



PHOTO COURTESY SAM SACHS

Members of communities of color and members of the police community gather together to eat and have conversations at a “Breaking Bread, Breaking Barriers” event organized by Sam Sachs, a former law enforcement officer and former Portland Human Rights Commissioner. The meet up was held at “Noho’s Hawaiian Café, 5627 N.E. Fremont St., whose owner Noho Marchesia, a friend of Sach’s provides free space and food for the monthly events.

‘No Hate Zone’ breaks bread and barriers

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Having grown up as a Jewish kid in a predominately white Christian community at South Albany High School, Sachs said he received his fair share of racial epithets from other kids, who used the Star of David around Sachs’ neck as a target for hate and discrimination in the 1980s. At the time, the school’s mascot was the Rebels and its logo was the Confederate flag.

“I would be harassed. And people would call me ‘k-ke’ or ‘h-be’ or a ‘f---ing Jew,’” Sachs, 50, told the Portland Observer.

But being a well-built and skilled football player at the school meant when others picked a fight with Sachs, he fought back and usually won, he said.

“I make no bones about it, I was a tough guy. And I would beat people up. And I got pretty good at it through junior high/high school, the Army, college, probably until I was 26. I would use violence to respond to racism or anti-Semitism,” Sachs explained.

He clarified that the fights were always “mutual combat” and never seriously injured anyone or sent them to the hospital.

One night while he was attending and playing football at Western Oregon University in Monmouth, Sachs brawled in what

would become a life-changing altercation. Everyone was yelling something during the fight, Sachs said, but he couldn’t understand what they were saying.

After the fight, a buddy explained that the people were chanting a rather unflattering nickname, “psycho.” “You’re a psycho when you fight,” the friend told him. Something changed in Sachs when he heard that.

“From that day on, I promised myself I would never use violence ever again. And I would never respond. It was an eye opener, it was an ‘aha’ moment, because I was like, ‘they think I’m crazy,’” Sachs recalled.

Rather than giving up in the fight against racism, though, Sachs would take up his battles through other, more effective, means.

“I still deal with anti-Semitism. But rather than use my fists, I use my mouth, my heart, my head to respond to people. It’s much, much more powerful than beating somebody up. Because you can beat somebody up, it doesn’t change them. They just probably hate you more or they’re more upset because they got beat up by a Jew, the very thing they despise,” Sachs said.

After college, Sachs went on

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