance that has caressed humankind since we first walked upright.

Timeless, relentless drums led the way to a sublime group consciousness. Blaring horns and synths accented samples of R&B vocal riffs that earnestly celebrated the rave mantra of peace, love, unity and respect. Time was marked only by the minute-hands of gleeful cheers that arose when the DJ would artfully change records, and hour-hands of the DJs themselves changing. Here and there, I would steal a glimpse away from my newfound inner self and out to the people around me.

To my left was one of the most beautiful women I had ever seen. She was tall, with the impossibly perfect bronze body of a comic-book super-heroine; only instead of tights and a cape, she wore pigtails and a neon-yellow bikini, the top straining to contain spectacular gravity-defying tits, the bottom peeking out above low-slung giant raver jeans that rode up and down her hips as they swung. Sweat glistened down her raised arms and exquisitely toned stomach, prisms by the sole light of the lasers and disco balls. Her eyes were closed and a look akin to genuine orgasm flushed her high cheekbones and full lips, which smiled to greet me as she noticed my attention. I could barely make out her voice even as she raised it to shout to me, “Hi! Are you having a good time?!”

“I’m having the best time of my entire life!” I shouted back.

“Awesome! I love this song!” She replied. Then she blew my mind further by giving me a sweet kiss on the cheek before resuming her dancing. In the real world, I would have been frenzied into a caveman lust simply being in the presence of such a nymph, much less getting a kiss. In my old world, women were prizes won by measure of spilled blood. Sex was an animal gratification that happened in the dark, behind closed doors. That night on the South side of Chicago, mundane sexual urges were superseded by an all-encompassing common love and empathy that came as easy as breath. Rather than bristle and flex in an obsession to have her—like I automatically would have done in the past—I silently