



PIERCING

WITH BRIAN SKELLIE

Interview: Sean Dowdell

Shop: Piercing Experience
City/State: Atlanta, GA (currently living in
Toulouse, France, piercing as a traveling
educator and guest artist.)
Number of Years Piercing: 23

Sean Dowdell: Why did you want to learn to do body piercing and when did it occur to you?

Brian Skellie: My fascination with studying outstanding humans, overcoming limitations, rites of passage, meditation, and body arts developed when I was adolescent in the '80s, and focused on piercing after much research and some careful experimentation.

SD: When did you start body piercing, who taught you, and where?

BS: I was autodidact at first during my initial experiments on my own body and learned more from friends. Searching for appropriate jewelry and training, I met Michael Natali and Jack Yount of Silver Anchor Enterprises in Florida. They helped answer my questions, steady my hand, discuss technical aspects, and supervise more complex procedures. Jack shared a qualitative perspective from his four decades of piercing with me, and we met to interact regularly until he passed away in 1995.

SD: What piercers do you and did you look up to, and why?

BS: Every conscientious piercer who I have interacted with stands in high regard in my pantheon. In particular, those who keep an open mind and pursue the mission of the APP for the benefit of our profession. A few who I hold dear and have had the privilege to interact with and or work alongside are: Jack Yount and Michael Natali, of Silver Anchor and Bravo for helping me get started;

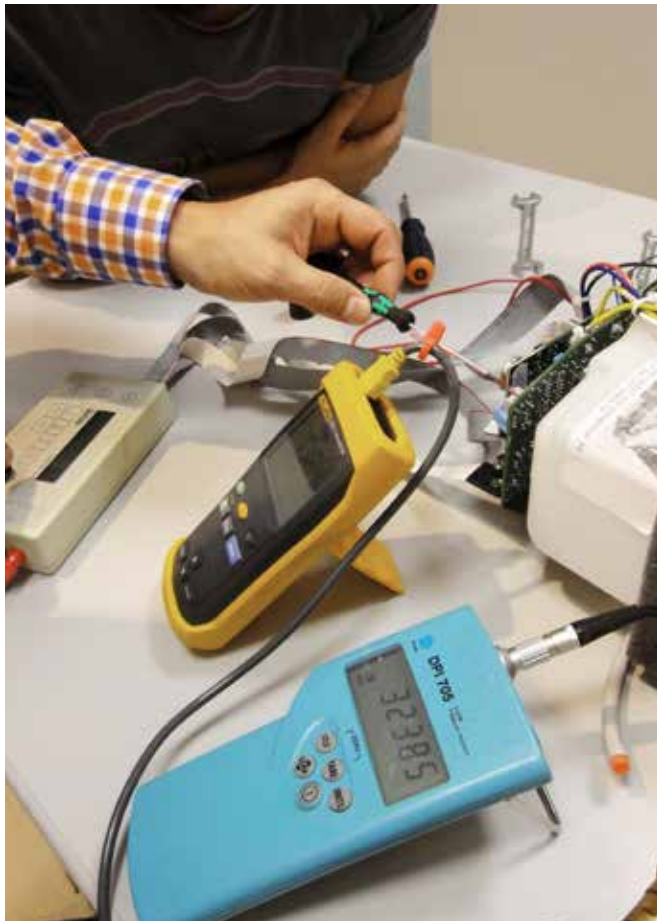
Michaela Grey, for her foresight and determination;
Crystal Cross, formerly of Primeval Body, for her encouragement and proof of concept of a successful small efficient studio;
Karen Hurt, of Future Primitives for sharing her ideas, tastes, and virtues;
Steve Joyner, for his friendship and diligent efforts in regulatory affairs;
Paul King, for his (im)prudence and humanist worldview;
Elayne Angel, for her articulate communication;
Jim Ward and Fakir, for their efforts towards facilitating the trade for others.

SD: Have you ever apprenticed anyone? How did it work out for you and them?

BS: Because of the kindness of my mentors, I have made it part of my mission to share technique and technology with my fellow trade workers. I have invited others to learn with me and put them in contact with my mentors, and helped others start piercing ever since I had more than three years of experience. In reflecting on my first few student piercers, they each reached a turning point where they decided to change careers. My apprentice, Christina Blossey took over Piercing Experience in 2008 when I started to travel frequently as a guest piercer and to teach at more events. Several who came for advanced training with me have gone on to do very well and remain friends whom I respect: Scott Jania, Pat Tidwell, and Christopher Glunt, to name a few.

SD: What would you say you are most known for in the industry and in your place of business?

BS: Safety and technology. The studio has been a place for experimentation and learning, where I was able to apply and develop the concepts of my constant research, along with thoughtful colleagues and friends. Piercing Experience is all about finding practical and graceful solutions to the questions we have in our trade.



SD: You are well known throughout the industry as the expert on many things, but I know you as the guy to ask any questions about Statim Sterilizers. What was it that got you into the equipment side of the industry with Statims, Anodizers, et cetera?

BS: The search for improving methods led to learning more about effective products and equipment. After expressing my curiosity to a few biomedical equipment technicians, I found myself in contact with a few companies and negotiating to get affordable access to the technology that I wanted to use personally. I was able to do so on behalf of several other colleagues, and after a few years, I made an independent infection prevention products dealership of it, with a collection of items that I use and have added a few others related to cleaning and jewelry finishing, such as anodization kits and training.

SD: How has being involved with the APP changed you, and what do you think it has meant to the industry?

BS: Working with the organization has impressed upon me the patience to appreciate greater change over time, and to encourage my colleagues through publication of evidence and well founded theoretical rationale so that they can make educated decisions. When I started, there were very few piercers working with a similar concern for safety standards to whom I could refer clients. I found that unless I was approached by another piercer, that even friendly outreach for constructive criticism was often unwelcome. I've learned to focus on sharing the details and offering them as references for those who want to learn and excel. As disquieting as it is to me when I can see how a fellow tradesperson could make many immediate improvements, I'm pleased to know that they can find evidence based solutions for most of the different safety aspects through the APP, and build their competencies progressively. I still hope that the very next piercing each of my colleagues performs is the safest, most attractive, and fun ever.

SD: Describe what being the President of the APP has done for your career and what do you think you have given back to the industry through your service?

BS: I seem to do the same work as President as before as a board member, perhaps

with a more public determination and accountability. My current board is a dream team to work with, along with their committee volunteers. Sometimes it feels like we are a part of guiding the trade towards a safe harbor.

Sharing ideas to make the piercing experience safe, simple, and gentle has been my platform to interact with the APP. Over the years, my efforts furthering concepts important to me have steadily persuaded more people to seek safe piercers, and many colleagues to employ the diligence due to uphold safety standards that I have been helping to propose and develop.

SD: What do you think are (if any) problems within the piercing industry?

BS: Complacency with what seems good enough, presumption about safety and quality, lack of desire to learn more, and occasionally, we'll find willful negligence. Working with minimum standards should only be the first step towards best practices, not a plateau.

SD: Where would you like to be in five years (pertaining to life and business)?

BS: For certain satisfaction, I'd prefer to be healthy and happy with my family, able to continue helping my colleagues and clients everywhere in the world. Visiting more piercers, and having more workshops, virtual and in person.

SD: What is your favorite piercing to perform and why?

BS: Earlobes are still special to me, since they are often the very first piercing experience one might have. I adore to facilitate that awakening of body and mind for an individual, and delight them with a safe, graceful, and fun process along with lovely jewelry.

SD: Are there any procedures that still make you nervous to perform and why?

BS: I am confident that there are no procedures that I know of themselves that make me uncomfortable. However, I still get to participate in the excitement a client has for a new piercing, and in some cases that can be trying.



SD: What do you think is something positive that comes from the piercing industry?

BS: Our trade has matured considerably over the past decades, and has given plenty of individuals a means of feeling beauty and accomplishment. We can encourage the benefits of personal self-image and a sense of community through our work.

SD: What would you like other piercers to know that they might not know about you?

BS: I'm here to encourage, not to mandate. Equality is my goal, without prejudice.

SD: Being a veteran piercer, what advice do you think that most new piercers should be aware of as they climb into this industry?

BS: Don't take anyone's word for something on authority. Question everything and come up with evidence to support or refute ideas. Realize that it is difficult, if not impossible to prove a negative, so focus on what you can do positively and constructively.

Competence with safety precautions for the worker and client should be the primary focus for a novice, which covers avoiding infection, injury, and mistakes of accuracy. Make sure to frequently observe and to be observed by more experienced persons. Learn from your mistakes, and especially from the history of mistakes others have made.

SD: Is there anything you wish to learn or get better at in the piercing industry?

BS: Time management for my customers and family, of which a major part is improving my support staff.

SD: What are you currently doing and where?

BS: Learning and sharing ideas everywhere there is interest, sales operations from my base in Toulouse, piercing as a guest in Europe and the US, and working on projects for the APP.

SD: What made you decide to move to France and when?

BS: I moved to Barcelona with my wife when we started to plan a family, and then to the South of France when the opportunity to be closer to her roots presented itself. It has been a few years now, and we have two children are growing up bilingual and open to cultural differences.

SD: I have taught in Europe many times, and I am curious to what you think is different in the piercing industry there versus the United States.

BS: Apart from conventional differences of the most common instruments and type of sharps used, it seems relatively harmonious with my experience in the U.S. and South America. There are some impressively sophisticated studios and experienced professionals, and in addition some that make the extra effort to carry excellent jewelry, which is often imported. There are not so many European manufacturers that have yet made jewelry to meet the APP minimum standards for initial piercing.

Like everywhere else I've visited, there are also many isolated workers who don't yet know how to meet safety standards due to fragmentation in the trade and language barriers, yet are eager to learn. You don't know what you don't know. There are those who don't feel that standards created in another country or language should apply to their situation, so I invest my efforts in making evidence and rationale available for colleagues.