

# SHANNON LARRATT—TWO TRIBUTES



ALLEN FALKNER  
SHAWN PORTER

*Editor's Note:* With the following articles the APP would like to recognize the contributions to the the modification community of BMEzine founder, Shannon Larratt, who apparently took his own life following a long and painful battle with an incurable illness.

## Catalyst to a Community

By Allen Falkner

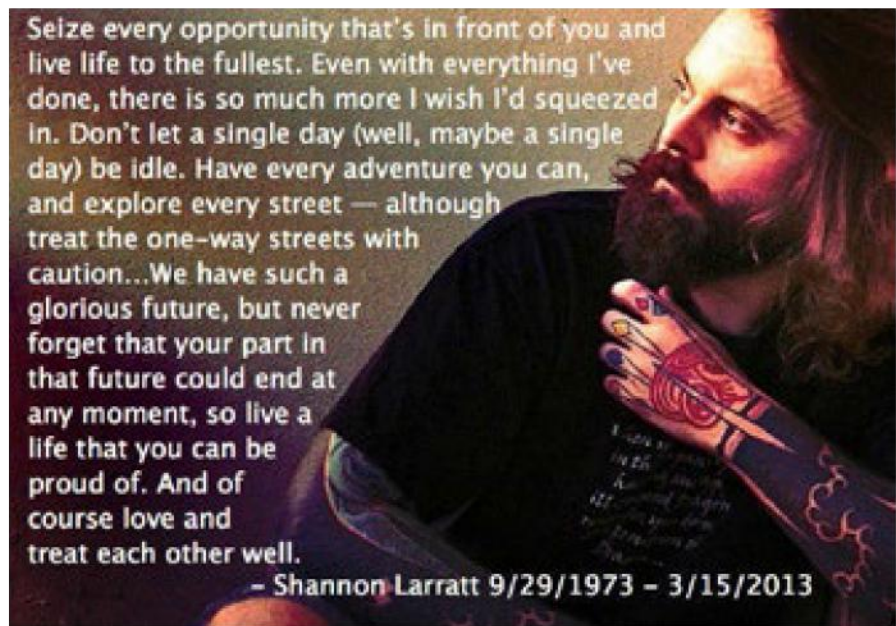
*Editor's Note:* This passage first appeared on *HookLife* on March 19th, 2013.

In life there is a simple truth: We all die. What we do with the time that we have is important. When this mortal coil winds to an end, what is left?

How should one spend their days? For some, it's a pursuit to amass wealth and fortune. Others may seek experience and adventure. Should we quest for glory? Enlightenment? Discover the unknown? Who's to say what is the right path in life? For me, I feel that it is our legacy that holds real value. The people we influence and the lives we change gives meaning to it all. To be remembered and to make a difference is, in my humble opinion, the true measure of one's existence.

Who was *Shannon Larratt*? I feel that there are better people to describe him and to tell his tales. I have no doubt that e-books will be written and memoirs published on his behalf. I want to focus on the community he helped to spawn.

Before Facebook, Myspace, and Friendster (does anyone even remember that one?) Shannon created a little microcosm called Body



Modification Ezine, better known as BMEzine or simply *BME*. As for his intentions of its creation, the story of its progression, and the future of the site; I will leave these topics for the historians to discuss. The reason for this article is to focus on his impact.

What could have been a tiny spark or mere flash in the pan turned into a blazing fire that lit up the lives of people around the globe. Believe it or not, less than two decades ago body modification was much more of an underground activity and—for many—quite taboo. Back then, the World Wide Web was still in its infancy and online communication between modded folks was generally done through Usenet groups. (*Google it.*) It wasn't until sites like BME appeared that the community was able to come together and communicate.

Was it a matter of being in the

right place at the right time or pure genius? Who can say, but it truly was a perfect storm. With the rise of media exposure and the shift from print to digital images people all over the earth could suddenly share their experiences and discuss their passion through sites like BME. A community was born, and it was a revolution. Shannon Larratt was truly a catalyst to a generation. In fact, I think Shannon said best in his *final blog entry*:

*A friend told me once that my role was that of a "catalyst" — that I started fires inside people that helped them to change themselves (or become themselves) in positive way. I feel so lucky to have found myself in that position, and I want to offer my heartfelt thanks for everyone who made that possible. And I'd like to think that even though I was a big puzzle piece in*

*body modification, that I was a smaller but still important puzzle piece in a larger movement of people from all sorts of different subcultures fighting for mutual support in a diverse pantheon of self-expression and dream chasing.*

Shannon, you will be greatly missed by many. Thank you, not only for your unending support of the world of body modification and suspension, but in your constant efforts to uphold people's rights and freedoms and instill confidence and happiness in those of us who are just a little different.

## **Shannon Larratt—An Obituary**

By Shawn Porter

It was because of a memorial that I initially met Shannon Larratt. My mentor had passed away, and new to the ways of social networking I posted a brief obituary on rec.arts.bodyart (R.A.B.) that caught his eye. Shortly after I posted it, he sent me an email: "I didn't know Jack personally, but his list of modifications was impressive. If you'd like to post something on my website, I'd love to have it."

BME was a fledgling at the time. While it was the biggest body modification site on the internet (then and now), it was still hosted on the *~io.org* server and was still severely lacking in content. I replied and, thinking I had just met one of the nicest girls in Canada, our friendship started to develop. "No. Not a girl. I get that alot."

From there, our emails became frequent. At the time, there weren't a lot of people our age interested in heavy body modification; in Shannon, I found a kindred spirit whose willingness to push the boundaries was equal to mine. He was someone who read weird comics, watched weird sci-fi movies, and also had a passion for modification. At the time, I was a paying member of Unique, spending \$70 every six months to meet folks three times my age via a mail exchange service, meeting clandestinely in hotel rooms at tattoo conventions and brought together by our shared interest in modification, but not much else.

I started submitting content to BME to help flesh out the surgical sections, as well as the "advanced" modification section and, eventually received an email from Shannon just shy of a year after Jack's death—and our first interaction—telling me that he was working on something new and needed my help and input. Our mutual desire to expose surgical modification to the masses had WORKED, and more people were becoming interested in extreme modifications than we could have imagined. More surprisingly, it was bringing people with existing modifications out of the woodwork. Photos and videos were pouring in—some even being relayed through me to avoid possible seizure at customs. (At the time most folks

didn't have a scanner for their photos, and digital cameras were still uncommon.) Soon, sections of the site were filling up, and new modifications were being discovered.

There were more people interested in "our" world than we thought possible, and with the anniversary of Jack's passing approaching, Shannon rolled out BME/Extreme, complete with the password "guarding the walls." The price to enter: submit photos of your own advanced modification. Lurkers came out in droves: "I'm not sure if my subincision will get me a password, but..."

From the small communities that had sprung up via postal exchange—Unique, BCQ, Enigma—none of us could have guessed how many people out there were already doing these procedures. Shannon didn't invent the game, but he sure as hell gave us a room to play in. However, these communities were closed, hard to find. They came with a great deal of secrecy, and a signup fee. BME/Extreme leveled the playing field; it turned on all the lights.

I finally met Shannon in person in Detroit, 1998. Lankier than I expected, he emerged from a Greyhound bus with his hood drawn up like a monk and smiling his half smile with a hand extended. "We have to get out of here. Let's find a hotel." It turns out Detroit was much sketchier than he was used to, and he booked us a suite in one of the nicest hotels in the city—earning a few stares from the patrons not used to stretched lobes and heavily visible tattoos. Over the course of the night we talked, and talked. Thankfully, the getting-to-know-you phase of our friendship had happened virtually, so when we met we were able to dive right in and talk shop.

/Extreme was now several years old, and had been joined by its twin /HARD, and Shannon was ready to move on to something new. "So, we've got all of these people talking via /Extreme. What do you think about a modification convention? No hotel rooms or sketchy practitioners...just a chance for people who may not know how to find willing artists to get worked on, and who can show off their modifications for BME?"

Several hours later, MODCon 1998 was being discussed. We decided we would host it in my area of Florida, and BME would fund it. Shannon wanted to contact Joel Peter Witkin (and later, Alejandro Jodorowsky) to document it. The invite list would be strict, the rules stricter, but—finally—our community would have an outlet. We wouldn't feel alone.

While that particular event never happened, a year later MODCon was held in Toronto. To date, it is one of my single proudest moments. It was a monument to Jack's legacy, and a home for people who always felt like outsiders. We met, took photos, performed modifica-

tions, risked life and limb, and even managed to be a bunch of goofball tourists.

The groundwork had been laid to do something bigger, and in 2000 Shannon rolled out the IAM subsite of BME. Inspired by Livejournal, IAM was a diary site where BME readers, unfamiliar with HTML, could start their own home pages free of any stigma from posting body modification content. It was also a tool to increase submissions to BME. From there, the community and the site would grow together.

Thirteen years later I feel that the impact of IAM was Shannon's greatest contribution to the body modification scene. Relationships were forged on that site that remain with thousands of us today: events were planned and friendships—even relationships—made. So much excess that Dionysus would be impressed. ModCon was very niche, but IAM...well, there your nose piercing carried as much weight as someone else's facial tattoos. You had friends all over the world who were there to support you through your hardest times as well as your happiest.

BMEFests happened: Suscons, Zombiethons, Scarwars. The “weirdos”—god bless us—went bowling, gambling, and rafting all while Shannon was constantly one-

upping the site code, the party, or the community. The room he originally provided us grew into a playground.

Over the years my friendship with Shannon evolved. We didn't always agree—far from it. As I got older my views became increasingly conservative, and his progressively more radical. We would butt heads—privately and publicly—about the safety of a procedure or the ethics of a practitioner, but we would always respect the other's opinion and by the end of the argument we would be smiling. We went through good periods and bad together, the balance shifting depending on the year. But through it all, he remained someone whose impact on my life is so thorough that it's impossible to imagine my life without him.

Had you told me almost 18 years ago that one day I'd be writing a memorial for him...

Shannon Larratt passed away in Toronto, Ontario. He was 39 years old and is survived by his daughter Nefarious, his fiancé Caitlyn, and his former wife Rachel—who carries on the BME family of sites. He was so many things to so many people: a mentor, a teacher, an inspiration... but to me, he was my friend.

Rest in Peace, Brother.

