

Confessions of a punk

by Kim Rilda van Feggelen

My denim jacket has two dozen or so rock 'n' roll buttons pinned to its fraying blue weave. I wear tights and loose shirts and sneakers because they're comfortable. People stare, or sometimes snicker, as I walk by.

If I dress like the "lady" that I am supposed to be, with tight skirt and high heels, then I get catcalls while walking down that same corridor from all the poor young jocks experiencing problems with their respective manhoods. They make me retch, as they run off for another beer with the guys.

I could, of course, travel the "normal" road. I could wear my designer jeans and shirts and colourful tailored sweaters with my Frye boots and ski jacket. But then I begin to suffer a feeling, not unlike claustrophobia, of losing my individuality. Clones are, after all, clones.

I ignore the comments on my yellow footless tights, my messy hair. I believe in my identity. I am a punk.

Punk is not a form of music, as many people believe. It is a political/social view. What is called "Punk music" is not music as much as it is a self-expression with musical instruments. It is loud, fast, often violent and blasted incoherence at high noise levels. It was hardly meant to be music; it is an audio expression of disgust and frustration, of punk "philosophy and ideals". The Music Industry, those great gods of the bankbook, saw the potential in the numbers who identify with this noise, and recorded a handful of groups, but for the most part, punk music is very underground. Most punk bands prefer to play in small, intimate atmospheres, swaying away from the "rock star" syndrome. However, there is no doubt that the fastest and most efficient way of voicing a view these days is to have it sent over the airwaves. The result is a music form that is rapidly taking over the commercial world—New Wave.

New Wave is a more middle-of-the-road look at the punk idea of treating the body as a work of art. As well as siring innumerable interesting music styles, it affects hair and clothes styles and even decorating styles.

But—I get off track. Punk music is but one form, one part of what punk is all about.

Punk is a form of self-expression. Punks view their bodies as works of art. They dress the way they feel. The way they feel is anything that goes against the established norm; they wear mini-skirts, clashing plaids, chains, bizarre make-up. And occasionally they wear items that convey to the public what they think of the way they are being treated, thus we also have chains for those who lead a daily routine, shopping bags for the ones treated like consumer products, garbage bags if they feel they are treated like garbage.

Punk expression started in England in the mid-70's, or at least the particular movement towards individuality which is called punk did. Punks may dress as I have described, but only as their "self-expression against the established norm". Punk is not black leather and green hair; punk is antidisestablishmentarianism. In this sense, the entire counter-culture of the 60's, with Dylan and Woodstock, are advocates of the same faith. A 1981 punk is really a "defiant ex-hippie". The hippies demonstrated against Viet-Nam; punks "demonstrate" against their oppressors: society. It's easy to see why the first punks were weaned in England; the English economy has been on the decline for years. As economies in other countries began to deteriorate, the punk attitude began to spread . . .

You see, we are the Youth. Pushed into a modern middle-class suburbia ruled by television; a world where no one is poor or ugly or immoral. The neighbours hide behind their curtains, afraid of someone destroying the illusion of bland, planned idle luxury. We all live on Respectable Street. The middle class struggling without expression, without creativity, to make Hollywood a reality in a 9-5 job. We the products, we the Youth, off to school and University with Farrah Fawcett stars in our eyes, only to discover that there are no jobs, no dreams; Hollywood's beauty is only as deep as the Cover Girl make-up they use. A society that worships the Almighty Dollar, but the Almighty is in very short supply!

Disillusionment. Frustration. And finally hate. Punks hate. They hate social standards, they hate convention, they hate anything that preserves this warped society and its attitudes. They hate being the masses and they cannot identify with the multi-million dollar heroes of the screen. And hate turns into anger. The "angry youth" is a reality, nursed on a picture of life somewhere between the 'Brady Bunch' and 'The Price Is Right, finding it very easy (and somehow satisfying) to smash that lying T.V. to bits. And ironically, the television was what taught us all about such violence.

But what I see when I look around me scares me more than smashed televisions. I am one of the elite masses; I am a University Student. And I see



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"I pose a question—Did you ever stop to ask yourselves if you were happy?"

three types of people around me.

Some of them gave in years ago. To them, life is but a party. They spend long hours over their beer, they prefer to escape the nasty fact that there actually is a rat race by running it in an inebriated state. Drug city. Conversations are limited to last night's intoxication and the hope of another tonight.

Then there are those who are into the society game, the ones who are actually taking the race seriously. The girls in University for their MRS and the guys for a good time before they settle down to the responsibilities of supporting the girls who succeed in getting the MRS's. Then it's on to forty years of 9-5 labour, paying off the house, the car, trying desperately to keep ahead of inflation and feed the kids. When will they reap the benefits? When they retire? Perhaps when they lie back in hospital beds with cancer from all those cigarettes that kept them sane through all the pressures?

The third type is a real minority. There are others like me. Contrary to popular superstition, punk is far from dead. The music may have mellowed into New Wave, the culture segregated into "Mods, Skinheads and Teds" (depending on both your style of dress and the music you listen to), but these seem to be tangents of a universal view. They all fight against conforming to the rat race. At age twenty, one should clean up one's act and blossom into a rational, conservative adult, right? I am fraught with the question "Why? So I can join suburbia and spend the rest of my years making mortgage payments?" To the "adults" of this society, I pose a question—Did you ever stop to ask yourselves if you were happy?

The jobless, the frustrated, those who want expression, still exist. We will not conform, we do not want to be pushed around or have our decisions made for us. And if, from your glorious treadmills, you choose to laugh or stare, it will mean nothing to me. My reaction towards you will be contempt.

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor:

I just read Debbie Robichaud's letter to the editor in the Jan. 15 *Gazette*, and am in a mild state of shock. This letter is addressed mainly to her.

The reference is to the section which read as follows: "Residence is my home and I hardly want to come back from a day of classes to hear everyone talking about the political and social problems of the world! I didn't discuss such things at the dinner table at home and I hardly expected to find such conversation here."

To include political and social problems in "such things" one doesn't discuss at dinner makes them sound like "dirty" subjects which decent people don't talk about.

If we talk about politics simply as an intellectual exercise, then it IS boring. But when the Canadian government provides elderly people who have no other source of income with a pension which isn't enough, and many are forced to beg, eat dog food, or live in cold and unheated rooms, then that is a political/social problem. When you and I drink coffee which was grown on land which was once used

to feed now-malnourished people, then that is a political/social problem.

I have faith in you as a fellow human being that you care about people. You must, therefore, also care about such things as political and social problems.

You may think, "Oh, what's the use of worrying about all the world's problems. If I did that, I would never smile or have fun."

If the only way to have a good time is to ignore what is happening to our brothers and sisters in the human family, then we have lost our humanity. It IS possible to relax, play games and enjoy the company of friends, while at the same time caring about the people around us.

We live a very protected life

here in Canada, and especially in university. Imagine that you lived like the majority of the people in the world. Wouldn't you appreciate it if others better off took time to at least remember you in their conversation at dinner and in their prayers, and even more if they actually DID something to help you?

Debbie, I beg you to please write to the *Gazette* with a reply. As I said, I have faith in you as a human, and am trying to understand your point of view.

Most sincerely,
Bruce Fraser

Dear Editor,

The weather has been positively vicious lately even for a transplanted Westerner. Late on Saturday night after using

the music practice facilities at the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium I got in my car to come home. Heavy snow and glare ice on the road below, however, proved to be formidable opponents. My car unable to gain a suitable "tirehold" soon was a prisoner. But luck had it that a whole troop of good samaritans appeared out of the blizzard to set my car free. I didn't have a chance to properly thank them so I wanted to take this opportunity to thank them and the other good souls who have so often over the past two weeks come to the rescue of many stranded motorists.

THANK YOU!
Bill Taylor
Family Medicine
Resident
(Post-grad. Medicine)