

the following article written by Tim Yohannon  
was reprinted from Martin Sprouse's 1989 book  
Threat By Example,  
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# TIM YOHANNAN

In 1977 Tim Yohannon started a weekly syndicated punk radio show called *Maximum Rocknroll*. In 1982 right after *Maximum Rocknroll* released its first compilation record, Tim helped start a 72-page monthly fanzine that was also called *Maximum Rocknroll*. The fanzine covered the international punk scene and social and global politics. In 1986 Tim was one of the main organizers of The Gilman Street Project, a volunteer-staffed space where weekly shows and events were presented. Today the radio show still plugs on, a few more records have been released, and the fanzine is up to 144 pages.

Tim is a person who has dedicated his life to people's ability to creat functional alternatives to the ugliness in the world.

—Martin Sprouse

Maybe I took too much acid. Somewhere along the line something snapped. Reality, as I had known it, melted...and would never be the same again.

I was born the day WWII ended, lulled into life by the postwar bliss of the Eisenhower era of the '50s, the hazy days of television's birth. My consciousness was shaped by cowboy shows, Beaver Cleaver, Little League, Boy Scouts and anticommunism. Mowing and weeding the lawn was one of my chores, and I used to fantasize that clumps of dandelions were Communist cells, and I'd hurry around rooting them.

I led three lives—probably a lot more. One of those lives was as an all-American kid. I spent two years living in Greece in the late '50s, while I was in junior high school. I hated it there. What kind of shithole was this that didn't have baseball, TV, cokes, burgers and rock 'n' roll? But it was that selfsame rock 'n' roll which eventually led me out of the cultural and political desert and opened my eyes.

My generation was really the first shaped by the mass media, the first rock 'n' roll generation. White folks rockin' to the "jungle beat." A sign of the times. And while the civil rights movement had some impact on me, it was really the integration of culture that made the biggest dent. Kids all over the country now had a collective consciousness. It's even better today, as kids all over the world share a collective cultural identity—where they have more in common than not— but that's another story. I remember well at the age of twelve realizing how powerful and special we (my age group) were, that we were like the Children of the Damned only in a positive way.

I packed it off to college in the early '60s, still inculcated by my cultural/political brainwashing, but several factors seemed (in retrospect) destined to wipe that smug smile off my face.

One was a physical distinction. I'm of Greek and Iranian descent, and the fact that I was short and dark and maybe a bit wilder than most of my contemporaries set me apart, even though I wanted to be accepted as one of "them." Also, I was brought up without a religious background. All the kids I knew were Wonder Bread, god-fearing

types. They let me know I was gonna sizzle for my lack of due respect for their Lord. Oh well.

Another factor was that the brainwashing society did on us worked too well. We really did believe in justice. At the time, we were all frantically pro-American because we believed that our country did wear a white hat and did things for the "right" reasons. But when the fog lifted briefly in the '60s, we turned our idealism full force on those who had conned us, with all the painful vengeance of our naïveté now violated. We were pissed!

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The outrages of racism became clear to many. The assassination of America's youngest president, his brother, and MLK ripped the fiber apart. The Vietnam War was the icing on the cake; no one with the slightest sense of right and wrong could go through those catastrophes without seeing just how hypocritical and diseased our national morality had become. It was a painful period, once the mask fell off but there was no turning back after that—or so I thought.

Most of my friends from that era are no longer angry, no longer insulted by the way in which we are treated by our political and corporate "leaders." They've been bought back in. Maybe they're still socially "liberal" and emotionally conservative, or outright reactionaries, but in either case they've opted for the physical comforts, the family life—they've turned off the sources of pain. It didn't happen overnight, like *Invasion of the Bodysnatchers*, but was a slow process of making unchallenged compromises and rationalizations. I wonder why I didn't go that route. I'm not that "special."

One possible reason is indeed that "I took too much acid." I had

this theory that I could deprogram all my previous conditioning and remake my psyche, that if I blasted my ego into oblivion, I could reconstruct myself as I wanted. I did too good of a job, and found myself on the brink-open to all the screaming input this world throws at you (which we learn to largely ignore) and with no safe way categorize and rationalize it. It was scary, and I had to try and piece myself back together again. Hey, if I got myself into this mess, I could damn well get myself out of it. It took years, and support from a few loving friends. I wouldn't "commend this course to anyone, but I learned a lot from the war within myself, mainly about psychology, my strengths and weaknesses, and the unshakable conclusion that peace and happiness for myself can only come about with peace and happiness for everyone. I could no longer escape back into greedy individualism, but had to strike a balance between maintaining my own sanity and then giving what I had left to share.

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There were a few incidents that also shaped my thinking. One hearkens back to my teens: a very clear understanding of why there was no fucking way I would allow myself to become like "them" - them being the boring ass "adults" who settle down and check out-hard to tell when their old hearts really stop beating. I set my sights on that picture and check in with it periodically. Youth may not have vast resources of information and experiences from which to draw, but it does provide a relatively bullshit-free perspective—one which I trust more than most intellectually-reached determinations.

"People's Park" was another event that shaped my consciousness. It took place in Berkeley in 1968. Berkeley was radical then, a center for antiwar activities and a gathering place for disenchanted and hungry youth. People's Park was real, a firsthand learning experience (which I shall describe shortly), which is not to say that the impact of the Vietnam War wasn't, though it tended to be more a lesson in civics. It got personal, though, when "they" wanted to ship my ass off to kill or be killed by those people whose right of self-determination (a great "American" principle, or so I thought) I was rooting for. Fuck that, no way. So, I decided to prepare for my physical. I ate one small meal a day for a year, and the whole last week prior to it ate nothing. I got down to 103 pounds, 4 pounds under the minimum weight. I stayed up the whole last night, took every drug I could, rubbed shit in my hair, had a turd in my pants, and pissed down my leg throughout the whole exam. And saved my beliefs.

I've digressed. Back to People's Park. Then-Governor Ronald Reagan was at war with the Berkeley Kids. He really didn't like it when hundreds of us decided to clear out the trashed square block of University of California property (that served as a parking lot and was full of abandoned vehicles) and turned that place into a community-controlled open space. The place grew as weeks went by, hundreds of us turned into many thousands, people of all ages and races working together to create something. People planted trees, hoed gar-

dens, brought in sod, made paths, cooked meals and fed everybody, made music-in other words, we defied the media image that we only hated and were lazy and destructive. I learned, for the first time, what democracy really meant. All decisions on what to build-be it a child-care area or a stage or a swimming pool-were reached by consensus of all participants. I understood clearly what taking control of one's life and environment meant. Ronnie couldn't hack the idea catching on. So, he sent in every police force in the Bay Area and the National Guard. People were killed and many were wounded as result of weeks of rioting as we tried to regain the land. Their force couldn't break us. It wasn't the park itself that mattered (although we did regain and keep it two years later in a spontaneous reaction to Nixon's bombing of Cambodia), but the idea of self-determination and the realization that work doesn't necessarily suck. In fact, I found that work was a joy if it mattered. It was creating, and that is basic to human nature—as opposed to the forced labor that most of us eventually talk ourselves into accepting cuz it pays the bills and buys us off.

People's Park has a lot to do with what I do now, be it Maximum Rockroll or The Gilman Street Project. The latter, in some ways, is an extension of that experience—a way to show other kids that it is possible to be creative, to learn responsibility and decision making, to find the value of work without the pay incentive-that all benefit one's self as well as a larger body of humanity.

I enjoy people sharing my experiences—not these recountings, but the lessons I've learned. I enjoy being able to provide material, resources and opportunities for others to experience growth, to see that there are alternatives to "growing up" and "selling out", that one can live by "alternative" values and have dignity, that money and prestige aren't really the important factors in one's self image, that we don't have to give into "their" way of doing things.

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One of my few talents has been organizing, be it as a kid getting ball games together or getting local hoods together to fuck over some neighborhood prick; as a young man in initiating riots or rent strikes; or as an "adult" in providing vehicles for people to have an impact so they can experience small victories in life that may lead to larger attempts later at overcoming apathy. The key is, first, having a dream. Second, it's important to communicate that dream to others to see if they share it or are part of it. And third, motivating myself to motivate others to joint action.

And this is where the dreaded word "politics" comes in. By my definition, it means any thinking or actions that involve groups of people. Then it's politics. Politics is part of human nature, a necessary evil, perhaps. I engage in politics, not because I'm good at it or because I love it, but because there is no way around it. Everything we do is political when it interacts with others. I know enough about my motivations to largely trust my actions, and have learned to trust

others over a course of time—not on what they say, but on what they do and how they do it. And I hope that is how I am judged, too.

Some people feel I'm too manipulative at this. Maybe. I do know how to get a lot of decisions my way. That's partly due to my confrontational East Coast upbringing. It's partly due to the fact that I'm usually older than most of the people I'm involved with and have the advantage of more life experiences (both victories and defeats), as well as people deferring to my age. But I think it's more due to my persistence, my learned skills at give and take, and my ongoing fire inside. I'm still angry. I don't like being treated like a moron by the powers that be. I don't like seeing most people who are born into this world have no chance to ever discover 1/100th of their potential while a few others get theirs and then some. It still pisses me off, and somehow, over time, I've gathered enough skills together and learned enough patience to channel that anger into constructive avenues for myself and others.

I used to think "we" could change the world. Maybe not, although the winds of history have a weird way of shifting dramatically, and what seems impossible today may seem very likely tomorrow. I try to remember that we're living in a period of historical depression where change for the better seems unlikely. But, like with personal depressions, it's not always going to be this way, even though you think so at the time. I'm lucky enough to have grown up in an era where change seemed not only possible but was downright demanded. I have lived through that contrast, whereas most of today's youth have only known strife and lowered expectations, have been born and bred on cynicism.

But even if things don't change for the better, I want to get through life knowing that I have my dignity. This is not a false pride built on race, religion, or country, but a sense that I tried my hardest to remain human, that I was able to give as much of myself as sanely possible—both good and bad—and that I can look at myself in the mirror and say I stayed true to those childhood insights. One can't go it alone, though, and it's the act of seeing others struggle with these same problems that inspires me onward—be it a people rising against repression against all odds or be it an individual giving enough of a shit to look at his or her fears and then taking the next step of self-confrontation because it's the right thing to do. It's people like Martin who make me feel that our stupid human race is capable of so much more, that gives me encouragement. Maybe this is a good time to insert a quote from one human who made a big impact on me, Ché Guevara:

*"At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love."*

I don't think I'm great or a revolutionary by any means, but as a fairly normal schmuck, if I can keep up the struggle to remain human, then so can everybody else. I try to live my life, in a way, like his—being a guerrilla. I try to pick my fights, have learned how to retreat and reemerge fighting elsewhere. We don't have the numbers or power to meet the strength of the industrialized state head on, so we must be clever, must know our limitations, but must not ever give in to defeatism.

Oh yeah, if you really want to know what I think life is all about, then read Joseph Heller's *Catch 22*. In the midst of man's complete inhumanity to man, in the midst of the insanity and depravation and absurdity of war, it's inspiring to find some fellow retards who are both sickened and yet maintain a very twisted sense of humor (which is one way I try to maintain my sanity and blow off a lot of bullshit), who can give up but then still find the will and hope to rebel. My bible! Let me leave you with a section of the book, where Yossarian, the protagonist, is talking about his feelings on the subject of God. Here goes:

*"And don't tell me God works in mysterious ways," Yossarian continued... "There's nothing so mysterious about it. He's not working at all. He's playing. Or else He's forgotten all about us. That's the kind of God you people talk about—a country humpkin, a clumsy, brainless, conceited, uncouth hayseed. Good God, how much reverence can you have for a Supreme Being who finds it necessary to include such phenomena as phlegm and tooth decay in His divine system of creation? What in the world was running through that warped, evil, scatological mind of His when He robbed old people of the power to control their bowel movements? Why in the world did he ever create pain?"*

*Pain? Lieutenant Scheisskopf's wife pounced upon the word victoriously. "Pain is a useful symptom. Pain is a warning to us of bodily dangers."*

*"And who created the dangers?" Yossarian demanded. He laughed caustically.*

*"Oh, He was really being charitable to us when He gave us pain! Why couldn't He have used a doorbell instead to notify us, or one of His celestial choirs? Or a system of blue and red neon tubes right in the middle of each person's forehead. Any jukebox manufacturer worth his salt could have done that. Why couldn't He?"*

*"People would certainly look silly walking around with red neon tubes in the middle of their foreheads."*

*"They certainly look beautiful now writhing in agony or stupefied with morphine, don't they? What a colossal, immortal blunder! When you consider the opportunity and power He had to really do a job, and then look at the stupid, ugly little mess He made instead, His sheer incompetence is almost staggering. It's obvious He never met payroll. Why, no self-respecting businessman would hire a bungler like Him as even a shipping clerk!"*

*Lieutenant Scheisskopf's wife had turned ashen in disbelief and was ogling him with alarm. "You'd better not talk that way about Him, honey," she warned him reprovingly in a low and hostile voice. "He might punish you."*

*"Isn't He punishing me enough?" Yossarian snorted resentfully. "You know, we mustn't let Him get away with it. Oh no, we certainly mustn't let Him get away scot free for all the sorrow He's caused us. Someday I'm going to make Him pay. I know when. On the Judgment Day. Yes, that's the day I'll be close enough to reach out and grab that little yokel by His neck and..."*

Yeah, kick ass!!