

# I WAS HIDING **AMONG**



Source: John Daly

## A JEWISH TEEN CROSSING PATHS WITH THE NEO-NAZI MOVEMENT

**N**eo-Nazi skinheads appeared on the American scene in the mid-'80s. The Southern Poverty Law Center, a human rights organization, writes on its website that after they emerged, "they have terrified mainly urban populations... But even within a world that is accustomed to violence, there have been a number of predators who are vastly more frightening than the rest." On a list of ten, the SPL included Richard Myers, who in 1990, at the age of just 17, became the Florida leader of the American Front (a neo-Nazi organization founded in 1984). As

the head of one of the largest hate groups, he indeed was one of the most violent skinheads in the United States.

When Myers learned in October 1990 that the AF's "regional operations director" in North Florida was Jewish, he undertook to carry out the "execution" with six other skinheads. During their trials, they testified that they watched their victim's body being swept away by the tide, then left, excitedly planning to get their cobweb tattoos, a privilege for those who committed murder. For now, however, they had to contend with imprisonment; Myers got ten years.



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THE FOLLOWING IS NOT A "JEWISH EX-NEO-NAZI"

STORY IN THE "CLASSICAL" SENSE. RATHER, IT IS THE STORY OF A JEWISH BOY WHOM SOCIETY FAILED TO PROTECT IN A FREE WESTERN DEMOCRACY, JUST FORTY YEARS AFTER THE HOLOCAUST.

### A NIGHT OF HATRED

That is, John Daly did not die. Why not, for that there is no rational explanation.

In October 1990, John was called to an officer's meeting in Daytona Beach. Such parties were regular and obligatory. Still, that night, John was overcome with a strange feeling. The others avoided him, and beyond constantly urging him to drink, they didn't really speak to him. He was relieved when they suggested going down to the beach because he hoped to leave in the dark.

Punches and kicks from booted legs rained down on him, mostly on

# G THEM

his head and upper body. "I think I would have preferred to be shot so I could have a cooler scar," John showed his sarcasm several times as we talked.

John lost his consciousness several times. As they began to drag him into the sea, he looked into one of the attackers' eyes. "I saw the devil's eyes just staring back to me, it was evil and hatred I can't begin to describe," he said. "I knew then that I was going to die, and they didn't leave any doubt of what was coming: 'Die, Jewboy, die', they shouted."

When he passed out, they believed he was dead. They left, but one of them turned back and saw that John had sat up. They came back and kicked him in the face so hard that he was pushed to a standing position. Then, holding his neck, they pushed his head down into the sand.

The skinheads left when he was lying on his back with his eyes and mouth open underwater. "They pushed me and watched me drift out with the tide," John recalled. "I woke



Source: John Daly

up above the water surface – there's no explanation for how that happened. No one found me, there was no one there. The tide was pouring out, so you couldn't float backwards."

He went back to his car and miraculously made the nearly 130 km

**In September 1989, a few weeks after John had his hair shaved for the first time.**

journey home. At home, everyone slept, he also went to bed. The next day, his parents took him to hospital. When they heard what had happened, the doctors couldn't believe it – "no one can survive such an ordeal, let alone drive home after."

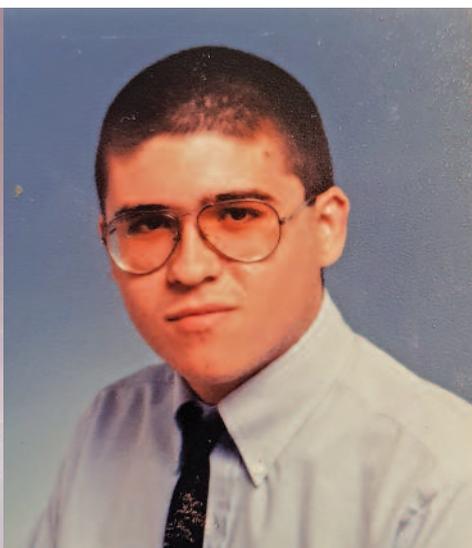
### SURVIVAL DAY BY DAY

It all began in 1989. John's family had lived in Ocala for two years, and as a teenager, not only was it hard to fit in, but it happened more than once that a car stopped, the guys got out and just beat him. (John was born in South Carolina, the second of four sons. His paternal great-grandmother converted to Catholicism so that her children would not have to "experience horrors because they are Jews." And his grandmother married an Irish man — hence the family name.)

John was 16 years old and met skinheads at a birthday party. They asked if he wanted to hang out with them — he said he couldn't because he was Jewish, so one of them pulled off his T-shirt and showed his tattoo. It depicted a black and white hand shattering a swastika. "We're not like that," they reassured John, because there are anti-racist branches as well within the skinhead movement.

One night, however, two of Daly's friends went to Orlando, where they were "recruited" by local racist skinheads under threat and asked for the names and addresses of people in Ocala. After a few days, they showed up at John's place, took him for a ride, and explained to him that those who tried to quit had all died under mysterious circumstances. Then they said: "Welcome on board." If he had

**John's yearbook photos from 10th and 11th grade (after he joined the skinheads).**



Source: John Daly



Source: John Daly

**John gave a lecture at a Jewish school in Canada. He always tells young people that our decisions can have serious consequences.**

realized that no one would care, my mom and dad would, my brothers too, but no one else on this planet. I decided to just try to be nice because it's free and it's contagious. You give the world something that is positive. It's the best way to live, and that came from that night. It was the best night of my life because it completely changed who I was and put me on the path I needed to be," he explained.

John also said there were a lot of things that night that shouldn't have been, like being able to drive home because he had another pair of glasses in the car. And he also shared an intimate detail: "I had a necklace on, it was my grandfather's, who died not long before... When we got to the beach, I grabbed the necklace and said, 'Grandfather, if anyone is in heaven, it's you. Please tell God that I am sorry that I have become what I am now... Forgive me. I don't know how to get out of this.' That's when I got the first punch."

After the attack, John had terrible nightmares, but one day he decided to work on his fears. Later, when he told a therapist about it, she explained to him that it was called cognitive behavioral therapy, and she wouldn't believe that John had found it on his own. For example, to combat water-related phobia, little by little he accustomed himself to be able to shower again, eventually even obtaining a scuba diving license. He didn't like being touched, so he took up martial arts and got black belts. To get rid of his dread of heights, he learned to jump out of planes and even took a pilot exam.

#### **A DIFFERENT KIND OF FIGHT**

The nightmares stopped, but the attack had another consequence, because of which John lost his ability not only to fly a plane but also

said no or confessed to being Jewish, the attack would have taken place right there. This way it happened only six months later.

John was constantly looking for, but could not find a way out. "I knew that the evil I was involved in was above me and greater than me, and I didn't know how to get away from it," he recalled, adding that it wasn't until the trial that adults began to understand that these groups were connected from coast-to-coast in America. His family couldn't afford to move to another city anyway. And there were many sympathizers among the cops — after the attack, the authorities even refused to provide protection for him. His father eventually sought help from the Anti-Defamation League, who arranged for round-the-clock police protection. And later a well-meaning police officer warned him to hide and not reveal his whereabouts even to him, because it must be written in the report and be accessible to someone who was in contact with the skinheads.

Before the attack, John lived in constant fear that his secret would be revealed. He kept a diary, recorded everything, whom he met, what he did so, in the event of his death, the police would be able to find his killers. And he used his wits so that he wouldn't have to engage in violence or get Nazi symbols on his skin. "I was hiding in plain sight," he noted.

So he stayed and tried to survive. He was the only one who didn't lea-

ve school or get kicked out, in fact he was an excellent student. The skinheads felt they needed him and he was promoted in a short time. His job was to recruit people, but he always found excuses for why he didn't bring in people.

#### **A SPARE PAIR OF GLASSES**

Back when John was "director of operations," the ex-wife of a friend started going out with an AF leader and had the organization's name tattooed on her neck. One morning, neo-Nazi skinheads called John and said "we want that tattoo back" (which was a command to kill the girl) because the girl had stolen some things from the main office. John warned the girl, who in turn went to Richie Meyers and told him this. She also didn't forget to mention that John was Jewish. A week later there came the Daytona meeting.

John somehow doesn't mind what happened that night. "My last thought when I saw the world closing on around me was: Who's going to care? I literally saw myself being lowered into the ground, looking up, people standing around my grave. I

**IT WASN'T UNTIL THE TRIAL THAT ADULTS UNDERSTOOD THAT THESE GROUPS WERE CONNECTED FROM COAST-TO-COAST IN AMERICA.**



Source: John Daly

**Karel Goetghebeur Belgian saxophone maker acquired a Nazi saxophone. He organized a special event where John played this instrument.**

music, so he had to figure out how to learn to use the instrument). The kippah on his head comes from the bar mitzvah of a great-grandson of a Holocaust survivor.

In the upper right corner, John is seen floating on the water. The faces on the other side are part of the statues of Yad Vashem. In the middle is Janusz Korczak, who ran an orphanage in the Warsaw ghetto, and although he should not have to do it, he went to Treblinka with the 200 children in his care. The statue has one arm, because he could not completely protect them.

In the United States, a comic book based on John's story is also being made. John jokingly remarked how much had grown out of a little story about "someone who once did something stupid." "I've always tried to give back to God something for being alive and encouraged other people to do whatever it takes to change the world around them. Don't expect someone else to change things for you, it starts with you." ■

to drive a car. A very slow hemorrhage in his brain caused a tumor.

In December 2009, he underwent an awake brain surgery. The local anesthesia didn't take, which, according to doctors, occurs in one percent of patients. John felt everything during the procedure, and the pain was agonizing. Yet he says, "God has been very good to me in many ways. He leads you on paths you don't understand at first." Doctors said they learned a lot from his case, which helps them prevent others from having to go through the same torments.

In 2014, another surgery was needed, which went smoothly. However, they couldn't access part of the tumor, so last year he was operated on for the third time.

John now lives in Israel, and despite all this has an amazingly active life.

There was no question that the skinheads would go after him, especially since his testimony had set back the growth of their organization. When he received a letter from Florida authorities that the first of the convicted skinheads was to be released in 90 days, he called the Jewish Agency in Miami and with their help arrived in Ashkelon on September 2, 1997.

He has returned to the United States on several occasions to give speeches on the skinhead movement, but is also a regular invitee in Canada and Europe.

**AN INSPIRING LIFE**

In July 2014, a skinhead friend who had since quit, tracked down John. Together they traveled to Treblinka and Auschwitz, about which a documentary, Escape From Room 18 was made. (In Judaism, the number 18 symbolizes life, but neo-Nazis use it for the initials of Hitler's name, according to their positions in the alphabet.)

John also showed me a painting and said it had been made last summer by a 28-year-old friend to raise awareness of the fight against anti-Semitism. On the far left, John plays a Nazi saxophone (another art project he's involved in, and one that's also special because John doesn't have the part of brain responsible for

HIRDETÉS

**Bornemisza Péter Gimnázium**

A Bornemisza Péter Gimnázium Felnőttoktatási Tagozata várja a jelentkezőket négy évfolyamos levelező képzésére. Korábbi tanulmányok beszámításával a tanulmányi idő lecsökkenthető; az érettségi akár 3 év alatt is megszerezhető

**Jelentkezés személyesen:**  
 2022. szeptember 12., hétfő, 15:00 – 19:00  
 Helyszín: Bornemisza Péter Gimnázium, 1107 Budapest, Száva utca 1.  
 Szükséges: személyes okmányok, legmagasabb iskolai végzettséget igazoló bizonyítvány

**Jelentkezés postai úton:**  
 2022. szeptember 12-ig az iskola által kiadott jelentkezési lapot visszaküldve (csatolva az utolsó iskolai bizonyítvány másolatát).  
 A jelentkezési lap letölthető az iskola honlapjáról.  
 Levelezési cím: Bornemisza Péter Gimnázium, 1107 Budapest, Száva utca 1.

**Jelentkezés elektronikus levélben:**  
 2021. szeptember 6-ig a kitöltött jelentkezési lapot, és a legmagasabb iskolai végzettséget igazoló bizonyítványt beszkennelve, a megadott elérhetőségek valamelyikére elküldve.

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