

COMMENTARY:

Non-punks rock

by Kevin Ells

First things first: Kim Rilda, thank you.

Thank you for writing "Confessions of a Punk" — an article which showed that a punk need not be a guitar-smashing imbecile with a Romanesque-level of English expression and a Sex Pistols-level of musical taste. A punk is capable of writing a thought-provoking article with clarity and compassion. The article, I'm sure, made a lot of people stop and think for a moment, which is something people should do a little more often.

Unfortunately, my admiration of the article fades as I examine its content more closely; because lurking underneath the apparent desire for change and the frustration of an idealistic youth that run through the article like a blue weave on a denim jacket, is the fatal contradiction inherent in the punk philosophy.

In case you are starting to think that this is an article about punks, I'll assure you now that it isn't. Nor is it an attack on "Confessions of a Punk" or on the writer of that article, though it may occasionally appear to be one. What I know of Kim van Feggelen as a person and a friend would make a nasty rebuttal impossible. I'm driving towards a far more vital point.

Read this carefully, people, because it's an important one: "I do not want to conform. I am a punk." When you strip away the chains, safety pins, rock 'n' roll buttons, pseudo-intellectual discussions on the importance of anarchy, the music, the dress, and the style, that is what lies at the heart of the punk philosophy.

And therein lies an example of the problem which has caused the failed potential of so many human lives. Kim divides university students into three groups — the mindless party-goers, the sheep in the flock, and the non-conformist punks. And even though I am constantly disgusted with the first group, and always frustrated and bored by the second, I cannot declare any semblance of open admiration for the third for the simple reason that all these groups — as well as all other groups within and without University — share one thing in common.

Quite simply put, people seldom, if ever, think things through.

We spend our entire lives learning from our schools, our parents, our art forms, our communications media, and our peers; but we seldom take these learned notions and see them for what they are — learned notions. Most of us, with the exception of a fortunate few, accept sets of unchanging patterns of thought and lifestyle planted deeply in our minds with the permanence of flies encased in amber. Though many of us

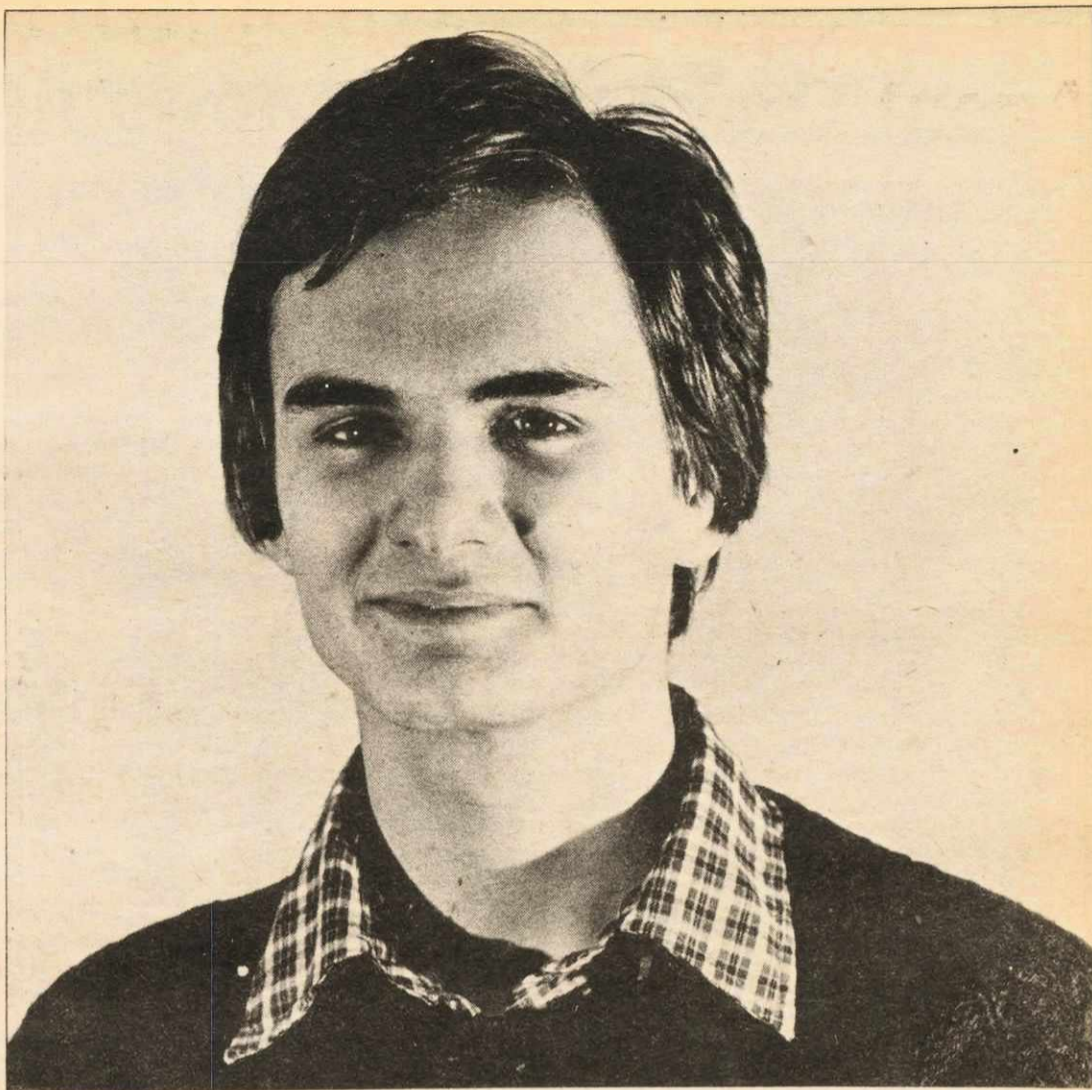
believe we do, few of us ever break free of them. Still, there are thousands of us living under a daily delusion of individuality. We, the Angry and Idealistic Youth, rebel against society with clockwork regularity, usually as a prelude to becoming a gear in the clockwork.

Whatever happened to the Hippies? Don't tell me that the Hippies of yesterday are the punks of today, because unless the Hippies of yesterday successfully decided to stop aging, that reasoning just won't ring true. It seems to me that the Hippies disappeared deep into the System they previously attacked. Perhaps they figured that in the middle of a recession, love and peace "jus' don't pay the bills, man." Time to look out for Number One. All of which causes me to wonder what the punks will be doing in ten years.

We continually give our rebellions different titles, assuming that our terribly startling expressions of individuality will rock the System. Usually, however, we do little but create our own circles of thinking. One superb example is presented in an excerpt from the "Punk" article, the implications of which are frightening. Word for word, here it is: "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."

Well, so do I. But I am not a punk. Nor am I a Mod, Rocker, Jock, Dopesucker, Skinhead or Ted. I am not an "Arts type." I am not a "Commerce type." I am, quite simply, nothing more and nothing less than Kevin Ells (which, in itself, is no big deal. Hell, I should know. I have to live with myself 24 hours a day). Some of my attitudes are "square," some are "avant-garde", and some are quite conventional (or "normal," as some would say).

I will assert my individuality simply by being what I am. I'd join a rebellion, but they all look the same to me. Look at what happened to the punks. According to the quote above, their music has mellowed into a middle-of-the-road look at the punk philosophy — inspiring new dances, new "hair and clothes styles and even decorating styles." The punks themselves have segregated into little groups, each of which labels itself, dresses its members in similar clothing, listens to the same kind of music, and fights against conformity in a uniform manner. Which do you prefer, the rat race, or the desegregated punk culture? At sea, the waves are always new, but the water never changes.



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Theodore Sturgeon wrote, "I have always been fascinated by the human mind's ability to think itself to a truth, and then to take that one step more (truly the basic secret of all human progress), and the inability of so many people to learn the trick." I, too, am fascinated, and more than a little concerned; because that pattern affects not only the punks, but all of those living with the attitudes the punks despise. These patterns of thinking cannot be limited to a discussion of the "rat race" concept, because they affect every area of our lives.

Case in point: Those of us with a social life or a desire for one generally divide those of the opposite sex into two distinct groups. Most are "just friends" and a select few become "more than just friends." We have "friendships" and "relationships" and assume that not only is there a large difference between the two (Attitude No. 1), but that those are our only alternatives (Attitude No. 2). Yet, what is the only difference between the two? Absolutely nothing more than the fact that you have very little, if any, physical contact with those who are "just friends," according to social custom. Now, "take that one step more" — and wonder why two individuals with common interests and common sense, a good respect and caring for one another, and a mutual desire to avoid the limitations and restrictions imposed by the rest of us on those who "go together," should not be allowed to express that affection of friendship. Think that through, folks, because that's an unwritten rule of conduct that lies at the heart of most adolescent confusion, a lot of strained friendships, and a

large number of failed relationships.

Our frequent inability to rise above these gut-level attitudes, and our natural tendency to conform to preconceived notions affects not only our career goals (the "Rat Race" Syndrome), but spills over into the way we establish simple, interpersonal relationships, and into our religious beliefs and our tastes in literature and music. And if we are doing little but living by pre-established rules of conduct and ways of thinking, how dare we have the gall to call any previous generation "old-fashioned" when all the signs point to our taking that generation's place someday?

Listen, the potential of the human mind and spirit is nothing short of awe-inspiring. The humanity of which we are capable is astounding. People can be, and often are, nothing short of great. When one thinks of how little time we have to realize that potential, it seems horribly wasteful to live through the cycles that just may be smothering our ability to grow as human beings. And in a world where stupidity and ignorance could so easily tip the balance of terror between those who could destroy the planet tens of times over by pressing the right buttons, it is not only wasteful, but dangerous.

We need our dissenters. We need people who will stand up and show that there are greater things to strive for, because most of us can't realize it for ourselves. And we desperately need to let our thoughts move in sharp, new directions. So again, I thank Kim for her pointed and articulate piece of writing. I cannot agree with all that it contains, but I will heartily defend her...um...right to write. If it

stirred some of you to deeper thought, then it served its purpose well.

If you stop and ask yourself, "Why do I think this way about this thing?" and go on to discover that you were right all along, then so be it. You may not always change your mind, but considering the alternative solutions may make you more tolerant of those who have come to different conclusions.

But think as *real* individuals. Not as punks, jocks, Dal students, girls, boys, men, women, Engineers, Commerce majors, Arts and Science people, or Residence dwellers, but in terms of those who you are and what you want. I do it as Kevin Ells, because that is who I am. That is the only way to sum me up. Whether being that way is a worthy thing or not is something I'll leave to your personal opinion. The alternatives I reach are (a) irrelevant as far as this article is concerned, and (b) my own business. I am not pompous enough to assume that I have The Right Answers. But I do like asking a few good questions now and then and I have not tried to divide humanity into punks and non-punks — this is for you all.

We *must* think in broader terms than "rising above the rat race" and think beyond the mental patterns that drive us back to the race with such alarming regularity.

I repeat: At sea, the waves are always new, but the water (save for pollution) never changes. And if the rebellion of an angry youth is little more than a recurring trend, renaming itself every so often as fads and fashions are altered, then how soon will it be before we become the elder generation, looking to our children to be the hope of the future we once believed ourselves to be?