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The Association of Professional Piercers is a California-based, international non-profit organization dedicated to the dissemination of vital health and safety information about body piercing to piercers, health care professionals, legislators, and the general public.

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FROM THE EDITORS

KENDRA JANE B
MARINA PECORINO
The Point Editors

• Kendra Jane B

It’s no secret how much I love donuts (or doughnuts), but to me these tasty little morsels have become so much more than something delicious to stuff down my gullet. They have become a tradition, an expression of devotion and love, and a symbol of family.

Our volunteer team shares a special bond, one that is often hard to describe in words. We have held each other’s hands, each other’s babies, been there for each other through weddings and funerals, and of course at Conference. Conference is sometimes the only time we get to see each other, people that come from all around the world to sacrifice their time in order to help put on the best event they possibly can, for all our attendees and industry as a whole. They are the only people I don’t mind sharing my donuts with, and I tend to guard my sugary treats with vigor. So from the bottom of my heart, THANK YOU to each and every person that gives part of themselves to Conference. I raise a donut in your honour and salute you.

Donuts are (usually) a circle, no beginning and no end, at least until I take the first bite. Our week in the desert is fleeting and before we know it, it’s over for another year. I hope you are ready to dive into this issue, re-living the ah-ha moments, the times filled with heartwarming laughter, the late nights, the smiles, and the hugs. I get to harness all that goodness year round now, so I feel like there really is no end to Conference for me anymore. I have already begun work for next year and the year after that. No beginning, no end; just goodness all around like my donut.

• Marina Pecorino

As with any APP Conference I’ve attended, this year was a rollercoaster of a week. There were times where I was busy beyond words and others were I felt relaxed and totally at peace. There were moments when I was surrounded by people, activity, flashing lights, and a cacophony of sound. And then there were those solitary moments in my hotel room or the volunteer office, where I enjoyed total silence and introspection.

This year also had its fair share of firsts, including the first annual Alternatives To The Bar activities. Most of my work responsibilities occur late into the evening, which usually brings me great joy; I revel in the contrary nature of the Conference space during the quiet times. Unfortunately, it means that I missed out on ATTB: BYOF on Tuesday night. This Bring Your Own Fun evening drew a sizable group to the Grand Salon with board, tabletop, and card games galore. I stopped by several times and everyone seemed to be having a blast. This activity is definitely in my wheelhouse, so I’m planning to bring along a few games of my own and definitely make the time to attend next year.

Thankfully, on Wednesday night, I finished up with my work a bit early and had a chance to watch some historic piercing films presented by Paul King during the ATTB: Movie Night. It was incredibly moving to sit in the Silver Room filled with piercing industry colleagues watching videos from the Gauntlet era.

The Members Meeting on Wednesday brought a personal first. As part of my administrative duties to the APP, I had the opportunity to stand in front of my peers, assisting during several presentations from the Officers and Board of Directors. We announced the new and upcoming features of our MemberLeap software, which was (and continues to be) a very fulfilling project for me. One of my primary responsibilities for the APP is the maintenance of Member records, and this software makes it easier than ever before. It’s a work in progress; there’s always room for improvement, especially in the world of technology. Watch for future updates and system additions, and if you have questions about how the system works, don’t hesitate to let me know: mpecorino@safe piercing.org / 785.856.4540.

Thursday brings the Banquet Dinner, a time for all of us that work to relax just a bit. The grand prize raffle awards were drawn and marked yet another first. For possibly the first time in APP history, the same person won three of the top prizes, and it was an astonishing event to behold. Paul Rainer’s personal account of the events leading up to his improbable win, as well as video of the drawing and Paul’s reactions, are available later in this issue. It just goes to show that sometimes taking a gamble can be life changing, especially when you have the best odds in Vegas.

Now that the dust has settled from Conference, I am looking toward the future and the changes to come. As my responsibilities with the APP continue to broaden and change, so do the dynamics of my family. A few months before the 2018 APP Conference, I will become a first time parent. The thought is incredibly exciting, but also frightening. It may mean that I miss our last year at Bally’s, but I am still desperately hopeful to attend. Despite all the hard work, that week in Vegas serves to revitalize me. Being surrounded by my industry family has a way of recharging my batteries and refocusing my energy; it truly is remarkable.
A gain and again I heard the same sentiments echoed throughout this year’s APP Conference. “This year has a great vibe.” “There are so many new people, and they are all about the classes.” “Everyone being so focused is making this my favorite Conference ever.” It really was remarkable.

I have to say, as President of an organization, going into something like our annual Conference comes with no small amount of nervous energy. You want it to be successful, but what I really want is for the attendees heading home to have that infectious energy that makes them want to improve their piercing techniques and health and safety. I want our attendees to be overjoyed about the goodies they are bringing home to their shops from our incredible Expo, and most of all I want them to leave excited to come back again.

In my humble opinion, this year’s APP Conference truly delivered. This was a top to bottom group effort, and really speaks to how well our community works together when focused on a common goal. I was blown away by the size of the Expo and the continued ingenuity of our Vendors. In addition to our vendors’ commitment to improving and innovating their products, the APP receives awe-inspiring support from sponsorships of our Conference activities and our raffle prizes. My deepest thanks goes out to our Vendors for all of their support.

The Mentor Program continues to grow and continues to support our new attendees. This year I was able to see Mentors meet their Mentees, and watch how that system works. I was very impressed to see how it was managed, but I was also stunned by the size of the undertaking! It is a genuine pleasure to see so many new faces in classrooms and in the halls.

The volunteers, no doubt, have established themselves as the glue that holds Conference together. I tried to say it as much as I could in person, but my gratitude to them for all their hard work knows no bounds.

There were several times that I ran into Caitlin’s office, panicked, asking if something was done. On every single occasion, not only was everything handled, it was handled months previous and I left her office thinking “how does she do it?” Thank you Caitlin, and thanks for making me look prepared even when I wasn’t!

A lot of this year’s success can also be credited to Kendra Jane, our new Vice President. It is a pleasure to serve with her on the Board, and I’m sure she is as thrilled as anyone at how well this Conference went.

Of course, when we look back at each Conference we also do so with a critical eye, imagining what we can do better. It has been this constructive criticism, from within the organization and from our attendees and vendors, that have made each Conference work a bit better than the one that preceded it. We will continue to develop, innovate, improve, and experiment, and I’m excited for what we have to come.

Which brings me to Camp APP 2017! As a camper in 2016, I can’t heap enough praise upon Bethrah Szumski and the Camp APP volunteers and instructors for the quality of experience they are able to deliver. It is absolutely one of my most treasured moments in my piercing career. I strongly recommend it to all of our Members.

There is a lot of wonderful activity happening within the organization, and I am very much looking forward to discussing it in the next President’s Corner. Enjoy Issue 80 and thank you for supporting safe piercing!
When I Give the Best of Me

When I give the best of me, that becomes my legacy.

—Karen Lopez McWilliams

This was the 15th Conference that I have attended and worked at for the APP. The job I do today has changed drastically from the first Conference, and I am certain will continue to change and evolve as the Conference does.

One of my main responsibilities at our Conference is to manage and oversee the training of the volunteer staff members. This started out pretty simply with a handful of volunteers and now we have just over 50 volunteers each year – some of whom have even more experience than I do at Conference.

I started referring to the volunteer group members as ducklings years ago and at some point I became Momma Duck; and in some cases just “Momma” or “Mom.” I suspect it was when I started being a better manager, when I moved from being a hardcore boss lady and started doing more mentoring. I didn’t come by it naturally, and it took a while. I am forever grateful for the volunteers who stuck out those harder years when I was not in control of my emotions, when I was angry most of the time, when I attempted to control everything and everyone and did a poor job of both.

When I started relying on my team, giving them the tools to do the job and then staying out of their way – I became a mentor. When I realized that emotions in the Conference environment were contagious even more than the Las Vegas flu and took steps to work on this flaw in my own life – I became a mentor. The pride I have when a volunteer becomes an APP Member, applies to a job in a premier shop, joins a committee, becomes a parent, learns to ask for help and support when in trouble, runs for a Board position, or reaches out to assist a fellow volunteer, is never ending. It validates the work I have done with the team.

Let me be clear, I love being a mentor to the volunteer team. To see a group of individuals who dedicate a huge amount of time and effort to a single cause – strangers who come together and through service work become friends and family. The team who goes on each year to celebrate each member’s victories and mourn each member’s losses; to be there for each other in their daily lives for counsel, laughter, instruction, and support.

But I don’t just mentor them – they mentor me. The whole of APP mentors me. I would not be the person, mentor, administrator that I am without this mentoring. Every challenge, every criticism, every little bit of feedback from an attendee, has lead me to work on myself personally, to grow professionally, to search out new technologies and tools to manage our event and attendees. The volunteer team more than most has both supported me in the challenges of running the Conference, and made it clear that I could do better.

Do better by relying on them, trusting them, and allowing them to do their jobs. Do better by doing less, stressing less, being happy, and relaxing more. Do better, by doing things differently than my brain says to do them. At the very basis of Conference is the belief that everyone can improve themselves with more knowledge and everyone has knowledge to share with others. Everyone can Mentor; and everyone still needs mentoring.

I encourage everyone reading this to find ways to mentor another piercer or another person. I encourage everyone to find someone or many someones who can be a mentor for them. Not just in piercing, but in life.

“If you’re not reaching back to help anyone then you’re not building a legacy.”

—Germany Kent

THE ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL PIERCERS
HAPPILY ANNOUNCES

3RD ANNUAL
CAMP APP MEMBERS RETREAT
October 3–7, 2017

Camp APP is a great alternative for people who can’t attend Conference or for anyone who wants to add to their educational experience. It is a week filled with great food, new friends, hands-on educational opportunities and summer camp style fun. To find out about registration first join the Facebook event page. (Make sure you are logged into Facebook before you click the link)

Location: Hard Labor Creek State Park
5 Hard Labor Creek Rd.
Rutledge, GA 30663, USA

Contact: Bethrah Szumski
curriculum@safepiercing.org
(phone: 404-315-6925)
We've once again broken all of our previous records; this year, our attendance climbed to 1,123!

As you can tell from our fancy pie chart (everyone loves pie!), as always, Piercers who are not APP Members made up the largest group of conference attendees, with APP Member Piercers coming in second. This probably comes as no surprise, since the main focus of our Conference is piercing related education and outreach. That being said, with over 200 non-piercing attendees, it's obvious that our conference still has plenty to offer industry professionals working outside of the piercing room.

Our third largest group of attendees this year was comprised of Expo Exhibitors and their Vendor Workers. The Expo is one of the main attractions of Conference. This year, the Expo housed 59 different Exhibitors with a wide range of piercing related offerings; literature, merchandise, advertising services, aftercare products, and of course body jewelry.

Attendance by Health Inspectors stayed the same as in 2016, with a total of five each year. The APP is working hard to encourage health department officials to attend Conference, but we can always use your help to bring this number up in coming years. Next time your local officials drop by for a visit, please encourage them to attend. Let them know that their conference pass will be free of charge if they book in the APP Room Block and there will be class sessions and meetings specifically designed for them.

Turning our attention to the bar graph, we can see a comparison of Full and Partial registrations for our Piercer and Non-Piercer categories. As you can see, most opt for the Full Registration option, allowing for full access to the class schedule (they still need to claim their seat in advance, of course) and a few other Full Registration perks. The Non-Member/Non-Piercer category seems to be the exception to this trend. When looking through these registrations from an administrative perspective, it's clear that this category is mainly used by owners, counter staff, managers, and jewelry buyers who are primarily interested in marketing classes and Expo access.

We look forward to seeing plenty of returning attendees and even more new faces next year. Mark you calendars now, July 15-20, 2018. It will be our last year at Bally's before our much anticipated move to Planet Hollywood in 2019. As our Conference continues to grow in attendance, we plan to expand our class offerings and work toward providing the most unforgettable week ever.
CONFERENCE MEMORIES:
The Opening Pool Party

Photo by Autumn Swisher

The Opening Pool Party
CONFERENCE MEMORIES:
The Opening Pool Party

Background photo by Autumn Swisher; all other photos by Matte Erickson
CONFERENCE MEMORIES:
The Banquet
CONFERENCE MEMORIES:
Alternatives to the Bar

Above: Movie night, photo by Marina Pecorino
Left: Board games in the Grand Salon, photo by Kendra Jane B.

Background photo by Matte Erickson

The Piercing Bible
The definitive guide to safe body piercing by Elayne Angel

This one-of-a-kind comprehensive resource covers everything piercers and piercees need to know about the subject. Piercing pioneer and authority Elayne Angel shares her exhaustive knowledge about piercing techniques, jewelry, placements, aftercare, troubleshooting, and more.

About the Author - Elayne Angel has been a professional piercer for more than 20 years and has performed over 40,000 piercings. She was awarded the President’s Lifetime Achievement Award by the Association of Professional Piercers in 2006 and is a contributing writer for PAIN Magazine. She lives in Mérida, Mexico. Visit www.piercingbible.com for more information.

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A portion of the proceeds from each sale goes to the APP.

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“Essential reading for anyone who wants to understand how modern body piercing arrived at the place it currently occupies.”

James Weber, Former President Association of Professional Piercers

* "Essential reading for anyone who wants to understand how modern body piercing arrived at the place it currently occupies."
One more great Conference is in the books. This was another record breaking year with over 1,100 registered attendees!

Every year at Conference we hold our annual Members’ Meeting. This annual meeting is a chance for our Members and Corporate Sponsors to hear updates about the future of Conference and the Association, and to get a review of the APP’s finances.

This year’s Members’ Meeting was particularly eventful with announcements regarding new Member perks and a new Conference venue for 2019!

**MEMBER PERK**

Our Member perk this year was a new window cling for your studios. These double-sided clings can be displayed at any studio with an APP Member on staff. If you were not in attendance at the meeting, you will receive a cling by mail with your 2018 membership certificate.

**CONFERENCE 2018 AND 2019**

Conference 2018 will be held July 15-20, 2018 at Bally’s. This is our final year at Bally’s! Be prepared for a great send off and another big year.

Conference 2019 will be our first year at Planet Hollywood Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas. Planet Hollywood is a big upgrade for our Conference and we are really excited about our future there.

**MEMBERLEAP AND MEMBER’S AREA**

Our new website and Member’s Area are now live. Our website has had a major facelift and is better than ever, with ongoing improvements and added features. Included on our website is a Member’s Only area where you can instantly update your Member profile, Required Documents (environmental and personal criteria) and keep updated on APP Events. Be sure to check it out. If you have questions about the Member’s Area or need help with the system, you can reach Marina Pecorino, Membership Administrator, at mpecorino@safepiercing.org.
MEET SOME OF OUR SCHOLARS

ERICA MARTIN—AL D. SCHOLAR

As I watch Las Vegas disappear from my plane window, I have so many emotions flying through me. Holding back tears, the only certainty I feel is that I could never have a year without Conference ever again. Being a mother and wife takes so much effort from my small amount of “work free” time that having friends, especially those outside of the industry, isn’t a possibility and the few friends I do have are mostly coworkers. I was and still am baffled that in one week’s time a group of complete strangers can not only work together seamlessly, but bond in such a way that now I couldn’t imagine not knowing these beautiful souls. Everyone was so incredibly welcoming and supportive, constantly looking out for one another and ensuring their fellow piercers/attendees were eating or getting enough water. I kept hearing everyone throw around the word family before attending, but it’s true. It’s a thousand best friends leaning on one another, swapping tips, asking questions, or just sharing a cup of coffee. It’s a week full of love and support from people with the same struggles as you, coming together for the same common good.

The classes were absolutely life changing. Even just knowing that you’re doing things correctly and affirming you’re doing right by your clients is a wonderful feeling. Those small AH-HA! moments where a simple thing clicks or that conversation about a new or different technique really is just so invigorating. As sad and hard as it is already being away from those kindred spirits, it’s fantastic having that blood flowing again and being recharged and better prepared for my clients. It’s great to take back what you have learned to improve your studio and be able to think critically and make smart changes to your environment for the betterment of you and your clients.

I also have to give a special thanks to the Al D. Scholarship Committee and Punkmedics (so much love for Badur and my Punkmedics PALS) for giving me and my other Scholars this opportunity. I will never accurately portray the love and gratitude I have for all of you (thankfully I can at least write my feelings down instead of inaudibly blubering, tears streaming, snot and all). These people work so incredibly hard behind the scenes and then on top of that, try and give other Scholars like me this life altering adventure (for me 11 years in the making). I hope so very much to be able to have the opportunity to volunteer again next year, but no matter what, from this year forward, I’m a new permanent face you’ll see at Conference. A year’s time in between seeing your family is hard, but I wouldn’t miss it for anything! See you all next year!

JESS FARRAR—AL D. SCHOLAR

I can see how Conference and the entire Vegas experience is considered overwhelming to an Al D. Scholar, being that a lot of us are from different cultures and countries but I have honestly never felt more at home than I did that week with all of you at Bally’s. I had no idea what to expect going into this and even now I’m struggling to put it into words, but the best way I can describe it is, for me, a formative experience. I am not the same version of myself coming away from APP as I was in the run up to it, and that is thanks to each and every person I met and interacted with that week. Kind words, encouragement, so many high fives, and being fed occasional snacks does a lot of good! It was due to the confidence instilled by my volunteer family that I was able to fully enjoy this life-changing week, meet people in the real world who I’d only previously spoken with in passing online, and take away new friendships and relationships as well as a bundle of knowledge from the incredible selection of classes I took. Simultaneously learning and working was more manageable than anticipated, which left me with more energy to make new friends and get outside (my two weaknesses!). I feel like I attended Conference at the right time for me, and it’s definitely a cornerstone in my piercing career.
The sense of friendship and acceptance was the thing I have been searching for. The APP brought this to me, and I have eternal gratitude for showing me I am no longer alone. I have learned great things from my teachers and friends from my employer. I learned that it’s important to keep tissues on hand because if you met me this year, you know all I did was cry during Conference. I learned a true sense of community and that no one that I came into contact with thought they were better than me. My educators are regular people, and my friends and volunteers are regular people too. People who are living with crippling anxiety, insecurities, and doubts much like myself. We all come together once a year for the betterment of one another and hopefully put those other things aside. To ask for help, to learn, to make everlasting friendships and family. We leave our comfort zones and push on to grow as individuals and develop as human beings. If there is one thing I have truly learned working with the Conference this year, it is that I can never be alone again. Thank you to everyone at this year’s Conference, from the tippy top of my heart, to the bottom of my boots. Without any of my friends I have made this journey, I would not be here typing out this essay. I worked hard to be here in this moment, but not without any of you. Hugs and sloppy kisses! ALCIA LOWE—AL D. SCHOLAR

Sometimes you have to lose before you can win. Last year I applied for, and didn’t receive, the Al D. Scholarship. Looking back, it was one of the best things that could have happened for my career. At the time of my first application, I was at the height of depression. Working in an environment that had no desire to change and no room for growth, I felt trapped. I saw the scholarship as a way to better myself and improve my situation. Every day, I checked my email hoping to be told I made it to the next round. That message never came.

Initially, the letter informing me that I did not make the second cut felt like a crushing weight. I’m not ashamed to admit that I cried. The tears did eventually dry, and I found clarity; the scholarship wouldn’t change my situation. It wouldn’t bring better quality jewellery into the business, nor from my employer to make necessary changes. I had to make the changes myself. I had heard about a job opportunity from a friend, and decided to try.

Once again, I checked my email frequently with hope. Once more, my email revealed disappointment. Over the course of a few weeks I went to work thinking I was able to hide how I was feeling. I was wrong. My employer had heard about my application and had chosen to let me go. My world around me spun out of control. Having been a piercer since an early age, I didn’t know what else to do. The next move escaped me. I decided to reach out to my network about the situation I found myself in. A piercer I knew allowed me to come in to shadow him, as well as talk.

After shadowing with him, it allowed us to open a dialogue regarding employment. He could only offer me a few days a week, but I was willing to try. I was happy to finally be in an environment that cared about their clients, and offered good quality jewellery. Around this time, I became aware of another shop in a different city that was also looking for a piercer. I nervously reached out once more to be surprised by another opportunity. Over the next several months, I travelled weekly back and forth between both businesses. This experience lead me to wanting to apply a second time for the Al D. Scholarship. Both of my employers were in my corner every step of the way this time. Their outpouring of support gave me renewed confidence that allowed me to discuss and submit my experiences over the past year. Having previously applied, I had a better sense of what I really wanted to say this time around. Submitting was the easy part. Waiting for the phone call with the decision had me on pins and needles for days. When I answered Kendra’s phone call, my heart was in my throat. Every moment we talked I felt like my chest would explode until I heard the sentence that would forever change my life, ‘Pack your bags! You’re going to Vegas!’ I almost dropped the phone in disbelief!

The next few months were a blur as Conference rapidly crept up on us. Packing kept the nerves at bay, at least until arrival. The thought of being under the same roof as so many talented piercers from all over the world was enough to make my head spin. As each of the Scholars arrived one by one, seeing faces just as shy and nervous as my own helped to remind me that I wasn’t alone. I was not the only one feeling this way.

The first meeting with the volunteers helped to set the tone for us. They were warm, kind, and eager to help at every turn. No question was too silly, no moment overlooked, and some even did daily check-ins to make sure we were still doing ok and enjoying our classes. Every moment spent with them was full of smiles and care. It was an instant family I never knew I needed until the moment I met them. A family I am so grateful to be a part of. I really can’t thank them enough for everything they did, and continue to do.
The classes were incredible in so many ways. From Revisiting Basics: Tongue Piercing with Ryan Ouellette to Navel Piercings: Advanced Fundamentals with Jef Saunders and Luis Garcia; all were great classes. They helped to not only change how you approach a piercing, but to hear piercers you respect and look up to suggest similar techniques you’re using helped to reaffirm you’re doing something right. All of the speakers were very easy to approach with questions both during and outside of classes.

Conference has also helped me to gain the confidence I needed to continue reaching out to others and have less fear asking to shadow others or ask questions. A week after returning home, I reached out to Rob Hill and was able to spend several days shadowing with him at Prysm Body Piercing. Seeing things I would not have been able to spend several days shadowing with him at Prysm Body Piercing. Seeing things that were discussed in the Strategic Marking class applied first hand was incredibly eye-opening and I don’t believe I would have reached out to Rob had I not attended Conference.

I cannot say enough how unbelievably grateful I am to have had the opportunity to attend, as well as for everything else the experience has given me. My drive to continue to better myself has risen far higher than I thought possible, and I’ll be coming back every year that I can. A piercer I know once asked me, “How far are you willing to go?” The answer may not be Vegas, but it’s a great start.

SAKU PENTTILA—AL D. SCHOLAR

It really was an honor to be selected as one of the Al D. Scholars this year. The process of applying came to me in the summer of 2016 when I was talking to a friend at a small suspension meeting and he asked if I would be interested in going to the Conference, and of course I was! He told me to contact Andre Nalin when I go to Germany for BMXnet. While there, I had a conversation with him, Nicole Heimes and Marita Wikström (previous Al D. Scholars) and they all told me that I should apply for the scholarship. Coming alone from Finland was the biggest cause of anxiety for me, but after three flights I met Caitlin at the airport and I knew I had made it.

When we had the first meeting with all the other volunteers, I knew that we would rock this year with all those motivated people getting together to make the Conference awesome for all the attendees! Getting used to the climate was impossible though, so I tried to stay indoors as much as possible. I arrived on Thursday, so I got to see what the casino was like before all the attendees started arriving. When the casino started filling with our group, I saw many faces super excited to see other their family and learn from the best of our industry. It made me feel butterflies in my stomach.

Work days were long, but with the volunteers taking care of each other like a little family they were surprisingly easy and FAST! You woke up in the morning and the blink of an eye it was time to go to bed again. The classes were awesome and informative, and I returned home with my head buzzing from all the new techniques and ways to improve myself as a piercer. That was everything I imagined and more! All the pretty people and jewelry! I bought lots of pretties and my first pair of new hooks, which I can’t wait to try out. It really was a great opportunity to make friends and network with people from all around the globe. Meeting your idols face to face is something you never forget. If it would be possible, I would like to live in a Conference all day every day! Thank you to all the attendees for making the Conference unforgettable, and to all the other volunteers for treating me as a part of the family. Love you all!

KIRSTEN JANUSIEWSKI—NO EXCUSES SCHOLAR

The 2017 APP Conference was the best learning and personal development experience that I have had the pleasure of taking part in. Along with five other Scholars, I was awarded the No Excuses Scholarship which was such a memorable, life changing opportunity.

Since starting my latest apprenticeship in March 2016, my goal has been to attend Conference again, but this time with a little more knowledge and confidence. I attended APP Conference for the first time in 2014 and because I lived in Las Vegas, I simply went to classes and went straight home. There was little to no interaction with anyone and I couldn’t help but feel like I was missing out on a major part of my community’s biggest gathering. This year, I made sure to step out of my comfort zone so I could really embrace the community surrounding me and all of the knowledge they were going to pass along. At first, being around so many professional piercers, who I’ve followed for years on social media, was quite intimidating. Although, knowing that I wanted a much richer experience than my first, I had to overcome some personal social struggles. So to break the ice, I made sure to smile and wave at anyone I saw, as well as introduce myself. Everyone was just as nice and receptive to meeting a fellow piercer.

One of the best parts about my week in Vegas was realizing I wasn’t alone and that no matter how early I was in my career, my peers were there for me as well. They made me feel so comfortable and allowed me to pick their brains any chance I got, whether we were sitting by the pool, in a hotel room, or standing by the elevators waiting to go to our next class. Some of my favorite classes this year was Strategic Marking, Navel Piercing: Advanced Fundamentals, and Planning for Success. I also enjoyed the APP Membership Roundtable which answered a lot of questions about becoming a Member and specifications on the requirements.

Coming back to New York to the normal hustle and bustle was a bittersweet feeling. I couldn’t wait to get back and share all the new information and knowledge with my peers and better assist my clients. I was also eager to practice some advanced techniques and improve on current ones. On the other hand, I truly missed everyone I just spent the last week with bonding, swapping stories, and sharing techniques. It is an indescribable comfort to be around so many other like-minded, expressive friends. We all came together to support our industry and expand our knowledge as a collective team. Thank you all for making the 2017 APP Conference unforgettable!

RACHEL HAWLEY—NO EXCUSES SCHOLAR

I want to start off by saying thank you for choosing me for the scholarship. I feel so privileged to have been selected. I took home so much from Conference this year—from the helpful tongue piercing techniques by Ryan Ouellette and his beard-net GoPro ensemble, to Rob Hill’s nonchalant industrial piercing magic. The love and compassion for the industry shown by Elayne Angel and Betsy Reynolds was overwhelming. Alicia Cardenas brought me back to my roots in remembering we are like modern shaman guiding people through their experience or spiritual journey. Being reminded to keep mundane facts in...
teresting for clients was also helpful. Jaymes Lombardi’s speech really hit me hard. I go to work with an entirely different outlook on my job and what it means.

After a week in Las Vegas you’d think I’d come home exhausted, right? WRONG! I was recharged!!! Knowing I am not alone and am a part of something HUGE. Much bigger than any one by. The resources are all there and I now know where to get them. I have a huge list of improvements that I’m excited to make!! Not only did I learn so much in class, but from my peers as well. People I never would’ve met otherwise have expanded my friend circle clear to Croatia!! I plan to set up some trips to go visit my peers and learn from them. If it weren’t for the No Excuses Scholarship I wouldn’t have had these opportunities. I really cannot say thank you enough!

ROGAN WATRAL—NO EXCUSES SCHOLAR

It was somehow the longest, and the shortest week of my year. Also, quite possibly the best week I’ve had all year. I urge anyone who has dreamed of going to the APP Conference as I did, to do whatever’s necessary to make sure you attend as soon as possible. Even if it means selling a kidney (ahaha jk please don’t sue me). Everyone will tell you how life changing it is, but you really can’t understand the weight of that statement until you’re there. Even more so, once you start meeting all the people who shaped this industry was somehow the longest, and the shortest week of my year. Also, quite possibly the best week I’ve had all year. I urge anyone who has dreamed of going to the APP Conference as I did, to do whatever’s necessary to make sure you attend as soon as possible. Even if it means selling a kidney (ahaha jk please don’t sue me). Everyone will tell you how life changing it is, but you really can’t understand the weight of that statement until you’re there. Even more so, once you start meeting all the people who shaped this industry was something I’ll remember and look forward to forever. Hopefully this next year I’ll be able to donate and give back so that others can be so thankful for the No Excuses Scholarship recipients.

VICTENCE AGLAURO-FEBREL—NO EXCUSES SCHOLAR

A year ago I began my pursuit to become a professional body piercer at Blue Star. When I began my journey I had already heard of the APP and its Annual Conference and had already decided it to be one of my goals to aid my learning. Fortunately with the generosity of the No Excuses Scholarship sponsors along with what I was able to save, I was able to finally make it to my first Conference. I was excited for the opportunity I had to help me gain more knowledge.

Being at Conference for the first few days almost seemed unreal. Here I was being given the tools to apply to my career which is being organized by people who have the same goals. Then the same people who organized the event are also the instructors for the classes, there was a definite sense of community that was already there even though many including myself were first timers. The classes were very informative and I can’t wait to apply my ideas at the shop and help it and myself grow. The events that were held after class, especially the ATTB, were a great idea. It gave people the opportunity to spend time and connect with our fellow peers. It was a great way to save money and made sure people didn’t feel like they had to drink just because we were in Vegas. The Banquet was amazing! Seeing everyone dressed up with their fancy jewelry was like prom, but actually fun, plus the food was amazing.

By the end of the week I didn’t want to go home, it almost seemed like the week had flown by. I did want to stop learning. I wanted to keep meeting new people and obviously the pool was a nice to stay at. I hope to be able to make it again and see everyone together again.

GARRETT CRAVEN—NO EXCUSES SCHOLAR

It was my first time attending and also my first experience of anything of this kind. I was also fortunate enough to be accepted as a recipient for the No Excuses Scholarship. A lot of stress lead up to the moment of leaving home and embarking on this adventure. Several people offered their time to try and help prepare me for what lay ahead. It certainly helped paint a picture for me and allowed me to prepare for several things. I had not thought of such as maps of the hotel, a re-usable water bottle (necessity!) and a hoodie for inside the hotel.

Upon arriving I was overwhelmed with confusion and the task of getting situated. Almost immediately I started meeting people which helped assure me I wasn’t alone. The amount of people who were welcoming and inviting was more than I’ve ever encountered in my entire life. That played a large role in calming my nerves as I arrived there not knowing a single person in real life and I’ve never been in that situation before. Without that I feel the week would have been hell. I would have been overwhelmed with the Vegas environment and the chaos of getting from class to class. As each day passed my notebook became filled with scratchy notes as I couldn’t quite write fast enough trying to get every critical word and bit of information that was new to me. I made sure to download the handout from the app as soon as I arrived in each class so when I got back home I could pair that with my notes to really be able to retain all the information. There were so many great classes that I couldn’t pick one which was most helpful. It was literally information overload. I’ve since then printed out all the handouts (and a few from classes I wasn’t able to attend) and paired them with my notes to have a “go-to” or just a refresher here and there. It was truly an unforgettable experience that has changed the way I do almost everything. Jesse Villemaire mentioned something in the sterilization class that hit me then but struck even harder after getting home, “You’ll want to start slow but start from scratch, but just start slow with one change at a time.” Couldn’t be more accurate.

In closing, this Conference is something I am striving to attend for the remainder of my career. Whether to obtain knowledge or meet amazing people you can’t go wrong. When I am able to I will surely donate to any scholarship I can if even just a few dollars. I fear that the people who made it possible for me to attend will never truly know how grateful I am for their donations. It’s hard to even really put to words. I guess it could be somewhat related to someone running up to you and hugging you so tight that you can’t breathe and feel uncom fortable and they give you a big smooch right on the cheek with a huge grin on their face and you’re not really sure why. That’d be my gratitude. Thank you.
“Before he passed away in February of 2001, Al D. Sowers devoted much of his piercing career to the education of piercers. It is only fitting that this scholarship be named for him.”

Gladix Porco, previous scholarship recipient

Be a part of the legacy. Donate to the Al D. Scholarship Program. Donations accepted in any amount.

Want to honor someone? Do it through scholarship. Donate the full amount of a scholarship and earn naming rights for that scholarship. Deadlines apply - see the link below for donation rules.

Change someone's life. Donate today.

Conference Memories on Instagram
Once again the Volunteers did what they needed to in order to provide excellent customer service to our attendees, and perform the tasks so that we could have a successful Conference. Our Al D’s came in to the Conference pretty nervous, maybe more nervous than any other year, but the volunteer group worked it’s magic and soon they were having fun and relaxing along with their fellow volunteers. They worked hard this week and gained new insights and made new friends in the process.

Our Al D. Scholars this year were:
• Alicia Lowe (Canada)
• Cas Willems (Netherlands)
• Erica Martin (Florida)
• Jess Farrar (England)
• Michelle Rose (Tennessee)
• Nina Rennie (Canada)
• Renee McKeith (Michigan)
• Saku Penttilä (Finland)

The APP thanks LeRoi and Intrinsic Body, Inc. for contributing to the Al D. Scholarship fund; and PunkMedics for sponsoring three full scholarships.*

Once again Piercers in our community joined together and contributed to the No Excuses scholarship fund and sent Vicente Aguilar-Ferrell, Misty Alford, Garrett Craven, Kirsten Janusewski, Rachel Hawley, and Ragan Watral to the Conference.

This year we invited back a few of the scholars from previous years who had received outstanding reviews: Dae Jedic, Jose Carlos Salgado, Logan Wright, Hika K, Zach Fitzgerald, Charlie LeBeau, Jane Absinthe, Hannah Bough, Jamie Biggers, Jason Heeney, Maree Fowler, Loreia Bürgen.

Our AV crew was in the classrooms all week: Brian Moeller, Allen Falkner, Aiden Johnson, Paul Rainer, and Shana Gyure. The shifts might be short, but these folks handle one of the most pressure filled roles of the Conference and we thank them for their hard work.

Our community should thank Julie Taylor who heads up our Welcoming and Line Wrangling group – having her smiling face and her team greet the incoming attendees really sets the tone for the week.

The Super Volunteers are our most experienced volunteers. They continue to sacrifice time and energy to this event and the Association, not just at Conference, but largely year round. We try to find the best place to use their set of skills and promote the very best of them.

Our Classroom Supers:
• Seven Wolfe
• Ryan Clark
• Mike Mc

Our Booth Supers:
• Casey Hosch
• Danny Greenwood
• Monica Sabin
• Mark Montgomery
• Ken Seyler
• Dianna Brown
• Andru Rogge
• John Roberson
• Marita Wikström
• Andre Berg
• Jezebel Voulé

Our Registration Supers:
• Kendra Berndt
• Theo Sheffler
• Anna York
• Badur Ramji
• Tiana McGuire
• David Kelso
• Marina Pecorino
• Stephanie Hill
• Ismael Vargas
This was our third year utilizing an onsite app—Shortly assisted this year with the development of the app, launched the Game, took Attendees’ emails, messages, and calls. Cale Belford not only managed the Mentors, but this year set up the Click game on the app. Thanks to both of these volunteers for helping our Conference transition from paper to tech and for helping the Attendees to get the most out of the app.

Our Conference Managers: Will Spencer, Sarah Wooten, and Gus Diamond help me manage the Conference onsite. They are members of the Conference Committee who participate in the planning and implementation of Conference and then work in the trenches along side all the volunteers who help make Conference what it is today.

We thank Megan Naito and Sydney Harbaugh for managing the Volunteer Underground this year—whether they are line wrangling or taking a moment to relieve a volunteer—they’ve always helped me and stepped in a wide variety of roles over the years and missed. Darren Walters has been helping out as volunteers—whether a Board Member or Vendor Liaisons they take on a huge task, but even has been taking care of us all since the first year I attended Conference. I ha...

This year marks the 10th anniversary of Josh Prentice’s death. Badur from PunkMedics commented to me that to many attendees Josh was more than just a memory or an award—he was a young kid, lost before his time. This year we memorialized Josh’s passing with a special pin and a toast at the Banquet dinner. People say that I always give the volunteer award to not just a volunteer, but to a person who has affected me personally. In that context—Seven has been taken care of us all ever since he’s been coming to Conference. Whether it is the contagious smiles and good cheer that trails after him like rainbows and moonbeams or the spiritual grounding of meditation, or the energizing and physical well-being of Yoga, he’s been there supporting anyone and everyone.

Having him smile and wave, provide that hug, or offer you some fresh vegetables instead of that greasy pizza, it’s all part of an unsaid mission—provide support, love, care, change the negative into the positive. Provide energy instead of drain.

He’s become an integral part of our team and seems to have an unending supply of energy, happiness, and laughter. Right now in our industry, we could ALL use more people like him. Right now in this industry we should be aspiring to be more like him. Right now we in this community of Conference Attendees need to be our own form of a very special unicorn. I was deeply humbled. I have volunteered since the first year I attended Conference. I quickly learned that volunteering was an important part of my experience. I wanted to offer my service to such an important event for professional body piercers. Being a part of the volunteer family has taught me the importance of working together, how fulfilling it is to work as a team (as cliché as it sounds), and the love I have for our volunteers. My volunteer work for the APP ranges from helping edit teacher handouts before Conference, helping pack in, managing the classroom door volunteers, offering meditation, teaching yoga, and packing up Conference. I offer meditation and yoga as a reminder to our community to look within. I believe part of being the best piercer you can be is knowing yourself and the Magick you hold within yourself. That Magick passes from us, to the needle, into the jewelry, and finally to the person receiving the piercing. Both the piercer and the client are forever changed by the ritual.

I hold this award, though for me, many people are deserving of this award: Caitlin, the Super Volunteers, the Al D. Volunteer, all the volunteers who help make the Conference. We work together to create this awesome environment every year. We create a safe, uplifting, inspiring, educational space for all to feel welcome. Every year the APP Conference continues to grow. As we grow may we continue to learn, create, inspire, and find balance. We can count on Conference to bring us all together; from all corners of the Earth, to learn, pass on knowledge, and even share hugs. Thank you to all the ducklings and Mama Duck for all the hard work, effort, and love. I feel grateful and I am honored to be a part of this family.
SINGLE BOOTH AWARD
Uzu Organics & Phoenix Revival Jewelry

At this year’s Exposition, Uzu Organics and Phoenix Revival Jewelry won the single booth award with their joint display. Their olive overtones were a hot topic of discussion amongst many Expo-goers. I had the opportunity to interview Cale Belford of Uzu Organics and Dustin Allor of Phoenix Revival Jewelry.

Marina: How long have you been producing body jewelry and how did you get started? Was there a particular inspiration or genesis event?

Uzu Organics: I’ve been making jewelry for years, but began weights for stretched ears about five years ago. I’ve always been a knitter/crocheter and I was looking to try something different with my craft. I love body jewelry (being a piercer, of course) and my goal was to combine my passion for both crochet and jewelry. After a few experimental pieces, friends started making orders with me and it just branched out from there.

Phoenix Revival: No particular genesis. One of my first jobs in the industry when I was 18 was working at Dakota Steel where the Fakir line of body jewelry was produced. I have always created jewelry in one form or another, but about seven years ago I began taking jewelry making classes and started producing some of my own designs for body piercings and stretched ears.

Marina: Are all of your products completely handmade? Do you use any special tools during your process?

Uzu Organics: I’d say about 95% of my product is created with my own hands. I bend the majority of my own brass and titanium, but this last couple of years I’ve been using large gauge hooks to attach some of the pieces to, and though they are handmade, they are not by my hands. I try to keep it from my hands only as much as I possibly can!

Phoenix Revival: The originals are all handmade, but I use a lot of tools. Once I have a master of a design I can make copies, depending on the design. There are tons of special tools used depending on what process I’m using; fabrication versus casting for example. They each have specialized tools, but nothing I make is automated and there are always hands in the process.

Marina: You offer a wide variety of styles and materials. Do you have a personal favorite?

Uzu Organics: I love making the crochet earrings. For a time, it was the only ear jewelry I created. I’ve progressed a lot these last few years and they are looking better than ever! Most of the crochet weights are one of a kind and rarely made twice. I also enjoy making terrarium weights, which I’ve had a line of for the last three years. I have some really great terrarium stuff in the works currently and can’t wait to reveal the pieces for Conference.

Phoenix Revival: I have a favorite process. I really enjoy carving and casting. Carving something out of wax and turning it into metal is pretty awesome.

Marina: Tell us about your booth display.

Uzu Organics: I try to keep it simple and organic, as I don’t want to take away from the pieces themselves. I try to use contrasting colors in the display to visually stimulate the look of the jewelry.

Phoenix Revival: I’m still a pretty small company so compact is key to avoiding hefty fees with the facility. Everything needs to break down and fit in one suitcase and has to display the jewelry nicely. This year I went with picture frames of various sizes that nested in each other for travel and had damask skull backgrounds in them. Piercers were going crazy online about olives, so I decided to have a mini olive bar at the booth. It was a great way to break the ice and get some laughs. The reactions of love or disgust were hilarious. I even had a few brave olive haters try an olive just to make sure their tastes hadn’t changed!

Marina: How was your Expo experience? Do you have anything to share with other small jewelry manufacturers that might be thinking about vending at a future APP Conference and Expo?

Uzu Organics: This was my fourth year vending at Conference and this year I split my booth with someone new (Phoenix Revival Jewelry) and got a different location on the Expo floor. I think moving my booth made a huge impact on sales and people just coming over to look at my product. My booth mate and I also won Best Small Booth! It can defi-
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Marina: How has that unique history influenced the company you are now?

Marina: Tell us a little about the history of Buddha Jewelry Organics. Your website has a synopsis, but it sounds like quite a journey. Tell us more.

Buddha Jewelry Organics: In 1991 Rion began piercing and in 1998 began designing and carving wood jewelry for the original Organics company. During a trip to Bali in 2002, Rion started collaborating with local artisans and Buddha Jewelry Organics was officially established! In 2004 Rion and I partnered personally and professionally. I have always had a love for piercing and jewelry, but came from an international business/fashion background. We quickly realized that our design aesthetics both contrasted and complemented the others in a unique way, and thus the Buddha Jewelry Organics design perspective was born. We have three piercing and tattoo studios in the Seattle area, which give us a unique insight into the studio owner/jewelry buyer perspective, as well as the end client’s experience. Between our studios and traveling often for our jewelry, Rion and I stay pretty hands on. When Cassidi joined our team in 2013, she elevated BJO to new heights. BJO really is a team effort and that collaboration has a wonderful impact on both the direction of the company and our jewelry designs.

Marina: The Expo was good. It was my third year of having a booth and it’s always a learning experience. Learning what designs people connect with and what they pass over, how the reception for different designs changes from year to year. What things I should have left at home and what things I should have made ten more of. I would suggest other small scale jewelers try similar methods of having a display that packs down into one case and to keep notes on what works and what doesn’t so you remember what you want to adjust for future expos.

Marina: Is there anything else you’d like to share with The Point readership?

Uzu Organics: Thank you so much for taking an interest in my company! I'll go from Uzu Organics and Instagram. And I'm always posting on Instagram.

Phoenix Revival: Yeah, olives rule!

Uzu Organics: Like any specialty pieces, it is important to not be aggressive with the jewelry, especially the crochet designs. I suggest keeping them hung on hooks or any other hanging display. There are a couple of studios who have used old picture frames to display the crochet pieces... I find that adorable! You can also just lay them on a flat surface. At home you will want to treat them similarly. Don’t just throw them in a pile with your other stuff as it may damage the threading!

Phoenix Revival: I love working with stones that have flash. Labradorite, spectrolite, moonstone and pietersite are some favorites. At the right angles and in the right light those stones come to life and the wrong angle and light makes them look dull, so adjusting the placement under lights and height in a display case can really change how those stone present. I’d suggest playing around with the placement until you find a spot that highlights the beauty of the stones. I love to work in sterling, which tarnishes. The tarnish can be attractive or not depending on the design and keeping a polishing cloth on hand can help brighten up the silver if the details get lost over time.

At home, storing them in a way that they are protected from elements and not in a pile with other jewelry is going to prolong their life. I am guilty of the pile method myself and I occasionally pay the price with broken jewelry.

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Marina: Do you have any suggestions about how to handle and display your jewelry in studio displays? How about recommendations once your pieces find a forever home?

Uzu Organics: Like any specialty pieces, it is important to not be aggressive with the jewelry, especially the crochet designs. I suggest keeping them hung on hooks or any other hanging display. There are a couple of studios who have used old picture frames to display the crochet pieces... I find that adorable! You can also
comes up with the most amazing ideas. We definitely inspire each other. Cassidi has also brought a new perspective and has had a great impact on our designs as well. There’s definitely a synergy, we’re super blessed to have the small team we do.

Marina: What was the inspiration behind the “Halo” design? What makes this design unique?

Buddha Jewelry Organics: We are slightly obsessed with stones and crystals… shocking right? I have a very edgy, high-fashion point of view and Rion is insanely creative. Our goal was to showcase the raw beauty of the crystalline structure and the stone, but in a very modern structural way. We played around with different variations and combinations until we just knew that we had something we wanted to wear every day. For us, that’s the win.

Marina: Buddha offers a diverse collection of styles. Do you all have any personal favorites?

Kat: I have so many personal favorites, when you design something and see it brought from an idea to a physical creation it’s a sort of birth, and I get attached to those designs. I’m a nerd, I can’t help it. Right now I’m really into our Osiris weights for everyday and of course my pair of Halo weights.

Rion: I wear the Idol plugs almost every day, or the Luxe weights. I also really love the Deco fans.

Cassidi: I love the Muse hoops, I’m obsessed with the crystalline rawness mixed with the streamline metal. I also really love the Deco weights, I can wear them to work and a fancy event, they look great anywhere. I really love anything vintage inspired.

Marina: As a well-known and established jewelry company, do you have any words of wisdom you’d like to share with the other up-and-coming manufacturers in our industry?

Buddha Jewelry Oragnics: Stay true to yourself and your style. The wonderful thing about jewelry is that each designer brings a unique perspective and adds a new dimension.

Marina: Is there anything else you’d like to share with The Point readership?

Buddha Jewelry Organics: We’re just really grateful for all of the continued support! We’re excited to see our industry evolving and look forward to sharing our new collection with everyone!

Will VonDoom’s interview with Michele Knight of Other jewelry is here. Michael collaborated with Paul of Tether to create this year’s Creative Innovators award winner.

### CREATIVE INNOVATOR AWARD

**Tether Jewelry & Other Couture for the “Olympica” Design**

At this year’s Exposition, Tether Jewelry & Other Couture won the Creative Innovator’s Award with their “Olympica” design. This design is available in yellow and rose gold, naked, and obsidian as part of Tether’s Noachis Terra collection. I had the opportunity to interview Paul Shinichi from Tether about this design and his experiences in the Expo.

Marina: This is your second year as a vendor at Conference. How were the two experiences different?

Tether Jewelry: It felt really good my second year to have studios and piercers come to our booth the first day specifically seeking us out, eager & excited to see the new collection. It makes me extremely happy knowing something I designed is bringing someone joy and excitement when they wear it. It feels like I’m on the right path.

Last year I was so nervous, honestly now it is a giant blur. I made some rookie mistakes, but I definitely learned a lot!

From a logistics standpoint, just knowing what to expect this year made it so much easier. We bring quite a bit of inventory to the Expo, so studios can take all the jewels home with them. This year, I had one person specifically handling all jewelry operations and that made everything smoother and quicker. Actually, I would like to shout out to my crew that made everything smoother and quicker. There’s definitely a synergy, we’re super blessed to have them. This year, I had one person specifically handling all jewelry operations and that made everything smoother and quicker. Actually, I would like to shout out to my crew that made everything smoother and quicker.

Noachis Terra and obsidian as part of Tether’s Noachis Terra collection.

Marina: Aside from the Olympica design, do you have a personal favorite in this year’s collection?

Tether Jewelry: I’ve been wanting to design a large gauge hidden hinge ring for quite some time. I just thought ‘wouldn’t it be cool if it was one continuous design and you almost can’t figure out where the seam is, almost like a puzzle?’ After many failed attempts, I finally got it. This design in particular had several iterations because steel is so difficult to work with, especially when you are casting it. What works in gold and silver might not work in steel. It’s a great design idea and I’m already planning more larger-gauge hidden-hinge concepts for next year!

Marina: Tell us about the Olympica design. What makes it so special?

Tether Jewelry: I’ve been wanting to design a large gauge hidden hinge ring for quite some time. I just thought ‘wouldn’t it be cool if it was one continuous design and you almost can’t figure out where the seam is, almost like a puzzle?’ After many failed attempts, I finally got it. This design in particular had several iterations because steel is so difficult to work with, especially when you are casting it. What works in gold and silver might not work in steel. It’s a great design idea and I’m already planning more larger-gauge hidden-hinge concepts for next year!

Marina: Do you have any personal favorites in this year’s collection?

Tether Jewelry: I really wanted to collaborate with someone for this year’s entry. Mike Knight, owner, designer, and jeweler for Other Couture, and I had been sharing little sneak peeks at what we had been working on in months previous. He is someone I have a lot of respect for; he is always pushes to do more innovative and detail oriented work, super inspiring stuff. So it just made sense to work together.

Marina: Aside from the Olympica design, do you have a personal favorite in this year’s collection?
CHOOSING THE PRESIDENT’S AWARD RECIPIENT

JEF SAUNDERS
APP President

Deciding on who should receive the President’s Award seemed like a daunting task to me, until I realized that Derek Lowe hadn’t yet been a recipient of it. I cannot imagine the Association of Professional Piercers without Derek. I believe that one of the reasons the Conference Committee had chosen Derek Lowe as the speaker for our Conference’s Orientation for so long is that Derek embodies so many qualities that we want our organization to represent: strong, rational, mature, friendly and always there when you need him. Derek is a member of the Oversight Committee, and in that position is a resource to the Board offering historical context and insight when necessary. He has been an enormous influence on me as a person, a piercer, and an APP Member. It was truly an honor to be able to present the award to him, and I will always be grateful for the opportunity to do so.

Tether Jewelry: I’m a big fan of the Vitae design. I’m actually wearing them right now. That’s one of the perks of being a designer, designing things for yourself! This design is a nod to my love of marquise cut stones.

Marina: Last year, we asked if you had words of wisdom to share with small manufacturers getting their start in the body modification industry. You answered to “plan for the long game.” Can you expand on that advice?

Tether Jewelry: I am the new guy and I’m still learning how to run this business the best that I can. However, I’m not new to the industry. I’m putting in the time to Tether, much like I did in my piercing career. You need to put in as much time as possible, and just make it work. It can be super challenging at times. I mean, I still drive for Uber on the weekends. Also, it’s not always about designing jewelry. It’s about learning the business side too. I read and listen to a crazy amount of entrepreneurial articles, books, and podcasts. I can make a pretty decent customized spreadsheet now!

The definition of success can vary dramatically from one artist to the next. For me it has changed and evolved over time.

The long game is complicated. Most makers don’t want to make production pieces or outsource and I completely understand why. The long game, in my opinion, rests on the success of brick and mortar studios. If more makers in our industry build interesting products that will sustain a reselling market it’s a win/win. I think there is a huge void in our industry of mid-range retail products that are well made, interesting, and made from steel alloys.

The biggest hurdle for me as a designer was switching my mindset from “I want to make the best quality, most bad-ass jewelry ever” to “I want to make well built, bad-ass jewelry, that studios can sell to a wider audience.”

Marina: Is there anything else you’d like to share with The Point readership?

Tether Jewelry: Do more 14 gauge piercings!
I t was simultaneously the best and the worst week of my life. And as enticing as it would be to redo some of the worst parts of that week, I probably wouldn’t be writing this article if things had gone differently. As it turned out, the series of unfortunate events that led up to, and overlapped Conference, would leave me the most fortunate piercer in the industry.

But first, a fun little flashback to my first Conference in 2015. I was lucky enough to be selected as an Al D scholar and recall watching as Ryan Ouelllette won the Anatometal top prize in the raffle that year. I was in a bad way and got Betsy Reynolds to convince me to see a dentist immediately. Quite reluctantly, I got into an Uber and went to the dentist in Vegas. “Oh, great, the dentist. Again. This time, in Vegas!” This was not my plan. I felt myself unraveling. I repeated the mantra: “This will all be worth it when I win Anatometal.” Soon, I was finished at the dentist (thanks Brian and Betsy) and I got back to my volunteer responsibilities. I received a few much-needed hugs from my volunteer buddies and got back to my room to write my info on my raffle tickets. At 7:07pm, I went back downstairs with 200 tickets in my hand. I figured, at least I’ll go home with “something” by placing them in Wednesday’s raffle. Yet another change of plans! I missed the raffle by seven minutes. I thought the last entry was 8 pm, but now I was seven minutes late.

I remember panicking to my wife on the phone “what if I don’t win on Thursday? I think I may have just wasted a lot of money.” She just kept assuring me, “This will all be worth it when you win Anatometal tomorrow.” I took a deep breath and hoped she was right. That night, I went to bed with my raffle tickets under my pillow, telling them we were destined for great things.

I woke up on Thursday, set-up my classes (as part of my AV responsibilities), did some other things with the tickets that I won, and then went to the Expo floor. As I dropped all of my tickets in the spinning acrylic raffle drum, my head was reeling with all the other things that money could have gone to. The car, the groceries, the rent. I forced those thoughts aside and continued on with my day. As I walked into the Banquet I heard the sounds of Jamiroquai and immediately started dancing. It may have looked like I was enjoying myself, but I was legitimately going crazy in my head trying to work out the probability that I would win. One thing was certain: gambling is not for the faint-of-heart.

Just like that, I was about to pass out again. I guess everyone was just as shocked as me to hear my name called a THIRD time.

I am literally the luckiest piercer alive right now. Just like that, I went from being a nobody, to being a nobody with a ton of Anatometal. ‘Thank goodness for changed plans, running late, and yes, even for excruciating tooth pain. As it turns out, it was all worth it when I won not one, not two, but THREE of the grand prizes from Anatometal.

I can’t help but feel like the whole experience was made more special because it marked the 10 year anniversary of Josh Prentice’s passing. While I didn’t know Josh personally, the volunteers who were fortunate enough to work with him are profoundly affected by his memory. I’m honored to be a Conference volunteer. Thank you Caitlin, for this continued opportunity and to all of the other volunteers for your genuine love. I am so fortunate to be able to surround myself with such amazing people each year at Conference and am honored to call you my friends.

It goes without saying that I can’t thank Anatometal enough for donating these prizes. They have changed my entire life, both on a professional and a personal level.
Charles Gatewood holds a special place in the heart of the body piercing industry. He used his camera to bring what was once private to the masses. He had a very special ability to capture what others viewed as grotesque in the most beautiful ways. After the passing of Charles last year, the Body Piercing Archive knew how important it was to preserve our history as it intertwined with the photography of Charles Gatewood. From this, the 2017 Body Piercing Archive exhibit at the APP Conference was born. We were fortunate enough to have Eva Marie, the “last Gatewood girl” present to lead tours of our exhibit and share her own accounts of her time with Charles. I was able to set some time aside to take one of her docent tours; it was truly the highlight of my Conference week. I have long been a huge fan of Charles’s work and had begun conversing with him regularly just before he passed. Getting the opportunity to listen to someone share their personal accounts of time spent with Charles, beyond what we can read in a book, was absolutely wonderful. Here is what Eva Marie had to say about her experience at Conference.

“I was first introduced to Charles by his friend Steven Leyba, the painter. Steven had approached me asking if he could use images of me for some of his paintings. Here are my requests he said ‘I need up close, in focus, hi-resolution photos of your genitals.’ I was excited for the collaboration, but wasn’t sure who to approach for such an intimate photoshoot. Several days later I got an email saying ‘My dear friend Charles Gatewood agreed to the photos. Why don’t you give him a call?’

Charles and I talked on the phone several times and set up a time to meet at his studio. When I arrived, he gave me a lovely tour of his penthouse apartment and made a pot of tea. We talked for hours discovering we shared similar interests and hobbies. We both loved to make collages from old magazines, write short stories, and take kooky self-portraits. ‘This is a direct hit my dear!’ We agreed to meet once a week on Sundays, then more and more frequently until I was a full time “Gatewood Girl”.

Charles liked to create and go into what he called magic space. He would get bored with traditional pose and shoot models and would turn down most offers for photoshoots unless he felt someone had a spark. Sometimes he would create magic space with something as simple as a scrap piece of fabric, or he’d use the sunlight peeking through the kitchen windows to create patterns of shadow across your face. He would grab an old can of paint and splash some on a piece of black plywood to create an interesting background. When he got a really killer photograph, he would get a creative high, and his eyes would light up and shine. He always insisted there be a bag of toys, props, and accessories somewhere nearby—whether it be goofy sunglasses, studded leather collars, or fuzzy bunny ears. On his living room table, he kept a fresh bouquet of stargazer lilies, his favorite flowers. There would usually be whipped cream, chocolate syrup, candy sprinkles, or spaghetti-o’s on hand, not to snack on, but for messy splosh photoshoots. There was an inflatable kiddie pool in the living room at all times!

Charles and I would sit in the living room, drinking cups of tea, and he would tell me these incredible stories behind his photographs. We would flip through pages of his books and he would grab Wall Street and say ‘Now this is the time I was out with my camera on New Year’s Eve in Manhattan and I got mugged.’ Or pick up True Blood and say ‘This is when a bunch of vampire blood fetishists called me up at 8am for a wild photoshoot that scared even me!’ He would tell me stories about the first time he met Annie Sprinkle and how through her Sprinkle Salon gatherings, he was introduced to Fakir Musafar.

It was amazing to see such an extensive body of his work in one place during this year’s Association of Professional Piercer’s Conference. I was flooded with memories of Two views of the BPA Charles Gatewood exhibit. Visible at the rear in the upper photo is the pavilion containing The Dream Machine.
Charles telling me stories and filled with immense gratitude that I was able to share these stories with so many people from all over the world. Some folks were very familiar with Charles Gatewood's books and art, some had stories to share with me of their time with Charles. For those who weren't as familiar with his work, I think they walked away with a definite idea of the contribution Charles made to the history of body piercing. What I thought was really special was every now and then someone would flip through a book or see one of his collages and say 'Hey, that's me.' I believe Charles was aware of the impact his work had on the Body Piercing Industry. He began photographing pierced people in the '70s after his friend and fellow Hell’s Fire club regular tattoo artist Spider Webb told him that one day piercing would be as popular as tattooing. Charles used to say he made the art he did for the 'True Believers'—the people who choose to live outside societal norms. True Believers for him were the folks who weren't afraid to be different or original, and held conviction in the unconventional lifestyles they lived. I believed photographing people in the piercing industry was so significant for him because to Charles, he had found a very special community of True Believers.

Indeed, he had many true believers in our community, with myself being one of them. It was an honor and pleasure to be able to speak with Eva Marie, while looking at a collection to honor the life and works of Charles Gatewood. I would like to add a special thanks to Paul King, Becky Dill, Matte Erickson, Danielle Greenwood, and Jennifer McMahon for their contributions to this exhibit, without which would have been impossible.

Jennifer McMahon was responsible for building a replica of The Dream Machine which was available to view in the archive display. It brought Charles' vision and the entire display to life. Post conference it was purchased by Steve Joyner and will reside with him as part of his personal collection.
In June of 2016 I was tasked with a project. That project was to curate an exhibit of vintage body jewelry companies and designs. I was both excited and terrified at the same time. This was to be the first project that was solely on my shoulders, but I had the confidence, drive, and belief in this project and myself to know I could do a good job. I also knew I would have to rely on people, which is something I am not very good at.

I decided that the APP Conference in 2016 was the best time to put the word out and try to get people interested. In the following months, there seemed to be little interest, but I pressed on. The Point staff was kind enough to run the advertisement in every issue. At this point, I felt the momentum growing. I also felt my hunger growing and Jerry’s was getting closer. When I got there I ordered 8 deconstructed Reuben sandwiches. I ate one (minus the cheese and Russian dressing) on the way to LAX. The other seven were packed in my bag. You know something? TSA looks at you really strangely when you are delivering sandwiches from LA to Sacramento.

That next week, I received the packages I sent from Good Art and the first Neometal shipment. The next few weeks were filled with photographing, cataloging, organizing, and making museum cards for each piece. During this time, I had sent the Anti-Bling eyelets back to Pat Pruitt for repair and restoration, and kept reaching out to other companies. I had also started teaching myself video editing and how to create intro and outro graphics. Just as I was finishing up with my deliveries, I received another box from Neometal and I got word that I had a box on the way from Body Circle Design. By the time I had received these next items, I had my process streamlined fairly well. Good thing, because Dallas Sussex was right around the corner. Upon returning from Dallas I started wrapping up all the pieces.

May was filled with building display items and totally stressing out. I also managed to secure a meeting/interview with Erik Dakota, so off to Santa Cruz I went. During my visit he also presented me with a stack of old catalogs and a few great stories. When I returned to my shop, I spent several days editing video and putting together the graphics. I actually had to redo this four times! The last time it was all rendered properly and I found a typo. UGH! This project was starting to take its toll on me, but upward I pushed.

June came, there was light at the end of the tunnel. I had reserved a trailer and maintenance on the truck was done. Finally I got word from Becky Dill that the Charles Gatewood exhibit boxes were ready to pick up. I headed down to Concord, CA. It was now a few days before Conference, and during all this I was still receiving little packages here and there. The Friday before Conference I finally heard from Pat Pruitt about the eyelets. He was shipping them directly to Las Vegas!

Saturday, the day before I had to leave for Las Vegas, I had the bright idea to go photograph the Sonoma County Hot Air Balloon Classic. It was being held about an hour away, and I had to be there by 5 a.m. I went and shot the balloons then headed home, picked up the trailer, and was off to work. Most of the day was spent loading the trailer and finishing up details. I finished up at 7:30 p.m. (we close at 8:00 p.m.). My stress levels were at their peak. Did I have enough stuff? Did I do it justice? I ended up getting to bed around midnight.

I was back up at 3:30 a.m. and ready for the road. The trip was as uneventful as usual. A little slower maybe, since I was pulling a trailer, but still uneventful. I finally arrived in Las Vegas at around 3:00 p.m. Unloading was expedient, which was good because I was exhausted. You know, there is something strange that happens at Conference. I was exhausted and road weary, but once I saw the first few people, I felt a second wind come right into old stories and a quick tour of his new shop. Thankfully, I had my GoPro with me and caught it all on video. After about an hour of him telling stories of how it all evolved and who the key players were, he presents a large folder full of vintage Good Art memorabilia and said, “take what you want”. I was like a kid in a candy store. I managed to fill my carry-on bag and still had to send 2 packages to my shop with all the items.

As I was heading to one of my favorite food destinations (Jerry’s Deli in Studio City), I got a call from John Kittell from NeoMetal. He was sending out some items with my next order for the exhibit. At this point, I felt the momentum growing. I also felt my hunger growing and Jerry’s was getting closer. When I got there I ordered 8 deconstructed Reuben sandwiches. I ate one (minus the cheese and Russian dressing) on the way to LAX. The other seven were packed in my bag. You know something? TSA looks at you really strangely when you are delivering sandwiches from LA to Sacramento.

In September, I got a message from Paul King about reaching out to Josh Warner from Good Art HELYWD. I emailed Josh and he wanted to gift us with old Good Art items, however, he was moving to a new shop and was going to be unavailable for a few months. This allowed me to start reaching out to anyone I could think of that was involved in manufacturing. In December I got a message from Anne Ott about the Anti-Bling eyelets; seriously one of the “Holy Grail” pieces from Custom Steel.

As January approached, I had booked a flight to Los Angeles and secured an appointment with Josh Warner. While in L.A., I was meeting Anne to pick up the Anti-Bling eyelets before heading over to Good Art HELYWD. Upon arrival I was met by a grizzly, bearded man with a cheerful disposition. This is Josh. We jump
over me and I was ready to press on into the night.

With Monday came setup and all was going well. The stress was draining away with every piece I put out. At least until I set the TV up. I had purchased it about a month prior and I told the guy at Best Buy that I needed to stream video off a flash drive. He assured me that it would. Well, when I set it up, it would run pictures off a flash drive but not video. Back to stress mode. After a quick run to Walmart for an HDMI cable, I hooked up my trusty laptop to the TV and it worked. Crisis averted.

Tuesday was the first day of the Expo. I picked up my last package from the business center on the way and the first visitors came by to see what we had for sale. They quickly learned we weren’t selling, just displaying. As the week went on, more and more people came by to see the relics. The enthusiasm was intoxicating! So many people had questions and stories. It was educational on both sides.

The highlight of Conference this year, however, came by text. I was having dinner and Becky texted me and said I had won the “Best Multiple Booth” award. I was blown away. I thought I had done a pretty good job, but obviously I wasn’t the only one. I am so thankful to all those that voted for my exhibit, loaned items for display, and supported me while I put this all together. I would also like to give special thanks to Josh Warner (Good Art HLYWD), John Kittell (NeoMetal), Gale Shub (Body Circle Design), Pat Pruitt (Custom Steel/Pat Pruitt Metalsmith), and Erik Dakota for taking the time and effort to gather and donate items. I would also like to thank my family for putting up with me being stressed and cranky for so long. Hard work always pays off!
I would like to start by thanking everyone who contributed to this year’s Body Piercing Archive Fundraising Auction. Your donations went towards the preservation of our living history and the history of those who helped us all get here.

Going into this year’s Conference, I again wanted to come up with items that were functional. For the last several years, I have carried my own jewelry in a protective book for safe and easy transport. When brain-storming ideas for this year’s project, I began to think of all the Conference attendees leaving Vegas with their precious new jewelry acquisitions. So with this year’s Conference, but we will have plenty of other new creations with us as well.

Different from last year, this year’s items were conceived to connect us not just with studios and companies but with our jewelry itself. As sort of a self-acknowledged reminder of the inexorable tie that binds us all.

Studios can open and close, piercers may move all over the world, companies may fade into obscurity. Come what may, however we find ourselves in this industry, we are all bound and driven by the jewelry.

Looking ahead, we have already begun the process of creating fundraising donations for the 2018 Conference. The collection of iconic studio and company shirts from this year yielded more than enough material for next year’s project. We’ll be returning with some of the items that were so popular at last year’s Conference, but we will have plenty of other new creations with us as well.

I am thankful to everyone who has made a purchase or donation on behalf of the BPA. There is no amount of money nor is there any amount of effort that is insignificant in the scramble to save our past before it eludes us. I would like to once again express my gratitude to the Archives Committee for allowing me the opportunity to be of help, however rudimentary it may be, to the APP and its membership.

Yours in service.

APP Membership:
A Glance At The Past & Environmental Criteria Updates for the Future

“The only time you should ever look back is to see how far you’ve come” – Author Unknown

I began volunteering with the Membership Committee in 2009. Originally, I thought each idea I had which I believed would further our mission statement would be a quick and easy change to make. Make the suggestion, state your case, done and done! Volunteering for a non-profit health and safety organization -- one whose membership has grown immensely at the same time body piercing’s popularity has surged -- has taught me change and improvements often come slowly and deliberately.

When I first started with the Membership Committee, our application process consisted of mailing a hard copy application and your video recorded to a disc (or VHS!) to the APP office. Then it got shipped to a volunteer. After being reviewed, it got shipped to a second volunteer for final review. This wasn’t the hardest thing when we were averaging maybe a couple dozen new Members a year. As the number of applicants began to drastically increase, through much work and trial and error, we improved upon the process and have now moved to a strictly online application. This has reduced costs and improved the applicants wait time. We are currently working on utilizing our new website’s features to even further streamline the application process. You’ll hear more about that in the coming months.

This application process was created because it isn’t financially or practically feasible to fly a Membership Committee volunteer to each applicant’s studio to do a walk through for environmental criteria. Similarly, when receiving a complaint about a member breaching their Health & Safety agreement, it is just not feasible to drive across the country (or to another country for that matter) to see for ourselves.

In April of 2017, the Board of Directors informed APP Members of a new update to our Membership Environmental Criteria:

“All piercers working at an APP Member studio (members or non-members) will only use appropriate jewelry for initial piercings as listed in the current APP minimum standard.”

Any use of non-compliant jewelry for initial piercing by any person (member or non-member) in the studio is considered a breach of environmental standards and can be grounds for losing membership.”

The APP Board of Directors and the APP Membership Committee feels this newest standard will help to further spread safe piercing practices and our organization’s mission statement.

If you have any questions in regards to this updated policy please do not hesitate to contact us at membership@safepiercing.org

All members will have until January 1, 2018 to become compliant with this new environmental standard.
PIERCING

ERIK DAKOTA
Interview: Sean Dowdell

City/State: Santa Cruz, CA

Sean Dowdell: Erik, let me start by saying that it is a huge honor to do this interview with you. You have given me and the piercing industry a lot of insightful and innovative years. It has bothered me for several years at this point in my career when I speak to young piercers and most don’t know your name or the incredible contributions and impact you made on our industry.

I have looked up to your work for my entire career and you are honestly one of the most inspirational figures in my piercing world. I feel that this interview is an important part of our industry’s history that I would like my colleagues and peers to read and know.

Can you give us a little background as to how you came to be interested in piercing?

Erik Dakota: I lived and grew up in Santa Cruz, CA. I was going to school for mechanical engineering when piercing started to creep into my life. Early 1980s, Gauntlet was the only real studio on the West Coast. I was using Silver Anchor, non-annealed jewelry and it was loads of fun, haha! I got excited about piercing and seeing what the mind and body was able to overcome. I was very experimental in different communities such as the punk and gothic scenes, and the “nerd” and “BDSM” cultures seemed to come together very naturally in my world of friends. I am straight. However, a lot of my friends and their friends were in the LGBT communities and I was immersed at least on the fringes of that lifestyle. I enjoyed the “Body Play” and seeing what the body was capable of accomplishing and enduring.

There were really no piercing studios at this time other than Gauntlet and everything was really expensive. At the time, us college students couldn’t really afford to play in the piercing world as often as we had wished, so I started getting into manufacturing jewelry myself. I wasn’t around any other actual piercers yet, so I started experimenting on myself and friends by piercing everyone. I wanted to learn more about the technical aspects.

Gregorio Gus had arranged for me and him to watch Elayne Angel pierce down in LA at Gauntlet for the day. This was really my first block of actual piercing knowledge. She was very kind and insightful as to how to perform certain techniques and was extremely helpful. Elayne was really impressed and thrown back because I had actually had my rook pierced and she had never seen one before. Apparently, I invented it which was a shock to me as well. I always assumed someone else had done this, but apparently not!

THE PIERCER THAT EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT, BUT DOESN’T
Sean Dowdell: I think you were a disrupter in the piercing industry and you have pushed the boundaries further than most people know. How do you think that came about?

Erik Dakota: Alan Falkner and I were hanging out and he was a great supporter of mine in pushing me into the field more and more (this was before Alan actually got involved in piercing). This was a really exciting time for me and all of us! Alan eventually went on to be one of the top suspension artists in the world as well. With friends like Alan supporting me and several others, I started to feel more confident about my abilities not only with piercing but with the design and manufacturing of jewelry.

Sean Dowdell: How did you work around the issues of not having standardized jewelry at the time of your learning in the 1980's?

Erik Dakota: By working with Silver Anchor, I realized that there were so many areas that it could improve the design. I wanted to pierce full time and design jewelry. Needles at the time were horrible, we were better off using a 16 penny nail. Gauntlet had their own needles on the market and I didn't like the style of needle that they offered. It was simply not sharp and really difficult to use. So... I started developing my own needle designs and introducing them to the industry. Back in this time, it was so hard to find a simple good needle and today it's almost hard to find a bad one.
Sean Dowdell: Weren’t you involved in creating some of the jewelry standards?

Erik Dakota: Yes, when I started making barbells, I noticed that there were gaps between the barbell shaft and ball, so I designed a countersunk ball. It got rid of issues with fluids and debris getting caught in the gap.

I was the first to introduce the ASTM standards to the industry in my catalog and created lot numbers for full traceability with stainless steel and titanium. I was also the first to “passivate” my stainless steel lots (this means that any deposits left on the steel from the tooling, and improved the overall metal surface; while manufacturing it would be removed). I knew within the medical implants field, the need for this when using ASTM stainless yet sometimes the SS would get rust deposits on it.

Sean Dowdell: Did you ever own a studio and where?

Erik Dakota: I opened the first piercing shop called Anubis Warpus in Santa Cruz and (I didn’t own it, however I helped open it around 1982). This was the same year the Body Manipulations opened in San Francisco as well. I never owned a studio myself; I was much more into the jewelry company Dakota Steel. I had to make a decision by going all in with piercing or all in with jewelry. I chose the jewelry company and decided to pierce on the side.

Dakota Steel did well for quite a few years until I decided that things weren’t going the way I had hoped in my life and the company’s direction was far from what I wanted. I tendered my resignation to Dakota Steel (a company that I founded and poured my life and soul into) in 2000 and founded (Noble Industries) DBA: Lotus Body Jewelry on my own. Around 2008, I decided I had my fill of the jewelry industry. I love piercing, I love making jewelry but at the time I was just over it.

Sean Dowdell: Who was most influential to you in the early years and why?

Erik Dakota: Jim Ward was an enormous inspiration. I was actually able to purchase my first set of Pennington forceps from Jim personally and I thought he was a god.

Sean Dowdell: What type of things did you invent in the 90s that most piercers wouldn’t know?

Erik Dakota: The big 3 were: the Rook piercing, the Daith piercing, and the development of a lot of tools such as small jaw Penningtons, fine tooth serrations on Foerster forceps, ring expanders, and slotted septum clamps.

Sean Dowdell: The Industrial piercing. Yes, for all of you youngsters out there this man invented all of these!

Erik Dakota: Yes, every day. I think about the industry all time. I felt like I was pushed out and if I had the funding I would get back into it in a heartbeat.

Sean Dowdell: What are your current interests and hobbies?

Erik Dakota: I still love to pierce, and cutting and suspension, as much as I can.

Sean Dowdell: What do you think your greatest contribution to the industry has been and why?

Erik Dakota: ASTM Certification for jewelry in our field.

Sean Dowdell: Do you have any regrets?

Erik Dakota: Yes, every day. I think about the industry all time. I felt like I was pushed out and if I had the funding I would get back into it in a heartbeat.

Sean Dowdell: What are you doing now?

Erik Dakota: I went into medical manufacturing. I used everything that I was doing in the jewelry industry and easily moved into the manufacturing departments for a couple of companies. I’m glad to have been a part of the industry for so long and hope it continues to grow.

"JIM WARD WAS AN ENORMOUS INSPIRATION. I WAS ACTUALLY ABLE TO PURCHASE MY FIRST SET OF PENNINGTON FORCEPS FROM JIM PERSONALLY AND I THOUGHT HE WAS A GOD."