

# Bee and me

By Frederick W. Cook



*Bee Stevenson*

## **Introduction:**

I'm writing this with the hopes that others thinking about leaving extremist movements see it, and find a way out, a way to heal, and a way to redemption. I write this full of hope and love and I hope it helps others to see that there is hope and anyone can change for the better. My message to those reading this is;

“A better life, a life of love not hate, a life of mutual respect instead of exclusivity, a life devoid of fear instead of one driven by fear, is waiting. A life without enemies, without conspiracies, a life where you can be you instead of what is expected of you, a life of freedom, is waiting. Once we see the humanity in one another, we see how interconnected each of us are.”

This is sort of a tough one to write, but I feel it's a necessary article, to give credit where it's due in my transformation. If you've read articles about me or saw some of my interviews, you've heard me mention my buddy Bee and how much he played a role in my change, but you don't know the

whole story. You see, I didn't just wake up one morning and say, “Not today Hitler!” and never looked back, it was a process while I was the movement that continued onward after I left. The process began with realizing part of the ideology were false, followed by the lure of the movement dissolving, but that was only the beginning.

Once I'd left the movement, I realized I still harbored a lot of the same extremist ideas about others, I was essentially still indoctrinated by the movement I'd left. Instead of choosing a side, left, right, conservative, liberal, progressive, etcetera, I decided to go onto social media and befriend just about everyone. I began making friends of every race, from many countries, from all religious backgrounds, all viewpoints, sexuality, gender; I imposed no restrictions on who I befriended. I wanted to hear all views, even and especially those diametrically opposite to my own, I wanted to break the indoctrination!

I joined numerous groups and pages from all corners of the globe and interacted with anyone and everyone. Facebook, Instagram and Twitter became a sort of therapy for me, exposure to everything from everywhere, and it was difficult at first, but necessary.

### **A chance meeting:**

I waded through countless groups on Facebook, and believe it or not, I found a very diverse community in the firearms groups. I've always loved training, range time, and collecting old firearms, so I immediately jumped in headfirst. I became an admin of a couple of groups and the other Admins liked me, that's where I met a fellow admin named "Bee." Bee and I told a lot of jokes in the groups and quickly started chatting for hours on end. The crazy thing about this chance encounter, was that Bee was a former black nationalist and I was a former National Socialist.

I can't tell you exactly how or when we initially told each other our pasts, but it was something we joked about often. Both of us having left our respective movements, held onto much of the ideology and politics still, but we felt free to share with each other. We made an agreement to talk, not to allow ourselves to get mad, just express ourselves and try to see things from each other's point of view.

We remained respectful, honest, and firstly sat down to find commonalities in our shared humanity. Everything from physical similarities to certain feelings, hopes, dreams for the future, everything we could think of went into a very long list. Once the list was finished, we went on to discuss important topics, share culture and music, current events through each other's perspectives, views on race, politics, and religion. The more controversial the topic, the more divisive the topic, we wanted to talk about it with one another. So, we sat and genuinely listened to each other and tried to see it from the other perspective.

Inasmuch as we talked, daily for hours at a time in chats, we never yelled, we tried our best to walk in each other's shoes, to see alien points of view and discuss them and rationalize them. We changed each other a lot in those talks, often debating, but we were friends, so no matter how different the viewpoint, we talked each other through it. We explained traumatic experiences to each other and how it influenced who we were, it was just open and honest.

### **Changes:**

Bee rekindled a love of hip hop in me, and I rekindled his love of goth/metal music, it was like that in everything, a total exchange of likes and dislikes. culture, and even fashion. Our list of differences ended up mostly superficial, or without context, misunderstood more so than an actual difference. Our list of similarities was literally in the hundreds on the first night we sat and thought them out together. We both began changing, breaking down anything we held as true that didn't serve us or others, and working to dismantle it. The more we changed the more we became buddies, close as family.

Bee invited me to join an African American gun club he helped run and I met a lot of great people, who were passionate about firearms, safety, training, and range time. We chatted about him visiting and us and meeting my family, rolling in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu in the summer, and having our kids hang out, we were planning. Things weren't always rosy though, me and my family lived in a horrible and cramped apartment at the same time Bee was fighting for child custodial rights against his Ex. We vented to each other about what we were going through, shared advice with each other, and tried to keep one another strong.

### **Darkness and light:**

Everything was soon upended, I was broken mentally as I saw a post on social media by a trusted friend that read; "Bri, bruh, why did you do this, I can't believe it R.I.P." I immediately knew that Bee had done something there was n turning back from, and it was quickly confirmed to me by one of his family members in a message. Bee lost his custody case and on 5/30/2016 walked to a park, sat on a bench and shot himself once in the head and was pronounced dead by the time EMT's got to him. Days after, I laid in my bed, unable to barely form sentences without temporarily numbing myself to respond to my wife and kids.

I didn't want my kids to see me crying which was pretty much off and on all day and night, so I'd pretend to be asleep, spent extra time locked in the bathroom in the shower, hiding beneath covers, etcetera. My wife helped me greatly through my grieving, at the time I didn't have Judaism, so grieving was wholly a personal process.

### **My takeaway:**

Remember, at this point I left National Socialism and a life of hate just years earlier, and was sitting there, broken by the death of a black man for the first time. This was a sobering testament; it gave me context to how much I had changed and how much of an impact Bee had on my life. I suppose his death broke me in a way that led to a lot of revelations, like in my past Bee and me would have been enemies, knowing that, it passed a deluge of tears that my verbiage cannot adequately express.

He was more than a friend, he was a brother to me and the friendship I had with Bee ultimately inspired me to focus on mental health in my studies and work, to not lose another soul to suicide. I would eventually open my own online clinic to help others, through holistic means and mental health care, as well as taking my knowledge of the movement I was a part of, my mental health expertise, and my knowledge of my friendship with Bee and the work we did, that led me to combating extremism. This directly influenced how I talk to others, how I talk to those leaving the movement and wanting a better life free of hate, and how I interact with others every day.

I left Naziism on my own and started the work of change, I'd love to say I pulled myself up by my bootstraps, that I did it alone, but that would be a lie. Leaving that life was merely a step, and important one, but only the first step, change, true and full change came from my friendship with Bee!

It's because of Bee that I am who I am today, it's because of him that I do what I do today in my work. So what did I take away from my years of conversations with Bee?

If we open ourselves to the similarities we have, the humanity, not what the media tells us, or others with an agenda says, connecting to our shared humanity and getting to understand other perceptions, is my biggest takeaway. This is not to say, "don't see race," or other differences, see them and respect them, but acknowledge that those differences are small and often superficial, our humanity is what matters. It's common ground, common humanity, and our connection to one another that is most important.

Judging others based on their differences is poison, when I met Bee he had multicolored hair, large glasses, chains around his neck, gold fronts in his mouth, if I judged him on that, I would have lost an amazing friend. Don't judge others based on superficiality or differences, because that is not who they are, buried beneath the external is a real and whole person to know.

Everyone is struggling with something, no matter how mad, mean, or happy someone seems, you don't know what they're struggling with or how deep their pain is. I learned to treat everyone with kindness, regardless of how they treat me, not only because of their unknown struggle, but also because I treat others how I would want to be treated, not how they treat me. Therefore, I am a pacifist today, even with 32 years in the martial arts and MMA, and much violence in my past.

If people can put aside their differences, honor that we're all human beings, and talk and listen, the world would be a far more beautiful place. The key is listening and trying to understand another person's perspective, even if it doesn't change your perspective, it will help in your understanding of the person. Remember, talking is talking, neither person is trying to influence or get the other mad, nor should anything that's said make one mad. Listen with the intent to absorb, instead of with the intent to respond, that will go a long distance to bridging gaps.

**In conclusion:**

Bee touched the lives of many, but he changed my life, he altered my trajectory in life and my perception of the world around me. He is the reason why I focus on mental health, he is the reason I am so open to and with people, and he is the reason why I have so adamantly combat extremism and anti-Semitism in our world. I honor his memory in my work, I take with me a part of Bee always and in this, his memory will live on.

Brian "Bee" Stevenson - 6/12/1983 – 5/30/2016

If you or someone you know needs to talk, have them call 800-273-8255 the suicide prevention hotline.