

THE POINT



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THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL PIERCERS



**THE TONGUE-DRIVE
SYSTEM** P.6

**PAUL KING
INTERVIEW** P.10

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FROM THE EDITOR



JAMES WEBER
Infinite Body Piercing, Inc.
Philadelphia, PA

This is the last column I will be writing as editor-in-chief of *The Point: The Journal of the Association of Professional Piercers*. This issue will mark the end of my seven-year, twenty-seven-issue run as editor of this publication.

I started as editor in 2005, when I also took over for Elayne Angel as Medical Liaison on the APP's Board of Directors. I've written before about my enthusiasm for this publication when I started—and about being blindsided by the reality of the work. There was no Summer issue that year as I struggled to find my footing. Issue #33 finally came out six months after I took office and three months behind schedule. While this was the first issue with a color cover and new layout, it admittedly fell short of my unrealistic expectations for a relaunch of the publication. (It was one of my first lessons on the new Board: good and done triumphs over perfect and undone.) With #34 the publication had its first full-bleed color cover, and it started to look like it does today. The #46/47 double issue was when *The Point* first started to be posted online in full color. Issue #55, released last spring, was the first printed with a color interior. Looking at the early issues, I'm amazed at how far the publication has come.

Re-reading the older issues now, I realize how different the organization is, how much we've grown and changed—and how much I've changed with it. My early writing is enthusiastic but not very good. It took me years to find my voice as a writer—and I think I am still looking for it sometimes. I've grown immensely from my involvement with the APP, and *The Point* has forced me to evolve even more, as both a writer and as a person.

My favorite issue? Definitely #37, which I devoted entirely to the ONE Project. At the time, it was a radical departure from anything else before it, and it broadly expanded the acceptable dialogue for both the publication and the APP. My favorite cover? Without a doubt the “uncensored” version of #41. Not just the cover, but the story that went into recreating the

homage to the now-legendary *PFIQ* magazine. (You can still download this issue—and every other one—at safepiercing.org.)

The article of mine I remember most is “Tongue Piercing, Trigeminal Neuralgia, and the ‘Suicide Disease’” in issue #38, from 2007. This is when I started to find my voice and focus—and when I first stepped up on my soapbox and started preaching about writing from inside our community, about representing ourselves and producing our own media. I really never stepped down from that soapbox, and this sense of activism was a motivation for a lot of my work on *The Point*.

I've worked with some amazing people through my years as editor, and I've had the opportunity to be involved with some amazing things. (One project I finally have the opportunity to write about in this issue: the Tongue-Drive System, on page 6.) It's impossible to list everyone who's had a hand in making *The Point* what it is, but there are several people who do need thanking by name: contributing editors Kimberly Zapata, Angela Smith, and Jennifer Heimbarg, without whom these past few years overseeing *The Point* would have been unmanageable; Jon Loudon, the graphic designer who has worked with me on *The Point* since shortly after I started—and still impresses me with each issue's layout; the amazing people I served with over my six years on the APP's Board of Directors, who believed in my vision for the publication—and for the APP—and allowed me to follow through with it; and lastly, Elayne Angel, from whom I took over as editor seven years ago, and who worked with me as co-editor for several years while we served together on the Board. As Isaac Newton famously said, “If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.” This is nowhere more true than with Elayne, and I am confident leaving *The Point* in her capable hands once again.

The advertisers deserve special mention for making this publication financially possible, with special thanks to Barry from Anatometal and J.D. from Industrial Strength for believing in the

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 4 PRESIDENT'S CORNER
- 6 THE TONGUE-DRIVE SYSTEM
- 10 PAUL KING INTERVIEW
- 22 TRIBE 20TH ANNIVERSARY
- 24 APTPI 7TH ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL MEETING
- 26 BRIAN MURPHY
- 30 DALLAS SUSCON
- 32 BRIAN GILLIAM



Dana Dinius has stepped down from his position as Outreach Coordinator on the APP's Board of Directors. Ash Misako, an active and long-standing member of the Outreach Committee, has been appointed by the remaining Board to the position until the next elections.

publication enough to keep their front and back inside covers for every issue over my entire seven-year term as editor. Most importantly, I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to *The Point* over the years. You've trusted me with your words, your images, your advertising, and your ideas. I hope I've done them all justice.

What is to become of *The Point* going forward? I've been working with Elayne to make the transition to the next era of the publication as smooth as possible. She and the Board already have plans for growth going forth, and I look forward to seeing where they take it. *The Point* isn't mine; it never was. It belongs to all of us, our industry and our community. It's going to be what we choose to make of it.

Wish me luck, and welcome to issue #59 of *The Point: The Journal of the Association of Professional Piercers*. **P**



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Material submitted for publication is subject to editing. Submissions should be sent via email to editor@safepiercing.org.

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER



ELAYNE ANGEL
APP President
Yucatán, Mexico

Recently someone asked me about what it was really like back in the “good ol’ days,” when I first started piercing professionally in the 1980s. Reflecting on the ensuing discussion, I am reminded of how truly new our industry is in the scope of history, yet how far it has come since that time.

Think about it: Body piercing is so young that there are still many areas without any legislation on the subject. One must study and practice for hundreds or even thousands of hours to qualify for a license to cut hair in the United States, but in plenty of locations you can pierce the body without any training or oversight whatsoever. This is because our fledgling field and the agencies regulating it are still getting their footing and figuring it all out—but it really doesn’t make sense. I expect that piercing laws will become the norm in the coming years—and the APP is actively assisting body artists and lawmakers to see that only appropriate legislation is enacted—but it simply hasn’t been prevalent long enough for this to have happened yet.

It is hard to appreciate the widespread acceptance of piercing in modern culture if you don’t know how misunderstood and ostracized it once was not so long ago. Any piercing other than the ears (or sometimes a nostril) was a rarity, and was considered disturbing and aberrant.

For young people today, piercing has always been around. They grew up with it as an ordinary and unremarkable part of the world—just like computers and the internet. It can be difficult to imagine a reality in which these were uncommon, or didn’t even exist. I have a number of clear memories that can help to clarify what a different world it was where piercing was concerned.

Imagine this: In 1981, even though I was legally an adult, my gynecologist broke the ostensibly sacred pact of doctor-patient confidentiality to call my parents and tell them that my nipples were pierced! Why?

One of my other favorite illustrative accounts from that era is how easily I was able to convince people that my tongue piercing was an acupuncture stud for weight control.

Because they thought I might need to be institutionalized for harming myself. Piercing was so foreign then there was grave concern for my mental and physical health—over something that has become commonplace today.

One of my other favorite illustrative accounts from that era is how easily I was able to convince people that my tongue piercing was an acupuncture stud for weight control. No one doubted me, since tongue piercings were unheard of at that time, and they couldn’t fathom the idea of doing it for fun. The public had not yet been exposed to body piercings, and when I began my career nipples were by far the most prevalent spot to adorn. It was several years before the navel outshined all the other pierceable body parts put together.

One of the biggest challenges I experienced in my early years working at Gauntlet (the first piercing specialty business in the world, founded in 1975) was that I couldn’t procure enough steel body jewelry to satisfy the fast-growing demand for piercings. There was just a single supplier for it then, so the quantity of manufacturers now making body jewelry is astonishing. There is an overabundance of the stuff, really—especially if you include the mountains of cheap junk that are being produced, mostly overseas.

I can still remember the moment I saw the first steel 18 gauge 3/8” fixed bead ring. Up until that point, all of the small rings Gauntlet produced were white or yellow gold. It was

novel and, well, adorable. I knew with that first glimpse I needed to put it somewhere on my body. I came up with the idea of a horizontal eyebrow piercing, which I’d never seen before. It actually healed well (even with the small ring for initial jewelry), and I had it for many years. I only removed it to get my eyebrows tattooed, and didn’t reinsert it afterward. Now this was before curved bars were available. Imagine doing navel, eyebrow, and other body piercings without curved bars as a jewelry option! Yes, it really was quite primordial in a way, but the world of piercing was just starting to evolve.

I feel like I should be recounting these historic tales from a rocking chair on a porch, my head crowned with gray hair. Yes, I am an “old-timer” in this industry—somewhat ironic since I’m just one notch into my fifth decade of life and by no means elderly. I’m the next generation down from our industry’s founders Jim Ward, Fakir Musafar, and Doug Malloy. (If you want to learn all about the formation of Gauntlet and the launching of our industry, read Jim Ward’s amazing memoir, *Running the Gauntlet*, available at safepiercing.org.)

Since its humble origins, thousands upon thousands of people worldwide have joined the ranks of “professional piercers”—but I do use the term loosely. Some are hacks who cast a shadow over the whole field, but others have advanced it to an art, melded with science and practiced with fervor and expertise.

High-tech materials and production methods have made body jewelry available that approaches true perfection. Innovations in design have brought countless new styles to the market. Now there is even a profusion of aftercare products specifically designed for our customers. (I shudder when I recall the instructions for care of my new nipple piercings: apply rubbing alcohol liberally and rotate the rings. Ouch!)

I'm incredibly thrilled that this "wild and crazy" fringe activity I engaged in back in the 1970s and 80s has become, more-or-less, normal thing to do, and I'm proud to have played a role in that. At the same time, I must admit I have a particular disappointment about the subsequent generations of piercers who are working today.

As the nascent business of piercing began to spread and mature, I expected that piercers would join their industry's professional organization as an ordinary matter of course. I envisioned piercers becoming members of the APP as a natural part of working in the field, the way professional librarians join the American Library Association. And so I address this message to the piercers who are not (yet) members of the Association of Professional Piercers:

Obviously you're acquainted with the APP because you're reading this publication. But in case you are unfamiliar with our precise nature and purpose, I'd like to clarify it and elaborate a bit. We are an international non-profit health, safety, and education organization. The APP is *the* professional organization for those in the piercing industry. We are a respected and reliable resource that has set the standards for the industry.

Piercers who are "Professional Business Members" uphold a safety agreement that encompasses minimum standards for using quality jewelry, maintaining cleanliness, and behaving professionally. They meet certain personal criteria, such as training with certification in First Aid, CPR, and bloodborne pathogens exposure. Their studios must also pass specific environmental requirements, such as having a separate sterilization room and a spore-tested autoclave.

I can't help but wonder, and want to ask any piercer who is not a member of the APP, "Why not? Do you fail to come up to the organization's standards, are you unfamiliar with your industry's professional association, or are you apathetic?" All of those are poor qualities in a piercer.

Since the publication of my book *The Piercing Bible*, the number of consumers seeking APP members has skyrocketed, as the public is becoming more educated about what constitutes a competent, qualified piercer. If for no other reason than an increase in business, I'd think more piercers would want to become members.

Perhaps you believe some of the rumors and misconceptions I've heard about the organization; I would like to debunk them. We are a group of very diverse piercers who are passionate and caring about our work; we are not an elitist clique! If you place importance on what you do, **join up**. If you don't feel that being safe, hygienic, and doing a good job are important, please find another field of endeavor.

The APP is not the piercing police. We do not dictate which piercings our members do, what particular aftercare they are to suggest, or whether our members also practice other forms of body art (where they are allowed by law).

The organization is run by volunteers who are elected by the members. If you are dissatisfied with aspects of how the APP operates, you can join, get involved, and change things if enough other members agree with your perspective. That's what I did.

Below is some of what the APP does:

- Provides information to consumers, piercers, health inspectors, medical and dental professionals, legislators, and anyone who wants to learn about safe body piercing.
- Hosts an amazing annual educational conference for piercers (and you do not have to be a member to attend).
- Offers piercers, legislators, and the public support and assistance in drafting appropriate legislation for the industry.

- Disseminates educational and informational materials, including numerous brochures and a Health and Safety Procedure Manual for piercers.
- Attends health-related conferences and body art conventions to share information.
- Conveys information and professional opinions to the media when requested and in response to erroneous articles and press about body piercing.
- Presents lectures to students, health care professionals, and other groups.
- Publishes *The Point*, which is dedicated to sharing piercing-related news and information.
- Staffs an email and phone response system for individuals with questions regarding piercing.
- Maintains a comprehensive website with information for anyone with questions about body piercing, safepiercing.org.

Among other things, the APP website contains a complete list of current members (you will be on there after becoming a member piercer), a section on getting pierced, FAQs, our brochures and publications, legislative links to all states, applications for membership, a job board, links, and more.

In other words, the APP shares information and works to help make piercing safe and keep it legal. I frequently hear that piercers (or their studios) aren't "ready" to join. The good news is that when you apply, the membership committee will work with you by making suggestions on how you can bring yourself and your studio up to minimum standards.

We genuinely do not want to keep piercers out; we welcome you into our community of caring professionals. If you have questions, please contact me at president@safepiercing.org, or our Membership Liaison, Sarvas Berry, at members@safepiercing.org.

As I observe and hopefully foster the next phase of development in the body piercing industry, it would be a dream come true to see more piercers take pride in their work and elevate themselves professionally by joining the Association of Professional Piercers. **P**

THE TONGUE-DRIVE SYSTEM



JAMES WEBER
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Philadelphia, PA

ate last February a rather curious news story made the rounds on Facebook and other social media sites and pop culture blogs. Various publications¹ reported on an article² about a project from Georgia Tech, one that enables a person with quadriplegia to control a wheelchair through the movement of the tongue by moving around a magnet worn in a tongue piercing. Piercers everywhere were sharing, reposting, and reblogging the article in a variety of places—including on my Facebook timeline. Fortunately, this was not news to me, as I’ve had the unique opportunity to be involved with the project as a consultant for several years. But after a dozen piercers forwarded me the article I realized it was time to write about my experience with the clinical trials of the Tongue Drive System.

In late October of 2009 I was contacted by Dr. Maysam Ghovanloo, Associate Professor at the School of Electrical and Computer Engineering at the Georgia Institute of Technology. Over the phone he explained the project that he was working on, titled in the research protocol *Development and Translational Assessment of a Tongue-Based Assistive Neuro-Technology for Individuals with Severe Neurological*

Disorders. Simply, this is a system that allows persons with quadriplegia to perform a variety of computer-aided tasks—including operating their wheelchairs—by changing the position of a small magnet inside their mouths. The magnet’s changing position is monitored by a headpiece that looks like a double-sided, hands-free phone headset.

His team had, at that point, experimented with different ways to attach the magnet to the tongue with varying degrees of success. Adhesives were only effective for very short periods, and the idea of permanently implanting a magnet into the tongue was not considered a workable alternative.³ This left a third option suggested by Dr. Anne Laumann: attaching a magnet to the tongue with a tongue piercing.

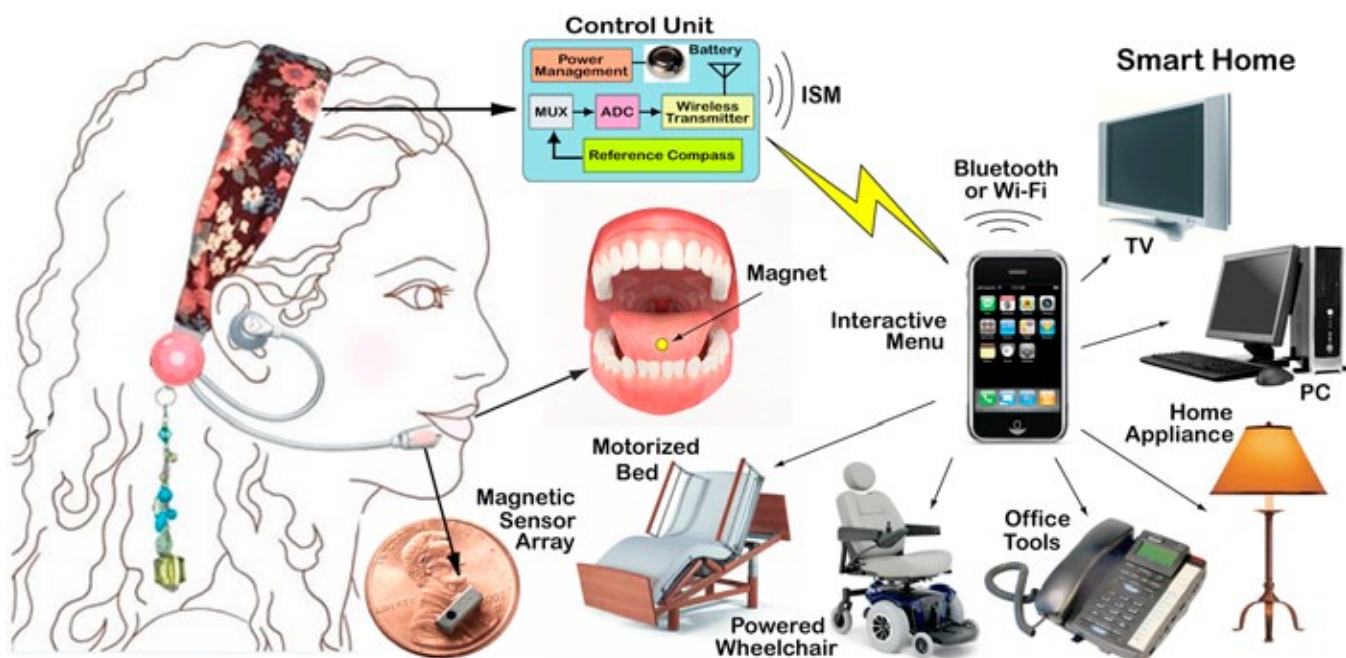
He then came to the reason for his call: he asked if I would be interested in being involved in the clinical trials as a member of the Data Safety Monitoring Board. As I listened to him describe the details of my involvement, I thought about the incredible places my life as a piercer—and my job as an APP Board member—have brought me. I enthusiastically and without hesitation said “Yes!”

For those not familiar with clinical trials (and I was not when I initially agreed to be

involved with the study), the Data Safety Monitoring Board (or DSMB, alternately called a Data Monitoring Committee) is a group of experts, independent of the study researchers, who monitor test-subject safety during a clinical trial. The DSMB does this by reviewing the study protocol and evaluating the study data, and will often make recommendations to those in charge of the study concerning the continuation, modification, or termination of the trial. The inclusion of a DSMB is required in studies involving human participants as specified by the Common Rule,⁴ which is the baseline standard of ethics by which any government-funded research in the United States must abide. (The clinical trial is sponsored jointly by both the National Science Foundation and the National Institute of Health, but nearly all academic institutions hold their researchers to these statements of rights regardless of funding.)⁵

I was excited to be part of the project, and the following May I received the full details of the study. The clinical trial was to be performed in three phases, with three sets of participants. The first involved ten able-bodied individuals with existing tongue piercings. These participants were

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1. <http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2012-02/21/tongue-drive-system>, <http://news.discovery.com/tech/tongue-drives-wheelchair-120222.html#mkcpgn=rssnws1>, <http://boingboing.net/2012/02/24/tongue-piercing-steers-wheelch.html>
 2. <http://www.gatech.edu/newsroom/release.html?nid=110351>
 3. Unlike implants under the skin, the tongue has no “pockets” in which to encase a foreign object, and there was also concern about the need to remove the magnet for surgeries and MRIs.
 4. <http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/commonrule/index.html>
 5. The history of research ethics in the country is simultaneously fascinating and shameful. Most of the modern rules now in place concerning clinical trials in the U.S. are as a result of the public outcry over the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment, a study that ran for four decades, from 1932 and 1972, in Tuskegee, Alabama. This clinical trial was conducted by the U.S. Public Health Service and was set up to study untreated syphilis in poor, rural black men who thought they were receiving free health care from the U.S. government. The study was terminated only after an article in the New York Times brought it to the attention of the public. More information about the history of research ethics can be found here: <http://research.unlv.edu/ORI-HSR/history-ethics.htm>
 6. In one of my early conversations with Dr. Ghovanloo I gave him the name of several manufacturers who I thought would be willing and/or able to make the jewelry needed for the trials. Barry Blanchard from Anatometal came through by manufacturing special barbells with a magnet encased in a laser-welded titanium ball fixed on top. Blue Mountain Steel also donated the barbells and piercing supplies for the initial piercings.



to test the hardware and software created by his team and to quantify the ability of those participants to operate the wheelchair with the specially-designed post⁶ in their tongue piercing. The second group consisted of ten able-bodied volunteers without tongue piercings. These participants were to be pierced, given time to let the piercings heal, and then monitored operating the Tongue Drive System. The third group of participants was to be a selection of thirty people with quadriplegia—without existing tongue piercings—who were to be pierced and then monitored while the piercing healed. Afterward, they were to be evaluated on their ability to operate a computer and navigate an electric wheelchair through an obstacle course using the magnetic tongue jewelry.

The study was to be conducted in two different locations: in Atlanta, at the Georgia Institute of Technology and the Shepherd Center; and in Chicago, on the Northwestern Medical Center Campus and at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, with half of the participants in each phase of the study coming from each location. (Five from each city for the first two phases, fifteen from each for the last.) Drs. Maysam Ghovanloo and Michael Jones were to oversee the trials in Atlanta, and Drs. Anne Laumann and Elliot Roth were to oversee the trials in Chicago.

The DSMB charter specified the

eight people who had been drafted to be part of the DSMB: The board chair is a professor of rehabilitation science and technology; one member is a director of a rehabilitation engineering research center; one a professor of rehabilitation medicine. There are two M.D.s: one a neurologist; one an associate professor of dermatology; two biostatisticians (one acting as study administrator); and me. Also included in the documents sent was the full study protocol. This document outlined the finer points of the study, including the protocol for tongue piercings to be performed by the doctors involved with the study. The email also specified the possible times of the first meeting of the DSMB, to be conducted via conference call.

As I participated in the conference call several weeks later it was hard not to feel I was out of my element. While I routinely lecture at several local universities, it's been quite a while since I've been in academia. But I soon realized I was not there for my academic credentials but for my position and experience—and as a de facto authority on piercing. This I could do.

During that first meeting I expressed the concerns I had about the piercing protocol, specifically about physicians performing the piercings—physicians with little or no experience doing so. “Do any of the members on the research team have prior piercing experience?” I wrote. “Even

though it is not a complicated procedure, it is better for doctors who are involved in this task to have prior experience with tongue piercing.”

I was told that the physician overseeing the piercings in Atlanta had performed at least thirty tongue piercings in his private practice. And although Dr. Laumann—who was responsible for the tongue piercings in Chicago—had no prior piercing experience, she had conducted extensive research on piercing and tattooing⁷ and had often observed professional piercers at work. (Furthermore, she is considered an expert among dermatologists in the field of piercing and tattooing.) While my concerns were addressed, I do remember feeling hesitant at the close of that meeting.

The second DSMB meeting was held six months later, in December of 2010. At this time the results of the first and second phases of the clinical trial were to be discussed. Before the meeting I was given information about the second study group and about the tongue piercing method performed at the Chicago location—and including images from both locations. From the images provided, I was concerned that the piercings performed by the physicians looked as if they were done by first-year piercing apprentices—which, in a way, they were.

Of the twenty-one study participants who received a tongue piercing, five were



noted as complaining about the placement of the piercing, and three piercings resulted in embedded jewelry. Based on the photos I guessed this was because either the piercing had been placed too far back on the tongue or the length for initial jewelry was improper—or both. I pointed out to the committee this left only about 60% of the subjects who were both comfortable with the placement of the piercing (at least enough to not state the contrary to researchers) and who did not have problems with embedded jewelry. I stated I thought this was far too small a percentage to ensure the well-being of each research participant. Even though it was outside my role as a DSMB member, I further stated the results of the study may be affected by the improperly placed piercings, as more than a few of the study participants had

taken out their jewelry and dropped out of the study within a few days of being pierced, saying they were either unhappy with the placement or found the position of the piercing uncomfortable.⁸

I went on to express concerns about the piercing protocols and to question whether piercers could perform these procedures instead of physicians. Unfortunately, I was told the parameters of the study, and the rules at the medical centers where the piercings were being performed, did not allow non-medical professionals to perform the piercing procedures.⁹

Despite my concerns, my suggestions and criticisms were well-received. Dr. Ghovanloo agreed to re-evaluate the piercing protocol and I offered him whatever help he needed. Most importantly, I got the impression the two doctors performing

the piercings were somewhat humbled by the experience. While there was no doubt that these physicians have anatomical knowledge and surgical experience that far surpasses mine, they were quickly realizing this didn't make them proficient piercers.

Several months after that conference call, I had the opportunity to finally meet Dr. Ghovanloo in person. The quarterly meeting of the APP's board of directors was scheduled in Atlanta in February of 2010, and Dr. Ghovanloo arranged for me to meet some of the trial staff at the Shepherd Center. I had the sense he was excited as well, and he also arranged for the physician doing the piercings during the clinical trials in Atlanta to be there: Dr. Arthur Simon. As I was at a board meeting with Elayne Angel (the APP's then-Medical Liaison, current President, and resident

7. Dr. Laumann has co-written several published papers on body piercing and tattooing. The most recent is titled, "Body Piercing: Complications and Prevention of Health Risks."

8. Dr. Ghovanloo and the other physicians had suggestions for the reasons for the high dropout rate among healthy subjects. In response to an early draft of this article, he wrote, "We simply lost contact with a few subjects after piercing, and cannot say for sure what their motivation was in participating in the trial and consequently dropping out after receiving the piercing." Dr. Laumann, commenting on the Chicago site, wrote, "We prescreened thirty-two volunteers. Ten of these were screened and consented. Three of these were ineligible due to a short lingual frenulum, or 'tongue web.' This would have made the use of the TDS impracticable and for research it would have been considered inappropriate to cut the lingual frenulum. We pierced seven subjects and—you are correct—our first subject dropped out related to embedding of the jewelry and pain on the first day. After that we were careful to measure the thickness of the tongue and insert a barbell that allowed for 6.35 mm (1/4 inch) of swelling. Otherwise drop-outs came much later during the TDS testing phase related to scheduling and unrelated medical issues. One of the subjects, a piercer herself, was particularly pleased with the procedure, the tract placement and the appearance."

9. Though the protocols did not allow the procedure to be conducted by non-medical personnel, Gigi Gits, from Kolo, was present during one of the phase-two health subject's piercings and Bethra Szumski, from Virtue and Vice, was able to offer advice at the first phase-three piercing session in Atlanta.

expert on tongue piercings), I asked about having her attend as well. He readily agreed.

When Elayne and I arrived we were greeted by Shepherd staff member and study coordinator Erica Sutton, and we were soon led to our meeting with Dr. Ghovanloo and Dr. Simon. Compared to the necessary formality of the DSMB meetings, it was a friendly and relaxed meeting. Dr. Ghovanloo and his colleagues were somewhat starstruck by Elayne (she often does that to people) especially since her book, *The Piercing Bible*, was used so extensively in drafting the trial piercing protocols.

As we talked about the clinical trials, it was hard to not be affected by Dr. Ghovanloo's enthusiasm for the project. We spoke at length about the issues the doctors encountered when performing the piercings. Doctor Simon in particular was humbled after his experience. "How do you hold those little balls to screw on?" he asked at one point during the several hours we met, a little exasperated and only half joking. I can't speak for Elayne, but I left with an immense respect for Dr. Ghovanloo, his staff, and the whole project. I also left with the impression that they had a lot more knowledge of—and a little more respect for—what we do as well.

Since that time, stage three of the clinical trials has already taken place. I've been informed by Dr. Ghovanloo that the third and final meeting of the DSMB will be scheduled in the coming weeks. In fact, trials are being planned using a new prototype that allows users to wear a dental retainer on the roof of their mouth embedded with sensors to control the system (instead of the headset),¹⁰ with the signals from these sensors wirelessly transmitted to an iPod or iPhone. Software installed on the iPod then determines the relative position of the magnet with respect to the array of sensors in real time, and this information is used to control the movements of a computer cursor or a powered wheelchair.

I'm looking forward to hearing when the project is out of the trial phase and more widely available to all who can use it. When that happens, I'm sure I'll be hearing from Dr. Ghovanloo—and seeing the news again posted on Facebook.

More information about the current trials can be found on the Shepherd Center's web site: http://www.shepherdcentermagazine.org/q3_11/#/feature2/ P

¹⁰Dr. Laumann: "The problem with headgear is that it needs to be removed at night, which means that the disabled individual cannot do anything in the morning until the headset is replaced and the TDS recalibrated. With secure intra-oral sensors, recalibration will not be necessary in the morning, nor will the sensors slip during use, which gives the wearer a great degree of independence. Of course, a dental retainer takes up space in the mouth and this may be difficult with a barbell in place."

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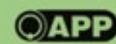
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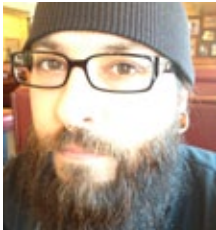
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PAUL KING INTERVIEW



CODY VAUGHN
Creative Visions Tattoo & Body Piercing
Monterey, California

Recently, as I found myself talking with a client about his piercing—we discuss jewelry options, aftercare, and carry on with small talk while I get everything set up—he asks me about why I got into body piercing. He seems like a nice enough guy, but the conversation soon takes a predictable turn.

“Do you pierce guys’... you know... stuff?” He asks.

By “stuff,” he’s referring to male genitals.

“Of course I do,” I answer.

“You do? Man, that’s gay.”

I’ve heard this countless times—or a variation of it. For those familiar with the history of our industry it’s no secret that our roots were mostly planted by gay men from the leather community. Unfortunately, the majority of our clientele—and even some body piercers—seem clueless about our history. In an attempt to rectify this, here is the first of what I hope will be a series of interviews discussing the role and significance piercers and enthusiasts from the gay community had in defining and shaping modern body piercing.

Paul King is a well-known name in the body piercing industry. He worked at Gauntlet from ‘91 to ‘98, co-founded and has operated Cold Steel America in San Francisco since 1999, has served as Treasurer for The Association of Professional Piercers off and on for the better part of ten years, is a “layman anthropologist” (his description), and finally, was the piercer shown in the 1993 Aerosmith video, “Cryin’.”

I met with Paul this past January while working in San Francisco. When I arrived at his home Paul gave me a warm greeting and wasted no time in getting things started. He pointed me to a body piercing archive he had acquired from fetish photographer Charles Gatewood, and suggested I look through that while he got changed out of his gym clothes.

There were handwritten “Pin Pal” letters from the early Gauntlet days, a typewritten rough draft of Doug Malloy’s book *The Adventures of a Piercing Freak* with a handwritten note above it that said “The original title was you to?” [sic], and an early piercing “menu” from when Body Manipulations first opened in San Francisco. (Fingernail piercings were only \$7.00.)

After an hour or so of going through various first edition books, magazine clippings, and all

sorts of other items pertaining to the history of body piercing that Paul had acquired throughout the years, we headed to the kitchen to officially start the interview. The following three to four hours were a mix of history lessons (not unlike his body piercing history classes taught at the APP conferences), candid conversation, and a question-and-answer session. Fortunately, for the sake of this article, Paul has a tendency for his stories to segue smoothly from one to another.

Q: What was everyday life like as a gay man in the late seventies and eighties? How did you perceive society’s mentality at that time?

I can’t comment on the seventies because I was too young. I didn’t have awareness of my sexuality. Was I diddling with boys? Yes—and girls.

The eighties: I remember riding down the street with my blue hair and earrings and having shit thrown at me because I had both of my ears pierced. For that I was called a drag queen. Just for having both ears pierced. It was definitely a much different time, and a much harder time.

In 1980 I was outed by a psychiatrist to my

I had a period where I wasn't doing any body modification. I took everything out and went real straitlaced. I had just gotten that tattoo done and then I looked at this book [*Modern Primitives*] and I was like, oh my god, this is what I want. I want tattoos *everywhere!*

mom. It was a hugely shameful thing. We're the only minority group that grows up with the enemy. For anyone else, you can go to school as an African-American kid and get called the n-word, then go home and Mom and Dad are going to hold you. They're going to love you. They understand, and you're getting some sort of support and validation. We have to go home and hide it from our families.

I was coming of age in the eighties, so I have a very different story than somebody like Fakir who is more pansexual or Jim [Ward], who is also gay but from a different generation.

When I was fourteen I was into punk rock, and I was carving on my arm. Because that's what you're supposed to do when you're into punk rock. I was hitting on this guy, and later I was carving on his arm, and then we had sex. And that was one of my first associations of knives, cutting, blood, and sex. It makes perfect sense! I don't know why, but it makes perfect sense [*laughs*]. To put it into context, there was something going on at a young age.

It was 1981 when I first pierced my ear lobes. By 1983 I had multiple piercings in both ear lobes, and I had pierced my nostril, too. That was about the first time I saw a lip piercing in person, though I'd seen pictures of them before.

This girl came to school with an ear stud stuck through her lip, and it just looked nasty. Nothing about it made any sense. Her lip was bulging, the gem was covered in crust, and the post and earring back were poking into her gums. Even with no knowledge of piercing, we all knew this couldn't work. And she was doing it because everyone else was pierced and she was trying to show us up.

In 1986 I started reading Anne Rice. I loved her books and read everything of hers I could get my hands on. I heard she'd done a series

that was fetish oriented. She had written it under a pseudonym [A.N. Roquelaure], *The Sleeping Beauty Trilogy*. I started reading it, and I'm like, oh my god, this is fucking gross. This is sick. This is abuse to women! They were enslaving her, raping her, and all of these horrible things, and I thought it was awful and disgusting. And then I start reading the chapter where they're doing it to a boy. And suddenly it clicked, and I got it. I don't know how to explain it, but I just got it. I was able to break through my feminist viewpoint on it. And when I say I got it, I don't just mean the male-on-male action; I got the male-on-female action too. It was revolutionary for me. It shifted everything and made the male stuff even more okay. And it made all of it okay.

So while reading that series, I started picking guys up and abusing them before I even knew what I was doing. That was definitely a process of trial and error. Good lord, I have some amends to make from that period.

In 1988, I was living in Long Beach and I had just gotten my first tattoo. My friend was an architect and drew me a design that was based on Russian Constructivist art. It was all shapes and whatnot.

The following year was a really important one for me. The book *Modern Primitives* came out in 1989. I'd already had those dreams about getting pierced, but again, it was fetish. All my other friends who were my role models already had tattoos. I felt like a late bloomer; I was about 23. I had a period where I wasn't doing any body modification. I took everything out and went real straitlaced. I had just gotten that tattoo done and then I looked at this book [*Modern Primitives*] and I was like, oh my god, this is what I want. I want tattoos *everywhere!* And I want them to be big, and I want them to be bold. This is what I wanted, but until then I didn't have the

visual symbolic vocabulary to think of it. But this is what I wanted.

So I went to Bert Grimm's tattoo shop in Long Beach. I showed this guy Dave what I wanted and he said, "I think that's one of them tribal tattoos. I need to get a picture of that, I've never done a tribal tattoo before." Can you imagine those words coming out of a tattoo artist's mouth? Yeah, that dates me. That was my second tattoo.

I remember going to see a therapist in 1990 and saying I needed help with some relationship stuff. I told him I was not there to deal with my interest in BDSM [bondage and discipline/dominance and submission/Sadomasochism]. I told him, "If you have questions about BDSM you can ask, but I am not here to 'treat' my BDSM." Well of course that opened up the floodgates. Every other session it'd come up. Eventually, I brought books and gave them to him. I said, "I'm not going to teach you about BDSM, power exchange dynamics, and healthy behaviors on my dime. You're welcome to read up on it." I literally told him that. And he laughed and said, "Fair enough." He let it go after that.

A dear friend of mine, a gentlemen named Race Bannon (and also Guy Baldwin) were instrumental along with some other people in getting BDSM declassified as a mental illness. And that's just within my lifetime: to declassify it as a mental illness and redefine it as a lifestyle; that's huge.

Q: In the late eighties and early nineties, who or what were some of your influences?

Genesis P-Orridge. It's weird; history is such a strange thing. In my day he had a *huge* influence with piercing because of The Temple ov Psychick Youth, and Psychic TV, which were a major deal in the eighties and nineties to a very small community. But that



little group was engaged in blood rites and piercings and what not. Though I wasn't a member, I was aware of their activities.

Genesis P-Orridge was a very early customer of Mr. Sebastian and The Gauntlet. He was affecting tons of youth and was one of those original hipsters that wasn't necessarily into BDSM.

Q: How large of a role would you say Genesis P-Orridge played in the association of piercing with the gay community, and then it branching off into the straight population?

I guess a good analogy is a branch, because the history is like a tree. And he's definitely a big branch; he's not a twig. So he wouldn't be the only one, he wouldn't be the first one, but he was substantial. What we're talking about now is not necessarily about BDSM, or gay culture, but people who are into music and who are pursuing alternative spirituality.

Psychic TV was already a phenomenon. You could've done a book just on Psychic TV, like *Modern Primitives*. It was already coherent, whereas *Modern Primitives* didn't become a coherent underground until after that book was published. Once something is named, it takes on a life of its own.

The book *Modern Primitives* started off as this project, where they talked to this person, interviewed that person. Then they met Fakir, who is very dynamic, totally interesting, and really articulate. So they started hearing what Fakir had to say and started meeting what Fakir had to say and started meeting what Fakir first coined the phrase "Modern Primitive" in an

issue of *PFIQ* in the 1970s. They decided to make that the title of their book.

There was no movement. Some of the people they interviewed barely talked to each other, and some of them didn't even know each other. They were doing these self-play things, or just exploring their bodies and what have you, but there was no cohesion to it. There was no "modern primitive." Then you have the title of the book and all of a sudden it coalesces; it brings together a movement. And it's a nice little package. It was like, "This is what the modern primitive people do, and this is what it's called, and you're going to look like this." So it was totally like an accident. There was something already going on, but without a name or anything like that, which I think is really fascinating. But what Genesis P-Orridge did with *Psychic TV*, that was deliberate, and it was already going on.

Another person was Bob Flanagan, who was a performance artist. He honestly wasn't that important to the piercing scene, but I just loved Bob. He was a great guy. He did work for The Gauntlet and was certainly known, at least in Los Angeles. The *RE/Search* book *Supermasochist* was about him.

Cliff Raven is one of my role models. I wish I would've met him. Actually, I probably wish I had dated him. He was a tattoo artist in the 1970's. If I'm not mistaken, Cliff Raven was at a few of the T&P [tattoo and piercing] parties.

I don't know who trained who, but Cliff was tied in with Don Ed Hardy, and Cliff was queer. I wish Don Ed Hardy wasn't so put off by piercing. Although he wasn't as put off by

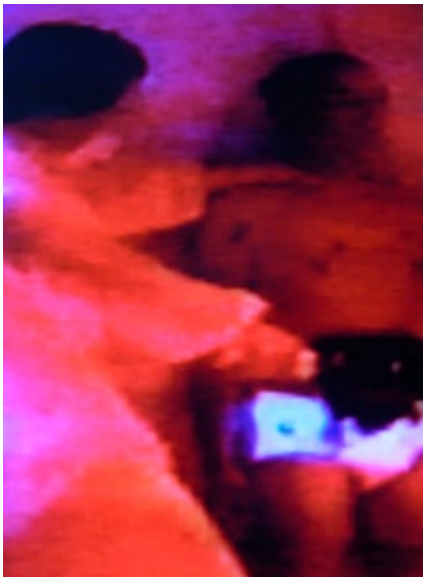


it as Chuck Eldridge. Nothing against Chuck, but the tattoo archive [located in Winston Salem, NC, and founded in Berkeley, CA by Eldridge in 1980] could be a great resource. Over ten years ago I asked Chuck if he had anything piercing related in the archive. "Nope." I was thinking to myself, you're telling me that in a tattoo archive there's not one piercing? Not a single earlobe piercing? He just didn't care for it and didn't want to be associated with it.

Q: Can you tell me about the years leading up to, and while you were working at, Gauntlet?

At one point, Fakir and Jim were very close. Mr. Sebastian was introduced to their group by either Sailor Sid or Doug Malloy. Doug Malloy flew all these guys out to the states, got them together. But Mr. Sebastian never had any aspirations of this thing getting big. The U.K. piercing scene was stagnant. You had this little fetish corner, but it never had the same boom until it exploded in the states; really, until it exploded in Los Angeles. The exception to this was Pauline Clarke of *Piercing World* magazine and P.A.U.K. [Piercing Association of the U.K.], a piercing enthusiasts club.

You can't talk about piercing history without talking about Gauntlet. Yes, piercing was around before Gauntlet, and piercing was already in the fetish scene, but it became Gauntlet's job to promote it in the fetish scene. It was definitely there before, but it became exponentially larger in the leather scene because that was Jim's first market. The



gay male SM scene was the first market.

Then it started going in to the tangential gay market, but it also went into the straight fetish market. And I hate to say “market,” but that was more like the Gauntlet business model perspective. But keep in mind it was very much a community. Gauntlet was in the community; it wasn’t some random corporation. All of us that were initially at Gauntlet were there out of fetish. And then there was this crossover when it went into hipster cool.

In 1988 I saw this fetish magazine that had an ad in it. The guy had his nipples pierced, and it was the hottest thing I’d ever seen in my life, and I don’t know why. One year later I was visiting my friend in San Francisco, and she said she needed to go get her nipple re-pierced. She’d had it pierced before in the eighties, I think at Gauntlet. She said she knew this shop that just opened [Body Manipulations, opened in San Francisco, CA in 1989 by Vaughan and Esther Saldana].

I saw my friend getting her nipple pierced, and for whatever reason I was still on the fence about it. I had the idea that it was the sexiest thing I’d ever seen. Within a year of that, I was dreaming about it.

So I was with another girlfriend and told her I had to get my nipples pierced. I didn’t know where to go. I knew of that one shop in San Francisco and that was it. She got back to me a month later and said there’s this place called Gauntlet in Hollywood on Santa Monica Boulevard, but you have to call for an appointment. So I called, and the earliest

appointment I could get was after Christmas. I decided this was going to be my Christmas gift to myself. So the first week of January in 1990 was the first time I’d walked into Gauntlet. Elayne [Angel] was working.

I got my nipples pierced by some guy with dreadlocks that had come in. He gave me an aftercare sheet and sold me Hibiclens. I have no idea why they never healed! *[laughs]* I had a horrible allergic reaction to Hibiclens.

So he does my piercings, I’m pretty sure he was stoned, and says he’ll be right back. He steps out of the room and never comes back. That’s the Gauntlet customer service they were famous for! *[laughs]*

I waited about five or ten minutes and thought, “I don’t think he’s coming back.” So I get dressed and go outside, and he’s out there smoking a cigarette. He says, “Oh, you’re still here?” He totally forgot about me.

Later I reconnected with a high school friend. I didn’t know this when I had went into Gauntlet to get my nipples pierced, but this friend worked there in the jewelry department. We started hanging out again; we reconnected. Then I met one of his close friends, who was the guy that pierced me, Dan.

At some point Dan cut his dreads off and, no offense but I’m not the long-haired type, I thought he was kind of cute. So we dated for a *minute*. And when I say we dated for a minute, I mean we dated for a minute. I think we had sex once and knew we weren’t compatible. Dan was roommates with Elayne. I was hanging out there all the time, and I

started getting close to Elayne.

When Dan and I were close, in whatever way it was, I said I really wanted to get a Prince Albert. He told me to come in since it was close to my birthday, which would’ve been April of 1990.

So I go in, and he and Elayne proceed to hammer me saying “You’re not going to get your Prince Albert done. They’re boring, they’re stupid, and you pee everywhere. It’s a ridiculous piercing. You’re going to get an Ampallang.” And I’m like, what about blowjobs? They said, “It’s no problem, you’ll be fine.” Totally bullshitting me!

The next thing I know, I’m getting an ampallang. To put things in perspective, this was done with a Gauntlet needle. We used to pierce with a needle pusher and put Band-Aids on our fingers, the whole time thinking that some tissue is just tough without realizing that our needles were just fucking dull! *[laughs]* So it was one of these dull Gauntlet needles later and I had my ampallang done. It was the single most painful thing I’ve ever felt in my life. But I’ll tell you what, I couldn’t get off that bench, I was so high. It was amazing. Later, I had altered orgasms and such. It was really cool. Eventually I had a boyfriend that didn’t like it and I took it out; it happens to the best of us.

Around that time, we started talking about getting me hired at Gauntlet. Elayne was doing all of their bookkeeping, and I was working elsewhere. I took the only job I could get at the time, which was answering phones. I found out that if you didn’t screw up, showed

up every day and had a good attitude, they just kept promoting you! *[laughs]* Even if you weren't qualified, they just kept promoting you! Eventually I had to go take accounting classes. Now you're in accounts payable, now you're in accounts receivable, now you're the supervisor of this department and are overseeing five people. It was crazy, but it wasn't what I wanted to do. I knew I wanted to have my own business one day, I just didn't know what kind it would be. I could see that there was enough business, even though I knew piercing was a marginal, underground fetish. And I thought: you know what, this might actually pan out. So I said to Elayne, "I will do your accounting if you teach me how to pierce."

Elayne said she would hire me if I could get a year of being clean and sober. Oops, cat's out of the bag. So the short of it is that's why I wasn't hired in 1990. It wasn't until 1991 when I had been clean and sober for a year. It was cute. I decided I was going to be very professional. I showed up in a suit and tie for my interview with Elayne, gave her my updated resume and everything.

So one day, this woman came into Gauntlet asking, "Do you guys know where I can find a T&P party?"

And I'm like, "What?"

She says, "You know, a T&P party."

"What's a T&P party?"

"You know, tattoo and piercing."

So I'm rolling my eyes; I was a little shit. I was in my early twenties. She leaves and I'm like "Oh my god. A T&P party?" I told Peter Morrison [then jeweler at Gauntlet], "You wouldn't believe this stupid woman that came in asking about T&P parties!" Peter said, "Yeah, it means tattoo and piercing. Haven't you ever heard of them?" And all of a sudden the tables turned, and I showed just how ignorant and stupid I was.

I could kick myself for this, but in the original Gauntlet, there was this little tiny, piece of crap staircase going into a cellar, and that was where the stock pile of *PFIQ* magazines were. That's where a lot of them got damaged. I think that's where the jewelers initially were. What a little shithole. We eventually expanded their space. There was this weird stuff, like filing cabinets

that hadn't been moved since it'd opened. We used to have this tool chest, and that's where our tools were kept. There was some weird stuff that looked like medieval torture devices. I'm sad to say a lot of that stuff didn't make the move. And who knew that a lot of that stuff was our history? We had some reusable biopsy punches if you can believe that. *[laughs]* I only used them maybe twice. I pierced a friend's ear with it and he asked, "How's it look?" and I said, "It looks good." It looked like he had been in a car accident, horrible.

I feel like when I stepped into the world of body piercing it was like walking into a damn bomb. Within a year it blew up! It went from this cute little thing where we're downstairs to us doing three or five or six magazine and television interviews a week. It was crazy.

Q: So, the uvula piercing...

Jon Cobb and I met in 1993. He was this cute adorable guy, really bubbly energy, really nice. He was obviously in his own head a lot. He had a little bit of OCD going on. We're talking and he's picking my brain and he says, "You know, there's something I've always wanted to do. I want to pierce my uvula." And even in '93 I'm like, "Really?" Honestly, if he wasn't cute, the conversation probably would've stopped right there.

Jon starts telling me the ideas he has, like, "Yeah so I'm gonna cut down the needle, and I'll get some Elmer's glue or something that'll wear off of the barbell so I can stick it to one side of the forceps." So I'm listening to this train wreck procedure and I asked him, "What about your gag reflex?" He starts sticking his fingers into the back of his throat and says, "I've been pulling at it for six months!" So we did it. It was his idea, and I give him full credit for it.

I had the second uvula piercing ever. After the jewelry was in, I started vomiting and vomiting and vomiting: this combination of dry heaves and gagging, then calming down, then gagging, and then calming down. I finally made it home, I had it in for maybe an hour and half, and I took some hemostats and took that thing right out. Jon had his for years without any problem. He probably still has it for all I know.

Q: Was the piercing community, once more established after the opening and subsequent success of Gauntlet, seen as a "safe" or more welcoming community for gay men and women compared to outside the piercing community?

Let's be honest, prior to the Aerosmith video the community was pretty much freak show and queer. Almost all the piercers I knew, even outside of Gauntlet—and there wasn't very many—were all queer. It was accepting because that's who was doing it and that's who the vast majority of our customers were.

Part of our training was "wanker" protocol: how to deal with masturbation phone calls. Not to freak out or call the police, but more like, alright this is what you do. If they're asking for a woman, always give them to a man. If they're asking for a man, always give them to a woman. We literally had to have protocol because it was such a common occurrence. So it was very fetish and queer oriented. Not a very typical job at all.

Q: If not for the gay/BDSM/kink culture, could body piercing as we know it today have formed in the first place?

That's a really hard hypothetical question. On one hand, you have the pioneers: The main motivation and drive was from kinky people, particularly queer people. On the other hand, what has ultimately attracted people to body piercing has nothing to do with that. So you wouldn't have had that initial drive, but somewhere you had that flip where it became about something completely different.

That's a great question, but it's really hard to answer. Because even initially when it was starting to make its roots, much of early punk started around a sex shop. So even as far back as that, the whole music scene and alternative fashion and culture was all about the taboo of sex and capitalizing on it and making a fashion out of it. As much as I hate to say it, that's what piercing is too: fashion.

It certainly would have been very different. I think a big part of where it is now has only a nod to where it was.

All right, here's a for instance: while Vaughan and Esther may have had some kink—I don't know a whole lot about their sex lives—he seemed to have more of a love



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of the piercing. He just really loved piercing. I don't think there was as much kink in it. And I could be dead wrong about that, but I never got that impression from Vaughan, that he was a part of the BDSM culture. And for all I know he was straight too. He was an integral part of the San Francisco scene. He opened up Body Manipulations before Gauntlet San Francisco opened, though Jim was already piercing up here. So a lot of the gay community was getting pierced at Gauntlet, but a lot of the straight population was getting pierced at Body Manipulations.

And then the straight community also started stretching their ears. You want to talk about critical, you can't stress enough about Nomad's impact. They put stretched ears on the map. We did stretching at Gauntlet; the first eyelets were made by Gauntlet, but we were so narrow with, "How big are people going to go with their ears?" We never put the energy into diversifying ear jewelry, really. That was all Nomad did. From a cultural standpoint, you can't stress it enough. From a business standpoint, it was genius. We knew people were stretching their PAs, why didn't we think they'd do it for their ears? So they got a big clientele, and a loyal clientele. They by far had the most ridiculous collection of ear jewelry; amazing. I think they were integral in spreading that. When Blake [Perlingjeri, original owner of Nomad Body Piercing in San Francisco, first opened in 1993] went to New York, he took that love of stretched ears with him. And whatever piercing you have, it is the best advertisement that you can do. You can sell more of that piercing.

Q: Within the piercing community in the 1970's-1990's, were the gay piercers generally accepted and free from prejudice from straight body piercers?

Up through the 1990s there was still enough queer presence, particularly as long as Gauntlet was around. Then piercers became like a virus.

So, what is a piercer? If you're putting holes in people does that make you a piercer? And you have no idea what you're doing, and you have no idea of your history, no training at all, but you're putting holes in people? Okay, you're a piercer. So that piercer exploded overnight and they would have been just as filled with hate.

I was at a lecture in Oakland, CA, and a "piercer" said, "Yeah, I wanna get my nipples pierced, but only faggots get them pierced." And I thought, "Not only did you have that thought, but you just let a room full of body piercers know you had that thought."

Q: What year was this?

A month or two ago. I thought, you have got to be kidding me.

So that runs into another thing: It's weird when somebody is homophobic, and they say, "I know what you guys have done is great and all, but..."

So yeah, seventies it was only queer.

In the eighties there were maybe a couple of exceptions. A master or mistress here and there were doing it. So yes, it was very accepting.

The nineties was when you saw an influx of knucklehead tattoo artists, not all tattoo artists, but the knucklehead ones, give their wives and their girlfriends something to do. Here, go poke holes in people. That's when you saw the culture change. It definitely started to change in the nineties.

Q: So there was homophobia present within the community once there were more straight body piercers?

That gets back to, what is community?

I saw my community as educated piercers. So this may be a little weird, but the educated piercers then, I would say, displayed less homophobia than the educated piercers now. And the reason I say that is, then, the educated straight piercers very much understood that they were coming into queer territory. The non-educated ones? Yeah, there was plenty of homophobia from people that didn't care to read or research.

Once piercing exploded, it was commonplace to hear, "I don't want to pierce a guy's dick. What do you think I am a faggot?" Or you know, it costs an extra \$100 if you want to have your genitals pierced.

The fact that Gauntlet charged the same price for everything from navels to genitals was symbolically profound. Something as simple as you getting your nipple pierced, or your navel pierced, or your penis pierced or your clitoral hood, or your clit pierced: \$25. I never realized how profound it was. What

it's saying is there is no difference and there is no shame. Whether I'm piercing your genitals or I'm piercing your cartilage it is all the same, and that is why we price it the same. It sends a message to the client, but it also says something about the piercer.

If you're straight, you're going to have to get used to handling a guy's cock, and vice versa. And even with Jim, very early on, he may not have known inner labia from outer labia, but he found out, and he didn't let it stand in his way.

I see the community as a community of educated piercers that care about piercing. The peripheral, you know like the little nail shop that was sticking people with needles, I never really saw that as the community. So the homophobia, I never saw it because they weren't piercers to me.

What you have now is the new generation, where you can get perfectly great, not just good, but great training. And it won't include anything about history, and it will certainly never bring you into contact with anyone that is queer. And so there is no challenge to that, and that's how you get homophobic statements like the one I heard a month ago. You're a professional piercer in an educated environment with queers in the room, talking this smack? Oh, and you're a person of color? That gets me to no end. The stuff that comes out of people's mouths that are hated is amazing.

So, in some ways, queer piercers are such a minority now; we're not even in the "10%".

Q: In reading Jim's book, *Running The Gauntlet*, or any of the early *PFIQ* or *Body Play* magazines, we can see body piercing started predominantly amongst the Gay BDSM/kink scene. When did you notice it start to stray away from that culture and become more popular amongst the rest of the public?

It happened in about 1993, maybe as early as 1992. It all goes back to the *Sun Tabloid* and *National Enquirer*. Those were the big ones. There were a bazillion little magazine articles here and there that piqued people's interest.

I think the celebrities had a huge impact on it too. It's like Naomi Campbell wasn't getting her navel pierced because she's getting

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tied down somewhere. It was a fashion statement. And that's what you had. You had people emulating celebrities and rock stars and models who had piercings. It just became a fashion statement. And it wasn't some symbolic marker of a subculture. If you're getting a piercing because your master wants you to have a pierced dick, there's a lot of symbolism there. That's not just a piercing as an adornment. That has a whole other level of meaning.

The fact that Gauntlet charged the same price for everything from navels to genitals was symbolically profound.

Of course there's that pesky little Aerosmith video. It really isn't anything I want as a part of my legacy, and it really wasn't any great brainstorm. I lived in Los Angeles; I worked for one of the most important piercing shops at the time. They approached us. Most things I said no to. But I said yes because I was savvy enough, having worked in LA, and I was like, "What are you paying me? I'm not doing this for 'extra' fees." I knew a little about that industry and told them I wanted SAG rates. It's an evil industry. It's like *trying* to have sex with a beautiful woman: compromise yourself in every way you can just to stand next to me. And by standing next to me, *maybe* you'll have me someday.

After the Aerosmith video, every little girl wanted her navel pierced. And what they'd do is go into local tattoo shops, and all these tattoo shops thought piercing was disgusting. And then when the tenth girl came in, for the tenth day in a row, they realized they could make a lot of money doing this. So you had people who hated piercing, or didn't think very much of it, realizing it was just money in the bank. And that also hugely changed the industry. People saw it like a business model. Like, we need to expand into this market. We can't just be tattooing because then we're losing money. It just isn't the taboo that it used to be.

So later you had the first online stuff, like rec.arts.bodyart, but then you had BMEzine.

Everything happened in a vacuum. It was like, who is this? What is this? It was a computer geek, on his own, doing his own thing. He [Shannon Larratt] launched the single largest dissemination of body piercing information that there ever has been. That's huge. And Gauntlet had no control over it. Fakir had no control over it. It was its own thing. It took things in a very different direction. And this was probably one of the largest [body piercing] contributors to the straight population.

Q: Was there ever a particular time, maybe 1992-1993, when you're seeing the mainstream population, and the models, the celebrities and rock stars getting pierced, you stopped and thought to yourself, "What is this? How did it get to this?"

Every day! I was literally at ground zero [Gauntlet's LA location] when that happened. And you know San Francisco was certainly getting their fair share of the attention too; you know, David Bowie coming in to get pierced and what not. In the book [*Running the Gauntlet*] I think Jim finally kisses and tells. It wasn't until his book that he told which celebrities were getting pierced. I think that was just to make it more interesting than he thought it would be. It just doesn't have the taboo that it used to. When David Carradine was getting his dick pierced it would have cost some jobs.

When Gauntlet was in San Francisco, it was doing double the business I did annually when I had two tattoo and piercing shops. And the irony is the sales figures were probably as much as any good mainstream business would do, like a restaurant, but for our industry, it was an insane amount of money.

So on one hand it was so sad to see where it was going, but on the other hand, it was weird. There was a really clear delineation.

Let me take a step back from that. We would have these old timers come in, just

some guy in a business suit, and he'd take it off and have a complete body suit of tattoos, and rings dripping off of everything. It always gave me an appreciation, the whole "don't judge a book by its cover."

Those were some of my favorite stories. Somebody would come in, didn't have an ear lobe piercing, but they wanted an ampallang. Nope, don't want an earring. I want an ampallang. You couldn't talk them into anything else.

I remember piercing in London, and that was just awful. That made me hate being a piercer, doing over thirty piercings a day. That's no way to live. But ten piercings a day, you can have conversations. You can meet people. And we did. And there was enough of a mix. Really cute girls, really hot guys were coming in. And then you'd get the grandma coming in. There was always the mix.

Q: As more piercing studios opened after Gauntlet, did you have any feelings or opinions one way or the other regarding straight body piercers coming into the industry?

My only judgment there was when they had no idea of their history, or if they were homophobic or ignorant and not giving respect as to where piercing came from. And that still is mostly what irritates me. It is not so much a problem with someone who was straight. Even really early on when shops first started opening there was tremendous respect, by and large, at least to our faces. And that's really all you could ask for. But later on it was blatant. We'd hear crazy shit, like the whole "if you want me to touch your dick it's gonna be \$100."

Q: Is there anything else you would like to add? Anything I did not bring up?

There are two interesting things I'd like to explore. And that is play piercing and scene piercing, which were very much a queer thing.

Play piercing is play piercing. You're just playing. But it was sexual before. It was about sex. But now you just want to make it look pretty. So that's interesting; that's definitely a change.

Not to say that we were necessarily the first, but Club Fuck [one of the early hubs of L.A.'s queer and kink underground] was the first

place that I know of that took play piercing out of the bedroom and brought it into the public space. Actually, Elayne was one of the first people to do it, if not the first. I think she should get credit for that. It's weird; I don't think of her as a performance artist at all—no offense—but she was probably the only person who could do it.

And then of course, scene piercing, as in piercing within the context of an BDSM scene.

Really early on, Jim made it his mission to educate. He would do performances and go to BDSM clubs. So even though piercing was already in BDSM circles, he would still show demos and create more interest there. When I was in LA, the public speaking was still taking place in all the BDSM groups, the

queer ones, the pansexual ones, the straight ones. Somewhere along the way Jim started getting invited to talk at schools. It's when he went to San Francisco all that got handed to me. I was asked to speak for a human sexuality course by a San Francisco State University professor. It was this huge auditorium and all these students were hearing the joys of piercing *[laughs]*. It was 1994 when we started getting into the student populations. I don't want to sound terrible, like it was an hour and half long infomercial, but on one hand it was. On the other, it dispelled so many of the bad concepts and misinformation.

At this point Paul starts to yawn, which then makes me yawn. He's been talking for over three hours. It's obvious now that we're both pretty tired. We end the interview and say our goodbyes.

I got home several days later and didn't get around to starting on this article for a couple of weeks. (I was a bit intimidated by the hours of audio I had to type out.) When I finally got around to it and hit play on the recorder, I found myself sucked in by Paul's stories and experiences all over again. The thing that still resonates most with me from that interview was a quote from Paul that has stuck in my head ever since: "As far as history is concerned, if it wasn't documented or recorded, it never happened. That person's story never happened." P



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TRIBE 20TH ANNIVERSARY



PAUL KING
APP Treasurer
Cold Steel America
San Francisco, CA

In January 1992, Joakim Eriksson and Marika Liebst opened the first piercing shop in Sweden. To honor the support of their friends and colleagues over the past 20 years, they decided to organize a commemorative event, which they held from March 30 through April 1, 2012.

The organizers selected a fully equipped facility called “House of Win-Win” in the heart of the beautiful city of Gothenburg, Sweden. The festivities kicked off on Friday night with Håvve Fjell supervising suspensions for any guests who wanted to suspend—and there were many participants over the course of the evening.

Seminar classes ran all day Saturday and Sunday. The program topics included Female Genital Piercing, History of Western Piercing, Surface Anchor Workshop, Ritual

Modification, Freehand Piercing, Suspension Safety, and Piercing Troubleshooting.

There were 54 seminar attendees (ranging in age from 18 to 63), and 80 more friends, past employees, and colleagues showed up for Saturday night’s gala, which included a fantastic banquet and a performance by Håvve’s group Pain Solution. With guests from seven countries and instructors from Norway, France, and the United States, this was truly an international event. Instructors included Christiane Löfblad and Håvve Fjell, Elayne Angel, Brian Skellie, Bethra Szumski, and me.

Originally, this event was intended as a one-time anniversary celebration. However, entirely as a result of the overwhelming response, Joakim and Marika have decided to offer educational seminars again next year! It

was a first-time endeavor, but their planning and execution were absolutely stellar. They’ve set the bar high for themselves for next year, but I have every confidence they will continue to provide a tremendous service to the Scandinavian piercing community.

Joakim Eriksson has been a professional body piercer since 1991. He was a founding member of ASAP, Sweden’s Association of Safe Piercing and sister organization to the APP. Tribe co-founder Marika Liebst is the jewelry, finance, and operations manager of the studio.

For additional information, please visit:

www.tribe.se

<http://www.safepiercing.se>

www.pinpoint-piercing.no

www.painsolution.net

www.wingsofdesire.org **P**





APTPI 7TH ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL MEETING



APTPI OFFICE

After spending 2011 thinking about the future of APTPI and the different paths we could have taken, we presented our 7th annual international meeting. Many events, along with a tight three-day schedule, took more time and effort than ever before. Even though we had fewer attendees than in the past, by the end we were really satisfied! The attendees appreciated a rich and varied schedule that covered almost all the aspects useful to improving the quality of a tattoo and piercing shop.

First aid, sterilization, digital photography, and shop aesthetics were some of the topics of the seminars; more technical lessons dealt with dot-work tattoos, female genital piercing, glass as a material for piercing jewelry, tattoo color theory with Emiliano Marchetti, the use of O-needles, and tattooist Jesus Sayalero's work.

Demonstration workshops were a new feature this year, both for tattooing and body piercing. Jee Sayalero, of Human Fly Tattoo in Madrid, completed a great new school tattoo (a style for which he is internationally renowned) while explaining his technique

and providing personal tips and tricks every step of the way. Luis Garcia, a professional piercer since 1994, taught a class about facial piercings and then put the lessons into practice by piercing some volunteers. Both workshops were well attended and highly appreciated—people actively participated in interesting debates not only between the speakers and audience members but also among the attendees.

The shared lessons were really useful: *Advantages of Immediate Use Sterilization* (Brian Skellie), *First Aid* (Italian Red Cross), and *Digital Photography* (Massimo Carlisi) are all very different topics, but every one of them contributes to improving the quality of services a tattoo or piercing shop can offer. To this end the APTPI board members involved the attendees in a roundtable discussion, *Studio Aesthetics*, in which they explained how to promote the business and simplify the work process.

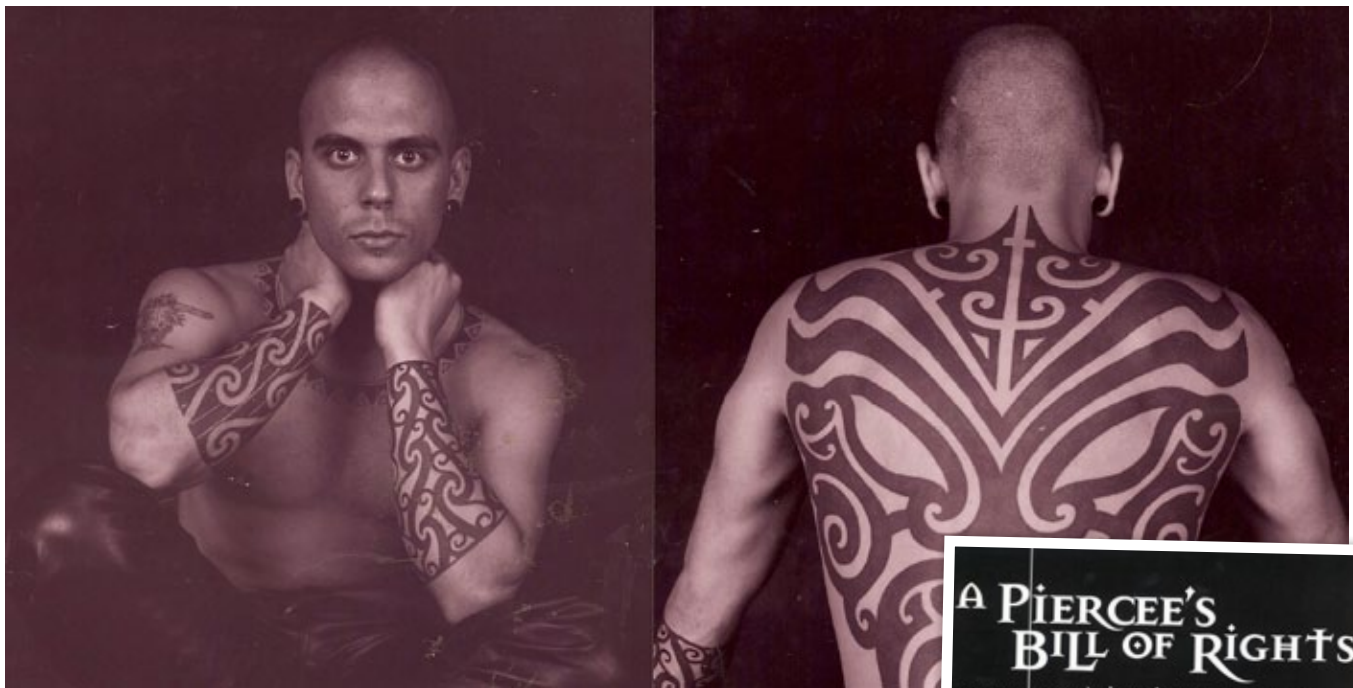
Jason Pfohl, Gorilla Glass founder, offered an in-depth lesson about the use of glass as material for body jewelry. Elayne Angel presented a workshop entitled *Safe and Effective Female Genital Piercing*. Last but not least, Marco Galdo taught his lesson *Inkdot*

and *Neo-Tribal Tattoo*, in which he shared his knowledge about the modern tribal style and dot-work technique.

The attendees had no chance to get bored during break times and at night: The Expo area offered a rich display of jewelry and tattoo supplies from the very best suppliers, mainly from Italy and the United States. APTPI has been very happy to support Skin's Friend, whose charity work collects funds to sustain the Sammy Basso Italian Progeria Association. Each night offered a different show everyone could enjoy: Isosmosi, Håvve Fjell from Oslo's Pain Solution, and the projection of Herbert Hoffmann's life documentary.

We would like to thank Skin's Friend; the suppliers, both the ones supporting us from the very beginning and the new ones; the speakers, who gave us the chance to deal with very interesting topics; and all the volunteers, without whom the entire event would not have been as well organized.

info@aptpi.org
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www.humanflytattoo.com
www.trafficantidarte.com **P**



BRIAN MURPHY



TAJ TREVA WAGGAMAN
San Diego, CA

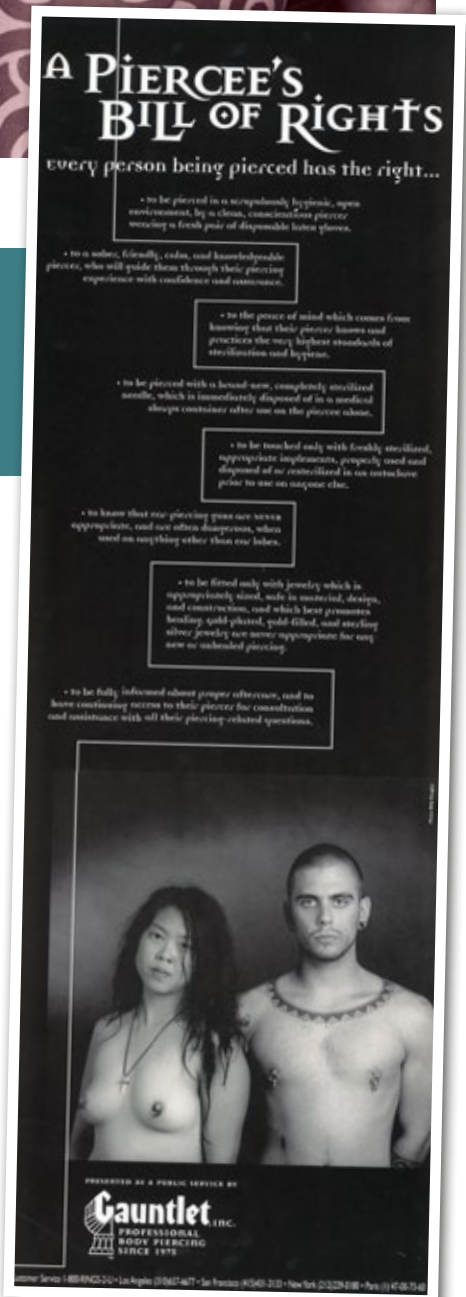
It is with great sorrow that I announce the loss of one of our community's most unforgettable members, Master Piercer Brian Murphy—affectionately known as “Baby Brian.” It’s impossible to recall Gauntlet in the nineties without being reminded of his trademark tattoos and infectious smile. As one of Brian’s apprentices, I witnessed his charm and seemingly effortless mastery of body piercing.

Brian became an employee of Gauntlet Los Angeles in 1992, where his training began under the mentorship of Master Piercer Elayne Angel. He was 22 years old and one of a select few who were to become the next generation of piercers. Simultaneously, piercing and its subculture of enthusiasts was gaining momentum: books such as *Modern Primitives* were published, and piercing was showing up in nightclubs, performance art, and music videos. Brian’s interest in art and culture, combined with his unique talents and timing, meant he was affiliated with many projects and collaborations. He was key in

several of the performance artist Ron Athey’s early works, where he joined the stage with Clayton (formerly Crystal) Cross, Paul King, Kristian White, Alex Binnie, and so many others.

Brian’s memorable image was attached to “A Piercer’s Bill of Rights,” a poster that was printed in Gauntlet catalogues and training manuals and hung prominently in all our retail locations—as well as in shops all over the world. He became—literally—the poster boy for safe piercing: his face advertised safety, trust, and a higher standard of piercing. Throughout this time he was also a principal trainer in both Gauntlet’s stores and piercing training seminars, and he left his stamp on countless budding young piercers. Words cannot express my honor and gratitude to have had the time and training I experienced with Brian Murphy.

On Saturday, April 14, 2012, we lost a friend and family member. We will miss Brian, but we will never forget his indelible imprint on our industry’s history—and our hearts. **P**



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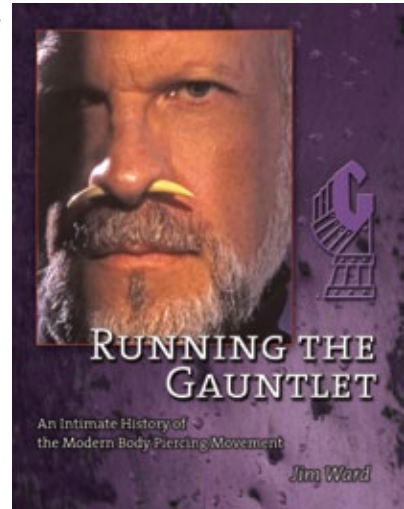
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR - ELAYNE ANGEL has been a professional piercer for more than 20 years and has performed over 40,000 piercings. She was awarded the President's Lifetime Achievement Award by the Association of Professional Piercers in 2006 and is a contributing writer for *PAIN* Magazine. She lives in Mérida, Mexico. Visit www.piercingbible.com for more information.

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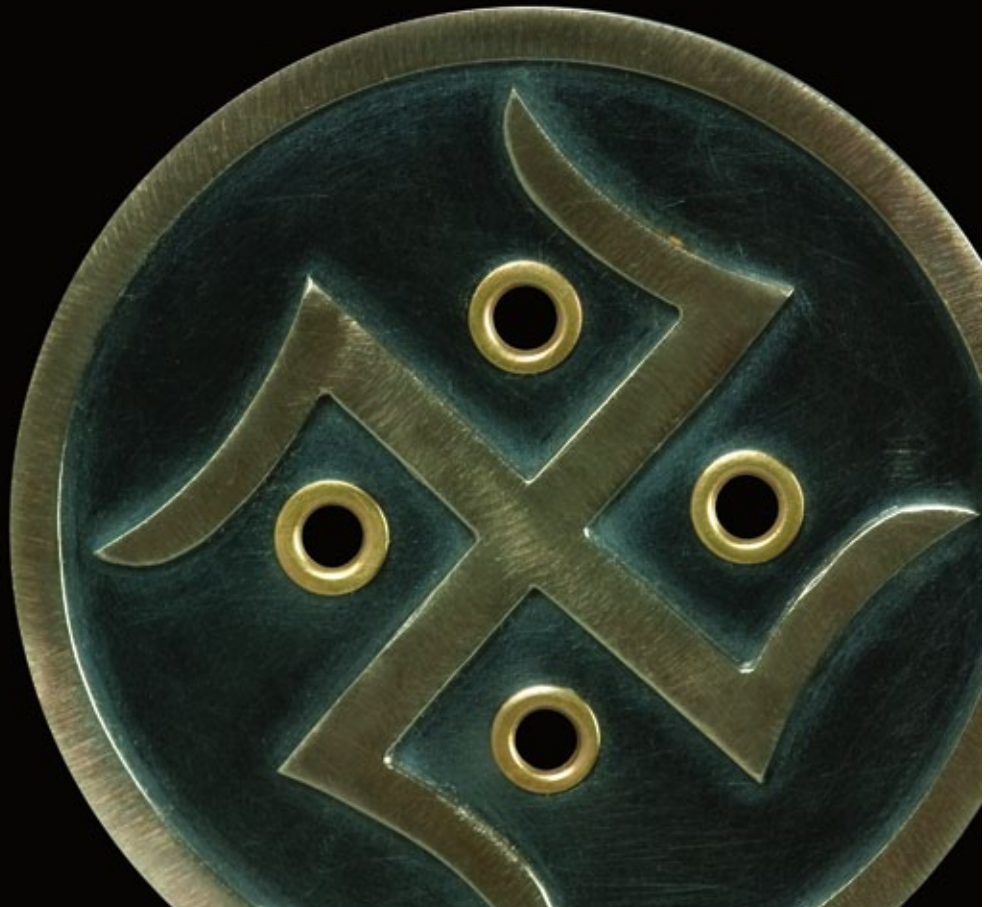
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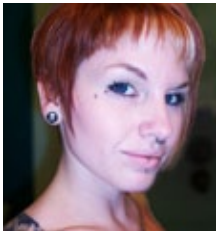
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DALLAS SUSCON



MISTY FORSBERG

Hook Life
suspension.org/hooklife
Photos by Mark Kaplan

The 2012 Dallas SusCon Practitioners Convention has come and gone, but most of us are still talking about the amazing weekend that took place. It was refreshing to see so many people come together in such a positive way. The suspension community has certainly dealt with its share of tragedy over the past year, and this weekend offered more than just an opportunity to improve our skills as practitioners; for many, it was a chance for closure, a time to build new friendships, and a moment to remind us of what an incredible group of people we are surrounded by. We left SusCon improved and more prepared to continue in this beautiful craft as we move forward.

This year saw several changes toward improving safety and education. The classes offered were accompanied by more interactive roundtable discussions that allowed us to learn not only from the instructors but also one another. Attendees were given the opportunity to take classes covering the technical aspects of suspension, such as suspension rigging and hook placement, as well as get into topics that impact our community, like media relations and legislation. Also added this year was a

hands-on belay workshop that presented attendees with several methods and tools to work with under the guidance of the instructors. The level of interaction between teachers and attendees throughout the classes showed the continuing desire for knowledge among people in this community.

There really were too many amazing suspensions taking place throughout the weekend to describe them all, but one that stood out was the resurrection and chest suspensions performed by Jill Coudray, widow of Arwen "Spliff" Rosa [photo at left, see also *The Point* #57]; the whole room seemed to stop and come together. As I looked around the crowd, at friends and family embracing one another, I was deeply touched. Tears fell and hugs were exchanged as we all took a moment to acknowledge the loss we suffered in Arwen's passing. As Jill slowly swayed on her hooks, tears turned to a smile that lit up the room. It was a beautiful suspension by an incredibly strong woman. With the energy and emotion of it all, many of us left refocused and energized.

There were so many amazing things to see that weekend: the 360 degree rotating rig, transitional and tandem suspensions,

and several wonderful collaborations, including one that turned the entire outdoor dome into rigging points for an incredible static lotus suspension. There is no way to describe the level of talent that comes together for this event. You just had to be there.

Even though there were a few bumps along the way, this year saw many new faces and teams join our move toward becoming more skilled practitioners. Though most of us are still winding down from the hectic pace of SusCon, plans are being made to make next year even better. Much like the way the APP's annual Conference and Exposition has educated piercers through the years, events like the Dallas SusCon Practitioners Convention are crucial in ensuring that we continue to work together and move in the right direction. I think the past years were only the beginning of great things to come for this convention. I hope that in 2013 we will see just as many new faces in attendance as we reach out to the ever-growing number of practitioners around the world. **P**



BRIAN GILLIAM



STEPHEN DETOMA

Anatometal, Inc.
Santa Cruz, CA

The morning of April 12th, 2012 started off the same as most at Anatometal. But after waking up the computers and pouring a cup of coffee, a shop meeting was called, and the news we were given knocked the wind out of each and every one of us.

Our dear friend Brian Gilliam, “Daddy,” had taken his life the previous night.

A great majority of you reading this know Brian, and have for many years. There have been dinners, birthdays, meetings, conferences, conventions, hotel rooms, cab rides, airline flights, hotel lobbies, back-deck BBQs, and early morning breakfasts with the kids. For the benefit of those who never had the pleasure of having Brian in their lives, on a personal or professional level, let me share a little of him with you.

Brian was a Santa Cruz local, through and through. He was massively involved in the local punk/hardcore scene, taking an active role in many well-known local bands through the years—for which he will never

be forgotten in this town. He loved his mom, like all good sons should; he was a devoted father who spoke fondly and often of his kids.

Brian was active in the body modification community from early on. He maintained a substantial presence on [rec.arts.bodyart](#) and [BMEzine.com](#). Brian was, in addition to being well versed in CAD software, a skilled machinist responsible for many designs that are commonplace in the industry today. A part of the APP from its inception, Brian was constantly involved in the progression of quality modern body jewelry.

Brian’s love of music led him to study sound engineering at Ex’pression College for Digital Arts, where he graduated at the top of his class. He was an honored speaker at his graduation; as a classic example of how Brian did things, he left his graduation ceremony—still in his suit—and flew to Las Vegas to work a convention with us for the weekend, looking sharp as a knife.

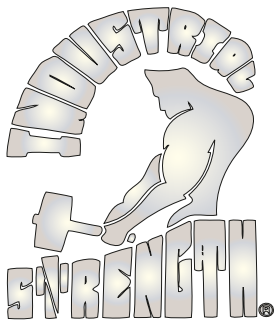
Most recently, Brian had begun a CrossFit

regimen. He had lost weight, gained muscle mass, and at lunch would constantly talk about the circuits he ran with his team.

Brian Gilliam was the best kind of friend any of us could hope to share this life with: unquestionably loyal and willing to help anyone at any time without expectation of reward. Never one to take himself too seriously, his face always wore a smile, and if you didn’t have one, he always had a spare. Many of us have tattoos matching Brian’s that we can always look back on and laugh at because, “well, seemed like a good idea at the time!”

In addition to his extended family, Brian leaves behind two beautiful children, Indigo and Violet. A Paypal account has been set up to accept donations. Anatometal, Inc. will be matching donations to this account dollar-for-dollar, and the proceeds will be placed in a trust fund for Brian’s children to help in the days ahead.

To make a donation in any amount, please visit [briangilliam.com](#) **P**



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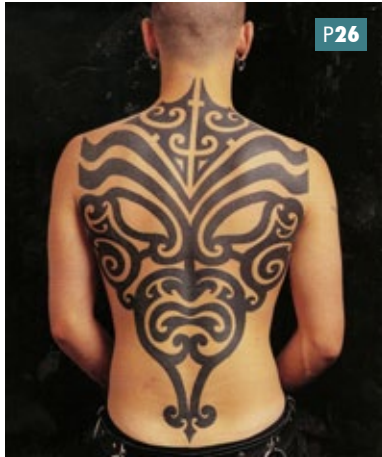
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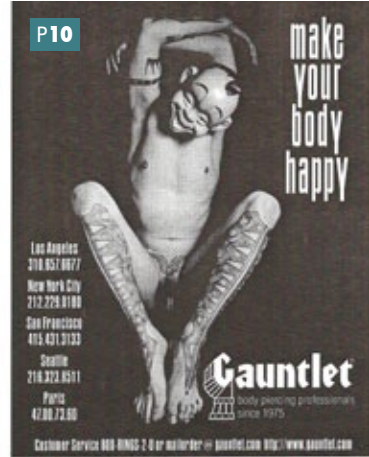
P26



P6



P10



PAGE
24

