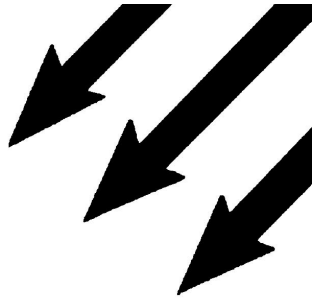


# IT DID HAPPEN HERE ●



It Did Happen Here is an independently produced podcast that documents the fight against racist white skinheads in the 1980's and 90's. The 11 episodes feature interviews with many people who worked together in those days and reveal the unlikely collaboration between groups of immigrants, civil rights activists, militant youth and queer organizers who came together to successfully confront neo-nazi violence and right wing organizing in the Rose City.

The podcast talks to three core groups: the Portland chapter of Anti Racist Action; SHARP- Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice; and the Coalition for Human Dignity. In out-and-out brawls on the streets and at punk shows, and in behind the scenes intelligence gathering to expose right wing and white nationalist organizing, the three groups united on their home ground over and over to attack fascists—and they won it back.

You can listen to the podcast at [itdidhappenherepodcast.com](http://itdidhappenherepodcast.com) and find more zines by 1312 Press at [1312press.noblogs.org](http://1312press.noblogs.org).



## ***SHARPER TIMES***



***PORTLAND ANTI-RACIST ACTION &  
SKINHEADS AGAINST RACIAL PREJUDICE  
BY THE "IT DID HAPPEN HERE" PODCAST***



this pepper spray at all times. And you need to know how to use it.” You know, that sucks. That’s not what I want to tell my teenager. This is not the kind of thing that I ever would have wanted to be involved in. It’s just what happened. It’s important to me to not regret the past or shut the door on it, and it definitely has shaped my life.

I hope that sharing my experience can help others. But I also wish that that never happened. I wish I never got in the vehicle. If I could go back in time, I absolutely would do a lot of things differently. But you know, like, we move forward from where we’re at. Racists and Nazis kill people. It’s not uncommon. It’s just not something I ever wanted to be a part of. I wanted to stand up to the bad guys, protect the vulnerable, feel good about myself, have fun, listen to music, have friends, like those are the things I wanted to do. And when I was a kid, when I turned myself in, I honestly didn’t think that I would survive my prison sentence. I just felt that’s what I had to do to, to be right with myself. But I did. And so here we are.

Anti-Racist Action (**ARA**) was a direct action oriented street-level network of organizations that formed in the 1980’s in the United States and Canada to fight the rise of neo-Nazi and white nationalist organizing. The Anti-Racist Action Network operated on four points of unity (taken from their website, 2009):

1. We go where they go. Whenever fascists are organizing or active in public, we’re there. We don’t believe in ignoring them or staying away from them. Never let the Nazis have the street!
2. We don’t rely on the cops or courts to do our work for us. This doesn’t mean we never go to court, but the cops uphold white supremacy and the status quo. They attack us and everyone who resists oppression. We must rely on ourselves to protect ourselves and stop the fascists.
3. Non-sectarian defense of other anti-fascists. In ARA, we have a lot of different groups and individuals. We don’t agree about everything and we have a right to differ openly. But in this movement an attack on one is an attack on us all. We stand behind each other.
4. We support abortion rights and reproductive freedom. ARA intends to do the hard work necessary to build a broad, strong movement against racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, homophobia, transphobia, discrimination against the disabled, the oldest, the youngest, and the most oppressed people. We want a classless, free society.

**SHARPs** (Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice) are skinheads who are explicitly anti-racist. The skinhead movement started in 1960’s England as a multi-racial working class youth subculture, and Jamaican music like ska, reggae and dub was its soundtrack. As the decades passed, the style, music and politics changed, and white nationalism crept in with the advent of the English neo-Nazi band called Skrewdriver. It became important for skinheads to declare their opposition to the creep of racism and white nationalism, and thus the SHARP movement was born alongside bands like The Oppressed. Racist and neo-Nazis who dress like skinheads are commonly referred to as boneheads, and are often viewed as illegitimate in skinhead culture given the multi-racial working class solidarity at the heart of the movement. The Don Letts BBC documentary “The Story Of Skinhead” provides an excellent overview of the history of the skinhead movement.

***Editor’s Note: Several people appear in and out of these interviews in a non-linear fashion. They are introduced in an italicized font throughout the zine.***

Cover image depicts a group of SHARPs up against a wall with their hands on their head, getting searched by police outside the Multnomah County Courthouse during the trial of Tom Metzger in Portland, Oregon in 1990.

# PART ONE

## “THEY THOUGHT WE WERE EVERYWHERE”



*China is a Black woman who was born and raised in Portland, OR, who ran in the punk rock scenes in Portland in the 1980s/90s.*

**CHINA:** I was like a punk rocker you know, I wasn't, I never shaved my head. I mean, I had a mohawk, I wasn't a skin. But you know, skins and punks were, we would kind of listen to some similar music. And there's a lot of transectionality between the two groups, you know, so I mean, I just would meet people, it wasn't any kind of formal thing, just because people knew me. They recognized me. Like I mentioned, I was probably one of the only black kids down there. There were a few of us, but I was the only black girl that I recall. So I think, I was also a target quite a bit because of who I was.

I remember actually hanging out with some of the skinheads when I was younger and them saying, like, the N word, and stuff, and I was kinda like, (\*laughs ironically\*). I didn't know what to say, I was like, 14, and they would be like, "oh, not you. Your nose isn't like that." And then I remember thinking to myself, "who are they talking about, my dad?" And I started to get just that anger started to build up and be to the point where I was like, "no, you're not going to talk like this. You're not gonna put," you know, I just, I mean, it was like a righteous rage, though. I don't feel bad about it. I'm like, hey, this was ridiculous.

*Jason also grew up in Portland. He was involved in the punk scene from 1985 on, and was an organizer with Anti-Racist Action.*

**JASON:** There was a specific moment where everything changed and the killing of Mulugeta Seraw really, really charged things. I remember being at Pine Street, I wanna say it was '88. Some kid had gotten his braces kicked through his lips and earlier in the night I was standing out front in between bands and I was 5'5" and 120 pounds, long hair, sitting up against the wall with a friend and I was approached by this very large white supremacist and he wanted to recruit me and I said, you know, "I'm not interested." And he disappeared. Couple minutes later

me, my family that I thought they were so crappy, they were really there for me to the best of their ability. And my friends who I thought were still in there for me, weren't present as much. And I can't put that all on everybody else because I dropped off, too. When I went to prison, I didn't know what to do with myself. I didn't know what I wanted to do. I didn't know what I should do. I really isolated for a long time.

But today, I have friends. I'm not entrenched in the activism. But I have friends that go back 20 years. I have friends that go back 30 years. This is my city. I grew up here. I've got a lot of love and support here. I was able to keep my nose clean while I was in. And eventually I earned minimum custody and I went to like a work camp where people go out on work crews and pick up litter and stuff like that. That was wonderful. That was such a different vibe. In the big penitentiary, you housed with people who will never get out. And some of those people are crazy, and some of them don't care. And so when I got to the work crews, I just felt like I could breathe a big sigh of relief. Everybody at the minimum security facilities is looking forward to going home and being reunited with their families. And I started that part of my journey. And you know, I was in Baker city, Oregon, which is very far from Portland, and my parents still kept making that trip even when the roads were icy, no matter what. I did over four years, but not by very much, because I earned some good time. I got out in '97. And then after I got out, I had five years of post prison supervision. And then I got out. And I didn't realize how weird that would be. There's a lot of things I had to readapt to, like, things that you might not ever think about. In prison, there's no darkness, ever, there's always lights on. So sleeping in darkness was kind of like, whoa. You know, I got married really quickly. I had a bunch of kids. I think I was trying to like be, quote unquote, normal. It didn't really make me normal. Today, I've been sober for eight and a half years. That's been really good for me. I have an amazing wife who is also sober with me. We're parents to five kids that we have part time.

Being an anti-racist skinhead isn't my whole story. You know, I'm active in the community and I work, I'm a carpenter, and mostly I'm a father. Firstly, that's how I identify now. I still always had this idea that I'd be murdered, I was convinced that I'd be murdered. I just, I carried that fear with me for a lot of years. The way I responded to that was I always thought, "I want to make sure that I always tell my kids that I love them. I want to make sure that I always hug them a lot." Even though it started from a morbid motivation, I ended up having really great relationships with all my kids. I'm the parent of a trans teenage girl. That's been a really eye opening and new experience for me. For those teenagers who are trans and are going down that road and facing all of the dangers and persecutions, like, I think they're, like, the bravest people. And these people come to our city to attack trans women, and to think of her getting attacked for no reason, this makes me so upset. And it happens, often. And it sucks, it sucks to worry about your kids safety. It sucks. It sucks to say, "I want you to carry

*Jon Bair, meanwhile, embarked on his journey through the prison system:*

**JON:** I'm a small guy. I'm not a big, tough guy, and I'm short and I'm thin. When I got to the penitentiary, I suddenly realized that, like, I didn't really know that, "oh, I'm a small guy." That was pretty intimidating. And there was about a week, I think, where people didn't know who I was. And it was pretty fine. People were friendly and I was trying to kind of get the hang of things. And then I think the first newspaper article about my conviction came out. And people started learning who I was. There were some Nazi groups where I was, but they were not the majority. And they immediately started giving me a hard time, harassing me, threatening me a little. The white people that I was friends with, for the most part, basically said, "hey, you seem like a nice guy. I don't want to have the kind of problems that you have. So don't talk to me anymore. Sorry if that seems harsh, but that's the way it is." And so I found myself very scared, very alone, not knowing what to do. I didn't know anything. People would confront me, I would swallow my pride and would walk away. It's just very, very scary. So what happened was, I wanted to try to keep myself safe as best I could. I felt very alone. I didn't want to get assigned a work position in the chow hall. I thought that seemed pretty dangerous, so I requested a work position in the college.

At that time they offered college classes for inmates, or GED programs, stuff like that. I got a job as a teacher's assistant for English as a Second Language. I tried to busy myself in as many ways as I could, that I felt were, like, safe for me--college, reading. But ultimately, what saved me is the guys I was working with, the Hispanic community, doing English as a Second Language, they started to wonder why I was different, and why I always ate by myself and why I never went outside, and I was all pale and they were wondering if I was like a child molester or what the deal was. They learned about who I was, they basically said, "look, we're going to make you an honorary Mexican, you're going to be with us now. We're going to take you under our wing, "but you look terrible. Starting today, you have to go outside every day. You have to start lifting weights." They had certain ways that they did their clothes and they brought me into their community. And honestly, it was wonderful. It was a type of community that I felt really comfortable in, and I could relate to at that time. It was a multiracial community. And we had fun, and they kept me safe. And I started getting healthy. And I started feeling better about myself. That was another real turning point for me. I would say that I had a not very good relationship with my parents at that age. And I had, I had, you know, my own feelings about the ways in which I thought they weren't great. I thought that everything that I was doing with my friends was really great. I can tell you that when I went to prison, my parents came and visited me every single month for all the years that I was in, and twice on every month that there was a holiday, and they drove, no matter how far it was. A lot of my friends, a lot of my brotherhood evaporated. Not completely, but, that was a huge wake up call for

I look up and he's right back in front of me with his back to me. All a sudden he swung around and sliced my face open. My friend ran off and I grabbed my skateboard and all a sudden I was surrounded by twelve, fifteen decked out, ready to go people. I had gone to school with a woman that was in POWER.

***POWER was a racist skinhead crew that formed around the same time as East Side White Pride.***

**JASON:** She recognized me, came over and got them to chill out and she talked me down, 'cause I didn't wanna back down. She was like, "you need to stop, otherwise they're all gonna attack you and it's gonna be bad." A few other incidents happened that night. They beat up a few more people and a few of us tried to help. A couple other strangers came to my aid and stood by my side. People I'd never met. It seemed like it was getting to that point where it's do or die. We either have to figure something out or people just get picked off left and right.

**CHINA:** At first it was just a few of us kinda standing up against these nazis. I think a lot of people weren't necessarily agreeing with them, but they were scared to speak up against them because they presented this force like they were going to beat your ass or whatever, if you said anything.

***Kelly Halliburton grew up in the mid-80s Portland music scene, going to punk and metal shows. He was in several local anarcho-punk bands in this era, including RESIST and DEPRIVED, and more recently was the drummer in Pierced Arrows.***

**KELLY:** There was this guy, Clinton and he, uh, he was a really big guy. And I remember seeing him squaring off with a crowd of nazi skinheads in front of the Pine Street after a show. That's when, the first times that I saw people actually fighting back. I think he got pretty beat up that night. But, at least it was someone on my side that was standing up to them. It was like, you'd found your team.

*As longtime community organizer and racial justice scholar Scot Nakagawa mentioned in episode two, historically, hate crimes have a limited effect, but not here. Mulugeta Seraw's murder electrified the local neo-nazis, infusing them with power grounded and guided by newly organized politics from national hate groups. Their street presence increased both in numbers and in flagrant displays of hate insignia on their clothing. All kinds of people reported more frequent brazen attacks, and at the punk shows, the boneheads' old stomping grounds, they doubled down. They turned out in bigger groups--with baseball bats and knives, ready for violence. But in response, local punks banded together. They had had enough.*

*Long simmering resentment and hatred toward neo-nazi boneheads finally came to a boil. After years of enduring attacks, lone teenagers like Jason and China, the punks under this increased pressure—began to show solidarity. They saw other people under attack, and came to their aid. They pushed back. The scene began to shift from Reagan-era nihilism to a broader understanding of unity in the name of reclaiming space from fascists and sticking up for each other.*

**KELLY:** And so, what that incident did was it galvanized peoples' politics. It spurred this movement towards incorporating straightforward politics into the punk scene.

*There was an understanding that remaining neutral in the presence of boneheads gave tacit approval to their existence. Mulugeta was not the first person in Portland killed by racists<sup>1</sup>, but when punks found out that one of Mulugeta's killers was a guy who sometimes took their door money for shows, and the other two were familiar faces in the scene, it made people see how close they were to the murderers. Ken Mieske was a vicious pretty boy who worked the door at the Pine Street Theatre; he was in a band with Kyle Brewster, who had been ironically voted prom king at Grant High School while harboring hateful ideology. Steve Strasser lived on the street. They were racists, they were bullying and intimidating—and they were punks.*

**JASON:** There was a show at the Starry Night and this was right after Mulugeta Seraw was killed. The Coalition for Human Dignity (CHD) was handing out fliers. A guy gave me one and I was pretty psyched to get it. That same week, there was a show at the Pine Street. A bunch of the punks showed up, the spikey-haired crowd, people that I ended up getting to know pretty well. In fact, I knew a couple of them from high school and within a week, we had gotten a meeting together and decided that we were gonna fight back.

**CHINA:** I think we had the first Anti-Racist Action and Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice meeting at a house in town, on Belmont Street. We were just kind of getting together talking about, what are we going to do about these Nazis, these skins that are causing problems.

***Jorin is a white punk from Portland, who was also an organizer with Anti-Racist Action.***

**JORIN:** The first meeting we ever had was at Karen's house on 17th and Belmont and a bunch of people showed up, some of whom became integral to organizing, and some of whom may not, not have been that involved at all in the long term. Someone presented information about the organizing that was happening in Minneapolis and Chicago, to Europe to some extent and had

We'd let 'em take our pictures. Of course, all this stuff was just going into files that could later be used against us. I called the officers to the stand who I dealt with in the neighborhood and there are two of them, and each of them said they'd never seen me before in their life. They didn't know who I was. They had nothing on file of any incidents. That broke my heart because I realized that I was fighting a system that was corrupt. I wasn't a huge fan of police, but I still believed at age 20, that they had to follow the rules. When they got on the stand, and lied to my face in front of the judge and everybody on an oath before God and all that, I knew that they are going to screw me. Honestly, that's a big reason why I didn't go to trial. I pled guilty to first degree manslaughter. They gave me the maximum that they could give me at the time, according to the grid block, which was 60 months. Since Measure 11, I think that changed to like, 15 years with no good time. I just landed in a really unique place on the grid block. And I used to hang my hat on that, "well, they sentenced me to the maximum allowed by law and they wouldn't listen to any of my mitigating factors." But I recognize now, as an adult, had I been a person of color, or a person who didn't speak English, I don't think I would have been offered a plea bargain like that. I think it would have gone to trial, and I think it would have lost. So, there is that.

*Racist violence still occurred in Portland after the Erik Banks killing, but by 1993 the groups of boneheads covered in hate insignia who had for years maintained a street presence of violence and intimidation were gone.*

**JASON:** A few people got hemmed up, from the cops, and it didn't shut it down. It made things different, and it changed the way the white supremacists went about things. Most of them believe that our side had killed one of them without hesitation. In some ways that really worked in our favor, because it quieted things down. But it changed the way they operated. And so they started moving further out. They grew out their hair, they changed the way they dressed. They started recruiting on a different format. They went online, and they started being more secretive. This led to the resurgence now.

**MICHAEL:** There were a lot of people, through being acquaintances with me and the people they met with me, you know, got into hanging out, and being part of the crew and getting shaved-in and doing a lot of violence. So I was really sad to see John go to prison for, for that. I don't think it needed to happen. I think I probably helped build his mindset that made him think that that was something that might need to happen. I don't think it really changed anything for anybody, other than it definitely put us on the map in a different way, at a different level than I think we had been. We have a reputation now and we have for a long time, as being somewhere that's not going to put up with your shit. So if people don't know Portland's anti-racist history, the nazis definitely know it.

---

<sup>1</sup> On November 12 1988, Mulugeta Seraw was murdered in Portland by a group of Nazi skinheads. This incident is elaborated on in Episode 2 of the It Did Happen Here podcast.

**MICHAEL CLARK:** The Banks killing was pretty crazy. That was a really hard time. John and I were, we were good friends, and he lived with me for a while in high school when he was having a hard time with his parents. The police thought I was there. My cousin drove a car very similar to one that was there that night, and his door got kicked in New Year's Day. I got a call, "what the hell did you do last night?!" The police just kicked in my door looking for you!" Blah blah blah. "I told them I didn't know where you were," and spent the day calling around going, "what the hell happened last night?" I would have been there, but I was a little too high on LSD to leave the house, you know. [laughter] So I definitely wasn't in any shape to do anything. It just, everybody was loaded, and it just worked out the way that it did. It was a hard time.

**JON BAIR:** We all kind of split up, we did different things. I was arrested and questioned and released. And before I was released, the detectives said, "you know, it's a shame that that kid lost his life out there." And I was like, "oh my God." And it just hit me like a ton of bricks. But they released me and they told me that they knew who did it. They had the person locked up, the person was cooperating with them. I surmised which of my friends was locked up, and I definitely knew that he wasn't cooperating with them. And I basically had some time to think about what to do. I was 20 years old, I thought about running away, jumping on the trains and leaving town and maybe trying to alter my identity. And I tried to think about what my little brother would think, what my parents might think. And I thought, "if I do that, they'll definitely think that I'm guilty or that I did this thing on purpose," or something like that. And ultimately, I made the decision to face the music, to turn myself in. And so I did. I went and talked to the detective, and I made a complete confession. I told them everything that I did. For me, it was important to just tell them my part, they wanted to know what everybody else did, and I just kept it to me. And then they let me call my parents and I called my dad, and that was the toughest phone call of my life. I tried to tell him what was going on a little bit and he was kind of confused and then he was like, "Did you talk to the police?!" And I was like, "yeah, I've been talking to them all day." He's like, "oh, my God, do not talk to the police!" Good advice. It was a little bit late. I think I did what I needed to do to be the right thing for me. Obviously, that was a huge turning point in my life. I think I was in jail for about six months before I was offered and accepted the plea bargain that I took, you know, and I spent my 20's in prison and on parole. So, at my pretrial, I wanted to defend why I would have ever bought a firearm or owned one. I had a rifle that I bought legally that I decided when drunk to take with me in the car when we went to go meet these guys to fight. So I was in court and I was describing how we lived in this house and it had all these problems, and everyone knew that was the SHARP house, and that house had been shot up at one time, Molotov cocktails thrown at it another time, and we had a lot of noise complaints and we had a strained relationship with our neighbors, and the police had been there a bunch of times. And the reason I bought the firearm was to defend my home. We were naïve. But we would ham it up for these guys.

proposed that we do something there. For many of us the idea was initially just let's take our scene back. There's more of us than there are of them. And the reason that they've been walking all over us is because we haven't stuck together, we haven't done anything when this is happening.

**JASON:** The main topic of discussion was, "are we just gonna try and stand our ground as a troop, or are we actually gonna fight?" And that was a big, long argument for a long time. A lot of people did not feel comfortable with fighting or straight up attacking them, and a lot of people wanted to find alternate avenues for that. We said, "ok, that's great, but we're gonna be part of the Anti-Racist Action network, the action part of that says that we have decided we're going to fight them. And we're not gonna wait for them to beat someone up again, we're gonna attack them." So the group that agreed with that said, "ok, this is the first show we're gonna go to." We made a very serious presence and everybody showed up with bats and stood out front and we got the Pine Street to agree to not let any of them in. They could tell something was different when they showed up and there were a lot of people out front waiting. They kept driving around the block and seeing and it got a little sketchy when a few groups of them walked up and they'd see people going towards them and they'd take off. There was probably a couple scuffles in the blocks around it, mostly people like pulling up in their cars and trying to jump out to attack. They would get beaten back down and they'd jump back in their cars and tear off. That happened for three shows in a row and then they, for quite a while, they just quit coming. And we were pretty shocked that it happened that quickly. We expected this to go on for months and I think the three shows probably happened within a month and a half. There ended up being a few things outside of the shows, so then over the course of that year, it got more and more organized. The Minneapolis Baldies and Chicago ARA folks came out here and really helped us when we asked them to. They came out in '89 and in '90. And we decided that it wasn't enough to protect the shows, people at those shows. We wanted to push further.

*ARA had a commitment to direct confrontation and action. Because of its racist history and proliferation of local neo-nazi skinheads, Portland became a major node in ARA's national network. So much so, that the national meetings of the ARA in 1990 and '91 were in Portland.*

**CHINA:** I think when we got together and stood up as a force against them in their face, that was pretty powerful because it was a lot of showing up and fighting, like people jumping out of cars and throwing punches and gangland type of stuff. Driving around and we would see nazi skinheads, we'd jump out of the car, and we're like, "are you white pride? Are you white pride?" And we would start, like, swinging, you know. It really, it let them know that they weren't just going to get away with standing there, you know, with their little skinhead finger movements. So I think us, like, literally just in their face, standing up against them and being like, "hey, you're not gonna pick on people

and you're not gonna get away with these things."

***The coming together of ARA and the Coalition for Human Dignity was not mere happenstance; both groups made deliberate efforts to engage each other in solidarity. Scot Nakagawa is an activist and organizer from the Portland area. M. Treloar is a white anti-fascist organizer, street protestor, activist and researcher from Chicago who moved to Portland in 1988 after connecting with Pacific Northwest antifascists.***

**SCOT:** With the rise of neo-nazi skinheads in Portland in particular, it became necessary to try to out-organize them at their projected base of support. So, specifically, what that meant was professional neo-nazis were deploying neo-nazi skinhead youth to organize and build base. One of the places they were doing that was the alternative music scene here in Portland. They would go into the scene, there were nazi bands, they would flier, they would terrorize people. They would polarize things in the scene, such that people who felt vulnerable often would join neo-nazi groups, because they were afraid. They were also very susceptible to the racist ideas that they represented, but you know, the primary lever was fear. So, in order to be able to counter that influence, we needed to get into the scene and do the same thing. So I mean, that meant doing things like walking around wearing "fight racism" t-shirts, and occasionally getting up on stage and making a speech, or throwing yourself into the mosh pit. We did do that. And that meant that there were times when neo-nazi skinheads would come after us. There were significant amounts of violence happening here. Stabbings, assaults. There was a instance in which a small group of neo-nazi skinheads attempted to break down the door of the office of the Coalition for Human Dignity with pickaxes. There was another incident in which it is reported by neighbors, that about 15 neo-nazis organized themselves in paramilitary fashion in order to attack the home of activists. This is the kind of thing that people were facing. And in those instances, we did defend ourselves. So, of course there was violence. Of course there was. There was no choice.

**M. TRELOAR:** ARA was going to the bouncers, and they were going to the bands and saying, "we need you to stop this. If they come in and they're flashing swastikas, if they come in and they're all dressed for a fight, we gotta stop 'em at the door." That was their organizing. It denied a public space for these boneheads, which is a term I'll use from now on to refer to all of these hundreds of neo-fascist skinheads who arose. Not the organized fascists, but the fifteen to twenty year old ones who were indigenous to Portland. We're gonna fight on this cultural front. Let's look at what Rock Against Racism did in England, steal from them, you know, why not. So, Coalition for Human Dignity organized a Rock Against Racism show that had hundreds of people show up and the bands took open anti-bonehead positions from the stage.

*each other. In the close-knit brotherhood of SHARP, young people looking for purpose, found their purpose in fighting nazis. Anti Racist Action was a broad-based political movement of punks and skins but by 1992, the skinheads were done with politics. Jason, the ARA organizer, describes this shift:*

**JASON:** The energy changed and it became more SHARP, very much more street oriented. And then it became just another group of skinheads, PUB and then it was Baldies. And then it was Unity, and then it was a few other things, and then it was Intensified. And then Rose City came about. It became more of, "how do we get out of the political?" And part of that was because the Trotskys and other factions were trying to use us, to get us just to be their, their muscle or wield political power in their name. We didn't want anything to do with that. Many of us, you know, were socialists or communists, and that was fine, but we weren't going to be a political component. We were here to fight racism, homophobia, sexism. And that was the focus at that point and we did not want to lose focus to that. And so, everybody was like: we're just going to fight them in the street, and keep it there. So that was about the time, I want to say that when Eric Banks was shot, I think those guys were claiming Baldies at that point.

*Erik Banks was a young neo-nazi skinhead and a member of Bound for Glory, a racist white power skinhead band from St. Paul, Minnesota; just after midnight on January 1st, 1993, Banks was shot and killed in a street altercation in SE Portland.*

**JON BAIR:** On New Year's Eve, my friends and I were drinking, we were at a party. There was some Nazi groups we'd been fighting in the area regularly. People were talking to them on the phone and threats were being exchanged back and forth. And we're all drunk, that's part of the story, too. So, we decided we'd go out and meet them for a, quote unquote, fistfight. It was very snowy and icy out everywhere. We went to wherever we were going to meet them. And they drove up. And they pointed a gun at us out the window. And we got back in the car, and then they were following us. Nobody could drive fast, because everyone's tires were slipping. And this is the middle of the night. There's like, no traffic around. And so we had this weird following-each-other thing around the streets for a while and slipping around the corners. We finally pulled into this parking lot and one of the guys I was with said, all right, I'm just going to fight the guy, and we pulled into the parking lot. He got out and stood up. And they came with their car and they just ran him over. At the time, we thought he'd been run over and killed. What happened was, he got pinned under the hood of the car and just slid on ice. He wasn't even hurt very bad. The next thing I remember, there's a lot of yelling, there's a lot of screaming, people are screaming that they're shooting at us. People are screaming, "shoot the gun," and I had a rifle with us in the car. I pointed it in their general direction and fired it a few times. At that point, my friend who I thought had been killed, jumped up and got back in the car with us, and we drove off.



## PART THREE

### JON BAIR



*Jon Bair was born and raised in Portland. Jon describes himself as a father, a carpenter and a community member; he lives in the same neighborhood where he grew up. In the late 80s and early 90s, Jon identified as an antiracist skinhead who ran with SHARP–Skin Heads Against Racial Prejudice–and then a Portland version of The Baldies. On New Year’s Eve 1992, a single incident changed the course of Jon’s life.*

**JON BAIR:** I worked since a very young age and I had a house that I rented when I was very young and I had roommates move in. That was the beginning of my house being the main house where a lot of the activity happened and the day to day of it was music, parties, drinking. For the most part, it was having fun.

Early on, people always thought we were Nazis, because we had a similar look. Sometimes we’d get attacked by people who thought we were Nazis. Ultimately, at least in my neighborhood, we formed some alliances with some of the other groups in our area and the pressure became less, but early on, it was a lot of drama all the time.

*As activists succeeded in clearing the streets and show spaces of overt neo-Nazi presence, the movement rhetoric needed to evolve beyond the simple and effective shared principle of ‘nazis out.’ But the disparate groups had no strategy for moving forward together, aside from a general–and fiercely held–agreement that racist homophobic and anti-immigrant boneheads should be evicted from the city. While the Coalition for Human Dignity focused on strategies like research, community defense, and maintaining a network of information and support, Portland SHARPs took it upon themselves to fight boneheads, wherever, whenever. The ongoing hostilities between racists and SHARPs consumed the two groups. The continual mutual harassment included frequent hit and run brawls–and sporadic, targeted, threats and street altercations.*

*It’s easy to forget how young these people were. They were kids, generally aged 18-22, many with abuse and trauma histories. They were basically raising*

**JASON:** We kept hearing that they would be out in Beaverton, beating people up at the mall, or recruiting at the homeless shelter or Kellogg Bowl and Milwaukie Bowl and starting shit at all these different places. And actually, at this point in time, upper Hawthorne had a huge presence. There were several different apartment buildings that were heavily populated, so we would go to those places and go to Beaverton, and go to Milwaukie, go, you know, all the places where we had run into folks before. So within that following year, they quit coming to the punk shows and they started going to metal shows. So, some of the bands, one of them in particular, Death Conspiracy, were very anti-racist and did not like what they saw going on and so they asked us, said, “hey, would you guys come to the shows, set up a table?” We did that. Set up a table inside. It was a huge metal show. Most of the bands were with us. They agreed with us. But some of them still didn’t care and had friends that were nazis and a lot of nazis showed up to the show and came and confronted us. But a ton of people signed our mailing list and wanted to get involved. We made a lot of good connections. It really helped.

**JORIN:** I actually was in high school the whole time we were doing this work. I did go to school. I worked at night, especially after we started actively organizing when we formed ARA, it was the kind of thing where it was not safe to walk down the street by ourselves. Some of the daytime talk shows that had portrayed racist skinheads on TV, had lead to an environment where a lot of people who are not involved in the punk scene saw no difference between punks and skinheads. So, being by myself with spiky hair and a studded leather jacket could get me beat up by people who had no involvement, who saw me as being a skinhead. Or, I could get beat up by the boneheads for being ARA.

*Patrick Mazza is a left wing music journalist who provided coverage in the Portland hardcore scene’s fight against boneheads. Here he reads again from one of his columns from 1990:*

**PATRICK MAZZA:** Within Portland’s youth culture a new resistance to racist skinheads is growing. A multi-racial network of young people known as Anti-Racist Action. Outside apartments where neo-nazi skinheads live, ARA can be seen demonstrated. At hardcore music shows where racist skins have done much of their recruiting, large groups from ARA now block their entry. When racists get in and sieg heil to the music, they are verbally confronted. When they still insist on preaching white power, ARA members escort them to the door. “It has never been that way before,” ARA member Karen Cale said. While youth in the music scene have been trying to organize themselves against nazi skins since 3 skinheads murdered Ethiopian Mulugeta Seraw in November 1988, only in recent months has there been a consistent resistance. People are so sick of nazi skinheads!

**JASON:** After three shows of getting stood up to, they quit coming to the shows. They didn't have the intimidation. They didn't have the power. They didn't have the ability to just walk in ten deep and push everybody around and then beat up anyone who stepped out of line. As soon as it was a fair fight, they were gone! They disappeared. There were three hundred of them in the Portland area in 1990, but they were all hiding out in Beaverton, out in Milwaukie, out in southeast. There were ten of us that were engaging them on a daily basis, and sometimes multiple different places on the same day. Five of us would get in a car, we'd drive to Beaverton, beat up a couple guys at the mall, and then we'd drive to Clackamas and beat up a couple people out there. They thought we were everywhere. They thought there were tons of us. It was just the same five guys! [laughs] Not just guys. There were several women, too.

**CHINA:** There was some people that kind of came and were doing some organizing, I think they were maybe with the Coalition for Human Dignity. And there was this place over on the east side called Matrix, that they kinda had a headquarters, they were keeping track of different white supremacist groups, they were kinda tracking them. So, some of the, these people came to town, we had a couple of meetings. So there were a couple of people that came and started talking to us, and I felt like some of them may have had a, you know, everyone has their agenda, may have had like a socialist agenda, which is not necessarily offensive, but somebody somewhere had made an effort to reach out to us on the front lines that were actually fighting.

***Jonathan Mozzochi was a Portland area activist and writer who became one of the primary coordinators of the Coalition for Human Dignity. He was their intelligence director; he led the Coalition's research work on neo-nazis, hate groups and the religious right. He reached out to China and her friends.***

**JONATHAN MOZZOCHI:** In the early years, the Coalition for Human Dignity, late 80's, early 90's, we began to work with street level anti-racist groups, in particular Anti-Racist Action and Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice. So, their work was primarily organized around protecting the alternative music scene and their neighborhoods from infiltration and organizing on the part of racist skinheads and their more professional sponsors like Tom Metzger and the White Aryan Resistance, Aryan Nations, outfits like that. We worked pretty close with them originally out of an office located at 333 SE 3rd. It was a radical, left-wing collective and the earliest CHD files were compiled there. In the early days we lived in the offices, quite a few of us. There were radical environmentalists, anti-gentrification activists, pretty broad collective there. Our work with Anti-Racist Action and Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice started out of there. There was music venues like the Pine Street Theater and Satyricon. We worked with ARA folks to protect those scenes that became sites of conflict between anti-racists and racist skinheads.



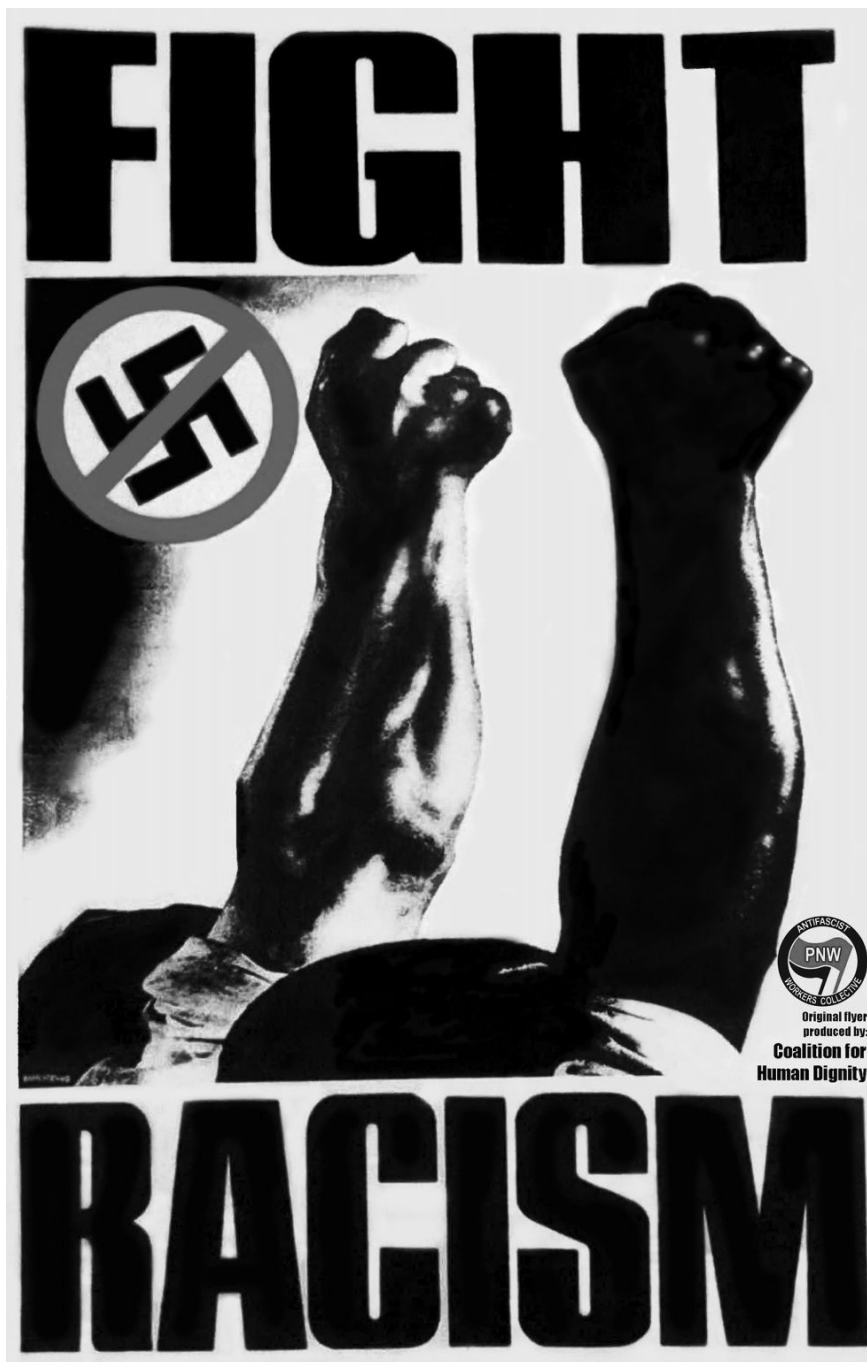
*First Anti-Racist Action conference, held at a house in Portland, OR*

*SHARP was the most visible anti-fascist presence in Portland, especially within the punk scene. The willingness of the SHARPs to consistently engage on the most dangerous terrain and put their bodies in the way of hostile threats and real peril gave them a measure of respect from many people. Cecil Prescod offers a reminder to those of us whose work is not on the front lines:*

**CECIL PRESCOD:** Many times you have these thought-shaping individuals who can make the goals reasonable to a more mainstream audience. And then you have the people who are willing to be right there in downtown at that rally or to do this action, the actors who will be those who are in the middle of the street, in the middle of the action. They are going to be misunderstood. And they're going to be mislabeled. That's a reality. That's what's going to happen. The people who are willing to risk are people who should be appreciated.

*By 1992 the combined efforts of the anti-racist Portlanders began to turn the tide, at least as far as punk shows and open attacks on the streets. As activists armed with undercover intelligence undermined the ability for blatant racists to live and work in Portland, overt presence of boneheads dwindled. They were not eradicated—their proliferation today contradicts that fantasy. Even though the boneheads were increasingly scarce, they were still a threat—especially to the SHARPs. Neo-nazis sometimes did drive-bys. Lone SHARPs were always at risk of being jumped. As local pressure cleared fascists from the public arena, the fight against neo-nazis went underground. At parties, rumors of a nazi skin at a corner store often led to a mass exodus as SHARPs jumped into their cars to find the nazis; they carried the fight to them wherever they went. Drug and alcohol use was widespread across the scene; people were traumatized. They were fighting the neo-nazis, the cops and the public opinion. Many also had to deal with personal demons. Even if they had no regrets, there weren't a lot of people who understood what they were a part of, what they'd seen, and what they'd done. So they really only had each other. SHARP eventually fractured into several different crews.*

**JASON:** People from CHD made an effort to come to several of those early ARA meetings. They made themselves available. They were honest and up-front about consequences, about what things looked like, and what the risks are. They were really, really helpful, but also supportive, and those things work both ways where people were invited to their meetings and then through coalition building there, I think it was '91 or '90, everybody worked together to throw the biggest march and rally Portland had ever seen. We almost got Public Enemy to play it [laughs], but they gave us a shout out on the radio. It was huge what we were able to do and we would have larger meetings where people from each of these groups, Leonard Peltier support groups, Radical Women, Lesbian Community Project, all these groups would be in the same meetings to talk about the churches that got attacked, bricks thrown through their windows, or what happened to the people that got beat up over here out in the outskirts. So, what's going on here. So we would all come together, talk about all this stuff, and work on it and, and this is cool, too, ARA we threw a couple benefit shows. One of them was for Leonard Peltier's Support Group. We did a big thing Bradley Angle House. Raised a few bucks and then got raided by the cops. But it meant something. It showed that we were serious, we were gonna put our money where our mouth was, and then go out and fight nazis the next night.



Poster by the Coalition for Human Dignity

**CHINA:** I mean, the police knew about us. They've called it. . . I remember one time I got a call and they didn't know. Because I'm black, if I was a skinhead, or a Blood, or a Crip, it was so stupid, like, really?

*The police were flat footed in their response to racist skinheads.*

**M TRELOAR:** Laurelhurst Park on Hitler's birthday. We had heard the boneheads had announced that they were going to meet there, so SHARP, ARA, Lesbian Community Project, and Coalition for Human Dignity all said, "we'll have a picnic there." Scot Nakagawa and I were there. We went over and talked to some of the other picnickers in the area, ask how everything was going, everybody said, "fine," so we left. Shortly thereafter, 50 cops showed up. They harassed everybody and forced them to leave the park. So there was no reason for that. But then the Oregonian wrote that the Portland Police had busted up a neo-nazi rally in Laurelhurst Park, which they could only have gotten that information from the Portland Police and the FBI. We decided we got to do something. They're just continually getting this wrong. And they're deliberately getting this wrong. So they're blurring the distinction between anti-racist skinheads and neo-fascist skinheads. And they're blurring the distinction between those of us who oppose the nazis and the nazis themselves. So, we responded with an op ed piece that they printed, where we pointed out they had gotten everything wrong. So, the Oregonian was embarrassed. They should have been ashamed and they stopped calling SHARP a gang from thereafter.

*The anything goes attitude of the SHARPs combined with their culture of violence began to wear on the local affiliations. SHARP maintained good allyship with members of the Coalition for Human Dignity—who, in turn, always stood up for SHARP in public and treated the group overall with respect. But cracks appeared in the bridge between the different organizations and this, at times, made working with the SHARPs a challenge. **Steven Gardiner is a member of the Coalition for Human Dignity:***

**STEVEN GARDINER:** Having political strategy conversations with SHARP skins to say, "look, you guys are doing great work, let's look at your overall politics. What about misogyny? What about anti-queer stuff? You know, do you, do you really want that hanging around your neck, when you're trying to do this anti-racist work? It's not enough just to be anti-Nazi."

when things got a lot more violent.

*In addition to daily confrontation with neo-nazis, SHARP was also constantly harassed by the Portland Police Bureau who targeted the SHARPs but maintained a mostly hands-off approach to addressing behavior of racist skinheads. The Gang Enforcement Team reported an escalation of dangerous youth gang activity rather than coordinated, sophisticated efforts to confront racists who enjoyed political and financial support locally and nationally. The media, and thus the public—ate it up. This put the SHARPs in the limelight as gangsters, and deprived them of the civic support of the very people they were struggling to protect—not unlike today’s Black Lives Matter protesters. **Meet Jon Bair, who was an activist and SHARP member from SE Portland.***

**JON BAIR:** A lot of the guys who were involved in the racist groups were pretty typical white guys that you’d see in your neighborhood and they weren’t very different than what we see with the Proud Boys and the Patriot Prayer types, more so the Proud Boys. They had a similar relationship with the police in that they seemed to be preferred. I believe the police exist to protect the powerful and our groups existed to protect those who don’t have power. And so, the motivations are really different right from the beginning, which kind of puts us at odds with the police. But white supremacy is not a threat to the police. Some racist groups, when they get a bunch of weapons and they want to go after the police, are a threat. But for the most part, people who hold racist views, that’s not a threat to law enforcement.

**JONATHAN MOZZOCHI:** When we were doing this work, the Portland Police Bureau and state cops treated all of this stuff as gang activity. Their entire worldview of this, they understood everything through this very narrow lens of law and order and gangs. Then Anti-Racist Action, a multi-racial group, that was fighting racists in the street, they were one gang, and you know, the East Side White Pride, or whoever was another gang. We of course had a very different perspective on this. There was one officer in particular Loren Christensen in the Portland Police Bureau, who was the point person on all of this. He was, I think, the most important person in the State Gang Task Force, within which a lot of the police intelligence was collected on the racist right, and on Anti-Racist Action and Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice, and Christensen was their guy. He, repeatedly in these early years, in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s, would attack Anti-Racist Action and Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice as being violent gangs, no better than the racists. That this was angry youth off the rails, and that we just have to have a firmer hand, and this will all go away. And it created an environment within which it was ok for the far right to attack people of color, and to attack ARA and SHARP activists, because this guy’s saying it’s just a gang thing, right?

## PART TWO SHARPER TIMES



*Michael Clark took what was called ‘direct action’ to kick nazi scum out of the Rose City. His family moved from rural Oregon to Northeast Portland in the mid 80s where he attended Grant and Madison High School. He was a teenage skater and punk rocker.*

**MICHAEL CLARK:** I’m just, I’m gonna own right here that I was actually born and raised pretty racist. I’m from a little teeny town where we rode bulls, and uncles are cowboys, and tote guns, and all that stuff. But I didn’t know any better, like I didn’t have anyone around, But my aunt also took in foster kids. I have a lot of foster cousins, some Hispanic, a couple of young men from India. We were all together. We were all family. We were all brothers. We’re all just people. We are no different. You’re from here. You’re from there. Everyone is flailing, everyone’s faking it till they make it. So as I was getting a little older, I started putting two and two together that actually, the white power guys were creating a bunch of BS for everybody. So it really lost its power for me.

[I was] 13, 14 new pair of Docs, walking down Woodstock Boulevard, and two carloads, guys pull up, “hey little. . .,” you know, yelling at me: “give up the boots!” There was a lot of racial violence in Portland at that time. I’ve witnessed shootouts with AK 47s in school parking lots, and drive-bys, and mass beatings, and stabbings, and all kinds of stuff. Also gay bashing was very prominent down by Stark Street. Definitely a lot of crazy stuff. So, late 80’s, early 90’s; I was already clean and sober. I quit drinking the first time at 13. So, I was pretty much a straight edge little punk rock kid. I knew skinheads from being out at shows and they hung out with all their white power buddies and they went everywhere and caused chaos. You would go to a show and the pit would be all the nazi guys. And pretty much you were gonna, you know, you were gonna get hammered if you got in the pit, so we would group up and go and get hammered, you know? As like a 13, 14 year old kid, being threatened by people. It powered, my need to, to get brotherhood, and to be in a group where I wasn’t afraid anymore, where I wasn’t afraid to say that I didn’t like what you were saying. And then Mic came from Minneapolis area. ARA was getting started.

*Anti-Racist Action, or, ARA, was the collective brainchild of the anti-racist skinhead group, the Minneapolis Baldies. ARA organized first regionally, and then in 1988 or '89, made their first trip to Portland. Local skinheads and activists welcomed the support of the Baldies, who came to help organize and were a big influence on the local scene. When Michael refers to, "when Mic came to town," he's talking about Mic Crenshaw, one of the co-hosts of this podcast.*

**MICHAEL CLARK:** ARA used to meet in the apartment next door to mine, downtown. And then we would all party. Some of that rubbed off on me and Mike's brother moved out and he and I became best friends. And it's a crazy thing that just seems totally implausible. But your own belief system coincides a little bit with this person's, and theirs rubs off on you, and they're stronger and tougher. You want to emulate them. And that is, especially when you're young, how your belief systems evolve, right? It's like what you choose to be exposed to, what your parents expose you to. I definitely got introduced to a lot of more political ideas. I'm not gonna be here and act like I was altruistic or something. That anti-racist mindset rubbed off on me from the people I was around, who understood that it was a more serious issue. I bought into that, and I was more than happy to go help make a difference. I wasn't, like, leading the charge that this is some moral and ethical positive thing. I wish that I could say I was, that would be kind of cool, but, but that wasn't exactly what happened. There are a lot of skinheads that I've been friends with for a long time since then, that were members of ARA, and who really worked within the parameters of the, of the beliefs in how to portray yourself, and what to get caught doing, and what not to get caught doing. Anti-Racist Action, really political, and politics always made me crazy. I believe in anti-racism 100%, and I believe it takes what it takes. One of the things for me personally, that kept me from getting more involved was too many rules. It's what people would nowadays call "very woke," right? You couldn't call a girl the B word. You had to be okay with everyone being gay, you had to be okay with everything, which, which I don't have any issue with. But it was like, I'm an old timer and I'm kind of slow, so like, I can't get woke all at once. And how woke can you be over the course of 6 months? So maybe I'll say it was morally intimidating. And over time I needed a place without all the clutter of all the political, like social movements. And then SHARP came around, and then SHARP was kinda the same thing, but you know, you could be violent if it was under these circumstances and it was totally cool and that was a little better. So I tended to gravitate over time from the more political to, "we're two-tone, we're working class, were not dealing with your Nazi BS. And if you look at me sideways, I get to punch you in the face." Which was kinda what I needed at the time.

*At the onset of the 90s, a Portland chapter of Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice—what is referred to as 'SHARP'—coalesced out of a crew of kids who had been fighting neo-nazi skinheads. As Michael noted, these kids were loosely*

the Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice, also known as the SHARPs. The national organization has had a local chapter here for about six months, but over recent months, SHARPs and racist skinheads have been involved in a number of fights. "Most weekends lately, relations between the two factions have been punctured by brawls and beer bottles tossed through windshields," says Loren Christensen, a Portland Police Gang Enforcement officer. "Just who is inciting violence is the subject of conflicting stories," Christensen said. The last three weekends in April. Also physical conflict between racist skins and SHARPs. He says SHARPs started the violence the first two weekends, while the racists began on the third weekend. That sequence, which occurred on April 27th and April 29th, saw a group of racist skins attack an apartment at Southeast 32nd and Belmont, where SHARPs lived. "We've been getting attacked by nazi SHARPs," spokesperson Mark Newman maintains. Police quote "are trying to make us look like bad guys." Newman says the SHARPs are not a criminal gang. "We're an organization that has banded together to fight racism." You have Karen Keel, from ARA. Keel believes SHARP members should now step back from confrontation with racist skinheads and let other anti-racists take care of the job. Mozzochi, that was Jonathan Mozzochi of Coalition for Human Dignity, who believes that the media has overemphasized the SHARPs' comments, "they are part of a much larger anti-bigotry youth movement. So far police and other forces in the city have defined their relation to that movement as adversarial."

*Every movement has growing pains. People who had been fighting the against the neo-nazi violence for years found themselves criticized by newcomers, which created a challenging dynamic that often follows a general call to action.*

**CHINA:** Just being toned policed, and like, action policed, by people being self righteous about their punk rockness, and their peace movement and all their ideologies. And me having to put my ass on the line to defend myself and stand up for others, backing up their ideology. And they were just sitting there feeling self-righteous.

**MICHAEL CLARK:** It became, with all the political constraints, I think it became harder and harder for people to, to get things done.

*The brawls were as ferocious as ever, and the spread of guns increased the violence to a far more lethal level.*

**JORIN:** I imagine that the toll it took on the broader community was actually probably more of the people who were not as actively involved. There were times where it felt pretty dangerous to walk down the street. And I imagined that there were some punk kids who had nothing to do with any of this that ended up getting their asses kicked because they were assumed to be part of ARA. I think for those of us that had really bought into it, on some level, we knew the consequences. We knew the risks we were taking. I think that changed a little bit

person. And I had to question like, “oh, I’m an anti-racist skinhead,” but I’m still like, the only black person for miles around. [laughter] Like, what am I really doing over here? You know?

**MICHAEL CLARK:** I always enjoyed smashing racists and setting people in their place. It did get to the point to where if you spouted off some racist shit, if you walked through downtown with an iron cross, you, you might be in trouble. If you talked smack about, “oh, you skinheads, you think you’re so tough,” well then, we were gonna start showing you why we thought we were, you know, so.

**CHINA:** I remember Jonathan Mozzochi was driving a van. There’s all these skinheads downtown and I remember driving up to this gas station. I saw these dummies, like skinheads standing there. And I was like “are you white pride?” And he was like, “yeah.” I slapped him. “Are you white pride?” “Yeah.” I slapped him. “Are you white pride?” And I slapped him. I slapped all three of them, jumped back in the van and drove away. I mean, we were on such a high like, yeah, coming into our like, who we were in like, no, this is not gonna work. That was a good feeling. I mean, I don’t want to glorify violence.

*As the SHARPs put the boneheads more and more on the run, escalation was inevitable.*

**M TRELOAR:** So the boneheads fought with, with fists and knives, and then eventually, when they became more organized, they were told and they learned, “oh, if we’re going after these people, somebody’s got to bring a gun.” I would say that they armed up way before we did. It’s also inevitable in neo-fascist organizing, is to go from: “we’re going to give a speech here,” to “we’re going to come after people with guns.” Because they’re not gonna, they’re not gonna win in a public debate, unless sooner or later, they bring out the guns. And, generally that’s been the basis on which they’ve either said okay, we’ll do bank expropriations, or we’ll attack Black communities, we’ll attack synagogues, etc. They’re always armed. They replicated that here in Portland fairly rapidly, going from a bunch of teenagers with baseball bats to a bunch of teenagers with AK 47s and 45s. Early on, at one of the apartment buildings that SHARP skins were sleeping at, a group of nazi boneheads rolled up with guns and attempted to break in. And if they’d gotten in, they probably would have killed some of them then and there. One of the SHARP crew, a 15-year-old woman, jumped out in front with a can of mace and just pepper sprayed everybody. All of the boneheads, and a bunch of her people, that drove them away. At that point, we assisted SHARP in getting some weapons for purposes of defense. From then on, I think, the wiser of them got their own weapons. And that was also true among some of the ARA people.

**PATRICK MAZZ:** This is what I wrote then: But while ARA has been moving against racists, its activities are being overshadowed by one of its ally groups,

*organized—they did not have the intergenerational foundation, critique, and social diversity of the Coalition for Human Dignity and were less ideological than ARA.*

*In the early 90s SHARP skins held an informal first line of defense against neo-nazi skinheads, especially in the clubs.*

*For a hot minute, SHARP and ARA were synonymous as multiracial coalitions of young punks and skins who approached the challenge of antiracism through directly confronting nazis in the punk scene. But as 1990 rolled into 1991, SHARPs emerged as a unique identity. While SHARP skins worked with the CHD on house defense operations and helped with security at demonstrations organized by various leftist groups, membership in SHARP was loose. As Michael says, SHARPs had few rules regarding conduct, and they didn’t have regular meetings. They were loyal to skinhead culture and held to a highly particular look—bomber jacket, Doc Martens, suspenders, button-up shirts, and of course a shaved head. A consistent feature of SHARP attire was some kind insignia declaring allegiance to anti-racism; typically a SHARP patch featured a stylized Spartan helmet design based on the logo for the UK’s Trojan Records. And they were SHARPs down to their shoes—yellow laces on black boots flagged the wearer as an anti-racist; white shoelaces on black boots represented white power; red signified either a communist or a neo-nazi so that was a little confusing; purple shoelaces identified queer solidarity; and black shoelaces were, well, black shoelaces. It’s important to note that not all skinheads adhered to the codes of colored laces and their implications.*

*SHARPs would identify a nazi at a show and surround them in the pit. Any kid wearing a bomber jacket or white shoelaces at any show space was guaranteed interrogation at the very least. Like their racist counterparts, SHARPs moved through the city in crews looking for fights, though their victims were the white power skinheads who preyed on the vulnerable. SHARPs were booted up and ready to go, whenever, wherever.*

*One of those fighters was CHINA.*

**CHINA:** There may have been more organized things that I didn’t know about, but as far as I’m concerned, it wasn’t some highly organized process. It was a group of us that were already, that knew each other, and that were already together, that were doing, like fighting the nazis in the streets daily. We had no backing, just our own conviction. A couple of the guys were gay and that we were also standing up for people in that lifestyle that were getting harassed. We understood intrinsically that this bullying and othering people and abuse was wrong. I mean, there was probably more in-depth things, but at my age and at that time, that’s what I kind of understood. We were just, anti-fascist. You know, we weren’t going around and picking fights, well, there was some people that

might have started fights, but I think we were just wanting to be left alone.

*The city experienced a distressing spike in neo-nazi hate crime and violence on the streets and at punk shows following the murder of Mulugeta Seraw. The punks and skins who had been informally standing up to and fighting neo nazis started coming together hanging out, sticking up for each other.*

**CHINA:** I started to see a formation of a, something that turned into being anti-racist. And then it was after that you guys came, ARA popped up, Sharp popped up. See, you guys might have been the bringers of SHARP.

**MIC:** So there was a handful of Baldies that came out here, before I got here.

**CHINA:** OK! Yeah, maybe that was it!

**MIC:** Yeah, we were catalytic in the sense that, I think it inspired people to become more militant with their anti-racism.

**CHINA:** OK, yeah.

**MIC:** After we, at least that's how the folklore went.

*The early days of SHARP and ARA where blurred lines between punk subcultures that abruptly became more distinct. The neo-nazis had recruited so aggressively and so fast among young punks and skinheads that plenty of the kids still hung out with racist skinheads one night and spiky punks on the next; as ARA, SHARP, and the CHD came together to kick nazis out of the scene, the neo-nazi crews rapidly declined in numbers.*

**CHINA:** I was definitely part of Anti-Racist Action. I was hanging pretty deep with SHARP. I think I would consider myself a SHARP member, but I also don't consider myself a skinhead, if that makes any sense. Just because we were together and we were kind of fighting some of the same fight. Back in those days, there were people that were like skinheads, and then they would, like, jump ship and become anti-racist. So, there was a lot of this back and forth. We're talking about young people. And I remember bringing some people that had changed from being Nazis to wanting to be anti-racist. I mean, the Nazis were doing evil stuff, they would even attack each other, you know, so I mean, I think it was a pretty clear line of right and wrong, so there was actually people that wanted to get out of that. I just would, like, bring people to meetings and stuff, but I mean, I wasn't like a top organizer, but just bringing people in.

**MICHAEL CLARK:** SHARP had a lot of documentation, they really explained a lot of ideology, and a lot of why things, why things are a certain way. Anytime, you know, they're bringing people into the fold, you kind of, you kind of have to

have ways to educate them. But I didn't get a lot of that. By the time I really got super involved in things, I think we had reached a point in Portland where it was pretty much just free-for-all chaos.

**CHINA:** We were fighting out of what we saw in our heart, what we felt, what we'd experienced. We were reacting in a very visceral and intense, gut reaction to what was, to the violence that was happening.

**MICHAEL CLARK:** I can tell you that the people I hung out with, if you brought some nazi BS to me or the crew that I ran with, or the people that we hung around with, you might get your face cut off with a broken pint glass, you might end up getting your head stomped in by 10 guys. You definitely were going to get something broken. And you're going to hear about, that what you were bringing to the table was unacceptable. So to have that power back, and to not have to walk into a place and eyeball everything that's going on, and to step from a position of, "am I safe here? Do I need to watch my back here?" to "anybody who's bringing that better watch their back," was huge and powerful. And there was a lot of that.

**CHINA:** Being someone who has to fight in the street, you know that you have to get in a mental state, right, to be that person. I mean, you can switch. I mean, it's like being, I want to say it's like being a soldier. 'Cause people nowadays are shocked if I were to tell them. But if I see somebody, or something kind of weird happens, I feel that tension. I'm ready. You know, and as a mother, I'm ready. But I, I had to work so hard to step away from that.

**MICHAEL CLARK:** There were a lot of riots. 60 nazis and their girlfriends, and them starting something and then like 80 skinhead anti-fascists, and then the general public joining in, and smashing nazis in the middle of Pioneer Square in an all-out riot. I think that we set a precedent where they weren't tolerated, wherever they were at.

**CHINA:** There was a group of us, Tran and [inaudible], she would drive around and we started like, coming at these Nazis because they'd been harassing us for years. There was a group of people that were non-white, those Tawne. . . [inaudible] was kind of in a different group, but he would like, pop in every now and then. There was a group of us that were seriously challenging Nazis and, and that felt good, you know, it felt like I wasn't alone for once. And that when I challenged them, there was going to be somebody behind me, you know.

**MIC:** I always wanted to get closer with you guys, because when I came out here, I was immediately adopted by the Sharps. But again, outside of like, Johnson Tanno and Tawne, they were all white. I remember seeing Tran and you're around, and being like, wanting to be like, closer to y'all. I had to also distance myself from the scene, because I just got tired of being the only black