

# DON'T JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER

## THE PUNK CULTURE OF ASTORIA

BY JULIE FITZPATRICK

*"On some level, punk and Buddhism are underpinned by a similar premise: Both acknowledge that the planet is brimming with unhappiness. The question is how you confront that misery."*

~A. C. THOMPSON (PUNK PLANET, NOV/DEC 2003)

Walking down the street, you see a group of teenagers hanging out on the street corner. Their hair is dyed, their clothes are torn, and they look as if they could all use a nice hot shower. But what is underneath the dye, the clothes, and the seemingly rebellious attitude? What values and ideals do they hold? Are they radically different from the ones you yourself may hold?

For most people living in a small town, the thought of a punk coincides with trouble, drugs, and a certain disregard for authority. Although some punks do fit that stereotype like a glove, for the rest that glove fits more like a shoe. Yet unlike the stereotype suggests, punks are not a mar on the face of our community. More often than not however, they get treated as less than equal. Once the people of Astoria learn to accept the punk culture as an asset, then the community can call itself strong and whole.

Culturally, the early punk rock movement was a direct reaction to the perceived pointlessness and overindulgence of mainstream rock music as it had evolved in the early 1970s. Bands such as Jefferson Airplane, which had survived the 1960s in some form, were regarded as having lost their message of rebellion and their support for counterculture values. Eric Clapton's appearance in television beer ads were often taken as a prime example of how even the icons of rock had literally sold themselves to the system they once opposed. Consequently, most attitudes and aesthetics of the 1960s were rejected in a firm renouncing of what music and counterculture had become (Punk 1). Punk rock bands started emerging all over, starting small scenes worldwide. The fast-paced music joined with the shock value of its fashion appealed to many of the youth who were desperately searching for their niche in the world.

In the mid-1970s, influential punk bands emerged separately in three different corners of the world: 'The Ramones' in New York, 'The Saints' in Australia, and 'The Sex Pistols' in London (Punk 2). These bands spread their music and ideals like wildfire. The punk phenomenon expressed a whole-hearted rejection of prevailing values that extended beyond the qualities of its music (Punk 3). The fashions that evolved from the movement were based on their shock value and rejection of capitalist society. Rather than spending money to buy their clothing, they took a DIY (Do It Yourself) approach. Clothes became torn, often sewn back together with patches, or held together with safety pins. Pants would be ripped off at the knee to create shorts, then sewn back together to make pants. To see someone walking down the street with blue or green hair became less unusual. It was often shaved into a mohawk or gelled into spikes. The more shocking, the better.

Another reason punk gained such widespread popularity was the boredom that most youths experienced. As A. A. Gill once said, "We did it because we had to, we were genetically programmed to be adolescent and, anyway, there wasn't anything else to do on Friday night." There was always a concert somewhere where the local punk bands could get together and have a good time. Many kids created their own bands. With most punk music consisting of the same three-cord equation, any kid who could play a guitar or beat on a drum could create a punk band.

These days, punk has changed. It has become exploited by corporations hoping to cash in on its widespread popularity. To dress poorly now is to be fashionable. Punk has become less about the clothing and more about the music and attitudes. When asked if someone could be a punk without the uniform, Astoria local Jordan Guenther replied, "Yes, they can. Punk is about what you think and feel. Your ideologies and beliefs. How we dress is just an extension of that." The music has also



NEIL SWAAB

changed. Punk rock underwent a commercial renaissance in the 1990s with bands like 'Rancid', 'Green Day' and 'The Offspring'. Additionally, bands such as 'My Chemical Romance', 'The Used' and 'Taking Back Sunday' have continued that commercial renaissance in the form of Emo music (Punk 4). With the music marketed to everyone, people who may have never listened to punk music are now singing along to these bands' songs.

The times have changed, and so punk kids have evolved over the years. Many punks have realized that it's not necessary to dress the part of a punk in order to be heard. Many punks still feel that the hair and clothes are an essential part of what they are.

Astoria is a small town, a town that doesn't cater much toward the youth. Many kids have their sports and school activities. There is a movie theater and a bowling alley. And although those are great time consumers, they are expensive, and most kids aren't exactly rolling in the dough. A lot of local kids skateboard. Astoria does have a skate park, but unfortunately it closes at dark. With the lack of activities, many kids spend their nights partying or finding ways to create mischief. When asked about the future of Astoria, Jordan Guenther said:

"I would like a more progressive town. Astoria is stuck in the past, and that's driving it further into the ground. The fishing is drying up and timber's running out, and the city stutters when stepping into the future, unsure of where to step next. I'd like to see more for teens to do as well. Outside of bowling and the movies, there's not a whole lot for kids to do. 'Idle hands are the devil's playground', and being bored is the first step to stirring up some trouble. I say this from experience. You ask any teen in Astoria what there is to do, and most of them will say there's pretty much nothing."

The lack of activities isn't a new problem. The local youth have been pushing for more activities here since the late 1980s. On October 25, 1989 the *Daily Astorian* ran an article about the local skateboarders along with a few city officials pushing for a skate park. The kids didn't want to break the law by skateboarding in illegal areas, they just wanted a place to hang out and practice. It took 13 years before Astoria finally got a skate park.

Local concerts are also a big draw for the punks in Astoria. For many, it is a place to come together, hear some good music and enjoy an atmosphere where people don't treat them differently because of their appearance. The only all-ages venue in Astoria is the River Theater. Many kids tend to avoid it, though, because there is lack of space to dance and move around. There are places that can be rented, such as the Astoria Eagles Lodge and the Wickiup Grange in Svensen. Those places tend to host the majority of punk concerts in Clatsop County. However, the Eagles is expensive to rent out, while the Wickiup Grange isn't very centrally located. So unless there is a show or it is daytime and they can hang out at the skate park, the local punks don't really have any place to just simply hang out.

Many people in Astoria believe that punks are simply troublemakers, dressing oddly for the attention, hoping to get a rise out of the people around them. Many local punks don't fit that category. Lindsay Frech commented that people base their ideas of the punk rockers from old stereotypes and what they see on the media. Ben Marks said, "We get harassed by cops, we have a reputation for causing trouble, doing drugs. I think for the most part, punks in the area are pretty responsible and try to keep the scene reasonably clean. We try to keep on good terms with people we often associate with." But many people will refuse to look past the clothes, the music, the hair. They are willing to see the bad that can come from a punk, but it's much harder for them to accept the good.

A new organization has recently started up in Astoria called "NW Punks". It is a non-profit organization whose goal is bring entertainment to the local punks, while benefiting the community. They have organized shows where all money goes to local charities around the county. NW Punks hosted a concert on Saturday, October 25th last year. Close to 150 people showed up and helped raise more than \$500 for the Astoria Rescue Mission. Their next show was November 20th with a food drive to help everyone in the community have a happy Thanksgiving. They recently adopted a stretch of highway. They are working to change the typical punk stereotype that many people in Astoria hold fast to. They want people to come together and realize that although there are differences between everyone, it doesn't mean there can't be unity in the community.

Johnny Rotten of 'The Sex Pistols' once sang, "You never listen to the words that I say / You only see me by the clothes that I wear... / Or did the interest go much deeper / It must have been the color of my hair." The song was aptly titled "Public Image." People don't want to see past the obvious, and don't want to take the time to break down stereotypes. They can easily forget that although the differences remain, we all breathe the same air, feel the same emotions, and live our lives as best we can. Perhaps when people stop living by an old stereotype, Astoria will really be able to stand together and say, "Yes we do have a strong, diverse community, and we wouldn't have it any other way."

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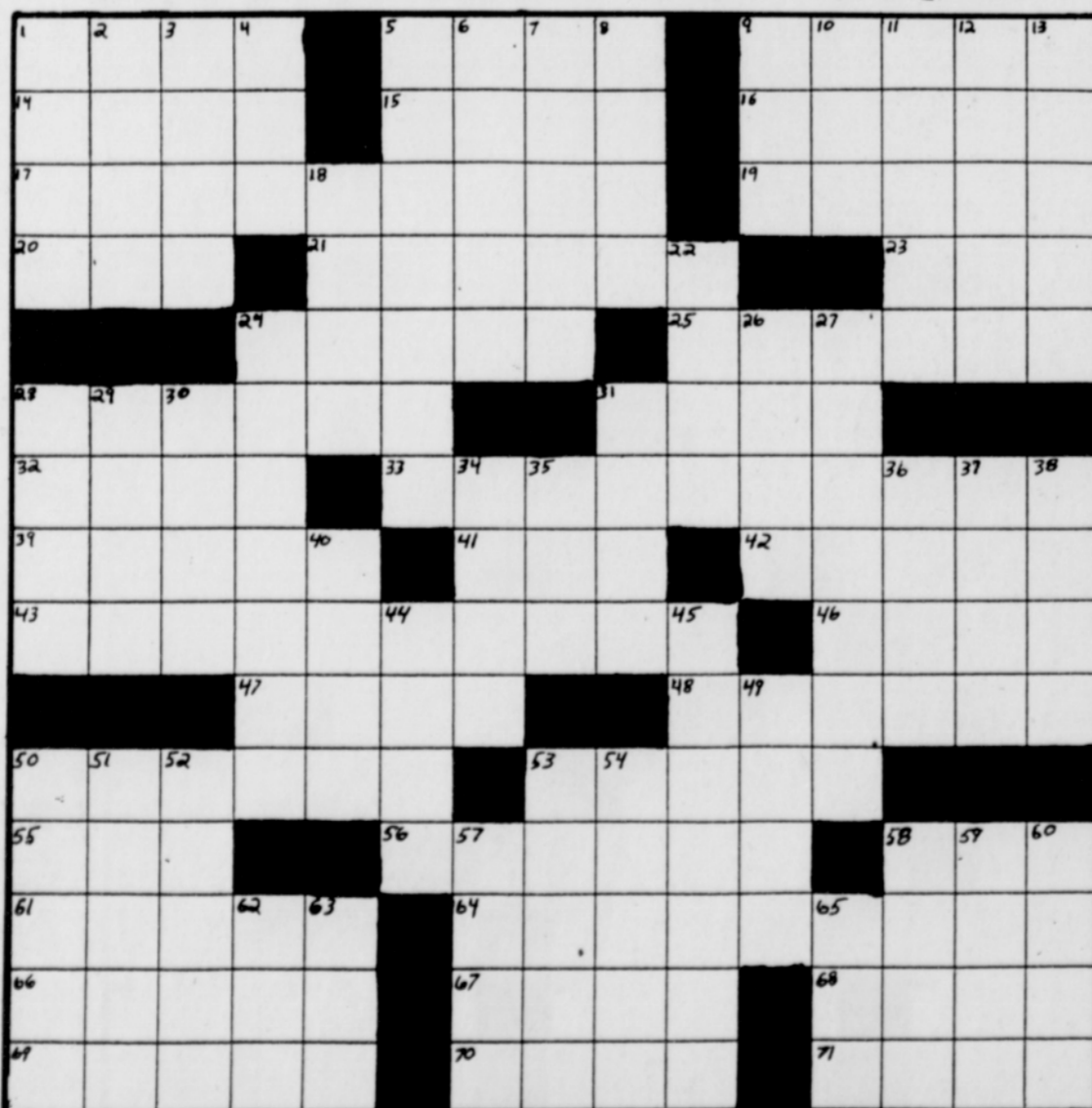
## JASON HALL'S XWORD

### ACROSS

- 1 wash
- 5 sheep shelter
- 9 valuable possession
- 14 off-Broadway award
- 15 an emanation
- 16 set aside
- 17 militarist
- 19 book innards
- 20 lwr right, on a map
- 21 capitol of Greece
- 23 play part
- 24 guitar ridges
- 28 wrap
- 31 squared circle
- 32 mitpl fatalities
- 33 stove fuel
- 39 present time or occasion
- 41 flee quickly
- 42 attack
- 43 Jew hater
- 46 north Ohio lake
- 47 bitch fixer
- 48 pine saps
- 50 great sufferer
- 53 macho guilt
- 55 rage
- 56 back
- 58 insurance co.
- 61 whinny
- 64 Vegas
- illuminations
- 66 division of a long poem
- 67 smooth wood
- 68 jazzer
- 69 city on the Ruhr River
- 70 mine extracts
- 71 Julia Roberts role "....Brokovich"

### DOWN

- 1 ship fronts
- 2 Arab cloak
- 3 wear out
- 4 shirt shortener
- 5 commissary
- 6 obliged
- 7 logs; once
- 8 get
- 9 small venomous snake
- 10 day or health
- 11 modern narratives
- 12 put up
- 13 pop quizzes
- 18 boat movers
- 22 provoke
- 24 dictator
- 26 nurses' assts.
- 27 most unfair
- 28 writer, St. Vincent Millay
- 29 midday
- 30 slanted surface
- 31 military group
- 35 won or chi
- 36 actress, Hall
- 37 opposition; Southern style
- 38 visualizes
- 40 glimpse
- 44 grandpa of Pickles comics
- 45 tasks
- 49 yours and mine
- 50 chop finely
- 51 spaces
- 52 jerk lines
- 53 smudge
- 54 lettered steak
- 57 not true
- 58 gelling agent
- 59 against
- 69 group of people
- 62 utilities co.
- 63 my sweetie, for short
- 64 30 degree h2o



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