Ex-Nazi Takes a Different Role

By Hank Burchard
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It wasn't until he became an ex-Nazi that John Patler began to understand what life is like for those fellow minority Americans he used to vilify in the hate magazine he edited as a member of George Lincoln Rockwell's American Nazi Party.

Now the former Nazi captain has resumed his original Greek name of John Patsalos and—while waiting to find out if he will go to prison as the convicted murderer of Rockwell—has founded a newspaper to serve the Washington area's growing Spanish-speaking minority.

Patsalos, 32, is confident that he will get at least a new trial when the case goes before the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals in its October term.

"I am innocent," he says softly. "The trial was a circus." So serene is his confidence that the American judicial system will uphold him that Patsalos appears to be almost bored talking about the case.

What he's really interested in is El Pueblo (The People), which went on sale May 5 with an initial printing of 2,500 copies. It's supposed to sell for a quarter, but mostly it is given away.

El Pueblo, Patsalos hopes, will not only give Spanish-speaking people information they need but because it is printed in both Spanish and English, will serve as a bridge across the language barrier.

"It's the first constructive thing I've done," he said, speaking with an undertone of the accent he picked up in his boyhood in New York's Spanish Harlem. "I grew up fighting, hating people. Even in the Marine Corps guys would call me a greasy Greek (here he ran his hand through his long, lustrous, black, non-greasy hair).

I thought they were right, that I was inferior. I thought I was dark and ugly (he's olive-skinned and handsome) and I felt bad because I didn't have blue eyes (his eyes are light brown clear, and compelling).

"The one I really hated was myself. I don't know why I joined the Nazis. I think it was a kind of attempted suicide. Man, the stuff we did, I could have been killed (at Nazi rallies and demonstrations, Patler was always at or near the point where trouble started).

"I was like Dan Burros (a storm trooper who shot himself to death when the New York Times revealed his Jewish parentage), trying to destroy myself." (Burros also was a 'super Nazi"; he, Patler and two young men of Polish descent were the early mainstays of the party).

"I realized I was going to end up like Dan (Patsalos paused and picked at some imaginary lint on his dark-blue, pin-striped bell-bottom trousers), but my head stayed messed up a long time after I got out.

"This hate, it's like a virus, it's a disease, only it eats up your spirit instead of your body (Patler had started to say "soul" instead of "spirit," by he no longer follows the Greek Orthodox faith of his father. "I was down on my knees all the time when I was a boy.")

"You know, I even married a big blonde, blue-eyed German girl, my first wife, trying to get away from my own heritage."

After a divorce, his first wife returned to New York with their two sons. Patsalos and his second wife live in an integrated building in Far Northwest with their sons, Mark, 6, and Nick, 3. Mark's teacher is black, and Patler's glad; Mark's doing very well in school.

During the more than two years his appeal has been pending, Patsalos has worked for an advertising agency, for his father-in-law's television repair shop, as a waiter and has operated a mail-order business from his home. He's now freelancing as an artist.

He made the rounds of area colleges attempting to enroll as a student, but was turned down "because I was John Patler (even those who prosecuted him acknowledge his intelligence.

"I passed all the tests, met all the requirements, but they'd keep putting me off. I must have tried for 40 jobs during the same time, and everything was fine until they'd make the connection. I felt like a black man looking for a job, getting every reason but the real one.

"So I changed my name back to the Greek and went out and got a job right away."

Patsalos is suspected by some of faking his "conversion" in order to influence his court appeal. But several persons who have long known him say he really is what he appears to have become.