

CHAPTER 4

WHITE PRIDE WORLDWIDE

THE END OF HIGH

school couldn't come soon enough.

After graduation, a friend from my Vancouver College days named Sean and I left for a two-month summer vacation to England and Spain. The trip was completely separate from my skinhead lifestyle, as the two of us never discussed music or politics, but there were still opportunities for me to explore these areas on my own. I arrived in England first and stayed with relatives for a week until Sean arrived. Without delay, I began exploring London in search of any skinhead clothing, vinyl, or iconic souvenirs that would up my status. The first stop was the Last Resort on Petticoat Lane, deep in East London. This store sold everything skinhead related, from Doc Marten boots to Harrington jackets; Crombie, Ben Sherman, and Fred Perry shirts; and T-shirts printed with every skinhead band, image, or logo. The coolest shirt—and one that evaded my search—was the cover for the album *Strength Thru Oi!* featuring the menacing pose of Nicky Crane. The album cover was a play on the Third Reich's Strength Through Joy program, which built seaside spas for workers and their families to enjoy ten thousand at a time, and made the resorts accessible via the autobahns and Volkswagens, or "people's car." Nicky Crane was greatly feared throughout London. He was deeply involved in the British Movement, an ultra-nationalist racist organization; was co-founder, with Ian Stuart, of Blood & Honour, a white power music network that organized concerts and published

a magazine; and ran security for Skrewdriver. He would later come out as gay, but he stuck with the neo-Nazi ideology, even trying to organize a much smaller group of gay fascists, and was a steward for London's Pride parade in 1986 while an active skinhead. Crane died from AIDS/HIV-related illnesses in 1993.

My last excursion before Sean arrived took me out of the vibrancy of London on a train travelling south to Croydon, where the National Front had a bookstore. This would be my first contact with organized racism. Everything until this point had been posturing, part of an image and identity expressed through music and drunken ideas. The visit would mark the beginning of a dramatic shift in my life, a pivot to a point where the white supremacist ideology would eventually equal and then supersede my identity as a skinhead.

I entered the shop apprehensively; I'd heard so much of the myth and reality of the feared NF, and I didn't know what to expect. I eagerly took in everything on offer, browsing stickers in bundles of five hundred, and bought copies of *The Servile State* by Hilaire Belloc and *The Camp of the Saints* by Jean Raspail, both of which fed my dark appetite for ideology to support my growing fascist political positions. *The Servile State* was a treatise for a third-way "distributism" that, like National Socialism, was neither capitalist nor socialist. *The Camp of the Saints* was a novel set in the near future when a million of India's poorest commandeer a flotilla of boats and head to France, where their arrival leads to the end of Western civilization. The store had a limited selection of music that included a few singles by Skrewdriver, namely "White Power" and "Voice of Britain," that I immediately added to my purchases.

One of the two men in the shop took an interest in me, especially when he learned I was from Canada (and originally English). We conversed for an hour or so, with me sharing the woes of immigration

from the Canadian perspective: the changing neighbourhoods, the increased crime, and the perceived loss of white identity. All of it resonated with my hosts. When it was time to leave, I gathered my illicit bounty in a brown paper bag and hurried to the train. That afternoon was a mixture of nervousness, excitement, danger, curiosity, intrigue, and pride at becoming the first of my crew to make connections with such a forbidden group. With these stories to share upon my return, my ego was doing somersaults.

Sean arrived the next day, and two days later we were on our way to Spain via a flight to Marseille. We revelled in five weeks of total freedom, with no adults. During our adventures I tucked away my skinhead identity—for the most part.

In Barcelona, we stayed at a small pension near the top of La Rambla that cost a mere five dollars a night. Exhausted after our endless partying, Sean went to bed early. I was feeling a bit restless, so I wandered down the four flights of stairs and out of the pension into the hot summer night. La Rambla was always abuzz with activity. I ran across a couple of punk rockers and asked them where the skinheads hung out. Communicating in broken English, they pointed farther down the street and off the beaten track. I headed down La Rambla for a bit, turned left into a residential area, and continued my search before finally coming across Plaça Reial. I realized I wasn't far from the dangerous area the manager of the pension had told us to avoid at all costs. Peering across the dimly lit square, I spied about a dozen guys with short haircuts, jackets, and boots. Nervously, feeling that unique thrill-seeking mix of fear and excitement that had become so normalized, I approached the group and greeted them with a "*Hola! Hablo inglés?*"

This immediately put a halt to their banter, and their shaved heads all turned to stare at me.

“Yes, what do you want?” one of them replied aggressively.

I wasn’t dressed like a skinhead, so to them I could have been friend or foe. Scanning their various pins and patches, I tried to ascertain what side of the fence they were on. There were a few symbols I recognized, so I said, “Oi! Oi! Oi! Skrewdriver!”

Their irritated frowns instantly disappeared, and one or two of them started playing air guitar while another began to sing—in the thickest of Spanish accents—the lyrics to “White Power.” Their enthusiasm earned them an A for effort.

Halfway across the world from my home, and despite our different languages, this group of guys and I had bonded instantly over white power music. It was as simple as putting a key in a lock and turning it. Just like when I’d walked into the National Front bookstore in Croydon, a shared dedication to racism brought with it not just an ideology but instant friendship and community. The city or country was irrelevant. White Pride Worldwide. This was what made far-right extremist ideology truly dangerous: a loose but linked collection of individuals and groups of varying sizes and levels of organization made up a movement that was basically leaderless, a snake without a head, but united by a common ideology. And the internet would later help to bring them much closer together.

After a lot of handshaking and back patting, I was thirsty for a beer. With the one skin who spoke English, I scampered across the street to the corner store to buy six large bottles of cheap Spanish beer, which we promptly passed around. When those bottles ran dry, we made another trip. Alcohol is another international language of friendship, regardless of politics. After several more rounds, it was time for me to call it a night and head back to the pension to pack before leaving Barcelona the next morning.

Upon my return to Canada, I learned that my parents had enrolled me at the University of Victoria, at the southern tip of Vancouver Island, separated from my friends and from trouble by several hours in a car and a ferry ride. Little did my parents know there was also a skinhead scene in Victoria.

In high school, it had been relatively easy for me to coast along, doing very little work and relying on the strength of my good memory. Cockiness and laziness were two of my many weaknesses, however, and in university this didn't fly. I found myself floundering, and after two years, my time at university came to an end. I left with a degree in fuck-all-ogy.

In the spring of 1987, I was back living at home, working with an investment dealer who was an acquaintance of my dad's, and toning down my skinhead activities for the time being. That would change soon enough.

One day, on the way to drop off a suitcase full of bonds to another investment dealer, I swung by some of my usual outdoor haunts to see if anyone was hanging around. I came across a skinhead I didn't recognize, and we immediately struck up a conversation. Oscar quickly became a close friend, and when he went home to Toronto a few months later, I visited him and got introduced to the skinhead scene there.

I was already somewhat familiar with Toronto skinheads. At the Black Flag show where Elmo and FiFi had sized up my Doc Martens, skinheads from Toronto were present. It was typical for them to make the three-and-a-half-day journey by Greyhound bus to Vancouver—and why not? Vancouver had a lot to offer. A little less than half the size of Toronto, Vancouver (and the West Coast in general) has the mildest winters in the country. Sure, it rains a lot, but there isn't that deep sub-zero cold that goes on for months.

The other huge benefit was that arrest warrants in Ontario weren't enforceable in British Columbia unless they were felony charges.

The Toronto skinhead scene was not only much larger than Vancouver's, but it was also much more mature and well developed. Whereas in Vancouver the skinheads were primarily young and coming out of the punk scene, Toronto had quite a few much older skinheads, many of whom were hardened criminals doing life on the installment plan: six months in or three months out, three months in and six months out—you get the idea. There was also heavier drug use in that community, with everything available from MDA and Valium all the way down to heroin. Out of that maelstrom came some of the hardest and scariest men I have met to this day. Some of them were so unpredictable you had to always be on your toes in case they went on the "turn," where anyone, friend or foe, could become a target of their rage. The Toronto skins had quite a reputation, and they were both feared and respected, especially in Vancouver.

As a result of these cross-Canada exchanges, new friendships and a social network developed through the sharing of music, clothes, and ideas. Toronto was where the older and established far-right parties and organizations were headquartered, and they eventually embraced the energy and vigour of the younger skinheads in what would become a symbiotic relationship. The organized groups offered direction, focus, ideology, and a stronger sense of identity, while the skinheads offered an army of foot soldiers and physical protection. When the old guard was introduced to the growing cadre of young people who had not only embraced white supremacy but were also ready to bleed for it and use violence to defend the white race by any means necessary, the result was explosive.

Courtesy of my mother's travel benefits as an employee of one of Canada's national airlines, I made many trips to Toronto. I would

take the red-eye flight from Vancouver late on a Friday night, return home Sunday night, and go back to work Monday morning. Initially, the purpose of these trips was to hang out and explore the huge skinhead scene that everyone kept talking about, but over time the visits became more and more political.

As the skinhead movement in Canada and the United States grew, it began to draw media attention, so it was only a matter of time before it also drew the attention of organized white supremacist groups. When we got word that Canadian white supremacist and politician Paul Fromm would be speaking in Vancouver, my skinhead crew decided to offer ourselves as security for his appearance. This offer was accepted, and providing security would be our principal role in the movement for quite some time. That first organized event opened up a whole new world to me, and was an invitation to go even deeper down the rabbit hole.

Paul Fromm travelled across Canada a couple of times a year speaking against immigration, censorship, and foreign aid. He was part of a loosely connected network representing Canada's far right, from conservatives to more radical elements. The conservatives I refer to here would be known today as alt-light—those who consider themselves to be separate from both mainstream conservatism and the white nationalism of the alt-right. Fromm's political platform came across as alt-light, and this was reflected in his audience of mostly seniors pining for the "good old days." He could always be counted on to supply a new batch of facts, figures, and stories of immigrant crime and failed deportations, not unlike the information currently delivered by Fox News on a nightly basis. For me, he was kind of like a refresher course, and I would load up on his ideological ammunition in order to make my points in arguments. Fromm provided a good public face for the "movement," a nebulous term

that would be replaced by the phrases “alt-right” and “alt-light” in the current discourse. There was no coherent body or ideology but rather a collection of loosely aligned interests and politics around what was perceived as the dwindling influence of white people and the loss of a mythologized way of life—many of the same grievances one hears today. While Fromm’s conservative demeanour and rhetoric were far more palatable to Joe Public than menacing skinheads wearing swastikas, what made his events dangerous wasn’t what he said or the books he sold but who went to see him. These events became the equivalent of a regular business networking meeting, but white power style.

These meetings served an important purpose—recruitment. Fromm was a schoolteacher at the time and wore a business suit, lending an air of respectability to his events. You could bring a grandparent to one and they wouldn’t hear anything too extreme for their generation. And new people could be eased gently into the scene, like a frog in a pot of slowly boiling water that cooks to death before realizing what’s happening. Attracting older people was a boon because that’s where donations came from; money certainly wasn’t going to come from skinheads. Once a new member was in and acclimatized, they could then explore the deeper and darker side of the ideology. I was assigned to be on the lookout for those who were a little more than curious and who had a little edge. Nobody becomes Adolf Hitler overnight; there is a learning curve, a progression, a desensitization.

Danger, excitement, and the shock of going to the extremes urged us to engage with more radical elements, and it was during this time that I formed friendships with members of the Aryan Resistance Movement (ARM), former organizers of the BC chapter of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), and people connected to Aryan Nations in Idaho.

There would be two tracks to my involvement in white supremacist groups: one in Canada that was more mainstream, and another that led me south of the border to the United States and to some of the most extreme elements of the neo-Nazi movement. Skinheads were fairly new to all of this, but since we were plugged into the speaking circuit through Paul Fromm, we got to know both the infamous and less well-known figures of Canada's far right at the time: notorious Holocaust deniers Ernst Zündel and David Irving, and prominent white nationalist leader John Ross Taylor, who was the first to have a racist hotline shut down by the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC), to name a few. My introductions to Don Andrews, leader of the neo-Nazi Nationalist Party of Canada, and Wolfgang Droege, co-founder (with Grant Bristow) of the white supremacist Heritage Front, happened alongside these events. I also met the lawyer who defended most of these individuals and who would later represent me: Douglas Christie.

These extremist leaders soon recognized me as an articulate recruiter and the conduit through which they could interface with the skinheads. Their events became places where we could bring young recruits, both skinhead and non-skinhead, as they were welcoming and not too scary. Whenever a speaker was coming to town, I was entrusted with organizing security. In return, I received attention and recognition for my contribution, which fed directly into my sense of purpose and belonging, as well as my need for acceptance and approval.