

Featured story:

A PUNK CONCERT

Written by Max Neil Maximchuk

I liked Punk, not only listening to it in the safety of my own home, but sometimes getting more involved by going to a place where there was some action.

In Punkland the Sex Pistols were the kings but there were a few others that gained notoriety. When we found out The Dead Kennedies (what a name?!) were playing in Winnipeg, a couple friends and I forked over the money for the tickets and eagerly anticipated the event.

It wasn't a concert per se. I don't recall any places for people to sit at, for example. At one end of the hall was a place to buy your beer, and at the other end was the stage. The space in between was where you did what you had to do.

My friends and I were comfortably close to the beer counter, taking in the scene and listening to the warm-up band. As the night progressed I didn't want to stay far in the background any longer so I bid adieu to my friends and made my way up to where the action was.

The friends were where you could comfortably move around, even move your arms while attempting to speak. Of course the others may not be able to hear anything, but that's another matter. Halfway across that hall there was a noticeable change in the density of inhabitants. It took an assertive agility to negotiate any further progress to the front-line action. I had wisely handed over my beer glass to my friends earlier knowing it would be a useless accessory as I approached the vicinity of the stage but I didn't think about my glasses.

Somebody shoved me hard from behind, and with that momentum I gained a metre or two closer to my goal. People were definitely rougher in this neighbourhood and the best way to get along was to shove back. I pushed they pushed we all pushed. Sometimes there seemed to be a rhythm, unaccounted waves of harmony, but that lasted only as long as the time it took to notice them. Then they were gone again.

All the time I got a little bit closer. I was nearer now, moving & pushing & being pushed and I could easily see the lead singer and the band screaming and gyrating. Then my shoe came off. Maybe somebody stepped onto my heel while my foot was momentarily up. I briefly thought of trying to retrieve it but I quickly lost that useless train of thought. It was impossible to bend over where I was. We were just a solid block of flesh and bone, unable to do more than go with the flow. If you wanted to be part of that moving mass, it wasn't enough to simply follow. You had to contribute, to be active. Then, in that way, you joined the rest, became one with them.

It was rough, but kind of fun in a way, too.

So, my shoe was gone and I accepted that. Another unexpected push, but this was a blow, not from one individual, but from somewhere deep in the pack, undulating its way out my direction, gaining force in its journey. It was sudden and hard, enough to jostle my glasses off their cozy resting place above my nose and ears.

They were gone.

Unlike my shoe, I made some hasty gestures in trying to save them but within seconds I was jostled to another part of the floor, people stamping and swaying and shoving. My glasses were history. Long gone.

Now I had nothing left to lose. So I really joined the crowd now. Pushing & shoving & receiving & moving. Meanwhile The Dead Kennedies continued thrashing their sounds out at us.

I pushed harder now and made my way to the front line. I was going to stay there. I was moving and dancing and pushing. No-one was going to send me back.

Some guy somehow made his way onto the stage, danced a bit then dived into the audience, almost gracefully turning his straight-held back as it made its gravity-bound journey to the public a short distance below. He was caught and released and we danced all the more.

I wanted to try it.

I somehow got up on stage and danced near the lead singer. The music and the band and the masses moved me. I didn't want to overstay my welcome even though there were no security guards roughly handling stage crashers to the side. So, when I felt the moment had come, I ceased my dancing and leaped into the crowd too, keeping my body straight and fairly parallel to the floor. There was a slight spin, bringing me to be facing the ceiling when I placed my trust with the people to catch me with their numerous hands and arms. They did catch me! What a feeling.

A couple more people tried it, but not a lot. I wanted to give it one more go. I made it up there, danced a bit and dived. Now I should mention that I was a bigger guy than most and that may have had something to do with what happened next. I went into that low spin, fully expecting that cushioning of arms and bodies but it was the hard floor that my lower back met first. I guess they had enough and this was their way of expressing their intentions.

That blow to the floor was a hard one, knocking the wind out of me. For a brief moment I was worried I might have been seriously injured but my more immediate concern was to not be trampled by the jostling angry giants swarming all around me, quickly closing the gap. I couldn't get up on my own, with no force moving through my limbs to get me going. I was stunned for a little while. It didn't look good.

Fortunately a couple fast-thinking guys noticed and assessed the situation quickly and moved accordingly. They firmly grabbed hold of my arms and pulled me up. The rest was up to me. Even though I couldn't move, still partially paralyzed, I was out of immediate danger. People were shoving and pushing, but it was all different now.

Little by little I discovered minute openings and gravitated towards them. Little by little I willed my body to stay upright and move, this time away from the pull of the centre stage. Little by little I found that gratifying space occupied by freer flowing bodies. I eventually broke free of that black hole and found my friends, as always, near the bar. I joined them, now taking in the show from a different perspective.

Well, I had wanted to be a part of it all.

There were still some parts of me out there on the dance floor. My glasses, which I'm sure were shattered into a zillion pieces. And my shoe.

From that distance I recuperated and safely enjoyed the rest of the concert. All things considered, it was a good night. I was fine after a while and when the music stopped, the lights turned on and the people began clearing out, my friends helped me scavenge the place for my shoe. Luck was with me that night. We not only found it waiting for me, but my glasses were intact. Well, the arms were badly bent, but that was all. Not even broken.

We headed home until our paths took us our separate ways.

Inside my apartment I looked into the bathroom mirror and took a picture of myself before turning in. I imagine that photo is long lost but if it turns up, I'll include it here. One of the things that stands out in my memory was the ripping my clothes got. Not a great deal, just a strip or two revealing some skin and some of the intensity of the night. I hardly noticed it in all that frantic fervour earlier on.

I should also add that this was not a typical night out for me. I can see why some would find such places appealing, (What a release!), but it was not my normal style. Still, it was good to step out for some fresh air once in a while, no?

AFTERWORD:

It's difficult to say what was characteristic of me in my 20s & 30s. I was 'myself' with different groups of friends but my actions and expression varied upon who I was with. And, it was not unusual for me to do things 'out of character', at least as seen by somebody else. I think that is one of the reasons I enjoyed Punk music so much. It is defiant and lets you challenge tradition, including the traditions that you have set up yourself.