

Breeds There A Man...? / Needletail. An extremely verbose and potted history by someone who wasn't even an original member.

Okay, so, I must preface this by saying it was a long time ago, and I have huge gaps in my memory due to a few factors, so, this is just how I remember it. I apologise if I got it wrong and if anyone from the original lineup of BTAM wants to get in touch I'd love to hear from y'all.

I was a HUGE fan of Breeds before I became a member. They started in the early 00's in a period where our little community was kind of going through transitions. The initial rush of everyone's first bands had given way as all the groups broke up and people moved on to different things. (One friend memorably described it to me at the time as 'everyone broke up or sold out'). And as always with hardcore a certain percentage of the crowd left behind their previous ethics with their music taste. I was very disillusioned with something that I'd built my life around.

It was galling to see people move on to the next thing and leave their politics behind. While the bandana thrash and crimethinc era was pretty goddamn naive and frustrating, at least it meant something you know? All the people I used to play shows with either went super crust – which to be fair to lead to some absolutely raging bands – or treated Steven Blush's homophobic nonsensical dirge of a book 'American Hardcore' as a lifestyle bible. I was someone who had spent the last five years devouring anything released on Ebullition and none of it spoke to me.

And into this comes this band that sounds like absolutely everything I love. I'd known Pete from shows a little bit, and was introduced to me by my ex who knew him from online. He seemed young to me, at a jaded 22 or 23, but was just into the absolute coolest stuff. I was super keen to hear what he was doing. I think I heard the demo before I ever saw them but no idea. I do know they played their second and third shows in Albury and Sydney and I thought that was so ridiculous and cool. Like...man, why? Why the hell not?

The demo had a song on it called 'what I see from Mt Flinders' that is still one of the best songs in the genre I've ever heard. I'd put it up against woolworm/angry son by Indian Summer, improv culture kill by Policy of 3 or training wheels by Embassy as one of the classics in the clean guitar/talking part/build to something bigger genre. We only played it once or twice live when I was in the band but I just picked up a guitar and I can still pick it out which is cool.

The initial lineup of BTAM was Pete Shepherdson (Guitar/vox), Emile Askey (drums), and Mike whose last name I never learned (bass). Pete, Emile and I ended up playing with Pete Hyde (Whitehorse) and Tim from Fahrenheit 451 in a chaotic screamo band where Pete H and I just improvised vocals. I literally cannot remember the name of this band, but we played a bunch of shows over a period of a few months before the joke wore thin. Sometime after this I found myself broken up with, not doing anything fulfilling, trying to quiet the noise in my head by playing in as many bands as possible, and ended up straight up asking them if they needed a second guitarist. To my surprise they were stoked to have me on board.

Our first jam was in a bungalow at Emile's parent's house on the Mornington peninsula. I don't know how much we practiced before playing our first couple shows, because it was always a bit seat of your pants, make things up on the spot kind of a thing. My first show with the band would have been at the Tote in May 2004. I have this picture in my head of standing in the hallway there talking to Mike about the Radiohead show the week before, and according to the internet that was April 26, so... Sometime around then we also played a show as a three piece at Good Morning, Captain café on Johnston street. That might have actually been the first show? It was definitely Whitehorse's first show. Not long after that Pete organised a huge festival called Awesomefest, over three days with bands from all over the country. Pete was incredible and just pulling things off like that. It seemed any time anyone said 'nah that won't work' he'd just be like 'why not?' then go ahead and do it. BTAM played that twice and it was the first time we met Alex and Lawrence from John Wayne Gacy Trust Fund, people we would come to do a lot with.

Mike didn't stick around long. In fact he might have been gone by Awesomefest and we possibly played it as a three piece without bass. I think the idea that we would just plug my guitar into a bass amp to fill the void. We were super inspired by that second The Assistant LP at the time. But eventually we recruited Lloyd Wilson on bass. I think Pete just put ads online, I remember meeting him at a show at Pete's parent's house in west Melbourne. He lived super far out of town, was not someone I knew from shows but was an incredibly talented bassplayer in a very unassuming, understated way. Like dude barely even owned his own bass (he shared a rig with his dad who played in a cover band) but could pull these super fluid, melodic parts like something off the first Promise Ring 7"s straight out of thin air.

From here on out it's a bit of a blur. I was experiencing extreme, untreated mental health issues at the time and due to this, and a head injury, big chunks of that time are now just gone from my memory. I know at some point Emile lost interest as the music became less heavy, and we recruited Tom. During this time, Pete, being the completely unstoppable force that he was, just up and taught himself home recording. The recordings that are still out there now were recorded in a couple sessions in rehearsal rooms at Threephase studios in their old building in Brunswick. The guitar intro (which I improvised, trying to rip off the guitar intro to Converge's 'you fail me' LP) and possibly the vocals were done by me and Pete at Midian studios in Richmond.

This was the lineup that toured twice up to NSW and at least once to Brisbane (told you my memory was rooted). The first was with Bene Gesserit, Alex and Lawrence's new band, and holy crap they were good. Kind of Maximillian Colby vibes. That tour ended up with us playing in Tamworth of all places before the four of us driving back in one hit to Melbourne in my two door Hyundai Excel, loaded down with Pete's Fender Twin, my Marshall JCM800 and Ampeg V4 heads, our guitars, and all our other crap. At one point I remember drifting off in the passenger seat, listening to track two of Q and Not U's 'different damage' LP. I woke up in track three, turned to Tom who was at the wheel and said sorry for falling asleep for a second there. Tom replied through gritted teeth 'I've listened to this record THREE TIMES IN A ROW!'

In my mind these shows were sparsely attended (apart from Brisbane) but wild and emotional. At some point I ended up doing vocals for the band as well and we didn't have so much lyrics as 'ideas'. This song is about a particular topic or concept and we would just let go with whatever was on our mind. Pete was definitely turning his gaze outward and showing a really interesting perspective on the big picture without being grossly contrarian or centrist. My lyrics were just selfish, self-pitying crap. Things I'm embarrassed about now. But people seemed to get something from it at the time.

Back in Melbourne a more 'screamo' scene was starting to grow with cool bands like Quebec, Violence Party, She Spits Macabre (who had the most charismatic, wittiest vocalist of them all), the New, and later Majorca. Suddenly we had bands who sounded similar to us we could play with, and people 'younger' than us who were super nice about what we were doing. We ended up doing some killer house shows with these bands, as well as playing these random places like university classrooms that Pete would find and turn in to temporary all ages venues. We never had an exclusively all ages policy but we did try to play as many places as possible that had no age restrictions..

Inspired by 90s hardcore we were always outspoken at our shows. We'd do lyric 'ideas' sheets, or talk about what songs were about. It was something people used to say was special about our shows but to me was just like...that's what hardcore bands do. I do have a fun memory of us doing this and getting made fun of by some hipsters when we played some vice sponsored bullshit, and us just being like 'yo we've got mics, you want to say something?' and then playing blasting feedback every time they tried to reply haha.

By this point I was making okay money and able to buy some cool music gear that backlined the band, and started getting really into using effects pedals. At one point I had five delays on my board. Pete had also moved into a space in Brunswick called Cloud City, your classic punk warehouse turned sharehouse and performance space.

We were also getting somewhat disillusioned with 'screamo' as it became more and more apolitical. I distinctly remember some people watching my friend's band and just talking about how hot their bassist was and me thinking like, do you not get how fucked this is? How have you listened to everything I've been singing about for years and thought that was okay? Of course, I was a complete fucking mess of undiagnosed autism, depression and gender confusion so my only way to respond was through extreme snark and bridge burning. I was an absolute nightmare to be in a band with.

But Pete, who was always the main songwriter, was bringing in these songs that were sounding more like the first Promise Ring LP. He also didn't want to scream anymore. So we decided to rename the band, and became Needletail. The name was picked from a book of Australian native birds Pete had.

We were all on board with this. Tom liked melodic stuff. I was listening to tonnes of shoegaze and noise and it was offering me opportunities to mess around with heaps of loop pedals and drum machines (the Liars record 'drums not dead' was on

constant rotation in my car). Lloyd and I loved all that pitchfork indie stuff at the time as well. I dunno, maybe it seemed like we 'sold out' or 'matured [perjorative]' away from the sound of Breeds but like...why do something like that if you can't do it honestly? It's not like we were chasing triple j airplay by going more melodic or any of that horseshit. It was 100% just what we wanted to do with our time. I honestly don't think anyone gave a shit anyway.

That said, I liked to be an obnoxious arsehole and start to play the intro to one of our older, heavier songs before going into one of our super poppy ones every now and then haha. But I just listened back to the only Breeds stuff that is available online and I'm kind surprised by how much clean guitar there is in there compared to what I remember so maybe it wasn't such a big move anyway. My songs were trying to ripoff Codeine at the time Pete was sounding like 'nothing feels good' anyway.

We also were pretty much all doing other things that enabled other creative outlets. Lloyd still wanted to keep playing heavier screamo stuff and started a band that eventually became Fireships with former Violence Party people. Pete played bass in a straight up hardcore band called Go For Broke. Tom was starting Hobbledehoy records. I was doing improv noise stuff and various other shitty bands.

We made the Needletail record again at Threephase. All our recordings were just made and distributed as CDs. We were adamant that everything should be self-released and available as cheaply as possible, if not free. It was again, something I thought was cool in theory but hard in practice. And then here comes Pete and he just up and does it.

We played a fair few shows in this incarnation. But at a house show in TJ from Majorca (now vocalist in Canine)'s place with Die Die Die from Aotearoa, just before our set Pete sat us down and said he didn't want to do the band any longer. He proposed a final trip up to NSW and then calling it quits.

I can't speak for exactly why, but I do know he was just not interested in that music anymore. Pete was an incredible musician, a ridiculously talented classical guitarist (fun fact: he never played with a pick the entire time we did the band), and he was finishing up his studies and I guess transitioning into another period of life. I do remember he was writing some kind of music thesis at uni analysing the music of Morning Again compared to classical composers which I thought was so cool.

There was no question of continuing without him and I think we all felt it was winding down anyway, so we were happy to end it. We did some NSW shows with Alex and Lawrence's new band, the incredible Eucalypt. I'm pretty sure the songs for the split with them were recorded at the same time as the NT recording and I think the split came out after we broke up? I don't think I ever even had a copy of it.

Our second last show was at an art gallery in Newcastle and I got incredibly sick and finished the set hunched over the toilet with god knows what coming out both ends. Food poisoning from the infamous Hamilton Station mock meat restaurant or culmination of the abuse I'd been doing to myself for years? It seemed kind of fitting for how much I hated myself at the time. Turns out I actually have a severe autoimmune disease. Huh.

We played our last show to a surprising amount of people at Cloud City. I can still picture it in my head: Eucalypt came down to do it and Alex said some really moving things about us during their set. Playing my brand new at the time Fender Jaguar and the bastard thing would just not stay in tune. I traded it for a Jazzmaster not long after. Spontaneously singing along with one of Pete's lines that I absolutely loved and can still hear in my head: "one day I'll be strong enough. One day I'll belong enough".

Tom and I continued trying to make music, doing a very Sarah Kirsch inspired band called Consider This a Threat. Musically it's one of my favourite things I've ever done. But I was just impossible to be in a band, or even friends, with. Tom still does Hobbledehoy and I believe has a kid and lives in QLD. Lloyd did Fireships for a couple years and then that petered out. I'm not sure he did any other music after that. He has a real cute kid and seems happy now, from what I see on social media.

Emile played in Whitehorse for a long while but eventually moved to the US where he is a very successful photographer, artist and uni lecturer. I don't know what happened to Mike, we barely knew each other. He was super nice though.

Pete moved to Aotearoa and we lost contact very soon after the last show. But I heard he was having a great time. I thought I saw him walking down Sydney Road recently but he seems to have just moved away entirely from his life in the Melbourne punk scene and gone on to something else. I hope he's happy because he totally deserves it, and I bet he's doing great at whatever he's focusing on now.

I got my shit together eventually. And now I live with my wife and a couple kids in the same street as one of the houses we used to play shows at. I still do bands and still try to throw everything into every performance the same way we tried to in Breeds/NT. It's getting harder and more painful as I'm getting older and fatter, but it's just never made sense to me to do music any other way.

In one of the bands I play in now, a couple of people have recently come up and spoken to me about both Breeds and NT in glowing terms, and talked about how inspiring it was to them. And that's incredibly flattering and I'm super thankful for them. But to me it's weird. It all just seemed so amateurish, but maybe that was the charm? I dunno. My memories of the time are not really that pleasant. I was a fucking garbage person. I've made my peace with some of the people I really hurt back then, but gee I was a huge piece of shit. It's hard to separate the shame and embarrassment of that from the music unfortunately. If you had to deal with me back then, I'm sorry. I had my reasons but taking them out on the outside world was not fair at all. I can't listen to any of the music from then. But...if people could identify with that pain and anger and confusion and get some solace from it in the same way I could with the bands that literally kept me alive back then? Well, fuck. What an incredible privilege to have been able to do that for someone.

Pete was the heart and soul of the band(s). And just writing this out right now reminds me of how inspiring he was in everything he could do. There were just no barriers to him in what he wanted to achieve. I'm forever grateful I got to be a part of it for such a long time.

Thanks so much for your interest, please feel free to look me up if you have any questions and I'll do my best to remember.

Dase Beard. 14/7/24.