

The Nazi lowrider who cried

I was only 19 when I met the Nazi. He was obviously radiant white with blue eyes, with a mop of hair on his head that he probably was too lazy to cut because he was a skinhead. He had sleeves on both his arms with a fat Nazi swastika on his stomach that was as big as his 5'8 frame could fit. I had an eerie feeling walking into this whole situation with him but regardless I had a job to do and it was to take care of him.

At that time, I had been incarcerated for about 4 years since I was 15 years old. I had just got transferred from Juvenile Prison to the big boy penitentiary and I scored a job in the prison infirmary. The only thing I could tell about this inmate was that he had to have been incarcerated since before I was born, and judging from his faded tattoos, they had to have been at least 20 years old. I asked myself if his ass was going to be racist, and I was kind of worried I was going to have to fight him, but only time would tell.

He had been laying in his bed for the last 2 months I had been working in the infirmary. The room stunk of salty urine, and feces, regardless how many times someone came in and cleaned, it was the accumulation of past inmates that had come through the room.

The room was painted with a beautiful backdrop of the garden of Eden, in a way, it was symbolic because it was a way of telling people when they would die, they would go to the garden of Eden. Or maybe some idiot thought that it would honestly give peace to whoever was dying by letting them stare off into the beautiful garden, whatever the reason there was a beautiful garden full of animals and two nude people. The rest of the room was full of shelves that were full of sterile gloves, diapers, towels, cups, paper, and his belongings.

I had been assigned to rotate with other inmates throughout my shift and make sure everyone was taken care of, bathed, changed and comforted. This included me wiping feces, a chore that I hated and will continue to hate even with my own children. It was a job that I had wanted to take at Snake River because I wanted to get out of the hectic stress of living on the complex but also because I wanted to give back, I was tired of feeling like I was useless. So, I thought taking care of the old folks in the prison would suffice that the best way it could, but also to fulfill my own selfish want to practice my socializing. To the average person, you don't think twice about the importance of socializing but to me and a lot of other inmates this mattered, we crave real socializing with normal folks who weren't guards and in this case they were cute nurses, it was a far cry from a bunch of men with testosterone and toxic masculinity.

Now, in dealing with the Nazi, I dreaded every moment, because he would always send me away, wanting someone new to come into the room. Since walking into the room, the first time I knew he was going to be trouble and I was right, nothing I did would suffice or meet the old mans standard. I didn't really know what to feel, maybe I wanted to be angry but I could, I tried to feel sorry but that didn't work. All I could muster up to feel was confusion. Why would someone dislike me? I felt like I was as respectful as I could be and I tried to convince myself it wasn't because I was brown but, in all reality, that was most likely the reason I suspected.

There were times that I was so angry like when he screamed for help because he fell on the floor and he couldn't get up. He refused my help even then, a poor helpless old man.

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Everything inside of me told me to pick his ass up but I knew what his reaction would be. So, I left him, until my white co-worker came and lifted him up, with feces all over him.

This wasn't my first encounter with someone racist, but it was the one that had stuck with me the most through out my life, mostly because this man was a hardcore gang member and to see first had what exactly life in prison would look like was frightening, even if he was a totally opposite of me I could relate because up until then I was half stepping on wanting to change my life. I had no sense on wanting to have a future for myself, I believed that prison was all I could accomplish with my life and I had an ignorance that was fueled by my sociological environment. Now the fact that the old man could sustain his ignorance at his age with the fact that he was living in a shithole was frightening. I was obviously naive and young. I should have known that ignorance knows no boundaries. I mean look at what is going on today with Israel and Palestine, regardless of how people feel, there is no sense in the murder of thousands or for that matter murder in anyone's life but because people are ignorant of many things and specifically human life, there is no boundary on either side. In contrast to my situation, I looked deep within myself and found some compassion towards the Nazi lowrider because I could have easily whooped on the man for the things he said to me or for simply rocking that Swastika loud and proud but there is no sense in hurting anyone, regardless of what they believe, and maybe that's the American in me or that I'm truly compassionate but with that being said yes, he was racist, but I had to understand that the man probably grew up with the hating sentiment towards those different, because regardless what anyone says Hate is taught.

I'll be real though, I didn't think the man would change but I always hoped that he would. To my astonishment, the day came and it's been engraved in me for many reasons and I hope those who read this visualize what I'm about to tell you.

The last few days that the Nazi was alive, he was being treated for hospice. The change was sudden, one day he was talking, then less and less he would yell for someone. He began having trouble bringing the food to his mouth so the inmates had to feed him. That was the day he had gotten my attention when I was doing my nightly checks on patients. He called me over real quiet, with one notion.

He said "Hey brother, I know I have never spoken to you but I want to say sorry. "

I replied "For what?" with a nasty taste in my mouth from hearing him call me brother.

He moved his eyes to meet my gaze, you could see the glassy tint to them and the haziness in his eyes. "For having hate towards you, it's just how I was raised but..." he took a gulp of air to catch his breath and continued "it's not right and I want to get right with god brother."

There was a bit of hesitation in accepting his apology because damn it the man waited till he was dying but I thought to myself if not today than when?

"You know what man, its alright. I understand that you probably grew up different but as long as you make the difference today is all that matters. As they say, love holds no boundaries." When I said that, he smiled.

"Love holds no boundaries." He replied.

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From then on, I would sit with the old man for his last days, we would talk here and there about life but it was hard for him because he would run out of energy. Then he would hallucinate, and the emotion in the room would get sad because he thought he was a kid again and would yell for his father, or his mother

“Mom, mama. Help. Where are you?”

I swear it was the saddest thing to see a old man cry for his mother. You could imagine that at that moment he regressed to becoming a child again, with his tears and wails for his family. Not soon after the old man stopped talking, eating, then drinking and finally he stopped doing anything for his last few days. I would wipe away the tears from his jaundice colored eyes with a napkin and roll him over to make him comfortable.

There was a lot I learned about this experience, like that I never wanted to end up dying in prison, nor die ignorant, or full of hate. I learned that I must see the other side of the conversation and forgive folks for their ignorance. I also learned that regardless of where you are in life or who you are, you can always find a better beaten path to walk on then the one you know.

Now, by then the old man's days were numbered, and finally the day came when he slipped away from reality.

That Nazi lowrider had cried but he was a Nazi no longer.