

Interview with Greg Fordham (Navy Greg) and Ewan Thomas (punk/skinhead subculture)

Part 1 – Navy Greg

So, the skinhead life and all that sort of stuff? When was this? Around 1981/'82? Who's this crew?

About 1982. That's me, Diane and Debbie, that's the girl who was going out with Ron...and Penguin Vic. I used to live with Dianne and Debbie, and Ron used to live there most of the time as well because he was going out with Debbie.

So, tell me about the difference between punks and skinheads.

We would often talk about the difference between punk rockers and skinheads because back then in Melbourne in those days, everyone used to hang out together anyway. All the skins and punks used to go to The Ballroom.

I said, "I'm going to be a punk rocker forever." And I ended up going to ska gigs with the skinheads. I got to meet all the skinheads. I really liked the music, that was one of the main things that changed me. I ended up shaving off my mohawk and getting the braces and Docs and all that sort of stuff.

Did your ethos change? Did you become a Nazi or racist or anything like that?

No, no, in fact at that reunion gig I went to recently, I saw some guys with red laces in their boots, and I went up and asked them and said, "are you guys' National Front?" They said, "what's that?"

So, they didn't know why they had red laces in their boots?

No, they just said it looked good. Some guys had red, some had white which was National Action and National Front back in those days. We had the Oi skinheads, and we had the ska skinheads. We wore Harringtons, Ben Sherman shirts, Stay-Press pants and boots and braces. We actually used to have run-ins with oi skinheads.

What kind of run-ins would you have with them?

Well, we'd all be at the same gig, and someone would say something about something, and we'd end up fighting each other. But generally, we'd get along.

So, when did you decide to shift from punk to skinhead?

It was over a long period actually. It was from going to skinhead gigs with Ron. I went to a few of the mod clubs as well. They could be anywhere. They could have an old record player, and they'd play records of Mod music, like The Police, I can't remember most of the bands they'd play. Personally, the girls were nice, but I didn't like the guys much. They were too pretentious and I went to a few of their gigs. It was the people that changed me. They were nice people. They were genuine, down to earth and pretty straight-up, which is what I like, I wasn't used to this at the time.

So, when did all this Nazi skinhead sort of stuff start to come in? I heard that in the early punk scene, the skins and the punks hung out together and they got on but, then something changed and all this sort of Nazi attitude came in and suddenly there was a lot of fighting between punks and skins.

I think it was because of the Sydney skinheads because up there it was never like it was in Melbourne. In Melbourne it was a lot more co-operative and peaceful. Up in Sydney there was a big rivalry.

Between punks and skinheads?

Yeah, and there were a lot more 'Oi' skinheads up there and once a year they would have big skinhead gigs. Everybody would go and there would be like 5 bands playing in one night, it was huge and everyone there was a skinhead. They'd have these gigs in Melbourne and people would come from all over Australia for these gigs. In fact, I was up in Sydney a couple of times when they did them and they'd organize big buses to bring us all down in one hit.

So, big skinhead gigs here?

Yeah, they were huge. I think a lot of them liked it down here and stayed here. Their attitude changed some of the people's attitudes down here. They ended up coming down and staying here because it wasn't a bad scene.

So that was still like early 1980s?

That was 1983, before I joined the Navy. I joined in 1984. I actually went into the Navy with a mohawk, and they shaved it off. I was still knocking around with the skinheads. I deliberately grew the mohawk to be in the Navy with it. It was around that time that a lot of skins were coming down from Sydney. Some were coming with more of a heavy metal side. And they were coming into our scene, but they had the attitude of basically, the old sharps from the old days. Do you know the sharpies?

Yes. So, they were fairly violent, were they?

Yes, very and they started getting in amongst us. They looked the part and we accepted them, and they would quite often start a lot of trouble. So, because they were part of us, we'd end up in trouble with them.

Right, so there was a skinhead pub crawling at one point in time. Did you ever go on a skinhead pub crawl?"

In the beginning the pub crawl was for everyone because back in those days, skinheads and punks were all part of the same group really. Everyone would go to the Seaview Ballroom on a Friday and Saturday night, and it could've been a skinhead band playing or a punk band or ska band. It could've been anything. It didn't matter; it was just our place. Not really anyone else went there but the people who did go there who were straight, we never bothered them unless they bothered us. Quite often during the dancing, the old slam-dancing, we'd get together and pick someone out of the crowd and slam-dance towards them and drag them into it. We'd give them a bit of a taste of what it was like.

Basically, someone who was standing there watching us like we were at the zoo. People would come up to me in the face and say, "excuse me, can I talk to you?" And I'd say, "yeah." They'd say, "can I touch your hair?" And then they'd touch it and they'd start talking to me and say, "I'm so surprised I can talk to you because you're a normal person", I'd say, "it's just a haircut and a look, I'm normal." A lot of them were really scared of us. You'd walk down the street and stuff like that, and people would cross the road, so they wouldn't have to walk past us.

Was this mainly in the city or St Kilda?

Anywhere, and everywhere we went. I remember walking out of Prince's Bridge Station, which is where Fed Square is now. It was the other station for my train line. I was walking past Young and Jacksons and I saw a female cop. Cops used to sit on the corner, and she looked at me and ran inside and brought about 4 or 5 other cops, and they were all pointing at me and talking. I just ignored them and kept walking but that was the thing, nobody had that look back then. It was all new, but these days I walk into places like video shops and there are people with mohawks and piercings everywhere. There was no way I could have gotten a job. I got into a lot of fights, but all the fights were because people had started on me. It was because I was so different.

Just because you looked different?

Yeah, because I had the mohawk and everything.

But you weren't the only person who experienced this?

No, I think most of us did, but I mean at The Ballroom, most of the time it was all good. There was a skinhead band back then called **Justified Hatred**, who had a singer, Tony; he was a really big boy, and his girlfriend had a mohawk with hair on the side, but she also had a British flag dyed into her hair. A really cute girl. We were walking out of the club one night and it had been good all night. One of these straight guys had come and beaten the shit out of him. That's what it was like and sometimes we'd have other people come down and it would end up in a big brawl out in the street. The cops would cordon off the whole street. We'd be fighting heaps of people and in some of the black and white photos, there's this big guy, he got smashed over the head with a hammer. Out the front of the Seaview Ballroom during one of these fights

There was no violence inside, but there was outside on the street...

Yeah. That time with Tony when the guy spat on his girlfriend's face, that was after the night had finished. That was out the front. Inside there was never any violence. I remember once I was at home and Debbie came back and had been hit in the face by some guy down at the Ballroom. I think it was the night Iggy Pop played there and I was pretty drunk, and I said, "right that's it, I'm gonna go down and get him." So, I went down there looking for him. But where that photo was taken was near the toilets, I was really drunk, and Diane was trying to stop me from beating him up. Diane actually punched me in the face to calm me down. But as she did, I lifted my hand up and I had a studded wristband on, and she hit that and I thought she was Rat and so I struck back and I sort of knocked her down. I didn't end up finding Rat that night. He found out I was looking for him, and he apologized for everything.

I know I hated him for what he did. I mean Debbie got taken into the St Kilda police station one night and had the shit kicked out of her for no reason and she came back with cuts and bruises all over her face. They just held her down and beat her up and she hadn't done anything; she was just walking around.

I heard that there was a lot of violence from the St Kilda police.

There was heaps of violence because they didn't like us. They were also very corrupt at the time; the best drugs you could buy was from them.

What about violence within the punk scene? Were there different punk crews?

No, not really in Melbourne, it was really very peaceful, because there weren't that many of us. Up in Sydney there were different types, a lot more violence up there. I ended up in Sydney because of the Navy. I experienced that up there. Down here, no everybody got along really well.

So, were you around when the hardcore scene started with bands like Depression?

Yeah, **Depression** were one of the bands we used to see all the time. I liked them. I really liked Depression. Spike was the only one who had a better mohawk than me. I think he was Turkish or Lebanese or something, so he had pretty good hair for it. I used to see all those bands, and I knew them all personally because the scene was so small, and there were two gigs on at night. We were there every Friday and Saturday night. It's like everybody knew everybody. I knew Spike really well, his girlfriend and all the guys in the bands that played. We all knew each other; we'd go out together socially.

I never really got to know Smeer that well. I used to go and see the band a lot, but Diane knew Smeer a lot better than I did. I didn't really go to his house (Hardcore House). I knew Smeer but not as a mate, more of an acquaintance. I knew Spike better than I knew Smeer."

What about Death Sentence?

Peter was a nutcase. He used to carry a cane around with a blade on it. You know the handle which would go into the cane? It would match up with it so looked like a normal cane. You could twist it so the blade would come out. They were good when they were straight, but when Peter was off his face, he was a very jealous guy. He would often accuse people of trying to take Maureen off him, and he would turn on ya. He never turned on me, but he would often say to other people that he thought I was trying to take Maureen off him or that she liked me. It was just things like that. Apart from that they were alright. I didn't mind them; they were right into the scene and at that time I didn't really care about anything.

I guess a lot of people were using Heroin around that time...

I tried it a couple of times as well. In fact, my going-away party for the Navy was because the punks and skinheads had a huge party and that was one of the gifts they gave me. I said, "no, look when I go into the Navy, I'm gonna get tested for it." I said, "I'll give it to you guys and you guys can have it but let me do it for ya." Like, wack you up you know. That way you'll see you get a fixation for the needle. I'll see how I feel about it and see if I miss it or not. So, I did it and I didn't get it, so I never really went back to it. But I had it quite a few times.

Let's talk a little bit about drugs, because heroin impacted the scene, and a lot of people are dead now.

Yeah, quite a few mates of mine died.

Because I guess it's always been part of the scene, and a lot of were using amphetamines as well, or just smoking dope?

And doing acid trips

When did heroin really make an impact? Do you think it destroyed the punk scene?

I think it did in the fact that people lost a lot of respect for each other, whereas before we were a tighter group and we would always help each other out. I think in situations where heroin came into it, it was more of "you're on your own." And you would get it anyway you could, like addicts today. I remember one particular guy, I think his name was PFL, we called him, he was kinda short. A really

good bloke and I was in the Navy at the time. I remember coming back from sea, and somebody contacted me, and said that him and a few other guys had gone out to score. A few Tasmanian punks had come over and they all wacked up in the car. He had overdosed, and they didn't know what to do, so they drove round to a hospital and threw him out of the car in the car park and that's where he died. They didn't go in and tell the hospital staff; they just dropped him off hoping someone would find him. He died in the car park.

Do you think they didn't go in because they were scared of what might happen?

They were scared they'd get busted, so they let him die in the car park.

So, when did heroin start creeping in?

It started creeping in when the other people started coming into the scene that I was talking about before. I think as people were getting older, they were looking for more than alcohol and everything else. As we got older, we found ourselves rejected by society and people would do anything to try and just get themselves wasted. A lot of times they'd be crushing up Valium or Serepax and inject it and stuff like that, which I even tried doing.

The whole point of being punk is to try and alienate yourself from society?

Not really. I considered it more to exercise our right to freedom. And I often used to say, "this is a democratic society." It's supposed to be but it's not, it's a police state. And because I walk down the street with a mohawk, I get targeted. I mean; where's the democracy in that? And that was more my feeling towards the punk rock scene. To be able to exercise the right to be who you are and what you want to be and we couldn't, society wouldn't let us.

So, why do you think there was a feeling of people wanting to express their individuality but also a feeling of alienation that went hand in hand with that? And were the drugs some way of coping with it?

Yeah, coping with it I suppose. I mean because of who we were and the way we were, I think a lot of drug users must have felt the same way we did. So, they melded into our group. And then their influences started to influence us. People who were drug addicts found themselves alienated, so when they found us and came into our group, they felt they were part of something. They were never alienated, nobody judged them for anything, and nobody cared that they used heroin or anything like that, and then you might've been there to see 'em wack up. You'd start to wonder because they were enjoying it and you'd think I might try that, so people did. Jo was really hard into it and Dianne was a heroin addict, but she stopped. She's married now with a couple of kids, she's alright. I tried it heaps of times but the first time I tried it I was really scared and we had actually done something very illegal to get it, and it was because of an older guy who was a real hardcore drug addict.

He had started coming to the Ballroom and befriended quite a few people and he ended up coming around to our place a few times. I was living in a squat in Union Street in Brunswick, and he ended up coming over there quite a lot and he would always talk about it. He said, "try it", so we all decided to try it and the first time I tried it I loved it. And that's what I hated about it, and I remembered feeling so good, but I was scared when I did it. He did it for me because I didn't know how to mix it up or anything like that. It was good but I never chased it, but if it was there I would have it and I think the last time I tried it I was going out with a boot-girl in Sydney and she was right into it and she went down to the Bondi Hotel and got some and brought it back then we both had some. But it wasn't as

good, and it just made me feel sick. You know how you vomit whenever you have it and all that? So, I didn't enjoy it anymore. I just didn't get it anymore.

Probably a blessing in disguise...

A lot of people did the same, you know, a lot of people had tried it and not kept it up. A lot of people got lost in it as well. But I think it was because of that it came into the scene; it was because of other drug addicts blending in with us. They were lost and had nothing, and they came in and saw they could fit in with us and not get judged.

Thanks for sharing that because it is a really important part of what happened.

The first time I saw someone inject themselves was a guy called Dave, we called him Snake. It was Dave and another guy; his name is Dave too. We used to call him Catman because he had the old Catman haircut. I walked in on them in the toilet once wacking up. I looked and thought, "Oh shit!" Because I was pretty young and I walked out. Later on, Dave came up to me to talk about it, he said, "look it's just speed." I ended up saying, "I wouldn't mind trying that."

The first time you try to fit in you know then you get addicted to that as well. I found I got to a point where I didn't want to go out. I couldn't go out because I felt I couldn't socialize if I hadn't had it. That was many years down the track and that's why I didn't really wanna use it anymore. I remember one day Ken came over to visit me at the squat I was staying at and had just hit up. I thought I had hit up too much and thought I was gonna die that night and I remember saying to Ken, "don't go, stay here in case I pass out, you can take me to the hospital or do something. I think I'm gonna die because I've had too much", and he stayed but I was cool. That night we were crushing up pills and trying to inject them. I was going to go to court the next day as well and some guy had told me about sniffing glue, and I'd been sniffing glue, so I went to court with glue around my neck.

Tell me a bit about the squats that you used to live in. You said Union Street, right?

Two main ones. One was the Punt Road squat which was famous and the other one was Union Street in Brunswick.

So, tell me about Punt Road. What year were you living there?

That was more of a squat for everybody. There were people who lived there but there were always people who just crashed there at the end of the night. It was alright, it had electricity and hot and cold running water. The place was a shit-fight, it was a mess. We always slept on the floor or the couch when we stayed there. The others who lived there had their own bedrooms. There were two lesbians living there who used to walk around topless all the time. There was another girl who was a Kiwi, she was part of the punk rock scene. I ended up going out with her for a little while. Quite often I'd find myself waking up in the backyard on an old mattress. I've even looked for it recently because they tore it down and it became a carpark for the hospital."

The place in Union Street in Brunswick was the guys who probably lived there. That was more of a place for me to crash than anything else. They were musicians and they had a spare room that was done up with soundproofing. They'd spend most of the time in there practicing.

There was me and Danny Seymour. He was the main reason I was there because he was a mate of mine. There was another guy who wasn't really part of any scene. He was just into his own music and stuff like that. There was another guy called Peter Showers, and he was from South Australia. He was a nutcase and his parents used to pay Danny to keep him there and look after him. He became a schizophrenic after watching his sister blow her brains out. Peter's parents had a walnut farm, so

they used to send big bags of walnuts. So, in the front room there were always big chaff bags of walnuts and that was mainly what we ate. There was a big fireplace and there was never any food in that place so sometimes we would just throw things in the fireplace to cook and eat. Ewan remembers most of it, and one day there was a vase above the fireplace, and it had flowers in it, it must have been there for a year or two. One day I was drunk and I just drunk it all, I was so thirsty.

Roasted walnuts...

Spit from The Mess also blew his brains out. He shot himself with a shotgun in his parents' bedroom. Actually, he went around to Dianne's place when I was going out with her, that one-bedroom place, and he basically forced his way in there and I had some of my old army photos on the wall and he stole them. It might have been the punk photos, and we ended up searching for him that night, and we found him, and we sort of roughed him up a bit and got the photos back off him. Because he'd roughed Dianne up a bit too. It was later on in the Navy that I found out he'd shot himself. He ended up going out with a girl who was my uncle's ex-girlfriend and he was knocking around with her. She was a heroin addict, and Spit became a heroin addict. There was one time, he stole money from her and he went and scored and then felt guilty and blew his brains out. Another mate of mine had done the same thing. He went down to the train tracks, and he laid down and decapitated himself. He'd stolen money off his girlfriend for smack, and he killed himself that way, because he felt guilty, he left a note saying it.

So, were some of your skinhead friends a bit on the racist side?

Very much so. I mean they'd be walking out of the Mod clubs, (the Mods would ride scooters with all the mirrors and Foxtails), when the skinheads were leaving, they'd smash the scooters up. They'd walk past cars and kick the mirrors in and things like that, which I never did. Quite often they'd get into fights where there were three of them onto one guy. Later, they'd say to me, "why didn't you jump in?" I'd say, "you guys had it covered, you know? You didn't need my help." I didn't like doing that sort of thing.

Another thing about the racist stuff. When I went to Hong Kong I met a girl there, a Chinese girl, I really liked her. I stop communicating with her because I was so worried about what my skinhead friends would think, you know? Which was stupid. I shouldn't have cared about what they thought. My kids here are half-Japanese.

Just sheer violence for the sake of it? What about Bastard Squad because I've heard lots of stuff about them, that they'd attract a lot of Nazis. That there were always fights at their gigs.

People like the Oi skinheads and the guys who came down from Sydney were more into that scene and that music as well, very thrashy. Not so much the band but the followers of that kind of music, although Depression were like that but not that same violence or anything. But that was an earlier period, and Bastard Squad came in a bit later. And later we had all these other people in the scene when the violence had started coming into it. But, in the beginning there wasn't that because we were such a small community and everybody got along. We were all into it for the same reason. And then later down the track the violence came in.

Part 2 – Navy Greg and Ewan Thomas

So, this is Ewan Thomas or ‘Thommo’ or ‘Greg’s mate’.

Greg: They were good days. I said, “I’ll be a punk rocker for the rest of my life.” I said, “I don’t care what happens, I’ll never change.” I did but that’s how dedicated I was to it. I hated seeing people come in who did it just as part of the fashion. We ended up getting people come into the Seaview Ballroom who had normal hair and they’d spike it up, and then you’d see them in the week in a suit or something, looking normal. I didn’t like that.

Week-end punks

Ewan: It was pretty much a statement. I don’t know if it was a way of life.

Greg: It was a way of life for me.

Ewan: I don’t know, some of them were political, some weren’t, they just did it. I initially went along because Greg was going and I just tagged along for the ride to enjoy the experience.

Greg: Which you did...

Ewan: I just felt like a fly on the wall a lot of the time.

Did you consider yourself punk?

Ewan: No, I never considered myself a punk or skinhead or a rude boy or anything like that. I was just myself, an observer of what was happening.

Greg: A lot of people used to ask me why Ewan was there. I’d say, “he was a mate of mine”, but everybody knew him. They knew him as Thommo, my mate. He was never really part of it.

Ewan: “I used to converse with a lot of people.”

GREG: But you found it more of a fascination kind of thing. A learning experience for you.

Ewan: Well, I suppose so, look to be perfectly frank, no-one pulled a gun on me, no-one shot me. No-one tried to shoot me; no-one tried to kill me.

Greg: Do you remember Debbie getting beaten up by the police?

Ewan: I heard about it, I didn’t see it happen and I wasn’t there. The police were forever raiding the Ballroom. When I Spit On Your Gravy played there one night, the vice squad were there and hauled everyone off because they were running around naked and swearing, using profoundly disrespectful language on stage.

Greg: Freddy Negro used to get up on stage naked. He’s got rubber chooks and stuff.

Ewan: That’s just seen as being sort of normal these days. In those days it was considered being quite obscene and wild. Now it’s just sort of; “oh yeah, Fred’s naked again.”

Greg: He ended up having a kid with **Sindy Virtue**. Sindy went to high school with us. I introduced Sindy into this crew. Sindy used to be a nurse at Fairfield Hospital in the infectious diseases ward. Dianne, the girl I was going out with, had contracted Hep-C, I ended up visiting her there and saw Sindy, and I went out with Sindy in the high school days.

I said, "what are you doing here?" She said, "I work here" and started talking to Dianne. They became friends and they started hanging out together. Sindy and Dianne became **The Spitettes**."

She is Millie Negro's mother

Ewan: And Millie; apparently, Fred named her after Darren Millane, the Collingwood footy player who wrapped himself around a truck one night.

So, what about the first **Punk Pub Crawl** then?

Ewan: All I remember is going there and the cops mainly.

Greg: the cops following us.

Ewan: the police were really...if you strayed from the group you were done. I remember witnessing this really horrific scene near Flinders Street station, this guy who had his bike helmet on and he was behind the group. The cops just pounced on him, "who are you?" Blah, blah, blah... he decided to put up a fight. He was with the punk crew. I don't know his name but I could identify him if I saw him, and the next thing I knew, these cops just swarmed on him, and his girlfriend, and he just tried to make a run for it, but they basically belted him and kicked him to the ground.

How many cops were on him?

Ewan: A minimum of 5 or 6. That was pretty wild to watch. I was just standing and looking at it, and they didn't come near me, they didn't know who I was. He got carted off and thrown into a divvy van, him and a girl he was with. From what I could see they didn't do anything wrong. They weren't drunk or intoxicated to any great level. They were just lagging behind and the cops decided that they'd just grab these two, ask them who they are, and the next thing you know, they were trying to arrest them. They tried to get away, and 5 or 6 cops just pounced on them."

And what was everyone else doing?

Ewan: They had gone into Young and Jacksons by this stage.

Greg: That's what the cops were doing, anyone that was away from the group, they'd get them.

Ewan: Slowly but surely, they were going around and picking off stragglers.

How many cops do you think were on the first one.

Ewan: 20 cops to start off with.

Greg: And there was a helicopter following us too."

Ewan: "I can't remember a helicopter, but I remember there were a lot of police and there were a lot of divvy vans.

Greg: "It was the first punk pub crawl, the police had never seen anything like it before.

What about the publicans' reactions? Were they freaking out? There were all these punks walking around the city going from one pub to the next. I know that Maureen had a map of all the pubs (Maureen O'Brien was the creator of the Melbourne Punk Pub Crawl which started in 1983 and was held on Grand final day each year).

Greg: Bourk St was all full of these punk rockers. So, I'd say close to maybe a hundred. Now, they weren't all decked out in their paraphernalia, some just wearing suburban gear, 1980s fashion.

Ewan: Not everyone always got dressed up.

Greg: But they were identifying as punks. There were a lot of people who just dressed like me. Not all of them classified themselves as 'punk', they just went along for the ride. They were probably from the independent scene or just alternative.

Greg: I remember Maureen being in the London Hotel. The London was a pretty grotty hotel and the attitude was "get 'em served and get 'em out of here as quick as possible."

Ewan: But we used to drink there on Friday nights before we went to the ballroom.

Greg: Then they went down to Hosies Tavern. In Hosies the attitude again was, "get 'em served, give 'em what they want and get them out of here." I remember at one stage Fred fell asleep, and he was on the floor, and the manager was freaking out and saying, "get him or else I'll call the cops", but I didn't want to see him hauled off. So, I threw water over him which woke him up automatically. He was really pissed off but I actually saved him from being hauled off by the cops, but they were really starting to freak out by that stage.

Ewan: Hosies - there was the ground floor, which was the public bar, the first floor which became an alternative nightclub, where occasionally punk rockers would go. The fourth floor was called 'Katies', which was a small intimate bar. That's where Greg used to drink a lot, we used to drink on the first floor there, before we'd go out somewhere else later on in the night. They'd been used to seeing people like me and Greg in there, but when there were a hundred grotty-nosed, snotty, smelly punk rockers descending on the place, they sort of changed a bit. I recall the atmosphere; they were quite anxious about it.

Is that the vibe you got from most of the pubs?

Ewan: No, not really, I mean the vibe I picked up on was they were happy to serve them but get them out of here. Because by the end of it, everyone was well and truly pissed. They had drunken people on the premises, and they were worried about the cops and their license. The liquor license laws weren't like they are now as then. So, the whole thing was they were worried about having drunkards. They were a bit anxious about the whole thing. Jesus, it was so long ago.

How many did you go on?

Ewan: Just the one.

Why?

Ewan: Pretty much because all the people that I'd known from that scene had sort of moved on or just dispersed. Including Greg, because he joined the Navy. Also, my taste in music had changed a little bit. I just developed a stronger interest in ska and reggae, so I used to go and see a lot of those bands. After the ballroom closed, a lot of people that I knew from that era sort of moved on. I just lost interest in it, I thought. What do you do? Plus, a lot of people that I knew had just become junkies.

So, how many that you knew had become heroin addicts?

Ewan: Quite a few. Danny was heavily into it; he had a mate from Wodonga who became heavily into it. It just seemed to be the norm; people became affected by smack or speed or something else. I also noticed that a lot of people from the scene here in Melbourne had gravitated to the scene in Sydney. So, it was quite common to go up to Sydney to visit Greg or see a band or people from the Punt Road squat, such as Trevor. He'd be up in Sydney. Trevor was from Elizabeth in South Australia.

He didn't claim to be a punk or a skinhead; he was just himself. He was just an alternative type of guy. They were the type of people that I associated with, and they weren't just in Melbourne. I didn't see any point of it anymore. I remember seeing a handbill, maybe 12 months or 2 years later, advertising the pub crawl, but I didn't bother going on it or anything else like that. I was surprised it was still going to tell you the truth. I just thought it was a one-off thing, that was it.

So, how many people did you know who are dead now?

Ewan: Greg's got his numbers and there's my numbers. Probably similar numbers. If not dead, people I sort of lost contact with...eight, nine, ten? To tell you the truth, some of these people that were doing themselves in just struck me as middle-class kids, some of them. That was then but now I'd probably take a different view of it.

What's your different view now?

Ewan: a lot of the people that gravitated to that scene had their own problems in life. I think there were a few people that had come from broken families, and had suffered childhood sexual abuse, things like that or abuse of some form. Then I had a pretty harsh view I suppose that some of them may have brought it on themselves or something along those lines. I mean, it's probably not a politically correct thing to say. It was just my feeling at the time. So yeah, sometimes I had a lot of fun with them as well.

Did you go to the squats that Greg was living in? The Punt Road squat? What do you remember about that place? Do you remember what part of punt road it was in?

Ewan: Yeah, it was opposite the Alfred hospital. Every time I go past the Alfred hospital, I always think of the Punt Road squat. It was a big house, a very big house. Some areas were clean; others were just a mess. Anarchy reigned in the kitchen, I can tell you that much, but it was just one big house with a lot of people staying in there.

Greg: We called it the 'punk road squat'.

Greg: I took most of the photos. I was the only one who took a camera. So, most of these photos, I'm not in them because I took the photos...

Did you make those outfits as well?

Greg: No, we bought them. That jacket I've got on there, that's an old German army jacket. An original one, because there was a lot of military paraphernalia; a lot of surplus from World War Two. I had a Sid Vicious padlock and chain. I used to have four earrings.

Part 3 – Navy Greg and Ewan Thomas

Greg: ...Probably about 6 or 7 of us, all skinheads, all dressed up in same way, in our little uniforms that we had. It must have been in Tiger Land (Richmond) because we were really close to Punt Road and we were walking down towards that way. It was late at night, there was not much traffic around and this guy had stopped at the traffic lights, and he had taken off to go, and his car's stalled. So, we've all looked at each other and said, let's go and give him a hand, and push his car for him, push him over to the side of the road. We've gone over there and as we've done it, we sort of run over towards him, and we see him locking all the doors and windows. Then our attitude changed straightaway, we're like this guy's really scared of us. We tried to say to him, "we're just gonna give you a push", but one of my mates jumped on the bonnet and was looking at him through the windscreen, and then this guy jumped out of his car and ran. We were just going to help him.

So, what did you do?

Greg: We just left it there and walked off. The guy ran away and left his car. He was scared that he was gonna get the shit kicked out of him by a bunch of oi boys.

Ewan: There was a skinhead called nazi jimmy or something. Just a fruit-loop. There was another skinhead he used to hang around with, and there was a rumour that they broke in their doc martens by getting a sheep or poor innocent lamb, tying it up and kicking it to death.

Greg: That sounds like some of those new guys that came down and joined in.

Ewan: That was the way they broke in their boots.

Greg: I think that's the guy I was thinking of who was getting them more into violence and things. He didn't like me. Every time we met there was always tension between us all the time. He wanted to test himself against me as well, fight and stuff like that. We never ended up having a fight because I knew everyone really well, but he had come down from Sydney or somewhere where they were really violent."

Why didn't he like you in particular, do you think?

Greg: I don't know, I really don't know. Probably because first of all, I wasn't into violence like he was. I knew all of the band members of the bands we saw. Everyone I knew I was friendly with and he was the new guy, but he wanted to be the hardcore guy. And I don't know, it might've been jealousy, might have been because I had a reputation.

Ewan: You might have been a bit of a leader I suppose, and in those days, it was like a challenge. You weren't crowned as any sort of leader, but you were respected. It was like the young bull challenging the old bull, but I don't think Greg intentionally set out to be like that. Greg always had a set of morals like I had a set of morals, and this guy who came into the scene, 'Nazi Jimmy' I think his name was, he was just off the planet, he was just mad.

Greg: He wasn't really into the skinhead scene at all. He was just there for the violence.

Ewan: Someone said to him, "why did your wife and kids leave you Jimmy?" "Oh, they turned Jewish on me, they turned Jewish."

Greg: "Ah yeah, I know who you mean, he used to have the Adolf Hitler album, he used to dress up in Nazi uniforms and listen to Adolf Hitler's speeches. He used to goose-step around his bedroom listening to Hitler.

Ewan: When they made ***Romper Stomper***, they must have looked at some character like him to get ideas on how to make the movie, because he was sort of a perfect incantation. That was years before they made the movie.

Greg: It was funny in ***Romper Stomper*** because they had a sailor in that as well.

Ewan: That reminded me of you.

Greg: Actually, I've got some of the old skinhead books that used to be around in those days. They were good books. I've got one called ***Skins***, and it's got a picture of the back of a guy's head, and he's got 'skins' on his head. And it's got old pictures from England. I never got into all that. The fights I did get into I never started them. One particular night I said to my brother, "come out one night with me, come and meet the skinheads, they're all cool, there's never any violence or that." My younger brother came out with me, and I got into five fights that night. I started them all.

Ewan: He was so pissed off with you too. I spoke to him the next day. He was really angry because Greg got into all these fights. I don't know whether he started them.

Greg: I got into the first fight and that had triggered me for the rest of them. The reason I got into the first one was because I had left my seat with my jacket on it and got up to get a couple of drinks and talk to a few mates. I had gone back to get my jacket and there were a whole bunch of blokes sitting there that weren't a part of us. A big guy, with longish hair and beard was on my seat with my jacket on the back of the seat. I said, excuse me mate, can I have my jacket? He said, "how do you know it's your jacket?" I said, "it's my jacket, gimme the jacket." He said, "no I'm not giving it to you". So, I tried to talk him into giving it to me, and he kept refusing to give me my jacket, so I punched him and he stood up, and that's how I got into my first fight. I was fired up and that was it. Anyone who looked at me, I hit 'em. The last one I got into, I had turned around, and I saw someone I knew who had been out with a girl I knew. I don't remember it but my younger brother Robert told me, I ran, jumped over a chair, onto a table, over the top and hit him in mid-air. Robert grabbed the camera and started taking photos of me fighting him.

And you didn't get kicked out?

Greg: "No, they didn't touch us because there were too many of us. They kicked the other guys out. I had never done that before and I had taken my younger brother out. He was pissed off for ages.

What about the skinhead girls? How violent were they?

Greg: Pretty violent. What you said before reminded me of some of the girls back then. They'd get the guys to initiate the fight and once the guys were down, the girls would come in and put the boot in. But they used to fight with each other, catfights all the time. It all seemed normal, nothing fazed anyone.

Ewan: The thing I found amazing about a lot of those guys was, a lot of 'em were just normal plebs from the outer suburbs, that used to come down, especially the violent ones, to watch the bands and just mess-up. I remember once they all went out bashing gays one night in the gardens off Fitzroy st. I was like, why would you do that? Why would you wanna go out and bash someone, using picket fence posts to bash someone coming out of the toilets? Then they'd finish that and quite happily go back to the suburbs where they lived. They were like cockroaches, they'd come out, cause chaos and mayhem and then go back. And they were the real violent ones.

Greg: I knew a punk rocker up in Sydney who did that and ended up jumping on this guy's head until it was squashed. He ended up in long bay jail. He was crazy too.

Greg: I never liked it but at the end of the fight, you're fired up and your adrenaline is rushing, and you're sort of looking around, fully aware of everything that's surrounding you and you're waiting for the next one.

Ewan: When you come down after it, you think, what have I done?

Greg: I've often gone to bed at night, not being able to sleep and it's like a movie going through your head, the violence you've been through, and I often feel for the guys that I've hit, and thinking how did it all come about? I wonder if he's ok? I had a lot of guilt for doing the things I did. I remember one day, I ended up doing a jumping front kick on this guy and I caught him under the jaw, and they said he lifted up so high. We took off and I often wonder about him, whether he was alright or not.

Ewan: I've had some pretty shocking things happen to me, not so much in the punk scene, not even in the skinhead or ska scene. I've got a very similar background to Greg. I was shot at one night, when I was up in Panton Hill. I've only started dealing with that for the past year. It all came to a head, and I decided I had to do something. So, when you're coming off adrenaline, you're pumped up, you're excited. When I was being shot at it was terrifying. Yet, it was also incredibly exciting because I could hear these bullets zipping past me; one here and one there, then I think it was another two. It's like, "wow what's that noise?" Then it dawned on me where I'd heard that noise before. My brother used to be in a rifle club, and you'd hear the bullet first, and then hear the gun go off. Just that excitement like someone's trying to kill you. Someone is actually trying to kill you. So, it's you against them and your first instinct in that situation was you want to kill them. You want to shoot back at them, but you've got no gun, so you can't do anything. You try and do the best thing you can. This was back in 1983.

Greg: I was at a bar one night when I was a skinhead, dressed up in skinhead gear but I'd joined the Navy, and we were at a bar in Hastings. Early in the night some guy had come up and said, "are you a skinhead or are you in the Navy?" I said, "both" and he said, "no trouble, not trying to start nothing." At the end of the night, we were walking out, me and a couple of mates, and I got hit from behind and I fell down. I've fallen down and he's laid the boots into my face. So, I couldn't see anything because there was blood everywhere, but then he sat down on me to continue, and that's when I could feel where he was, and I got him up around here and squeezed really hard, pulled him underneath me and started hitting him. I stood up and backed off to try and get the blood out of my eyes so I could see. The whole pub had gathered around, and they were telling him to kill me. And they're saying, "kill him, kill him" and that's when you start thinking i've gotta do something. Even the bouncers were there watching. My friend got his ear bitten off.

But this guy came at me. I could see by this stage, I was doing martial arts at the time, so I've kicked and caught him under here, and without bringing my leg back down, I've brought it straight back around to the side of his head and he fell to the ground, he got up and bolted. The cops had just got there, so they grabbed him and they grabbed me. I can remember saying to them the guy had started it, but this female cop pulls her gun on me and says, if you move again, I'll shoot ya. She's put me up against the car like that and I've got blood everywhere. I ended up in hospital for two weeks, because of the damage he had done before I could get to him."