

I researched white supremacist groups and visited the same sites that my husband frequented. After a month of clicking on platforms that ranged from *The Drudge Report* to *The Daily Stormer* and reading about the alleged takeover of Illuminati Elite, my computer turned into a Nazi.

Up until then I hadn't realized that my computer, like me, was ethnically Jewish. The ads that normally filtered through my Facebook feed were preoccupied with celebrity gossip, yarn sales and timely reminders from Chabad.org advising me to pre-order kosher lamb legs for *Pesach*.

As it turned out, becoming a Nazi was not unlike catching a common virus like the flu, and then having it spiral out of control as it hijacked your immune system and ultimately your common sense. As I tried to retrace my ex-husband's descent into madness, my very Jewish computer became an alt-right conspiracy theorist whose new interests included obsessing over the "fake news" of the far left and praising President Donald Trump's (then candidate Trump's) candor and can-do promises which, as of yet, remain largely unfulfilled.

Online advertisements included everything right of the aisle, from saving unwed mothers to praying for the heart of America, to religious church tours of the Holy Land, promotional sales for Mylar bags (in what appeared to be a far-sighted effort to prep for the inevitable reign of the Anti-Christ), guns, guns, NRA ads and, yet again, more guns, collector's coins, how-to advice on hoarding gold and book reviews for authors who re-envisioned history "as it truly happened," along with white-power graphic tees that made the unabashed claim, "Hitler Was Right."

MY EX-HUSBAND WASTED NO TIME RECRUITING OTHERS to his ideological army. When his attempts to lure long-time friends failed, he studied mesmerism and surrounded himself with a posse of younger men, all of whom fit a social profile: awkward, alienated, angry.

He loved-bombed them with my home-cooked food, small gifts and, above all, lavished them with male attention. He invited them to play video games and drink beer, get high and, afterwards, when their defenses were down, plied them with his ideas about God, race and supremacy. He led meditations and taught them about male chastity and other esoteric liturgies espoused by obscure and fascistic occultists like Julius Evola.

Thirsty for a father figure, these young men lapped up my husband's teachings. Was it any surprise that his ideological conquests had backgrounds flecked with mental conditions such as Asperger's, schizophrenia, paranoia, depression and PTSD.

In one such case, my ex performed a Reiki-like energy transfer on a devotee who was clinically diagnosed as a schizophrenic with a history of attempted suicide. Whether through a placebo effect or his hypnotic capabilities, he

was able to overcome the young man's inhibitions. The boy began to laugh hysterically and experienced what he claimed was an overwhelming sense of joy, followed by waves of peace.

This peace, however, did not last. The young man returned to our house two weeks later, yet again on the verge of killing himself. My ex's response was swift and harsh: He handed the boy a loaded semi-automatic pistol and told him that, if he was really serious, he should quit wasting everyone's time and get it over with.

Where was I when these events occurred?

In the kitchen. Cooking. Like Bethany Sherman, I fed the would-be army that my husband aspired to raise.

After the divorce I found myself in the rabbi's office, stunned with shame at my own self-betrayal — the betrayal of my people, my identity, strength, logic and moral compass. The rabbi was quick to point out that my experience paralleled generations of conditioned self-loathing that Jewry had appropriated from their host countries in order to survive. But what was my excuse? I had remained married to my husband out of love and not by force.

PSYCHOLOGICALLY, I'D BEEN STOCKHOLMED, surrendering my will to the prevailing force within my marriage. Although I was still responsible for the concession of my own power, I consigned myself to the sting of my husband's criticisms, which covered everything from my weight and my heritage to my incompetence as a housekeeper and, more pointedly, my failure to carry a pregnancy to term.

The divorce came about in the same manner as the marriage. He announced his intent to leave on email. The majority of his family supported his decision on the grounds that I was infertile and both a non-Christian and a Jew.

I took these criticisms to heart until a pair of condoms surfaced from inside his wallet, along with a string of "sext" messages on my ex's phone. He promptly moved to Springfield and got engaged.

Eventually he relocated to another state with a new wife in tow.

As my marriage came crashing down, I was left to sort through the rubble of lies that once disguised the insanity of the man I called "husband." There isn't a day I don't wake up wondering what I could have done to stave off his descent into white power radicalism. I've spent hours trying to understand why he married me, a Jew, only to become a Nazi apologist.

But there are no easy answers. Even as I write this, mutual friends apprise me of his ongoing efforts to draw in and proselytize others into his fold.

In the wake of Trump's ascension to the Oval Office

I struggled with the shame of my marriage and the infinitesimal but acute link that tied my past to a man that became a white supremacist.

Some of my Facebook acquaintances exposed my guilt. Why hadn't I left my racist husband long ago? I was guilty of supporting Nazism through marriage. They reasoned that I, like Melania Trump, carried a shared culpability. They told me that, if I frequented the coffee shop where they worked, I would be refused service due to my prior marital association with a Nazi.

Fortunately the ostracizing I faced wasn't universal. My community of friends, accrued through synagogues and knitting bees, welcomed me with open arms. I cried my eyes out, face down on the bed of my acupuncturist and on the sofas of several therapists who listened without judgment. I made friends who didn't shun me for my bizarre and frightful association with a Nazi, or scoff as I struggled through the self-hate that I'd been schooled in for the past six years.

It was a slow process of re-education — one that keeps occurring every day.

No one is safe from their own predilection for power, love, meaning and, above all, acceptance. I loved my then-husband and wanted his acceptance. My ex-husband wanted power, and accrued a following of needy individuals seeking answers but, above all, a sense of significance.

The truth, with a lowercase t, is that there isn't much difference between the desires of humanity on the alt-right and the far-left, among Nazis, Jews or my knitting circle. The desire to be a participant in something greater than oneself is a formidable urge embedded within every human being, regardless of his or her religion, race or creed.

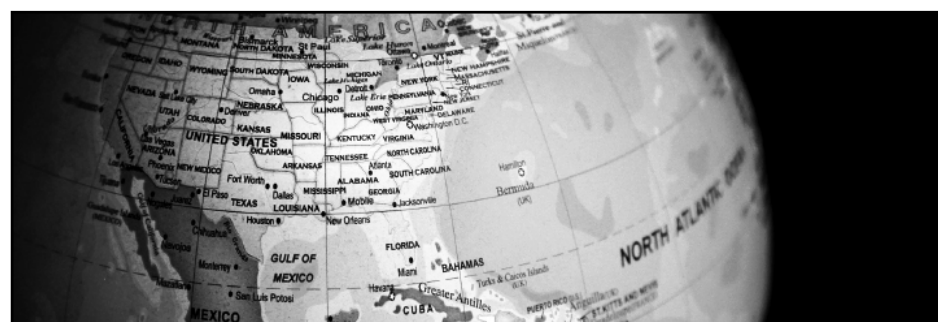
The need to be safe in numbers, to harness the unpredictability of life, to understand invisible forces beyond one's control drives modern man, as it did the hominids from which we evolved.

What would I have done if my community — my neighbors, friends and relations — had abandoned me to the abysmal emptiness of the hatred I'd come to endure?

When I read about Bethany Sherman's holing up with Jacob Laskey and Jimmy Marr, my heart aches for her and especially for her children, who are vulnerable to indoctrination now more than ever. I'm filled with a mixture of anger and compassion that I've often leveled at myself: anger at an intelligent woman who should know better — and compassion for someone who has surrendered her strength to an organization that does not have her best interests at heart.

All I can manage to do is shake my head in recognition. That could have been my name in the headlines. She could have been me. "There go I, but for grace." ■

The identities of the writer and her ex-husband have been concealed to protect the writer, her family and the community. Jacob Laskey was recently arrested on charges of assaulting an acquaintance with a knife.



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