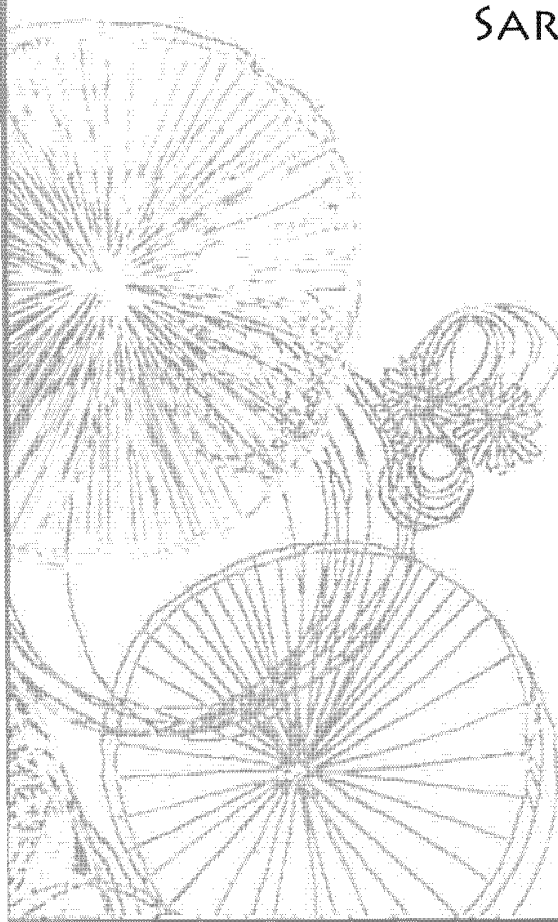


LESSONS IN TRANSLATION

SARAH RHETT



Security had been heightened. Every twenty feet or so stood heavysset men in yellow slickers carrying walkie-talkies and eyeing the kids getting into line. There were gates before the doors, and two people at each gate to pat down ticket holders. Dog collars, wallet chains, and some big piercing had to be removed at the door. We were given the choice of letting the staff confiscate the items, or stepping out of line to stash the artifacts in a car. I was surprised how many let their belongings go. They dropped the bits of metal—potential weapons or hand-hold in a fight—into black garbage sacks before disappearing into the auditorium. Our tickets were precious

to us. They were marked General Admission, and walking away from the venue, even for a moment, meant a deeper separation from the band. All the freaks had come out for the event, and there wasn't a black trench coat among us.

After Marilyn Manson had been forced to strike his Denver show in May from his tour, there had been debate about whether or not this one would be held. The line stretched down the Colfax Avenue face of the Fillmore Auditorium, around the Clark Street side and two blocks beyond the building. As they began to let people in, more concert goers were lining up. Some had to be turned away because they hadn't already bought tickets. Anyone under sixteen was sent away, even the fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds in front of me, even though their parents were accompanying them.

"This is not a movie theatre," a girl in a yellow slicker told the father. She was slight and short, completely undermining her authority. She was only at the front gate to frisk female concert attendees, the concert promoters covering every angle for this concert. "Venue policy, no one under sixteen."

"We've been to concerts here before," the father protested.

"Sorry, sir. They're not allowed in. Says it right there on the ticket."

Their four tickets went up for sale immediately, and were sold quickly.

Everyone behind them fished their driver's licenses out, or ran to cars to get the ID while friends held their spots.

"Doubt they're this tight-assed when fucking Brian Setzer Orchestra plays," someone grumbled "This is bullshit."

My sister, Maz, spent about an hour getting ready, mostly putting on the completely wrong outfit for the event. I gave her a hard time because her music genre of choice generally is dance. Not the good kind, but the crappy repetitive *uhn-tsss uhn-tsss uhn-tsss* kind that is the same damn thing for eight minutes. She had never been to a metal concert, and was afraid to stand out.

"Pull on a black T-shirt and jeans," I told her, rejecting the short, black vinyl skirt and stacked heels. "Boots or sneakers. Nothing opened toe. That's a pretty basic rule."

We were at the venue by three in the afternoon. The doors weren't even going to open until half past six, but we wanted to be close. Only a couple of dozen people were ahead of us, so we were still in the front rows.

"Who are you here for?" the guy in front of me asked. He was a scrawny pasty kid with a grin way too big for his face and bleached blond dreads.

I appreciated his enthusiasm, though I was a bit annoyed that I had to answer the question. I pointed to the T-shirt I was wearing. It was an acquisition for the

Family Values tour, the six band members were pictured and the band name spelt out: RAMMSTEIN.

A security guard walked passed us every fifteen minutes or so, telling us to stay by the wall of the venue. We weren't supposed to block the side walk. We were supposed to stay in single file. As soon as he past we gathered up again and struck up conversations with our neighbors in line. We didn't talk about security, about the likelihood of the concert ending abruptly. We weren't rowdy, just a docile line of metal music lovers. When a man in a yellow slicker with SECURITY emblazoned across his shoulders came around, we scrunched up against the wall, and conversation ended until he passed.

Sound-check could be heard through the brick wall of the building, and we were becoming rather anxious, excited. Childish grins grew on the faces of fans getting to hear the bass thumping of their band, even if it was through brick and mortar, insulation and drywall. Punks with orange Mohawks and tattoos of skulls, black-lipped Goths with pale faces and piercings in their cheeks, and kids like me in T-shirts and jeans could do nothing but smile and speculate about what set they would play, what sort of show they would put on.

I had fallen out of a conversation with the people in front of us, and was looking around to see if I recognized anyone else in

line. It was nearing five o'clock and the line extended behind us too far for me to gauge accurately. When I looked forward again there were some pedestrians hitting up a radio station's booth for give-away schwag. My jaw dropped when two of them turned around. Actually, I did a double-take. I couldn't help staring at the two men fifteen feet in front of me. They were practically in reach.

"Look," I whispered at my sister. I didn't want to draw too much attention.

"What am I looking at?"

"That's Flake and Christoph." I should have just said "band members" for her to understand. "Keyboards and Drums."

They were out of make-up and out of costume: clean-shaven, tall, lanky, Flake's goofy bird-like features and large eyes taking us in through round spectacles. Christoph shuffled his feet, his sharp, angular face pointed down. They could have been just anyone in their button-downs, ties and slacks, and they moved past the crowd of inattentive fans, through the network of fat security guards and current of Denver foot traffic. No one else recognized them, which suited me just fine. I had this vision that if they had been spotted more people, a group of screaming fans would rush after them à la Beatles' fans. It wasn't likely to happen with this crowd, in which showing enthusiasm is not considered cool, but I still had that worry.

"Go." Maz gave me a light shove in their

direction, as they had already started around to walk away.

They moved fast. Maybe they saw me. In a moment they were half a block away, and I was considering sprinting after them. I nearly broke into a run at the thought of getting to meet them. A security guard crossed the sidewalk between the band members and me to talk to a couple uniformed policemen. I kept walking. If I ran, maybe one of the guards would tackle me, maybe arrest me, or just as bad, I would not be allowed into the venue. I slowed my pace a little until I could turn the corner after them. It's all about timing.



Most people hear “columbine” and think of Colorado, that square state right smack-dab in the center of the country. Colorado conjures up a variety of vague ideas itself. They think of skiing and mountains, maybe the Telluride Film Festival, celebrities in Aspen, the Great Sand Dunes. When they hear the word, people probably don't think about the actual columbine: a funky looking flower. Usually it has a white center with blue sepals in a whorl behind it. It's wild. It's beautiful. It's the state flower, but plants are easily forgotten. “Columbine” reminds people of Littleton, unfortunately, though they might not be able to recall the city's name. They think of those two kids who managed

to ruin a lot of lives in a single afternoon.

That's the only summation of the event that fits: lives taken, lives ruined. Fifteen lives (including their own) were lost, but plenty of people were destroyed. I knew the uncle of one of those... Criminals? I still don't know what to call them. No tidy little rude epithet, no matter how vulgar, suits them properly. It's brutal. It's ugly. And why utter their names and let them have their identity? The blame was dispersed almost immediately in the investigation. Fingers pointed at everyone but them: their parents, *The Matrix*, the school district, *Basketball Dairies*, the police department, KMFDM, gun shows, Wal-Mart, Marilyn Mason, the black trench coats they wore, the Internet, society, Rammstein.

The fact that the Columbine Shooting had happened three months before, nearly to the day of the concert, about twenty miles from the venue had not escaped anyone's notice. The band had announced the tour at the beginning of the year. They were lucky to be unknown enough to finish.



What would I have said to them anyway? I didn't speak their language.

I knew what the German lyrics meant because I had sat down with liner notes and a dictionary. Only bad translations were available on the Internet, and my friend learning German in school were useless

then. The band didn't speak English. It didn't matter. Christoph "Doom" Schneider and Christian "Flake" Lorenz had turned the corner at the end of the block and vanished.

I felt sick, crushed, walking back to the line, which had moved in my absence. My sister was kicked out of it because I had the tickets. They were letting people in early, so they could start confiscating metal objects and patting down baggy clothes. The pair of us were bumped to the end of the line.

"Did you talk to them?" Maz asked as we walked down the sidewalk.

I just shook my head.

"What happened?"

I shrugged. "They disappeared."

This was starting to turn into the worst concert ever: way too many fat men in yellow plastic coats, a whole lot of tension, a missed opportunity to meet two of the band members, and now we would be at the back of the auditorium. My face burned. I wanted to kick myself. Why had I gotten out of line?

Slowly we all shifted forward. Maz and I were allowed into the venue without further delays.

The Fillmore Auditorium is set up kind of like a skating rink. There is a sunken polished dance floor in the center, just below the stage, and a four-foot raised platform all around as a sort of mezzanine. To the right of the front doors is a coat-check booth,

where merchandise was being sold, a small bar just beyond it, and a larger bar along the left wall. A few tables were smashed up against the walls on the mezzanine level. The walls and mezzanine carpeting were all black. The stairs down to the wood floor were difficult to see in the pale, faint light cast by the five blue glass chandeliers above. More railing was put up in front of the stage, keeping the fans a fair six feet from the stage. Of course, as people crowded in, the barricade was pushed forward a good two feet despite security's efforts.

People were crowded up against the merchandise table and the bars. The floor was virtually empty. We quickly jumped down the stairs and slid up tight to the barricade.



About a half a year before Rammstein had come through with Korn's Family Value Tour. A video had been produced, which MTV aired one weekend when my sister was home from college. I wanted her to watch it because I had been trying to convey what kind of an experience a Rammstein concert is. I was slightly mortified when Mom said that she wanted to watch it with us, but what was I going to say? So the three of us settled in on the sofa, Dad had no interest whatsoever (his taste in music lies in Classical and the Clancy Brothers with Tommy Makem). Mom got up in the middle of the show, after a Rammstein

song, to get something to drink. Korn's lead singer was finishing an interview, in which he was saying that parents aren't supposed to like his band because the band makes loud, rowdy rock. Mom came in half way through their song.

"Who's this?" she scrunched up her face.

"Korn. They headlined the tour," I explained.

She listened a moment. "I don't like them."

I snickered. "Why?"

"They're boring."



I began to get excited again. We were close enough to the stage that our eyebrows could potentially get singed off when Till Lindemann, Rammstein's lead singer, came out completely alight to perform their namesake song. Fire is a key component of their show. Typically I didn't go for the theatrical bands. I figured that if a band couldn't keep their audience's attention just playing, they weren't worth my time. The show was peripheral in my opinion. Had they been broke and been limited to sound gear and nothing else, I would have still gone to a Rammstein show.

"Who are you here to see?" my sister asked a woman next to us.

"Rammstein, of course," she smiled. It was probably the most logical answer for her

to give, but she was still quite out of place. "I'm Elsie."

We shook her hand and told her our names. She was just taller than my sister, well into her forties, dressed in nice khaki colored slacks and a cream chenille pull over. She looked too sophisticated to be rubbing elbows with unwashed miscreants and us. She was joined by a coworker in her late twenties, dressed in a pair of elastic wasted jeans, a cotton blouse with flowers embroidered at the collar, and white Reebok sneakers.

"Sarah almost met two of them, just before we came in." Maz pointed to me.

"I don't know what I would have said to them. I don't speak German," I shrugged.

"You say *'ich liebe Sich'*," Elsie smiled. "It means 'I love you.'"

I repeated. It came quite naturally.

"You speak German. So you know the lyrics?" I smiled. I was afraid that she would be completely unprepared for the show.

"I'm half Hungarian, half German. I grew up speaking German."

Lights went down and people crowded in.

As the first band (an atrocious excuse for a punk band) began to play, someone started to circle around, trying to make a mosh pit. The Hungarian lady and her co-worker moved up to the sides. When I got hit for the second time by the twirling jackass starting the pit, I moved closer to the circle. I wanted to punch him in the face or trip him. As tough as I

think I am, I am really not. Thankfully, a guy with naturally red hair and a broad build pulled me back into the crowd with a gentle smile, and stood between me and the slam-dancers, who were now starting to pick fights. They were actually shoving people rather and just bumping into them. Two security guys stationed between the stage and the crowd pulled the slam dancers out of the audience. I didn't see them again.



Four-twenty meant one thing for my schoolmates at Centaurus High School: International Toke-Up Day. Weed. Not that most of them needed an excuse to get high, but having a date like 4-20 was irresistible. A third of the student body had not shown up for class. They were too stoned, too lazy, or both to be bothered. Some of the ones who did show up were expecting to meet someone who was dealing or at least holding. By lunch time all transactions were complete, and a couple of my classmates had moved to the football field to get high with the M&Ms (the two fat guys in yellow SECURITY slickers hired, essentially, to protect the school from the student population). A couple of my friends and I skipped out on the second half of the day. It was the fourth or fifth "senior ditch day" my class acknowledged that semester, and to some degree the teachers had given up on keeping us in the building.

It was probably safer not to. We went to my friend C.'s house to hang out and watch TV without benefit of intoxication.

The radio and television stations were tied up with the event unfolding. Forty minutes away in Littleton, another CHS, Columbine High School, had another meaning for 4:20, April 20th, 4-20. Hitler's birthday, or some bullshit. Whatever the translation, it resulted in violence. News was blaring about the Columbine being under lock-down, a shooting inside, a hostage situation. We had had fire drills and tornado drills, but never a lock-down drill.

How does one process this information?



During the second set, my feet barely touched the ground. The crowd had shoved up against the barricade. There was no breathing room, I was wedged shoulder to shoulder, my sister somehow squeezed behind me, and a giant of man probably weighing three hundred pounds or more beside me. Everyone bounced. Even if you didn't want to be jumping, you were taken up into the air, sandwiched between people who did want to. That is to say, everyone but the guy next to me. With his sort of heft he didn't have to move, and apparently he didn't want me to move either. An awkward situation, in which I was being forced to jump, quickly became extremely uncomfortable.

My neighbor, whom I not-so-lovingly called “Fat Bastard” as he looked like Mike Myer’s character in *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me* (a foot taller than me, easily three times my girth, bearded, sweating profusely), leaned his elbow on my shoulder, and started to shove me down. My sister had taken it upon herself to try and gather up my waist-length hair for me to hold on to. I think she was afraid that it would be snatched out by someone else in the audience, but I still don’t quite understand her reasons.

Fat Bastard shoved me down, while I involuntarily moved up and down with the crowd on the other three sides of me, and my head was being yanked back and forth by my dear sister. I was in a bad enough mood, having missed meeting two of the band members, and I wasn’t having any of this. I did not want to die crushed under some whale of a man. I began to elbow Fat Bastard’s flab, and pinch him, the only defenses I had in that tight crowd, in effort to get out from under his arm. He just leaned down harder. I shifted my weight, forcing my sister back. His arm slipped off my shoulder and he stumbled in front of me.

“We’re getting out of here,” Maz and I said together.

We waded through the pulsing crowd, and she didn’t let go of my hair until we were on the stairs up to the raised sides. My scalp ached as I snatched my hair out of Maz’s hands.

“I was trying to get it over your shoulder,” she tried shouting over the music, by way of an apology. I just rolled my eyes and searched for an opening along the rail. Nothing. Fabulous. Missed meeting members, nearly got smothered under Fat Bastard, nearly had my hair torn out by my well-intentioned sister, and now I wasn’t even able to see the stage. I was, to say the least, pissed off.



I had come home from a study group and found my parents in front of the TV, switched to Channel 4. Columbine was omnipresent, seeping into every aspect of life and distorting it. The news, perhaps spurred on by parent groups or who knows what, had taken it upon themselves to broadcast information about the “boys” (as though they could ever be considered innocent and naïve about their actions) and their influences. The investigators rifled through their possessions, finding the paperwork laying out the bulk of their plot, in the most minute detail. They had information down-loaded from the Internet on building pipe bombs, hate propaganda, white-supremacist rhetoric, etc. They found *The Matrix* and *Basketball Diaries* videos, and numerous CDs of heavy rock and metal.

“Among the collection of music the boys listened to were Marilyn Manson, KMFDM and the German metal band Rammstein,” the anchor woman explained (mispronouncing

the name: Ram-steen), “whose lyrics promote violence.”

“You dumb fuckers,” I snarled carelessly at the TV in front of my father and mother. Before I could feel embarrassed, or they could get offended about my language, I continued to rail at the boob-tube. “That’s total bullshit. Why do they always blame the music? There are hundreds of thousands of fans, and those two fucking sons-of-bitches are the only ones who got that bullshit violent message. How the hell does that work? And this idiot is spouting off about how the media is to blame, the media is to blame, the media is to blame. Sweetheart, you are a part of the media. Stop fucking vilifying everyone except those two assholes who committed the crime.”

There was a long awkward pause, punctuated with my sharp inhalation.

“Feeling better?” Dad asked, eyes wide.

I took a deep breath.

“They’re lyrics aren’t violent. It’s a lot like reading Poe or Allende, actually. They’re not like what people are saying. They’re raunchy, yes, but they’re a rock band, you have to expect that. This, this is bullshit,” I jabbed my index finger toward the TV.

“Yeh, I caught that part of your speech.”



Between sets, some of the people on the railing stepped away to get their drinks refilled. Maz and I swooped in quickly. We

were closer to the stage this way than we had been on the rink floor. We were about four feet away from the tower of speakers that poured out God knows how many decibels of sound, and about five feet away from Richard, the guitarist. The band’s shows are a series of fierce impressions: white sparks and orange flames leaving ghostly images, light burns, on retinas; the bass rolling though the subwoofers bulleting against chest and guts; and the treble piercing and tearing through the air. My sister and I were pressed up against the mezzanine railing, nearly pushed through it like a sieve by the force of people behind us. Richard Kruspe just beyond our grasp.

Lights went down. Silence at the end of the set was chased away by murmurs. The subtle sound of lighters flicking on to encourage an encore could not be heard but the warmth and light felt. I belted out one last: “Rammstein!” and my voice broke on the last consonant, but it reverberated through out the auditorium. People cheered, and the murmurs became shouts for another set.

In Colorado, despite some amazing venues (like Red Rocks Amphitheater) we always have the fear of getting abbreviated shows. Most of the time, bands don’t even bother trying to conceal the oxygen tanks. Between songs, sometimes between verses, singers have to take a hit off the tank to compensate for the high altitude. It is not just difficult

for them to sing, but the whole band fatigues easily. Bands that are willing to do two or three encores in low elevation states can only manage a full set and maybe a brief encore. Given everything (mountain altitude, political atmosphere, public attitudes), we wondered if they would take the stage again.

Suddenly a pair of slender arms wrapped around my shoulders. The right wrist was adorned with a fluorescent pink “21+” ID bracelet.

Yeah, drunk people, that’s what I need, I thought to myself as the woman leaned against me. Just don’t puke on me, I pleaded in my head.

“Hi, girls,” this woman said leaning her head against the back of mine. “I’ve got a favor to ask.”

I couldn’t hear what she was saying as she spoke to Maz. My ears were ringing delightfully after being hit for the last forty minutes with loud bass and high treble riffs. The woman withdrew her arms, and Maz pushed me backward. I flailed my arms, trying to grab a hold of the metal railing. I was prepared to pull a full-on five-year-old temper tantrum, clinging to the railing until the show was over, but my fingertips slipped off the bar, and three skinny women closed into the place where we had been standing. They were about a foot taller than me, and drew across the stage like a curtain. I shoved my sister off of me.

“They’ll get us backstage,” Maz explained, taking another step back beyond my arms’ length. I think that she half way expected me to take a swing at her. I half way wanted to.

“Or they lied to you,” I hissed pathetically. My voice was completely shattered from singing and screaming.

As the band took the stage again for the single encore, I paced with my arms folded across my chest. Maz approached me once, but I shrugged her off and strode away. She stood behind the three women, chewing her nails and eyeing me nervously. The night was over, ending rather anti-climatically. I glared at the skinny women dressed scantily in pleather and stilettos, the one who had threaded her arms around my neck was swaying to the music, waving a small yellow card in the air. It was a backstage badge, like the ones Christoph and Flake had been wearing on their lanyards that afternoon.

I stopped pacing. Maybe they were honest, maybe they would get us backstage.



I went shopping with my friend C. a couple of days after we graduated high school, a month and a half before the concert, a month and a half after the Columbine Shooting, but still in the wake and the aftermath. The investigation was still turning up more information on how everything had gone wrong. The school district had

been informed ages before of the “boys” aggressive, hateful behavior. Hind sight is twenty-twenty, administrators shrugged off the accusations about their incompetence.

The news turned out top ten warning signs of your teen being anti-social and psychotic. I matched most of the symptoms: withdrawn from parents, less concerned with school work, angst-ridden, often closes oneself off in their room to listen to heavy rock music, dresses in black. I dare say most of the teenagers I knew fit the “type.” The one symptom I didn’t have was that I was one of the few people I knew who did not own a black duster or trench coat. Apparently that piece of apparel played a pivotal role in those “boys” lives, so much so that anyone who had worn a black trench coat at Centaurus had practically been crucified by classmates, and some school just forbade them.

I was happy to leave that nonsense, and graduation was the easy excuse to sever ties to people who believed everything they heard.

C. was headed to college in Greeley that August while I was taking a year off. We wanted to spend some of the summer together before she buckled down into studies. Often that meant we ended up drinking coffee at Prufrocks Café in Boulder, or kicking around some mall. It was a rainy day, so we ended up at the mall.

She liked shopping in Christian stores

and Hallmark gift stores and I always headed for Hot Topic and the music shops. How we were friends was inexplicable. In most ways we were not alike. She was nearly six-feet tall, blond, awkward and unladylike. I was equally awkward and unladylike, but a bit better at accepting these qualities. I could clean up nicely, and be on my best behavior if I had to, occasionally. She compromised and tried to clean up and be on moderately good behavior. I was always surprised when we’d be in a restaurant and she would let out a rolling belch. Yet it was my swearing that caused her great offense most of the time, along with my boyish attire and penchant for reading Eastern philosophy.

I followed her into one of the Christian supply stores because she wanted to buy the new Veggie Tales DVD. Because we shared a love of *Jeeves and Wooster* and most BBC sit-coms, I let this aspect of her suspended adolescence go by without comment. After all, I am certain I was childish too. I was surprised that the “WWJD?” trend in inspirational apparel had faded away. In its place was “Yes, I believe in God!”

“Kind of a duh-statement, isn’t it?” I smirked looking at a T-shirt with the new trendy logo. I was looking for the price tag because C. thought it would be a good purchase for her.

“Those kids at Columbine were atheists,” the cashier explained. “They shot at Christians

because they believed in God.”

I didn't turn to look at him. I just kept my eyes ahead, searching for the tag.

“Huh,” I laughed to myself when I saw the label stitched to the collar. “DELTA made this T-shirt. I've got a Rammstein shirt put out by the same company.”

One of the thirteen people they had killed, one girl, had been asked before being shot, if she believed in God. She had replied: “Yes, I believe in God!” Now her statement of faith was commercialized, slapped on a T-shirt, sold for \$29.50. How can one profit from this situation?

How is one supposed to process this information?



Dawn, the woman with slender arms and vodka breath, in a white pleather lace-up dress, told me her name. She owned up, and got us backstage passes, scammed off the bouncers.

“Thank you,” I squeaked, my throat aching and feeling torn. She peeled the yellow fiber sticker off the plastic coated backing and slapped it over my heart.

“You girls are totally sweet,” she grinned, setting Maz up with a pass too. “No one was letting us near the stage, so it was really awesome of you to move for us.”

She swayed in her stilettos, towering above me. Her full make up with silver eye

shadow was smeared, her straightened brown hair starting to wave, moistened by sweat and spilled beer.

“How'd you get your passes?” I asked. She had been with two other girls at the railing, and they were now joined by a guy and another girl.

“Oh, the guys,” she casually referred to Rammstein, “came into our work last night.”

“Where do you work?”

“Shotgun Willie's,” one of her companions replied. A gentleman's club.

Conversation stopped as we were ushered up a back staircase to a lounge above the stage.

In my worn down Doc Marten boots, which I had had since the seventh grade, I stood at a scant five-foot-two-inches. I was the shortest person in the after-party. It wouldn't have bothered me so much if there hadn't been so many tall women in vinyl and high heels strutting around oblivious to who the bands were: groupies for the sake of being groupies. My eye-level was right about cleavage-range, and I scanned the room for anything else to look at. I turned around and craned my head up. The band arrived: all six of them, most of them above six feet tall.

Christoph, the drummer, the object of my affection (in my own little teenage obsession), passed by me and slouched into an armchair nearby. Before he could flee again, or I could stop myself, I had approached him. He

smiled lightly, and amiably shook my hand, nodding benignly all the while I spewed forth my adoration and respect for him, his band, and his band's music. It came out as a garbled mesh of words punctuated only by my head bobs, the worn-out pubescent-like breaks in my voice, my right hand gripping his, my left hand waving in gesture. I took one breath at the beginning and a deep gasp at the end.

Politely he smiled wider, and blinked.

"Thank you."

Miraculously I had forgotten Elsie's German lesson, "*ich liebe Sich*," and scurried off to a corner of the lounge to try and die from embarrassment and disbelief.

Maz was already talking to another audience member, who introduced himself as "Pin." His right hand was in a cast because, he told us, he had punched a crack dealer in the face a few days ago and broken a couple of flanges in his hand. Who knows if it was true, but it was a good story. He knew two of the other people at the party: Denver P.D. They were either plain clothes officers or just not on duty. We never learned which, and they left shortly after the band arrived.

"How do you know them?" Maz asked.

Pin was from Monaco and MLK Jr. Drive, a neighborhood in Denver that had been dominated by Bloods. He himself had been a Blood, but reformed and worked with an outreach organization for troubled urban youths. He knew those particular officers

because of his work, but he was familiar with Denver P.D. more broadly from his previous lifestyle.

Till, the lead singer, and Christoph were sitting back on the sofa against the far wall, knocking back salty dogs like they were going out of style. Paul, the second guitarist, was chatting up the vinyl-clad groupies. Oliver, the bassist, had nipped out of the party with the road manager Nikolai and the band's medic Thom to kick around a soccer ball in the alley behind the Fillmore. Flake, the keyboardist, drank beer in a corner and fidgeted with his suit jacket, trapped by a teenage boy who spoke broken German. Richard, the first guitarist, made the rounds. He introduced himself to everyone except Paul's flock.

"Hallo," he smiled at us. He shook Maz's hand, and then mine, then Pin's. "I'm Richard."

"We know," Maz and I blurted out together and giggled, making him laugh too.

"What are your names?" he asked. Not much taller than us, he leaned slightly forward to listen to us, repeated our names as if he really intended to memorize them. "Did you like the show?"

We babbled about how much fun it was, how it was such a good show. He smiled and listened, lighting another cigarette. I then realized he was carrying a Styrofoam cup in his left hand that was not a drinks cup. It was half full of ash and spent cigarette filters.

He drank very little, but smoked enough that most of the time he didn't use a lighter, just lit the next cigarette with the ember of the last. He spent a few moments with us asking us minimal questions in stilted English, and listening patiently, looking interested in what we had to say. I didn't know if he understood us at all, but he made it clear that he was more interested in the fans than the groupies. One of the vinyl-clad women draped herself on him by way of introduction. He shrugged her off, shook her hand, and continued on, chatting with a kid in jeans and Rammstein T-shirts.

Pin hadn't heard of the band from Germany until they were mentioned on the news following Columbine. He didn't consider them much even then until a week and a half before the concert, but he was sold on them now. A skinhead, not a SHARP (SkinHeads Against Racial Prejudice) nor a RASH (Red and Anarchist SkinHead) but a full-on neo-Nazi skinhead, had given him the ticket to the show.

"To be honest, I really wasn't sure about the band until tonight. They're pretty cool."

I nodded involuntarily. I was wondering why the hell he was dealing with a skinhead. Maz blurted out the question for both of us, more tactfully than I would have managed, and Pin laughed.

The skinhead had to do some time in jail,

leaving his pregnant girlfriend behind. She decided that his world wasn't working, so she sought help, and ultimately ended up meeting Pin, who looked after her. The skinhead finished his sentence after the baby was born, and when he found out his girlfriend had been getting help from a black guy he nearly came unglued. When Pin came over to check on her, the two guys talked. As a token of the skinhead's gratitude, he gave Pin a ticket to the concert.

It was a good story, but who knows how true it was.

How does one process this information?
Who cares?

I liked the idea of Rammstein, of music more generally encouraging unity for once, or again. At that time, too often the responsibility for good things never seemed to fall on music.

