

# AL D. SOWERS—THE MAN BEHIND THE SCHOLARSHIP



**SHORTY CALMA**

*Member, Ink and Pistons*



*Editor's Note: In order to write this article Shorty spoke to Al's colleagues and friends. This article was possible in part to the verbal contributions of Gale Shub of Body Circle, Michaela Grey and David Vidra.*

**T**he annual APP Conference and Expo is something that piercers from all over the world look forward to throughout each year. For many it's the highlight of their year. A time filled with camaraderie between like-minded individuals, catching up with old friends, and making new ones. This is a time of focused learning, with knowledge being shared around the clock, for six solid days, class after class of information, plus the invaluable time at the bar late into the evening. For some less fortunate individuals, the idea of attending Conference is only a pipe dream. But to a small handful of deserving individuals, one man's legacy has made this pipe dream a reality.

Al D. Sowers is a man often men-

tioned by many, but very few know more than a detail or two. Who is he? What did he do that was so deserving of having a scholarship named after him? What did he do to inspire the generations of piercers that he preceded?

Al started his piercing career before piercing was a thing in North America. There is little information available about where he started or who taught him. He was very involved in Seattle's gay/leather scene in the '80s, as were other pioneers of the industry. Al also played an important role in the early days of body jewelry, being one of the go-to piercers for Tom and Gale of Body Circle Designs. He helped to perfect basic designs and create some new ones. In the early '90s, Michaela Grey and Jim Ward began Gauntlet's body piercing seminars teaching body piercing fundamentals to

those that wanted to learn. It was in 1993 that Al signed up for Gauntlet's advanced piercing seminar and met a man named David Vidra. Al and David clicked immediately and became very close, both personally and professionally.

At the same time, many in the community saw a need to come together and organize piercers, addressing new legislation and creating a formal set of standards for our fledgling industry to follow. In 1994 the APP was officially formed. In October of 1995 Al became its first official business member and David became the second. Together Al and David set out to not only help bring piercing to the mainstream and make it a profitable business, but also to make it as safe as possible. Al helped to create and evolve the APP's minimum standards. He pushed to make the proper steril-



Board dinner in Atlanta after meeting at Piercing Experience, 1998



Meeting in New Zealand

ization (autoclaving) of jewelry and tools a minimum requirement. He also suggested that jewelry should always be run in a clean ultrasonic prior to sterilization to remove any manufacturing debris.

In addition to helping set standards he quickly became part of the Board for the APP, serving as secretary for a short time and spearheading local and international outreach. Al and David were known for their ability to think outside of the box and willingness to buck the system in the name of safety. They were always pushing to raise the bar and create the safest possible procedure for the client.

Al was passionate about the necessity for sharing knowledge. He believed that in order for piercers to be successful, they should be appropriately educated and that education should be industry specific. It was that passion which pushed Al to become one of the first industry specific OSHA bloodborne pathogen instructors in Seattle where he also began teaching his own piercing seminars. Along with his local teaching, Al helped develop some of the core curriculum that would be

presented at the annual APP Conference. He also traveled to Europe to help with the piercing movement that was beginning to explode there and teach bloodborne pathogen and infection control procedures.

Al continued working in the industry for many more years, continually pushing to raise standards and mentoring many young piercers. In 2000 he finally retired due to declining health issues and sadly passed in February of 2001. Al's passion

for education is the reason the Association of Professional Piercers decided to honor his memory with a scholarship. This scholarship gives less fortunate but deserving piercers the opportunity to attend Conference, where they can learn and understand new concepts and techniques specific to the piercing industry. Continuing education is a necessity for our industry and if there is any one thing we can learn from Al it is to never settle. Always strive to learn more.

*"Body Circle Designs was founded in 1991 by Tom Finch and Gale Shub, making simple, high-quality, hand-crafted body jewelry for piercers in the Seattle area. The focus was on using only the highest quality surgical steel, simple but beautiful design, and hand-polishing each piece to a flawless mirror finish. Cheap piercing jewelry, poorly made caused too many problems, such as rejection. But quality jewelry was hard to find back then. By working with skilled and experienced piercers such as Fakir, Al D. Sowers and Elayne Angel, we perfected the classic styles of body piercing jewelry and developed many new and innovative designs."* <http://www.bodycircle.com> ©



First meeting of the short-lived European APP in London