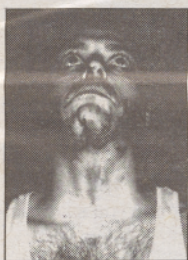


Addict's Almanac



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BY TYE DOUDY
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Darby and I had been doing car burglaries for a few weeks now and selling whatever we could to the pawnshops and used clothing stores. We got the idea from this kid we met named CJ who was a long-time downtown Portland dope fiend and had been doing the car prowling thing forever. CJ had dirty blonde hair that had matted into two large dreadlocks; he called them his mud flaps. He had a number of shitty tattoos up and down his arms, mostly punk rock stuff like anarchy signs and pentagrams. On his face, right above his eyes and taking up most of his forehead, he had poorly inked bluish green goat horns. He always wore filthy black Carhart bib overalls that were blown out in the ass and held together by Punk Rock and Black Metal patches.

CJ was a good thief and long-time heroin addict like us. He had hopped freight trains and hitchhiked all over the country. He knew so many tricks for getting by under the radar in the city, and he taught us a lot. He showed us how to use a chip from the porcelain part of a broken spark plug to break car windows quietly; which downtown pawn shops were legitimate, and which ones were crooked and asked no questions. This is the short version of how CJ ended up on the streets as he told it to me one night while drinking rum under the Ross Island Bridge.

CJ was only 19 but he had taken up the street life at around 12 years old after he got tired of his foster dad giving him black eyes and putting cigarettes out on him. After getting in one too many fights at school, his teachers had finally noticed CJ and his problems. It wasn't long before child protective services was called and CJ was placed in the first of a long string of foster homes around Denver, where he was from. At first he tried to be a good kid and do what he thought was expected of him, but invariably the strict structure and rules of the foster homes would be too much for him and he would run away. He would always get picked up the within a few days and returned to the home or placed in a new one.

Finally, when CJ had just turned 12, he ran away from his last foster home. He had taken an interest in painting, and using some paints and brushes he had found in the garage had painted a picture of a purple dragon on a piece of cardboard. It was the only thing he had ever done on his own that he felt proud of and he couldn't wait to show his foster dad Jimmy. As soon as Jimmy

pulled into the driveway CJ ran up and dragged him over to the garage to show him his masterpiece. Jimmy immediately flew into a rage; he didn't even look at the painting. He just grabbed CJ by the arm, yanked him into the house and gave him the beating of his life. Jimmy finished by painfully shaving CJ's head with a rusty old pair of hair clippers, stripping him of his clothes and locking him in his room so he couldn't run away. The crime? CJ in his youthful enthusiasm had forgotten to clean the paint brushes he had used without permission.

It didn't take more than a couple of days before CJ found his chance to escape. It was

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a Sunday and his foster family had dressed him up and taken him to the church they attended. As they were pulling into the church CJ noticed that there was a truck stop just down the street and he knew he had found his chance. During the service CJ told his foster mother that he had to use the bathroom and instead went right out the back door and down the street to the truck stop. In his Sunday best he approached the truckers asking each for a ride out of town. The men wanted nothing to do with him and as he grew more panicked he saw an old couple getting into their truck together. He ran up with tears streaming down his face and begged them for a ride. He didn't care where they were going, he just wanted to go. They were good people who fed him and didn't ask too many questions. It turned out they were going to California, and when they let him out at an off-ramp in Oakland with a \$20 bill and the sleeping bag they had given him, CJ thanked them with tears in his eyes and never looked back.

When he made it across the bridge into San Francisco he was terrified and refused to talk to anyone. Finally, though, his money ran out and he got hungry. One day while panhandling, he came up on a group of kids

sitting on the sidewalk flying a sign for beer. These other kids were intimidating as hell; they were dressed all in black Carharts and their jackets were covered with spikes and patches. They had multicolored Mohawks and fucked-up dreadlocks. Some of them had lots of metal sticking out of their faces.

One of the kids, a big fat guy with really bad skin and a huge ring through his septum, got up off the sidewalk and pushed CJ up against the wall. "Are you trying to spare change on my corner?" he asked CJ from about an inch from his face. CJ was so freaked out he couldn't answer, and at the moment when he thought the guy was gonna smash his face in, one of the girls

stood up and told the guy to let him go. "How old are you, kid?" she asked, and when he told her that he was only 12, her immediate response was to tell him to "GO HOME!" All the other kids laughed when she said this and then she smiled and asked him if he was hungry.

That afternoon they feasted on dumpster pizza and day-old bagels. They spare-changed and bummed smokes from passersby until they had enough money for a few boxes of wine that they called "space bags." The kids had a camp in Golden Gate Park they took him to. That night they drank the wine, got drunk, rolled smokes, told stories, and had a lot of laughs. CJ had never felt so free. In the morning he went back out to fly a sign with his new friends and after making a few bucks in change they took him to a thrift store to get him some new clothes. He found a pair of army fatigue pants and a Dead Kennedys shirt that he was able to buy for just a few bucks. He threw his old church clothes in the nearest garbage can and from then on wherever he traveled he always found his black-clad and tattooed tribe on the street corners and in the freight yards in pretty much any city he visited.



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