

# News

## When German Neo-Nazis Have Doubts, There's a Number to Call

By **FRANK JORDANS**  
Associated Press

SCHLEIFE, Germany— Felix Benneckenstein was a rising star on Germany's far-right scene, a young songwriter whose rousing guitar anthems made white nationalism sound romantic and rebellious.

But when fellow neo-Nazis attacked a friend, Benneckenstein found the doubts he'd ignored for years coming to the surface.

"It was a rude awakening," he recalled. "You have an idea of what's wrong with the world and believe you've discovered hidden truths... And to then realize that everything you've done to yourself and others in the past years was built on lies is a bitter moment."

After almost a decade on the far-right fringes, the 30-year-old is now part of a small but effective network of former neo-Nazis helping people to leave the scene. Spread across Germany, they work closely with an organization called EXIT that provides quick, un-bureaucratic advice to extremists who want out.

At a time when extreme nationalism is on the rise in Europe, EXIT has helped

**"I felt I'd done enough damage so I wanted to make up for it a bit"**

hundreds of neo-Nazis start a new life, according to founder Bernd Wagner, a former East German police detective. He says EXIT has an edge over government-run programs because those answering its hotline dropped out of the far-right movement themselves.

These former neo-Nazis call themselves the 'Action Group' and try to meet in person at least once a year. The meetings aren't advertised, and



In this Thursday, Nov. 3, 2016 photo former far right extremists Felix Benneckenstein, left, and Falk Isernhagen, right, speak to the Associated Press in Schleife, eastern Germany. They are part part of a small but effective network of former neo Nazis working to help people leave the far-right scene. Spread across Germany they work closely with an organization called EXIT that provides quick, non-bureaucratic advice to extremists who want out.

journalists aren't invited because some members fear their identity could be revealed to friends and colleagues unaware of their past. Last month The Associated Press received unprecedented access to the group's two-day retreat at a former police training center tucked away in a wood in the eastern state of Saxony — notorious for its strong far-right presence.

About a dozen people — mostly young, mostly male — came to talk about their past and brainstorm ways to reach out to those still inside the neo-Nazi scene.

Wagner says the Action Group gives ex-Nazis a way to become involved in political campaigns again where other organizations might reject them due to their past. The meetings also help them deal with their own demons.

"It does a lot for people that they can talk about the old days, not like old warriors who've won battles but about the mistakes they made in their lives," said Wagner. "They're still looking for

direction in a highly complex and diverse reality."

That includes people such as Falk Isernhagen.

Bespectacled and slight, he felt he was an outsider as a white kid in a mostly migrant neighborhood of Berlin. When older white students at his high school invited him along to football games, he was grateful.

Soon he was marching alongside them at far-right demonstrations. Then he offered to run their website.

Isernhagen left when the pressure from his comrades became too

much. Shortly after making the call to EXIT, he was attacked by unknown assailants and ended up in hospital, under police protection.

Instead of just turning his back on the far right, he chose to help others find their way out, too. "I felt I'd done enough damage so I wanted to make up for it a bit," he said.

But it's not all penance for the former neo-Nazis who met in Schleife, a village near the Polish border, in early November. Sitting on a frigid porch outside the training center, Isernhagen grinned as he recalled the previous nights' larks.

"It's really interesting to work with people who have the same or similar experiences," he said. "Because you feel that they understand what you went through and felt. That welds people together."

Read the rest of this commentary at **TheSkanner.com**

### Obituary: Ruby Jean Stephens Elliott

July 31, 1933 - Dec. 1, 2016

Ruby Jean Stephens Elliott was born on July 31, 1933 in Abilene, Texas. The youngest daughter of Emanuel and Bessie Stephens, Ruby was known for her wonderful sense of humor and often had her family howling with laughter when she dressed up and impersonated her



Ruby Jean Stephens Elliott

father and other family members. Ruby was married to her best friend, George Elliott, for 44 years and together they raised seven children. Known for having a green thumb, one of Ruby's favorite pastimes was gardening. An exceptional cook, family often assembled during holidays and special occasions at the Elliott's home. Ruby also enjoyed canning and sewing and made several beautiful blankets and quilts over the years that she generously gave to family and friends.

Ruby would often jokingly say she used to be pretty, but her sisters beat her up when she was young and stole her beauty from her. A fa-

vorite memory of her children was when they would sneak and listen to comedienne Moms Mabley records Saturday evenings. According to her daughter Denise, it was worth getting in trouble for!

Ruby deeply loved her husband and children. She went home to be with the Lord on

Thursday, December 1st at approximately 3:00pm. She was greeted at heaven's gates by her husband George, her father and mother Bessie and Emanuel, her oldest sister Minnie, her brothers MC and Bill, her beloved daughter Deborah, and daughter-in-law Diana Dixon Miller.

Ruby is survived by her children Ronald, Randy, Denise, Donna and Kerry; step children Lamar, Delores and Willie; several grandchildren and great grandchildren, her sisters Thelma and Mary Lee, and several nieces and nephews.

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Pastor Annie Gutierrez

Celebration Service

In celebration of Pastor Annie Gutierrez's life, we will have a service to honor her. This is a time to gather and celebrate the most Beautiful Woman Of God, who touched so many lives. Everyone is welcome to come celebrate with us. Parking will be provided.

In lieu of flowers, the family request donations to be made to My Fathers House Ministries @ [www.mfhmportland.com](http://www.mfhmportland.com) or sent to P.O. Box 873756 Vancouver, WA 98687

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