
PATRICK O'NEIL
friday
NOV. 8
UNDERGROUND RAILROAD
all ages
TRUE SOUNDS
plus M.I.A.
and BIØ HAZARD
MON • JAN 23
$7.00 AT THE DOOR
santa cruz fairgrounds
watsonville
indoor concert pavillion
Amazing DANCE Party
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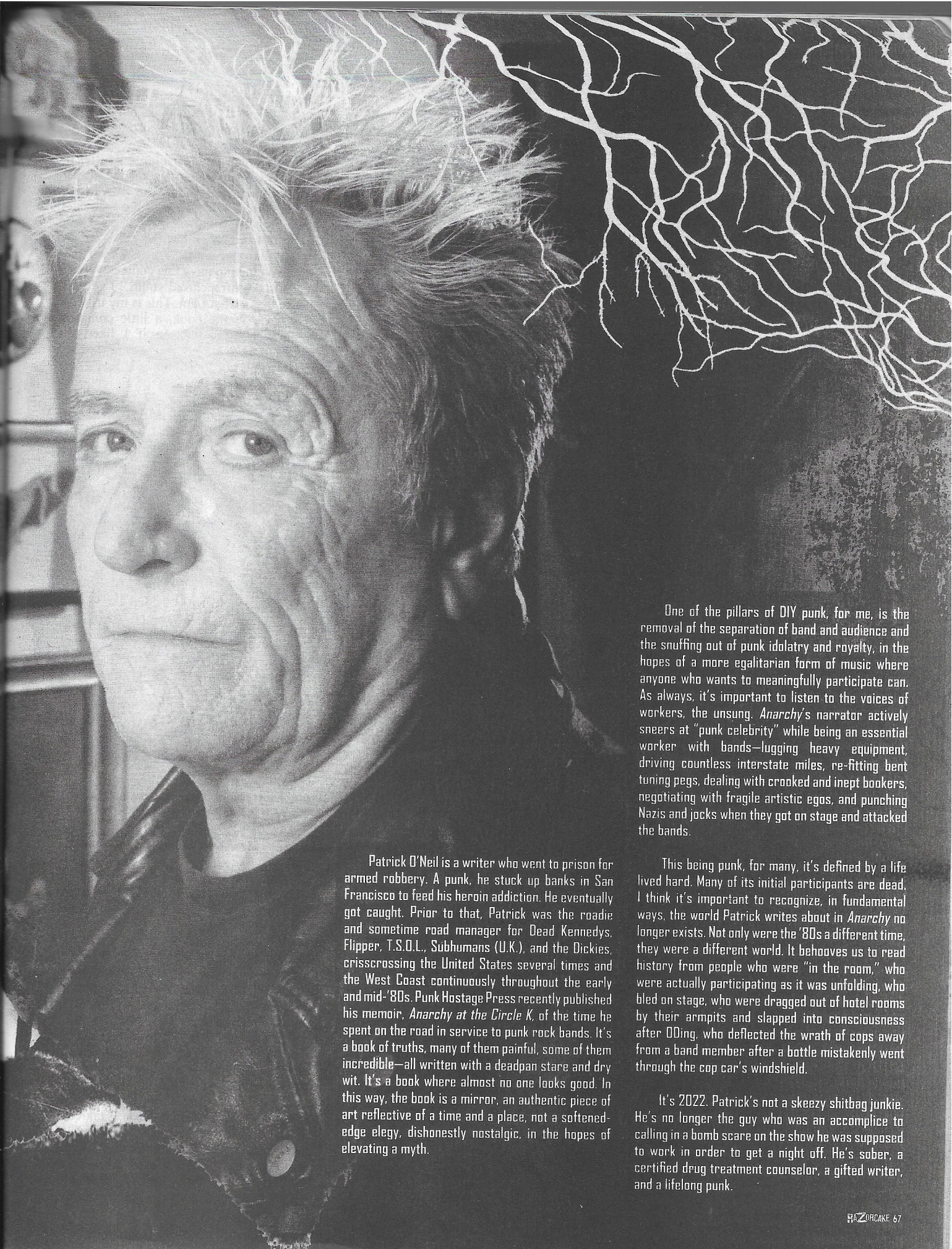
CARLOS JR. SAYS: "THERE IS LIFE AFTER THE GOLD DISC"
DEAD KENNEDYS
with
TSOL
BUTTHOLE SURFERS
NEW YEARS EVE
at the Starlite Ballroom
7pm
$7.00 ADVANCE
$8.50 DOOR
No Hollywood
DEAD KENNEDYS
CORROSION OF CONFORMITY
Interview
Daryl & Todd Taylor
Photos
Kasper Tobias
& courtesy of Patrick
Introduction
Todd Taylor
Layout
Dylan Davis
KASPER TOBIAS



Patrick O'Neil is a writer who went to prison for armed robbery. A punk, he stuck up banks in San Francisco to feed his heroin addiction. He eventually got caught. Prior to that, Patrick was the roadie and sometime road manager for Dead Kennedys, Flipper, T.S.O.L., Subhumans (U.K.), and the Dickies, crisscrossing the United States several times and the West Coast continuously throughout the early and mid-'80s. Punk Hostage Press recently published his memoir, *Anarchy at the Circle K*, of the time he spent on the road in service to punk rock bands. It's a book of truths, many of them painful, some of them incredible—all written with a deadpan stare and dry wit. It's a book where almost no one looks good. In this way, the book is a mirror, an authentic piece of art reflective of a time and a place, not a softened-edge elegy, dishonestly nostalgic, in the hopes of elevating a myth.

One of the pillars of DIY punk, for me, is the removal of the separation of band and audience and the snuffing out of punk idolatry and royalty, in the hopes of a more egalitarian form of music where anyone who wants to meaningfully participate can. As always, it's important to listen to the voices of workers, the unsung. *Anarchy*'s narrator actively sneers at "punk celebrity" while being an essential worker with bands—lugging heavy equipment, driving countless interstate miles, re-fitting bent tuning pegs, dealing with crooked and inept bookers, negotiating with fragile artistic egos, and punching Nazis and jocks when they got on stage and attacked the bands.

This being punk, for many, it's defined by a life lived hard. Many of its initial participants are dead. I think it's important to recognize, in fundamental ways, the world Patrick writes about in *Anarchy* no longer exists. Not only were the '80s a different time, they were a different world. It behooves us to read history from people who were "in the room," who were actually participating as it was unfolding, who bled on stage, who were dragged out of hotel rooms by their armpits and slapped into consciousness after ODing, who deflected the wrath of cops away from a band member after a bottle mistakenly went through the cop car's windshield.

It's 2022. Patrick's not a skeezy shitbag junkie. He's no longer the guy who was an accomplice to calling in a bomb scare on the show he was supposed to work in order to get a night off. He's sober, a certified drug treatment counselor, a gifted writer, and a lifelong punk.

Todd: How long did it take you to write *Anarchy at the Circle K*?

Patrick: It's actually the first book I tried to write. I started out with some stories of touring and it was too close to home. I was having a hard time with it. I got lost in the factual stuff. I went back and I started writing *Gun Needle Spoon*, my first book. I wrote that and then I went back to *Anarchy at the Circle K*. It just wasn't coming to me. It wasn't feeling good and I didn't have a voice to it. There was really no direction to it. I ended up leaving it alone for a couple of years, came back to it about four years ago, and then started writing it in earnest. Then, for some reason—because the time or whatever—it just clicked. It started working. I found the voice and I found what I wanted to do with it. I found the structure.

Daryl: How would you describe the voice you found?

Patrick: This sounds weird, but humble? Not gushy and fanboy and not egotistical rock star. [laughs] Something in between there.

Daryl: I'm so glad you said that, because what I truly love about this book is—the way I see it is—it's the worker's perspective of the '80s hardcore tour circuit, where you're receiving zero recognition. There's no celebrity. You're not in the annals of punk history. You're just a worker who's throwing their life into something one hundred percent.

Patrick: I first pitched this book years ago, to a press and an agent that were interested. I sent them some pieces. They go, "Where's the dirt on Biafra?" I go, "That's not what the book's gonna be about. I can't speak about Biafra. This is what my experiences on the road were." And they weren't interested.

Daryl: There's a lot of dirt in the book.

Patrick: [laughs]

Daryl: For all you readers who are thinking there's no dirt in this book, believe me, there's dirt.

Todd: There's a lot of grime, too. There's also no one glamorous in the book. Very few people look good in this book. I'm saying these as big positives.

Daryl: Especially how so many people write about drug use—to have a non-glamorous portrayal of hard drug use is refreshing.

Patrick: Actually, this is when drugs were working for me. That's the funny part. There's nothing better living as a drug addict and moving from town to town, having no responsibilities—as in taking care of yourself— just being on the road. The job was the responsibility to focus on, but it was just part of the equation at the time. One of the things that came out of the San Francisco punk scene was there was a real identity with being a drug addict, along with being a punk rocker.

One thing I really want to portray—and what you guys are talking about—is the roadie side of it, the real road manager side of it. I think that's a really important view that nobody really talks about. It's kind of a thankless job, but it's also exciting. It's also kind of cool. You get to travel everywhere, do all these things, hang out, and make things happen. The really cool part about it is every night's a different problem and you fix it and you make it happen. There's a certain feeling of satisfaction to that, just always on top of things and be moving things and making things work.

Todd: I follow that with punk's proclamation of limiting of the separation between band and audience. I think being roadie/road manager/merch person is a perfect example of that. Because, on tour, you're as much a part of the band as the musicians going on stage every night.

Patrick: Yeah, absolutely.

Todd: During that time, you're considered to be of the band. Yeah.

Patrick: Bands like Dead Kennedys, they really exemplified that. There wasn't that us and them mentality—except in the end when they were all fighting, and it wasn't great anyway. But we were always included, we were always there. We were always part of the entourage. Bands like Flipper, you were living with them, driving in the van with them. I mean, literally, it was Flipper and me. It was hard not to be part of the band. You're sleeping in the same bunk. You're driving the same van.

Daryl: You tried to join the band at one point.

Patrick: Yeah, I did. I was a little pissed off, because I knew I was a better bass player than Bruce was. [laughs][sighs] It's a lot of ego involved. That's a really bad idea for a band member to be the manager or the road manager. It doesn't work well. It's a power dynamic that really fucks things up.

Todd: You mentioned being punk in San Francisco. Specifically in the book you talk about punk being a tribe. It's way beyond music.

Patrick: Yeah.

Todd: Can you explain that? When you have that tribalism and you're driving all over North America, how explicit is that? We're talking early, mid-'80s. It's a different time, sure, but it's a different world. Can you talk about some contrasts?

Patrick: What really clicked for me was that, in the '70s, I was going to shows like Yes and Judas Priest. Huge arena shows. There was fucking Day on the Green in Oakland that were massive hair bands. That's all there was. I also saw Bob Marley and big reggae bands, but it turned arena rock. I think I mentioned in the book—I went down to the Mabuhay (Gardens). I had no idea what was going on here. I sort of knew this punk fringe was happening. I saw a band from Canada, DOA, and they just blew my mind. There were three guys up there, putting up this wall of noise.

Todd: Three lumberjacks.

Patrick: [laughs] Yeah. Joey Shithead, Randy Rampage, and Chuck Biscuits going crazy. It was maniacal and I was like, "Oh my god, this is what music's missing." This is what's happening here. Then, the Ramones played an outdoor show in the middle of the day at the Civic Center in San Francisco. Went down, saw that. Within weeks—I had had really long hair—I cut my hair off. I was a rock'n'roller and all of a sudden that's not happening anymore. It felt like there was a movement happening.

I was thinking about this on the way over here—much like what's going on right now politically around us—it was the Reagan years. It was bad. It felt like Big Brother was coming. It was also coming up on 1984. All this symbolism was happening. There was a like-minded thing going on in punk. It was really important for me at that age to find something that I identified with and felt part of. The hippie thing was over in San Francisco. Then it went to glam and it went to weird bands like the Tubes. It was uninteresting and wasn't really what I was about. And then to have this come up. It was like, "Ah, disenfranchised youth." I get this, because that's what I am. This is my tribe.

A piece in the book, a little comment was—somebody asked me if I liked the music, and the reality is, music is just what I *did*. It was part of the whole package. There was a whole lifestyle. I just did an interview the other day and the guy was an outsider talking, and he said, "It felt like you needed the code to get into that organization."

DEAD KENNEDYS SOUTHWEST TOUR CREW AND BAND, 1984
Back row L to R: Gary Taylor, Candace Batycki, East Bay Ray, Luxury Bob, Nancy "Chuck" Humphries, and Michael "Microwave" Bonanno. Front row L to R: Lisette, Ron Shasberg, Patrick O'Neil, Klaus Fluoride, and Allison Jambor. Photographer unknown.

Yeah, probably did. It was a pretty tight knit group. But it was also a tight knit group that recognized another tight knit group, because we were everywhere.

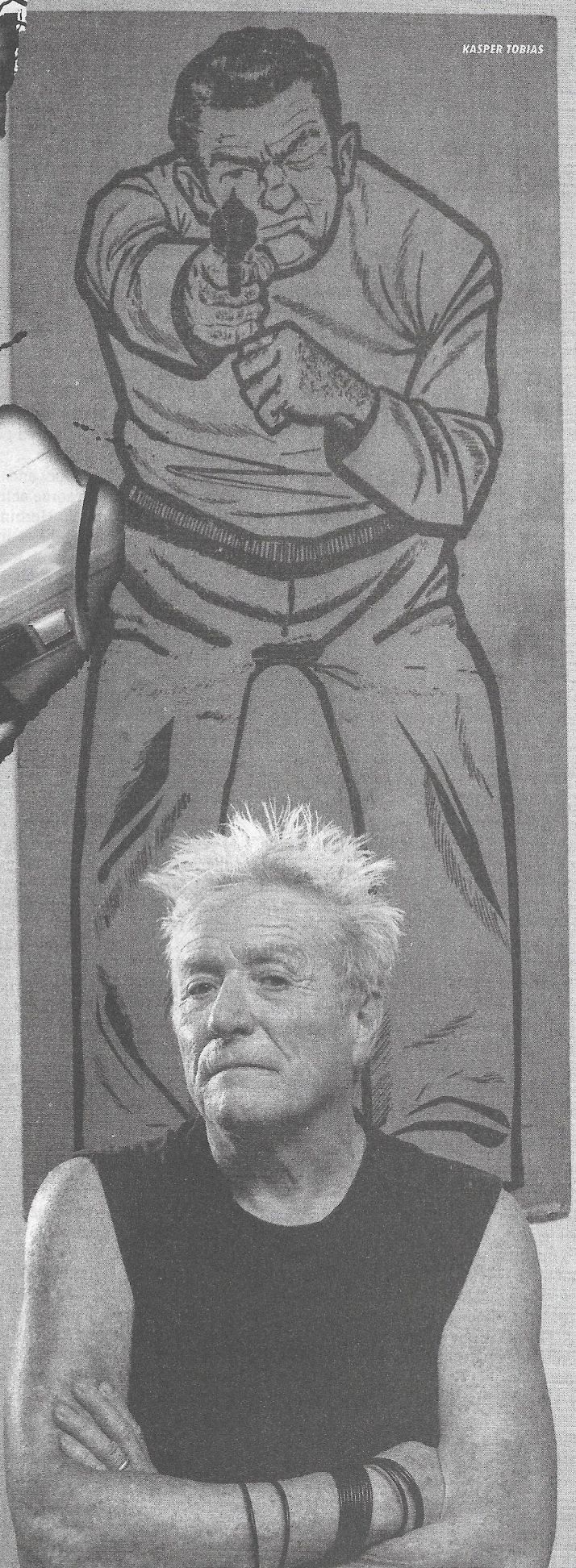
Daryl: It's not so much about saying the right thing, but not saying the wrong thing.

Patrick: There you go. Yeah. And allowing things to happen. Because punk was really inclusive in the old days. In San Francisco, at least. The Nuns, which weirdly had a keyboard—they played kind of a punk rock thing. There was Crime that came out in cop uniforms and they played San Quentin. They were full on, in-your-face noise. There was just a whole gamut under the under the punk label. Chris Isaak came out of there, Silvertone was his band. He played rockabilly. Then hardcore reared its ugly head, and we all started going down that alley.

DEAD KENNEDYS
YORK THEATER, VANCOUVER, 1984
Photographer unknown.

PATRICK DRIVING DEAD KENNEDYS VAN, 1986
San Francisco, Calif.
Photo | ANNA LISA VAN DER VALK

KASPER TOBIAS



the roadie side...
It's kind of a thankless job, but it's also exciting....
every night's a different problem and you fix it and you make it happen.

Todd: And we also have to remember that Dead Kennedys sound strange. We're used to it, but like, you basically have surf and a guy who sounds like a cartoon character, plugged into punk. They were, at one time, one of the largest punk bands in the world.

Patrick: Exactly. I think that's because they sounded different. It was a signature sound. Ray's guitar is a signature sound. Biafra's voice is a signature sound.

Todd: In one sung word, you know it's him.

Patrick: I still hear his voice. [laughs]

Daryl: They're also an incredible band.

Patrick: Yeah, they are. What blows me away about them, is Klaus (Flouride) is a

trained musician, really knows his shit. So does (East Bay) Ray. And D.H. (Peligro) is one of the best drummers I've ever seen. For a rhythm section and musicians, they would go out and put on a good show every night. A lot of bands I worked with—well, let's say Flipper—they would put on a good show once every thirty nights.

Todd: And that show would be amazing.

Patrick: Amazing. And the other twenty-nine nights would be just one of the worst things you ever saw in your life. 'Cause they got it. I saw something that Biafra said in an interview he did a little while ago. It said he didn't just want to have the best punk band around. He wanted to have the best kickass band around. That's cool. I get that idea. You know, to be on top like that.

Todd: Punk bands now have the option to fall back on established punk templates. "I'm going to be this type of punk band." And that's it. There's something comforting about that, but it's not exciting for music to go forward. And also, over time, that can make punk a monoculture, which is totally unexciting.

Patrick: Half the opening bands for us were formula one, three-chord punk bands that fell by the wayside because they were doing the same thing. It was really generic. I give them a lot of props for getting up there and doing what they're doing, but what really made it were bands that were innovative and really took that sound one level up. And that's what T.S.O.L. was doing. They took it in a totally different direction. The Kennedys did it. Flipper took it the other direction. [laughs] Got very slow and low. The Subhumans were probably the closest to that punk rock formula of, "Oh, that's punk rock." They even did their spin on it, with that Crass, blitzkrieg stuff going on.

Todd: Also, they would be the one band in your book that put their ethics into their business model every single way.

Patrick: Oh, yeah, absolutely. As politically involved as the Kennedys were—okay, this is an opinion [laughs]—I don't think they changed a lot of minds. I think Biafra preached too much and people were leery of his preaching. The Subhumans were the living, working model, and to me that that goes a lot further.

Daryl: If you look at the two bands today, the proof is right there.

Patrick: This is "old man shaking his fist at the bands going by my lawn," but I have a really hard time with bands that are out thirty years later playing the same tunes. I don't begrudge anybody making a living. I think that's fine. But you gotta say what the band is at that point. Bands that are still evolving and still making music and have continually put out records, whether they're good or not, is a band. The other one is a nostalgia act.

Daryl: Did you ever do anything wholesome on tour?

Patrick: [laughs] What do you mean by wholesome?

Daryl: Like a hike to a waterfall or something?

Patrick: When I was on tour with Flipper, we were totally bored, and we all hated each other. There was the speed freak faction and there was the heroin faction. We were all in that bread truck driving around. The bread truck only went sixty miles an hour. It was a nightmare. It was loaded with guns and drugs and fireworks.

Todd: And a gas-burner espresso maker.

Patrick: All this kinda shit. I actually took it out of the book. I'm sad I did. We went to the Jack Daniel's factory. We would stop at places that gave tours. We went into the Philip Morris factory to look at how they made cigarettes. We went to the Jack Daniel's distillery, which is in a dry county. We thought we'd get some shots. We didn't. I went to a fucking museum with Ted Falconi in New York City. I can't remember which. I was so loaded, but he and I went and looked at art. A little culture with Flipper and they're the most uncultured people known to humankind. It's hilarious.

Daryl: Cigarette tour and whiskey tour. Those are the wholesome activities.

Patrick: Pretty much. Heroin tour.

Todd: Going along the same theme—I'm gonna repeat—you don't look good in this book because you do a lot of sketchy shit, even sketchy for 1984. It's 2022. I don't want to excuse your behavior, but I understand your behavior. I'm hoping to understand—and hopefully the readers will understand this—why is it important that you wrote these stories down? Why did you air this stuff out?

Patrick: Because it was a time when anything goes. I find it to be an incredibly creative, insane time. And with that kind of creative intensity, there's just insanity involved with it. It was a creative process. I really stressed over putting some stuff out there. I really stressed over putting about the road crew calling in the bomb scare for the Kennedys show. I didn't want the Kennedys to know that.

Todd: Did they know before the book came out?

Patrick: Nope. Here's the road crew gacked out on coke and they don't want to go to a show, so they call in a bomb scare. That's not something you really want people to remember you by. I don't think Ray's talked to me since but, come on, it was over thirty years ago. Somebody's got to chronicle it or it's just gone.

Todd: Would it be fair to say that writing the book was a form of therapy for you to get these things out of your head for good? Put them on paper so other people can read them and make their own value assessments?

Patrick: Yeah, there's always a cathartic part about writing. With this book and everything else I've written, I do have to get this stuff out of my head. I gotta get it on paper and put it somewhere else. I'm not getting any younger. Senility is coming around the corner. I'm probably gonna forget half this stuff. I have a damn good memory. I gotta get this stuff down and done.

There are people who I loved and cared about who are no longer here and I need that to be put into history. A lot of them aren't, and a lot of will never be thought of again. The real thing that I tried to portray here—how imploding punk was, how destructive it was, because it was all about anarchy, fucking things up, and tearing the system down. But a lot of that was directed inward. That's where the drugs came from. That's where the violence came from. I don't think people realize that. I don't think people really see that. I just want to put that place in history. Put a stamp on it.

Todd: I think it's very important that people who aren't on the marquee are memorialized, too. Because if you do believe that punk is more egalitarian than other subcultures and we all have something to learn from one another, we shouldn't be investing so much in punk idols or punk celebrities.

When I was on tour with Flipper... the bread truck only went sixty miles an hour. It was a nightmare. It was loaded with guns and drugs and fireworks

FLIPPER, PYRAMID CLUB, 1984
New Years Eve. L to R: Will Shatter, Bruce Loose, and Patrick O'Neil. Photo | ANNA LISA VAN DER VALK

Patrick: The Ramones are great. They were the biggest band of punk rock. But the Ramones were the grandfathers. Tons of stuff came after them and none of it gets the recognition it should have.

Todd: It's all cast in shadow.

Patrick: Yeah, exactly. There are bands that got left by the wayside. There's really important bands out there like M.I.A. from Vegas and they got nothing. There's a bunch of bands.

Todd: *Absolutely. M.I.A. even got their* name taken by a rapper. I have no issue with her, but choose a name that hadn't already been used.

Patrick: There's quite a few of them like that. History is to the victor. This sounds really dumb but the book was about the underdog, the under people, what was going on below the surface. Also, here's a little egotistical part. I want people to know what I did. I chose to not be a frontman. Well, none of my bands got picked up. But there's no chronicle of that anywhere. I'm not getting interviewed in *Where Are They Now?* thirty years ago.

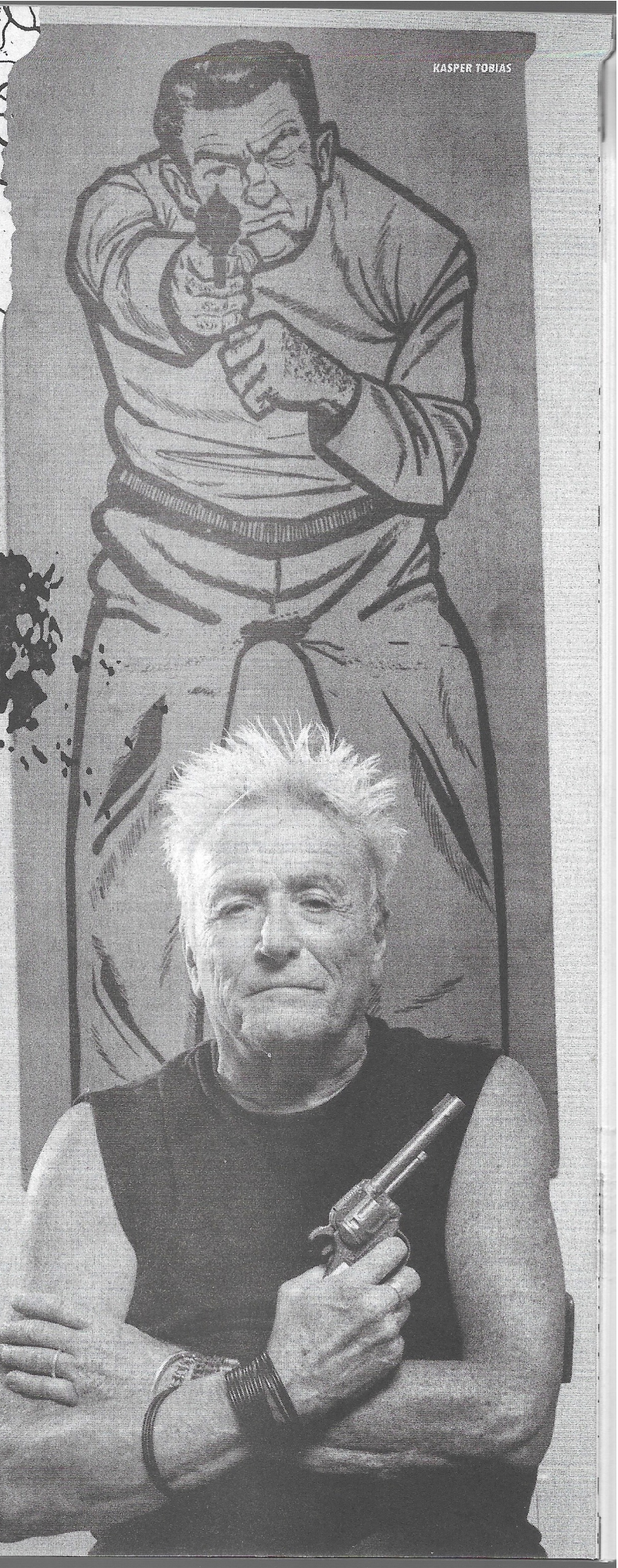
Daryl: If you're lucky, you'd get the two-second sound bite.

Patrick: Exactly. Nobody cares.

Daryl: This is a two-part question. Were there any bands you refused to tour with?

FLIPPER TOURS
THE JACK DANIELS DISTILLERY, 1985
Lynchburg, Tenn. Right side of crowd: Ted Falconi, tour guide, Will Shatter, Patrick O'Neil, and Steve DePace. Photo by Jack Daniel's employee.

PATRICK
SAN FRANCISCO, 1987
(Short-lived first attempt at being sober.)
Photo | ANNA LISA VAN DER VALK



KASPER TOBIAS

Patrick: Oh, yeah, I gotta leave that out of the book. Concrete Blonde. Bingo. She's not a very nice person and they were really difficult to work with. I insulated myself in punk. Then these things were happening that people would tap me and wonder if I would come in and work with them. Concrete Blonde asked me to be a road manager. I wouldn't. I met her and their manager at some bar in Silver Lake, and walked away, going, "No fucking way I'll work with that woman. Horrible." I met her again, thirty years later. She didn't know who the fuck I was. I was like, "Good. Good decision."

There was a bunch of bands that wanted me to work with them when I had gotten to the other level. I was at a Kennedy level, so I wasn't in the van, sleeping on people's floors anymore. I know that sounds bad, but I just couldn't do it anymore. I was getting to be an older guy and I couldn't just jump in the van and sleep in truck stops, which is what we did the beginning and that was hard.

There was also that L.A./San Francisco rivalry. There were things I couldn't touch, I couldn't get involved with. T.S.O.L. was the first crossover. But there were other bands, like The Vandals and people like that, "Uh, no I don't want to go there."

Todd: Whose identity was Southern California, very regional?

Patrick: Yeah, exactly. T.S.O.L. crossed a lot of genres, even though they still held their Orange County heritage. Any band that had at least a tiny stench of fascism, Nazism, or any crap like that, I wouldn't even get on the same stage with. There was no way. I don't think people realize how huge the skinhead population was back then.

Then there were bands I thought I was too good for because I hated them, like False Prophets from New York. I didn't want to work for the Dicks because they were just such a mess. I love them, but it was total, like, "Yeah, we're gonna go on a tour. There's a kid somewhere. He's got a VFW hall." Nothing was solid. I'm just like, "No, that's not going to work for me. I'm gonna lose my shit." I did a few gigs with the Butthole Surfers, and Gibby was a difficult guy to work with. We had a falling out at The Farm in San Francisco. I didn't work for them anymore. It was all about money.

Daryl: Alright, so the second part of the question was, were there any bands that refused to tour with you? [laughter]

Patrick: Red Hot Chili Peppers. Which is okay, but they paid really well. There was talk of the original Hawkwind going back out again, back in the day. I was in the running and they said no. I got kicked off the Lollapalooza tour. There was the Thompson Twins. They said no. That type of peripheral band. It was pretty obvious I was not the happiest guy to work with.

Todd: I was a small kid. I was very bookish. Loved punk. Early shows mid-to-late '80s, I saw a lot of violence. It almost completely turned me off from punk, but some people really valued violence as part of going to a show. Let's share something from the book. Tell us the story about being cut by a skinhead when T.S.O.L. is playing.

Patrick: So it was in Denver. You gotta remember that T.S.O.L. had done a kind of a crossover at that point. Jack and Todd were out of the band and Mitch, Dean, and Joe Wood were in the band. They were going in a direction of a metal band, a big hair band.

Todd: Hard rock.

Patrick: Yeah, yeah. Don't get me wrong. They were a great band, but they weren't punk. They were disingenuously getting booked into punk shows. I know Chris of the Rock Hotel in New York refused to book them because they weren't punk. At one point he said, "I'll put them on a metal show." And they were like, no, because T.S.O.L. would have been opening on the metal show. So there were issues there.

Denver had a huge pile of skinheads. Every time Ron went up to sing in the mic, one of the guys would grab the mic stand, smack him in the face with it. I watched that three times and said, "That's fucking enough." I jumped in, knocked one of them around, and pushed him back. This kid lunged towards me and then all of them stayed back. I was like, "Okay, I'm a badass." [laughs] I got back up on stage and I went to straighten the mic stand. There's blood all over the stage. I'm like, "What the fuck is going on here?" I reached down and I saw blood spurting out of my thumb area by my wrist. It was like shooting out, like artery shit, right? "Oh, fuck." So I wrapped it all up and I look back. The skinheads are laughing at me, flipping me off. and I'm like, "Great. I'm not a badass."

I got the promoter. He was the guy who did tours with Psychic TV and Throbbing Gristle. He got one of his guys and took me to the hospital. It's always wonderful to show up in a hospital in a different city all fucked up. The best part about those days was they didn't ask you for health insurance. They were gonna send you a bill. That was perfect for me. "Send me that bill." [laughter] The problem was I had been punched out the night before. It was my first cross-country tour with T.S.O.L. It was a nightmare. I got my jacket stolen. I got my face punched in in Salt Lake City. Then Denver, where I got sliced.

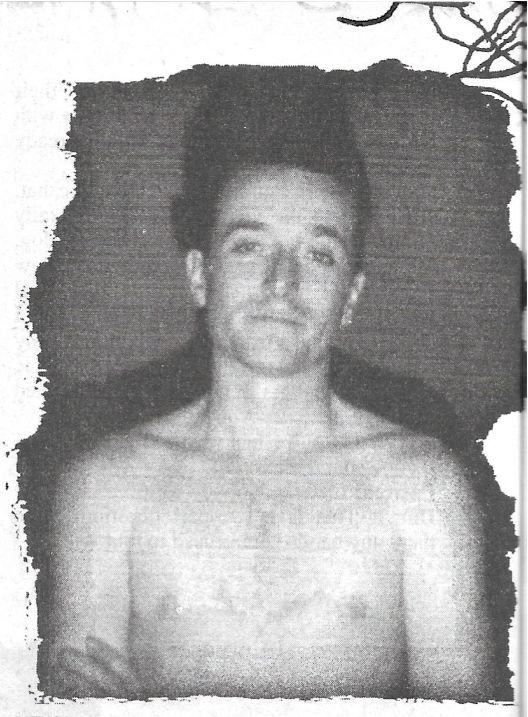
Todd: And you look like an alien without any of that happening.

Patrick: Yeah. Right. Exactly. So I go in there, the doctors and nurses look at me like, "What the fuck do we have here?"

Todd: "Nothing good."

Patrick: Right. I think the doctors actually said, "You do this for a living?" and I go, "Yeah." He goes, "Well, maybe you should find another job." I was, like, "Shit." Then, "Fuck you," and "Take me back to the show. We're gonna go do this thing." My worry was that Mike Vraney, who was the manager of T.S.O.L. and Dead Kennedys, was gonna look at me and go, "This guy's a liability. Get rid of him." I was gonna lose my job that got my face punched in and got sliced. That's what I was worried about.

Todd: I saw it happen firsthand. It was so weird that people would pay good money to go in and want to physically attack the band and start fights. Racist skinheads would come in quite often and just tried to disrupt the whole show.



PATRICK
SAN FRANCISCO, 1985
(Strung-out on heroin.) Photo | ANNA LISA VAN DER VALK

Patrick: It's fucking weird. There were shows where I can totally admit I was scared. There were gangs of them. It was bad. Up the ante, like in L.A., the Olympic Auditorium was fucking scary. It was hardcore and L.A. took it really seriously. It wasn't scary, like, "Oh, my," and run away, but I gotta be on my toes.

Todd: Be very, very alert.

Patrick: Yeah. Because here I am in the beginning, just jumping in willy nilly to a bunch of skins because I'm badass. I paid the price. I learned from that. I got into a shitload of fights and I wasn't a violent guy. I've been in fights. I grew up in a tough part of Boston, but I never had gotten to the level there. The problem was that hardcore changed the punk rock scene. It became that and a lot of other punk bands got left by the wayside. They also weren't respected when they got on the bill with hardcore bands and that was a real problem. Flipper had balls going out playing for those people. You play "Sex Bomb" for two hours in front of them and go "fuck you," you got balls.

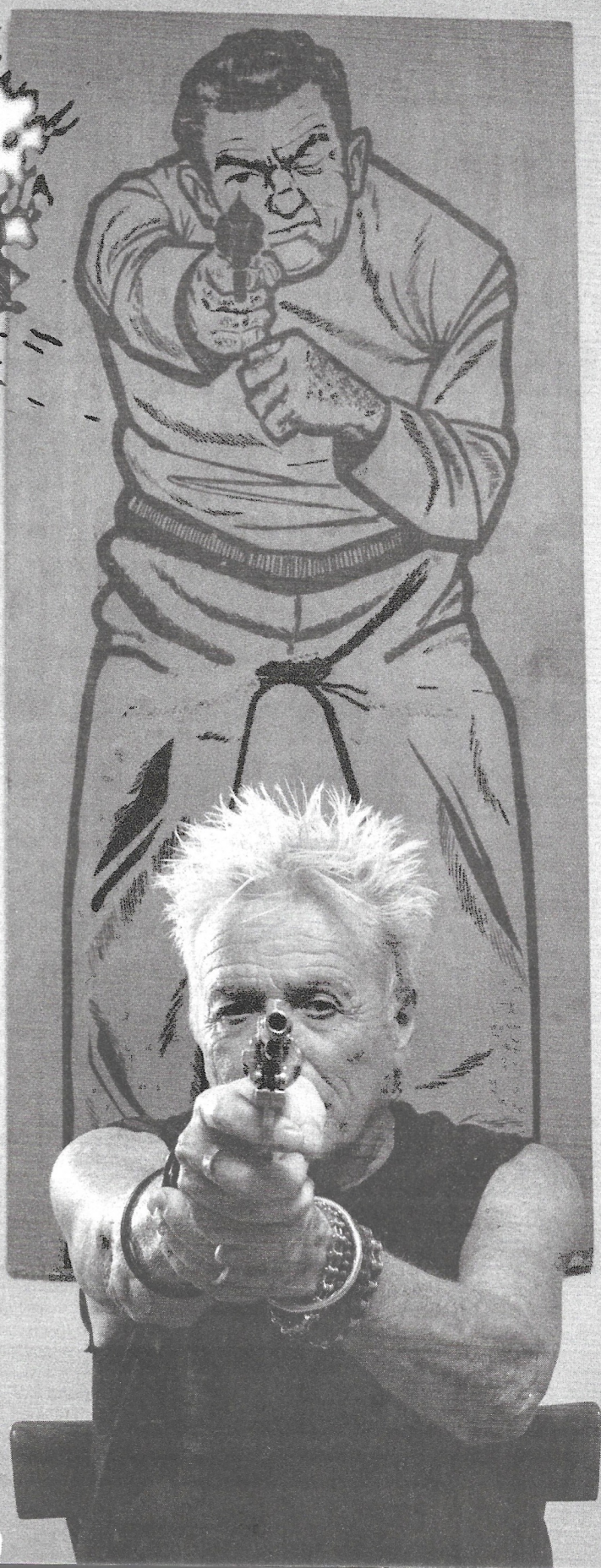
Todd: I do think—this is just looking large scope—because of the violence, a lot of the initial diversity of punk disappeared. There were times when I was just like, "I think I'm out. I just can't take this anymore." But there'd always be another good band coming through or you have your friends, who are really great and support one another. You're in your own universe in a lot of ways and most people didn't think you were cool. There wasn't a lot of cachet to it. You're a fucking weirdo.

Daryl: Have you heard from anyone about the book yet?

JUNGLE STUDS, 1983
Photoshoot
San Francisco
L to R: Anna Lisa Van der Valk, Steven DePace, D.H. Peligro, and Patrick O'Neil.
Photographer unknown.

I remember scoring heroin in a biker bar in Norman, Oklahoma and thinking, I'm gonna die in here

KASPER TOBIAS



Patrick: I sent an advanced copy to someone I thought was a friend of mine. They came back to me and said, "I'll basically sue your ass if you put me in there." They could've said, "Hey, I don't like the way you portray me. Take me out of the book," but it was, "Fuck you, fuck you." I was like, "Wow, okay." Probably because, like you said before, nobody looks good. I recently got an email from him that said, "You're a piece of shit, Patrick." [laughs]

Todd: Was there a smiley face afterwards?

Patrick: No, no. I had taken him out of the fucking book. I wasn't gonna tell him he was out of the book, because I wanted him to go buy a copy. [laughs] I sent it to a bunch of people who really mattered and who I could get a hold of. I sent a copy to Ted Falconi, because that's the only one in Flipper I'm talking to. I don't know of any way to get ahold of the Subhumans.

Daryl: Subhumans will be in L.A. on the sixteenth.

Patrick: I saw that. That's so cool. Bless their hearts, man, but here's the truth. They couldn't do anything else. There's nothing else that Dick (Lucas) could do. He's not gonna work at 7-Eleven. No fucking way.

Daryl: Have you seen him balance stuff?

Patrick: Balance stuff?

Todd: He balances ordinary objects really fucking high.

Patrick: How's he get paid for that? Just kidding.

Todd: Wow. You're asking your artists how they get paid, Patrick. They don't.

Patrick: Really, so he found a career?

Todd: At least a soothing hobby.

KASPER TOBIAS

ALTERNATIVE TENTACLES, 1987
Patrick hard at work as the A.T. art department, San Francisco, Calif. Photo | ANNA LISA VAN DER VALK

Patrick: There were certain people who I looked at in the punk scene those days. "This is what they were going to do. This is it."
Todd: Right. That's their skill set.
Patrick: Yeah, exactly.
Todd: That narrow line.
Patrick: Klaus would be in a jazz band, no problem. D.H. would play any band as long as it's hardcore. I think Ray would be running a corporation if he could. [laughs] Just kidding. Flipper would just be drug addicts.
Daryl: It was interesting that at the end of the book, D.H. Peligro won't even look at you. He's so done with you when you see him at a show. But then it's refreshing because he wrote a pretty warm blurb that's on the back of the book.
Patrick: Yeah, we buried the hatchet and we're really good friends now. I see him a lot around L.A. It was all drug addicts' stupid shit. He had lent me some money. I never paid it back. There were some women involved. Just a bunch of bullshit, explosive stuff.

I also disappeared from the scene. I was there and I was gone. People resent that you just dropped out of their lives. I lived with D.H. before I toured with him. He lived in the same building I did, a boarding house, Mission A in San Francisco. He was a roommate. We were friends. We were tight. I worked at Alternative Tentacles. We were hanging out. After all that was over with, I knew friends of his and were close to me. I was still in the same scene. And then I just dropped out, I was gone. There's the feeling that, "I'm not worth keeping in touch with. What's going on there?" In a lot of ways, he's hurt. I know my friend 4-Way from New York is the same way towards me and still is because I dropped out. I just never got in touch with him again. And we were really close, but dope fiends don't send postcards. It's sad. Also, Darren cleaned up and I cleaned up. There's no secret to that. Part of our program is putting that shit behind us and talking about it.
Todd: I have a drug trivia question. You mentioned Placidyls in *Anarchy*. Do you know what they have in common with the current baby formula shortage in the United States?
Patrick: Whoa, no.
Todd: They're both manufactured by Abbott Laboratories. Just wanted to put that out there.
Patrick: Wow. Okay. Goddammit. That would've gone in the book. And I'd like to point out you're not supposed to shoot them. [laughs] "Don't try this at home, idiot."
Todd: "Or anywhere."
Daryl: That isn't code for, "Actually try it."
Patrick: Definitely not code. Do not do this.
Todd: Attentively reading your book all the way through, drug addiction is exhausting. It's all-consuming, because the cycle never ends. At what point in the book do you know the drugs have taken you over? Because at the very beginning of this interview you said, "They were working for me."
Patrick: So a real parameter on when it happened that I was not in control was when I couldn't kick before tour, because that was always the deal. The early first couple of years, I would get off heroin, go on tour, find heroin on tour, and get strung out again on tour. It's less stressful craziness to go on the tour not strung out, because you take drugs with you and think, "You got this for the next month," and they're gone in two days. And you're like, "Oh, Jesus Christ, I'm in Omaha." I remember scoring heroin in a biker bar in Norman, Oklahoma and thinking, "I'm gonna die in here." You're trying to find a twenty-dollar bag of dope. It's just insane.

I hope I touch on this, though—the insanity of the idea that you would leave a Mecca where drugs are, to just go out on the road. It's the same thing expecting shows to be there. We're expecting drugs to be there, expecting everything to be okay. As my drug addiction progressed, that became an impossibility. Without this mechanism of actually touring and going out there, I don't think I would have attempted it.
Todd: Follow up question. What have you learned about your relationship to your artistic ego and drug addiction?
Patrick: My artistic ego?
Todd: In the book at the very beginning, you go to San Francisco and want to be a graphic designer. You had early encouragement and then faced up to the reality of, "Oh, shit, I'm having a hard time getting a job for actual artistic production." So I'm talking to you now, today.

I write addictively ... There's a need for ritual. There's a need for creativity or self-expression, more than anything else

Patrick: Oh, okay. Well, drugs are the great reducer of the shit going on in my head. There's a constant negative voice that you're a loser, you're needy, you're fat, you're ugly. Nobody loves you. Now, you're old. [laughs] That's going on constantly in my head. Drugs brought that down.

Also, I'm not a social human being. You and I do great. I don't like parties. I don't like going to chit chat with people. It's not a thing I do. If you look at touring and shows, that's ninety percent of the game: going backstage and hanging out. One of the reasons I started doing drugs, it was the social lubricant. In the beginning, there was a certain level of creativity along with it. Which ends up with I'm in the studio recording something, but basically, I'm in the bathroom shooting dope. All drug musicians had that sort of story that formed an idea that this was a creative drug, which is easily discounted that it was not.

To turn it all the way around to me today is that I write addictively. I get into it. I get up in the morning, I write every day. I got a book I'm writing right now. It's part of what I need to do and if I don't, I don't feel well, I don't feel one hundred percent. I don't feel like I'm in rhythm with the universe. It's the same level. There's a need for ritual. There's a need for creativity or self-expression, more than anything else. That's what it's evolved to me today.
Todd: Okay, great. That's something, dear reader, you can take away as a positive.
Patrick: Yeah, right. [laughs] Exactly. Do this!
Todd: Seriously, do not shoot up Placidyls.
Daryl: Let's say you had the power to

force all the bands on the road to tour without smartphones.

Patrick: Oh, Jesus.

Daryl: Would you make them do that?

Patrick: I'm horrified to go to shows and see all the people holding up phones. There's no intimacy. The sad part about it is that, back then, those were times that probably should have been recorded and they're gone. It's disposable art. It's there and it's gone. It doesn't mean it didn't happen, it means it was an experience instead of being a legacy.

Daryl: A tour manager with a smartphone, do you even consider that really tour managing?

Patrick: [laughs] I would love to have had GPS units, tell you that much. I used to follow Leonard Cohen's tour manager on Flickr and he used to have all these great shots of having fun on tour, and I was like, wow, things have evolved from some seedy hotel room with a pint of booze.

Here's the deal, we're ruled by technology now, instead of using it as a tool. Me and my wife have this thing when we go out to dinner together, there's no phones. I didn't come to dinner for you and me to look at our phones. It's our rule. There should be some level of interaction. It's just really sad that we've found an illusion of intimacy without actually having intimacy. It says a lot about us as a society.

Todd: And also at the cost of real intimacy.

Patrick: Yeah, totally. Me and my three thousand closest Facebook friends.

Todd: Or being able to look at somebody face to face. Silences and boredom, I think are very important.

Patrick: Oh, yeah. That's big. Talk to people now—if there's a silence, they freak out. They don't know what to do. They're like, "What the hell is going on? You don't like me?" It's just bizarre.

Todd: What's one thing you could take away from people touring today, like bands and band managers—"You don't need this technology"?

Patrick: Well, fucking guitar techs and all that gear they carry with them. Tune the fucking guitar, dude. It blows me away. What are you doing? Klaus had one bass, one cabinet. It got stolen when they were in Brazil. It was a Lake Placid blue '66 Jazz Bass, Fender, and it was beautiful. He would throw that fucking thing in the air every night. I was like, you asshole. I would buy tuning pegs by the case just because I'd throw them back on. It's the massive amount of gear. It's bloated. It's going back to arena rock.

Todd: Well, technology often takes away from your own observations or learning a skill. I think that looking around at the analog world makes you a more situationally aware, adaptable, useful person. So when the power goes out or the phones fritz out, you know how to read a map. GPS is awesome, but if you ask people if they know north, south, east, west, they don't.

Daryl: Some people, to go to where they live, they don't know how to get there.

Patrick: Yeah. It's insane. "How do you get to your house? I can just GPS the address. I just need your zip code." It's not a learning device. I don't know phone numbers anymore. Fucking iPhones have got it so I don't know phone numbers anymore. I don't know my wife's phone number!

Todd: Yeah. This is a really good segue. When was your first bank robbery? [laughter] We've got to help people who haven't read your first book hit the high points... or low points.

Patrick: It has to be in the early '90s. '93 or something like that.

Todd: This is way after where *Anarchy at the Circle K* ends. You're no longer working at Alternative Tentacles.

Patrick: This is many years afterwards. Because 1987/'88, I cleaned up. I went out to New York City.

Todd: Seems weird. That's why you should go to Omaha.

Patrick: I pulled a Keith Richards clean. I drank a lot of booze every night. I thought I was clean because I wasn't shooting heroin. I stayed there a year, I did pretty well, and then I came back to L.A. in '89/'90. I worked for Goldenvoice and got strung out again. At one point, that's when Chris Grayson was murdered. All this stuff was going on down here, and I said, "L.A. is the problem, obviously. You got to get the fuck out of here." [laughs]

So went back up north and discovered meth. I shot meth two times a day, hating it, and did it for two years because I thought that because I wasn't doing heroin, it was better. Then I finally succumbed to doing heroin and got some sleep. That's the point where it really took off. They talk about how your addiction is always exactly where you left it. So I did a twenty bagger of heroin the first time. "Oh, good high." The next day, you need a hundred dollars just to get back up, because my body remembered. At that point, it was just the logistics. I had to figure something out quick. So it escalated.

First it was a liquor store/gas station. The normal escalation of an armed robber. [laughs] I realized you gotta go where the money is. What happened with *Gun Needle Spoon* is I condensed it into one year, but actually was it was over two and a half years, which is a pretty good feat in San Francisco, because it's a tiny town. I was deathly afraid of going anywhere else, because I didn't want to get popped in Oakland and do time in Santa Rita Jail, which is basically a prison. So I kept it there, pushed it to the limit, and got arrested. Look at that. [laughs]

Daryl: *Gun Needle Spoon* ruined reading other books for me because I was like, "Holy shit. That was the most intense book I've ever read and I know the guy who wrote it from hanging out in book stores."

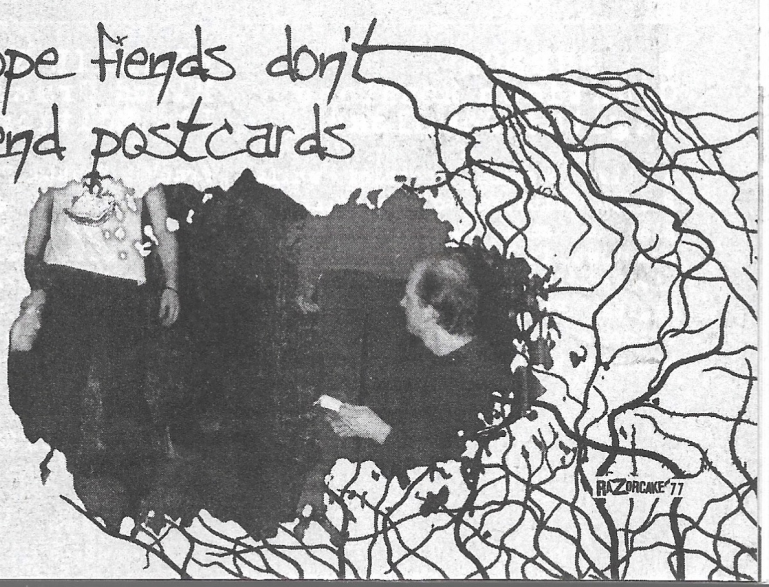
Patrick: That's the best thing I've ever heard. Thank you.

Todd: You're arrested. How long were you in prison?

Patrick: I was arrested and it all caught up with me immediately. The cops realized what I'd been doing for a while, so I get charged with multiple counts of armed robbery. The feds didn't pick it up, weirdly enough, because California decided they're going to three strike me, which is twenty-five to life. I'd never been arrested before. I'd been charged. Bullshit, put in the drunk tank. Crap like that. No felony arrests. So it was a real bastardization of the law to come in and say, "Oh, we're gonna three strikes this guy," because three strikes is supposed to be a habitual criminal. They're gonna go 1-2-3, you're out all at once.

I was like, "You gotta be fucking kidding me." I sat in county jail in San Francisco for about eighteen months, got a real lawyer,

DEAD KENNEDYS TIJUANA TOUR, 1985
L to R: Rebecca Stafford, Patrick O'Neil, Anna Lisa Van der Valk, and the Two Bills.
Photo by tourist bar photographer.



PAINTING THE FLIPPER VAN, PRE-TOUR, 1984
Capp Street Studios, San Francisco, Calif. Sitting L to R: Patrick O'Neil, Will Shatter. Photographer unknown.

and fought this case. It went up and down and they offered deals back and forth. They gave me four years, which amounted to two because of time served. The DA came to me and said, "We found a cost-effective way to deal with people like you"—because the two years meant two strikes—and they said, "You'll get out in two years and come back. You do a crime; we'll put you away for rest of your life then." I was like, "Cool. Let me go. Let's take this deal. I gotta get out of here." So I did, with "good time," as they say in the business, less than eighteen months in San Quentin and then was released on parole.

Todd: Did you get sober in prison?

Patrick: I got sober in county jail. There was a drug treatment program in there. The worst thing that blew my mind was that in county jail everybody who I was buying drugs from was also there, too. There's this constant supply of drugs coming up and you're trading your Cup-a-Soups and Cheetos for hits of heroin and getting loaded.

My lawyer was like, "What the fuck are you doing? You get busted for doping here, you're gone. It's gonna add to your sentence." Interesting enough, I got busted with a bunch of dope, but they didn't charge me with possession because they didn't want me going to a treatment center. So they put me away. I got clean there.

Not to sound like an idiot, but it saved my life because I wasn't in the mix in the prison system. If you're not trying to gamble, or buy drugs, or have sex, or all these other things that are involved with the commodity of what's happening in there, you're useless to them. They don't really give a shit. So I just bided my time. I didn't get blood-in into a gang. Didn't get a tattoo.

I put this in *Gun Needle Spoon*. It's one of the most defining moments of my life. I was literally on the yard of San Quentin, you're looking out at Marin County, which is a very affluent area, and there was a ferry boat going over to San Francisco. People are on there laughing and you'd hear them. I'm in blue and on the county yard. I was like, "How did this happen? How did my life stray so far?" At seventeen, I was the youngest published cartoonist in America. I had gotten a free ride and earned a bachelor's degree in film from the San Francisco Art Institute. I was that kid who loved art and loved creating things, which led me to music. I discovered heroin and punk rock in the Art Institute.

I looked around at the grey wall and the grey yard and all these people who are angry, and I just said, "This is not where I want to be. I'm not doing life here." That was the ultimate change. I had a hard time. I went back and forth and fucked up a couple of times. But inside of me, I was like, "This is not happening." It's the antithesis of being a punk rocker, because you're conforming every fucking day. You're being told what to do. Where you stay. Your clothes. It was the worst. It was hell.

Todd: Glad you're here.

Patrick: Thanks. Good to be here. Good to be anywhere. [laughs]

KASPER TOBIAS

As a drug addict and an armed robber, I think it's really important to be part of the community of giving something back

Daryl: So in a way, it's easy to work really hard for something you believe in. But what do you think happened with the last tour you were trying to work on? Did you just not believe in it the same way?

Patrick: I was calling it in—Lollapalooza and all that stuff like that. It had already changed for me. It was arena rock. I ran fucking four ought cable for the sound system for Depeche Mode at Dodger Stadium. Just horrible shit. It was grueling work. Here's the thing: I wasn't part of the band. I wasn't part of the scene. I was a grunt, and I wasn't even a well-paid grunt.

There are a couple of things I had in the book, but took them out. I had a short Southwest tour with the Dickies. That's when Stan was still strung out. I had to drive them to the methadone clinic every morning in each state first thing in the morning. I'm trying to be clean and sober. We get back from tour and I've got all this money in my pocket. They're like, "We're buying heroin. Give me that money." I'm like, "Okay, let's go." I was so fragilely able to go off in the wrong direction. Lindy was their manager and he was the Red Hot Chili Peppers manager. I was basically committing tour suicide at that point. It wasn't the same. Not to say anything bad about them, but the Dickies didn't have the same allure to me as a real punk band. [laughs] They're playing the *Banana Splits* song. Fucking horrible. I love them dearly, but it wasn't what I wanted to do. What it comes down to, it became a job.

Todd: It's tough to play second fiddle to a penis puppet.

Patrick: Right? Also, a sexist, homophobic puppet.

Todd: Stuart's not cool, man… So how long have you been sober?

Patrick: Twenty-one years since last January.

Todd: You help other people with their sobriety now?

Patrick: I just went back to school during the pandemic, did a grueling bunch of hours at school, an internship, which was just working at the place I work at now, and got my CADAC, from California Consortium of Drug Counselors. It legally means I'm a counselor. I've been a counselor for seventeen years, now it's official. I know this sounds cheesy, but it's part of giving back for everything I took. As a drug addict and an armed robber, I think it's really important to be part of the community of giving something back. I consider my working in the writing community as giving back, but this is an actual, physical giveback. Somebody did this for me. Let me do this for someone else. It's an integral part of my life. I need to be of service to keep my recovery.

Todd: I don't think it sounds corny at all. A lot of punks get into the caring economies—teachers, social workers. As an entire wave, punk didn't change much nationwide, but individually and in local communities, it has outsized and continued impact.

Patrick: That was a continuation of DIY. We could only be rebels and outsiders so much. We had to conform to something. There's a structure of things in place so you can make a difference, or at least try to make a difference, especially with teaching, social work, and therapy. Plus, we're incredibly fucked up people. We want to help things. [laughs]