

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" culture 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.

"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."

"NEEDLES AT THE TIME WERE HORRIBLE, WE WERE BETTER OFF USING A 16 PENNY NAIL."



"I STILL LOVE TO
PIERCE, AND
CUTTING AND
SUSPENSION, AS
MUCH AS I CAN."



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 tenured 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!

What do you remember about coming up with the Daith piercing and are you surprised by the popularity of something you created?

Erik Dakota: I think that it is all about the jewelry choices that are available now. That has made these specific piercings as popular as they are right now.

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."

