

“THE TRUE STORY OF THE KOOTENAI COUNTY TASK FORCE ON HUMAN RELATIONS

BY: NORM GISSEL, ATTORNEY

This statement is in response to the Coeur d' Alene Press editorial of May 29, 2011.

It is sufficient for us to say that we, the KCTFHR, created HREI, we are a major fundraiser for HREI (approximately \$140,000.00 over the term of its existence) and we are a champion of its efforts and goals. HREI has no better friend or ally than the KCTFHR.

Anyone - editorialists included - who suggest otherwise appear to be willfully ignorant of the facts. We are not Cain to their Abel or Brutus to their Caesar.

The editorial states that there is “... too much emphasis from the Task Force on what was, and not enough on what is or what can be.” We take exception to that comment. First of all, much of what the Task Force does is not reported on as the people who we assist or members of the Task Force itself prefer it that way.

As an example, a Task Force Board member in the early 1980s convinced the FBI that Order 1 existed and was a terrorist group. The FBI arrested many members of the Order shortly thereafter, thus ending a crime spree of epic proportions which included armored car robberies, arson, murder and even a declaration of war against the United States. We do not recall that our role in the arrests was ever reported. Nor was this fact –until now- ever mentioned by the Task Force publicly.

In a second example of the Task Force discovering serious criminal activity, a KCTFHR board member and attorney insisted that his client report to the FBI information that the client knew about the Phineas Priesthood and their bombings and bank

robberies in the Spokane Valley in 1987. This report was the key that enabled the FBI to arrest four members of the group thus ending that particular crime spree. The KCTFHR board member testified in that successful criminal trial. Again, we were silent about our relationship and our assistance in bringing these criminals to justice and have not mentioned it until now.

Certain things we do – in fact many things we do – are not released to the press. If we have not mentioned our roles in the arrests of Order 1 and the Phineas Priesthood until now, we can hardly be placing “too much emphasis on what was”.

From time to time since the millennial year 2000, when the Keenan vs. Butler trial occurred we have talked about this trial. We do this for several reasons. The first is that thousands of our neighbors and friends did not live here at the time, and it was a significant cultural moment that our new friends and neighbors should know about. Secondly, we talk about the trial as a warning to any new band of Nazis of their certain fate if they choose to set up activities in this region. Thirdly, and most importantly, the trial and its result is metaphorically more about the future than the past in the sense that if a community can do this, it can do anything to which it puts its mind. It is a message of community empowerment.

The editorial accuses the Task Force of living in the past, which we believe is the same as saying that we are not doing anything now. We agree with the general principal that if you have ceased to be useful it is best to stop what you are doing and do something else. However, in our case the opposite is true. In the last 28 months, there have been 15 significant acts of prejudice, malicious harassment, and hate crimes in the Inland Northwest to say nothing about the attempted bombing of the Martin Luther King Jr. parade in Spokane in January 2011. We have worked hard on these matters and we will continue to do so. Some of these activities we

will talk to the press about, most we will not.

We now turn to the most dismal aspect of the editorial. The editorial states “Constantly reliving the rise and fall of Butler’s pathetic little empire does more than keep the past alive...it provides parasitic modern-day racists with the attention they must have to survive.”

The Task Force has listened to Neville Chamberlain style assertions for all the years of its existence. In fact the comment “If you don’t say anything about the Nazis, they will simply go away” is by far the most common criticism the Task Force hears. The opposite is true and will always be true. The Nazis themselves regard community silence as a cultural affirmation of their atrocious actions and beliefs. The victims of the Nazis also regard community silence as a community’s affirmation of the actions that harm them. In this context, both the Nazis and their victims are right.

To our knowledge the editors of the Press have never argued that we should be silent around child abuse and child abusers, rape and rapists, theft and thieves, murder and murderers, arson and arsonists, etc, etc, etc. But we should be silent around Racists and their criminal activities when they occur? No. No not now and no not ever.

The Task Force is at times a dark and brooding organization as we deal with evil in its pure form. Admittedly we can be hard to understand, and difficult if not impossible to like much of the time. And regrettably we now find ourselves offending the tender sensibilities of the editors of the Press. Apparently, we cannot avoid this and still do our job.

Sometimes it seems as though the Task Force is engaged with the Nazis in a knife fight in a ditch that has lasted 30 years and from

time to time we see and hear people safely on the sidelines holding perfectly chilled glasses of Chardonnay and bits of cheese on toothpicks as they say, “Fight fair Task Force, fight fair.” You can well imagine that this advice when received brings out a complexity of emotions in Task Force members.