

1. You were the guitarist/vocalist of the northern Virginia death metal band WITCH-HUNT from 1992-1999. Are you in contact with your former bandmates Erik and Seth at all?

My brother Ben, who was the band's original drummer and active with Witch Hunt from August 1992 until July 1995, is obviously in contact with me on a regular basis. He was 16 when he left the band, and the only reason he left was because my father, who was a Marine officer, was transferred from Virginia to North Carolina, and as a minor my brother had to go with my parents. I remained in Virginia for university, which is how I was able to stay in-state and not leave for North Carolina as well. Ben played with another band or two in NC, but nothing equaling Witch Hunt's achievements. He graduated high school in 1999, then did his bachelor's degree in sociology and Spanish at Radford University in Virginia. He finished that in 2001, then did his master's degree in sociology at the University of South Florida in Tampa. By the time he finished his master's degree, he'd gotten married and was commissioning in the Army. From 2003 until 2005 he was in the Army and stationed in Colorado, but got medically discharged after a major spinal injury during a training exercise. His wife, who was in the Air Force, was reassigned to Cape Canaveral, Florida around that time, so they moved back to Florida, where they'd met and where she had family. While they were in Florida, Ben got his law degree at the University of Florida at Gainesville, then began both teaching undergraduate classes as well as working for his own legal firm, which he created around 2010 shortly after passing the Florida Bar Exam. They got divorced a couple of years ago and his kids live in Arlington, Virginia with the ex, but Ben sees and talks to them all the time, and he's continued living in Tampa doing his thing.

Erik Sayenga (who played bass from 1994-1995 and then drums from 1995 until the band broke up in the early 2000s) and I first met in July 1994. His parents split up in Key Largo, Florida and his mom moved up to Virginia, where she had family. That's how we met, and Erik and I were inseparable from the time he joined the band in July 1994 until I left it in September 1997, even though we had been drifting apart as friends for about a year leading up to my departure from Witch Hunt. It was nothing nasty when we stopped hanging out; just a simple case of two guys with very different life plans going their separate directions. I also think, looking back on it, that we were both frustrated with each other. Erik could see that I was moving more into my college studies and wanting to take a different career path, and that must have saddened him, since I had been so into the band and metal during the first two years we knew each other. And I was upset when I could see that he and I weren't going to be as close once my life starting moving in that new direction- I had assumed we'd be able to maintain our tightness even if I wasn't in the band, but it just didn't happen. So I think we were both disappointed in the other to a certain extent. Still, to his credit, Erik did keep me in his life for a period of time after that, I think out of respect for what we once shared. He kept me updated on stuff Witch Hunt was doing until he left the band, and once he was involved with Dying Fetus from 2001-2005, he used to give me tee-shirts from their tours and stuff like that. I was really happy to see him succeed at that level and get to live out his dream- especially since I never got to tour or receive the kind of public adoration he got in Fetus, so it was great to hear about his experiences, like the first time they played in Japan, or when they opened for Morbid Angel in Mexico City, or when they played in Wacken on the main stage for the first time in front of 40,000+ people. We haven't been in touch as much the

last few years. When I last spoke to him, he was working for Geico doing IT-related stuff, I believe, and was married.

Seth Newton played bass in Witch Hunt from July 1995 until the band broke up in the early 2000s. He also played keyboards and some guitars on the band's second album, *Souls Enshroud Fire*. Seth was an interesting character. He and Erik met each other when they were both in high school in 1994. Erik had just moved to Virginia and was starting 11th grade, and Seth was already a senior, though I have the feeling he barely went to class! He was like the character Matthew McConaughey plays in *Dazed and Confused*. If you've seen the movie, you'll understand what I mean. Just this cool, long-haired dude who had hilarious stories and did a lot of hanging out. Seth was a guitarist, though not a very good one, and when Ben left the band in July 1995 and Erik changed from bass to drums, we needed a new bassist. The only person Erik knew who looked cool enough to do it (we wanted someone skinny with long hair) was Seth, and I remember the first time we had him over to Erik's place to jam with us, it was horrible. But he had a basic sense of timing and looked cool as hell, and was a really fun guy to hang out with, so we decided to teach him the basic bass parts and keep him turned down low, so he couldn't do much damage to the sound until he was able to improve. Plus, we had shows lined up and needed a full lineup, so Seth's presence in the band kept us moving forward. Over time, Seth ended up becoming a better guitarist than me, oddly. The guy practiced constantly, and it was clear he really cared about his performance and the quality of Witch Hunt's music. It was cool to see him progress in that way. Listen to the band's second album- you'll hear the guitar work and songwriting he did there. He and Erik recorded that entire album on their own, a labor that took them the better part of two years, I think, to accomplish. I never thought they'd actually finish it, and when it came out and I first heard it, I was amazed at the quality of what they'd done. Since then, Seth and I have been in very little contact. I saw him a few times in 2003, and talked to him on the phone in 2007. My brother Ben and I both got a Facebook message from him two years ago. We wrote him back but never heard more from Seth. As far as I know, he's in the Boston area managing a construction firm, married and doing well for himself.

2. Early in their inception, WITCH-HUNT released four demo tapes - *First Kill*, *Born Dead*, *Fearless* and *Darkened Salvation*. Share with us some information about these rather unknown pieces of work.

Ben and I recorded *First Kill* in December 1992 at Pierce Recording Studios in Arlington, Virginia. The place no longer exists. I have a really cool story about how we came to record that demo. In summer 1992, I got my first Cannibal Corpse record, which was *Butchered at Birth*. I think they had already released *Tomb of the Mutilated* at that point, but somehow I ended up getting *Butchered* first. I saw they were on Metal Blade, and even though Witch Hunt was brand new and I knew we were still sucked, I decided to write a letter to the label and pitch our project to them, thinking maybe they'd be impressed. Three weeks later, in October 1992, I was literally on the toilet when the phone rang... My brother answered it... He started screaming, "Brian, Metal Blade is on the phone!! They wanna talk to you!!" So I went flying downstairs, pants around my ankles, and got on the phone. It was Marco Barbieri himself, who headed A&R at Metal Blade at the time. He was REALLY influential. I got on the phone and he said, "Send us a demo, here's the address..." Man, I was totally certain we'd scored a record deal, and the demo was just a

formality. That was supremely naïve of me, but that's how you think when you're 16 and just got a call from The Man. So we scheduled studio time at the cheapest place we could find and my mom drove us up one Saturday in December 1992 to record. We laid down three songs in a few hours, live-to-DAT- and walked out with our first demo. It sucked- I mean, even at the time, I knew we'd done a poor job. But we did the best we could, and that's all we could do. I sent it to Metal Blade and we got a rejection letter back from Marco a few weeks later. It said, "Good effort, but it's not there yet. Keep working on it." He wrote the rejection note in his own handwriting, though, which was really cool of him. It was a personal touch that still inspired us even though we were being rejected. But we felt like Marco had taken an intimate interest in us as a young band, and that meant a lot to Ben and I. I kept that letter and still have it today.

That's what led to the second demo, *Born Dead*, which we recorded in late spring 1993. There are both good and bad things about that demo. On the one hand, if you listen to it compared to *First Kill*, you can see we made a HUGE leap forward in terms of performance and sound. WE recorded it at the same place as the first demo, Pierce Recording, but we had made huge strides forward in the preceding months. I think we listened back to *First Kill* and realized we'd never go anywhere if that's the best we could do. We practiced more, and started tightening up our songwriting. Also, it helped that for *Born Dead*, we actually tracked the songs, instead of recording everything live-to-DAT. Ben and I did the drums and scratch guitars, then I went back and recorded the guitars again, plus the bass, and did the vocals separately. The final effort was considerably more polished. This was the first demo we ever "marketed" to the underground fanzine scene, with our first-ever published review being in a Maryland-based 'zine called *Chainletter*. The guy who ran *Chainletter* was named Mark Gonce, and he was the drummer in a band called Corpsegrinder, whose vocalist was none other than George Fisher from Cannibal Corpse. That's how he got his nickname, as the singer for Corpsegrinder. We also got onto our first radio programs this way; to my knowledge, the first time Witch Hunt was on the radio was on a college program in Copenhagen, Denmark. They sent us a cassette tape with the episode recorded. It was cool. We don't speak Danish, but could understand every time they said Witch Hunt's name, then played one of the songs from the *Born Dead* demo. We were sandwiched between Deceased's "13 Frightened Souls" and a Macabre song. I still have that tape. I remember sitting there with my mom listening to it, and her eyes bugged out when she realized her sons were being played on the radio in northern Europe. Not bad for a couple of kids in the pre-Internet age. But the demo had a bad side as well: the songs were totally bite-offs of Cannibal Corpse, and I'm still ashamed of the song titles: "Born Dead" and "Blessed are the Sick". I'm amazed that I thought it was ok to use those titles, especially the latter, knowing they were already taken by bands way more famous and accomplished than us. But I was a 16-year old kid trying to do his thing, and in my head I thought we were just emulating our metal idols. We just were extremely unoriginal, still finding our sound and learning how things worked.

Fearless, which we recorded in December 1993, came about due to a mixture of many things... You can listen to that demo and hear that it's got a very crossover/hardcore feel to it. In mid-1993, Ben and I decided to call it quits with Witch Hunt. We had been recording and performing as a two-man band and weren't really able to get shows or anything, so got tired and wanted to do something else. During the short time the band wasn't active; I joined a group in Woodbridge, Virginia called Open Defiance. They were AMAZING, this thrash/hardcore blend that was like an edgier version of early Biohazard but with cooler lyrics and better grooves and riffs. They had

a lot of personality and ego issues in the band and were already about to break up right as I was joining, so after two gigs with them the whole thing imploded. It was the first time I realized metal could also be jumpy and a bit looser, just playing to the grooves. Up 'til then, I'd always thought it had to be technical, since bands like Death, Deicide, and Cannibal Corpse were all very technical in their own right, and that was the style we'd been hoping to copy up to that point. Open Defiance taught me that it can be fun to play simpler stuff that still crushes. Interestingly, the bassist in that band was Jennifer Arroyo, who later went on to play for Kittie (she's in their interview segments in the *Get Thrashed* documentary, though Jennifer doesn't talk much in them) and then formed a band with Billy from Biohazard called Suicide City. So the songs on *Fearless* were very hardcore-inspired. I think the songwriting on that demo is really solid, but the sound left a lot to be desired. That was the last one we recorded at Pierce Recording Studios in Arlington, Virginia. We had gotten tired of hauling Ben's drums everywhere, so before we recorded this demo, we called the studio and asked them if they had some drum equipment we could borrow for the recording. They said no problem. So when we got there, they loaned us this snare drum that had some problem with the head, and after the studio tech told us he fixed it, we went ahead and recorded. Even when we were laying the songs, I could sense something was right about the sound of the snare, but we went ahead anyhow, assuming we could "mix it out" in the end. Bad move. The snare sounded at best wimpy, and at worst like the snare on *St. Anger*, in the final recording. The snare sound totally distracted from everything else we'd done right on that demo, and we felt it ruined the demo. But once we'd finished, it was too late. We'd already used the studio time and didn't have money to pay for more, so we walked out that day with a product we weren't happy with.

We didn't record again until about a year later, in December 1994, after Erik Sayenga joined the band on bass. That's when we did the *Darkened Salvation* demo. It's ironic that you refer to it as "unknown" in your question, since this is still the recording Witch Hunt is probably best-known for. We recorded it at Neptune Recording Studios in Occoquan, Virginia, where a lot of great local bands were recording at the time. It was a 16-track studio and we were ready to step it up to the next level sound-wise. The drums were low in the mix, but other than that, the recording was done as well as it could be given the time we had and the technology present in the mid-1990s for an underground band. We were really pleased with the result. It was also the first time any Witch Hunt songs used harmonies in the guitar parts, and you can hear what a huge difference it makes in the overall listen-ability. Once we finished *Darkened Salvation*, we knew we had something special, and began marketing it immediately. We pushed the hell out of that demo. This was all in the pre-Internet age, when promotion was done by regular mail through networks of contacts in the global underground. We moved 25,000 mail ads for that demo, which people distro'd for us all over the world. That made our name into a semi-household term in the underground around 1994-1995, even if most people never heard our music at the time. We ultimately got that demo into fanzines in 33 countries, radio programs in over 15, and small-scale distro in something like 20 countries. Again, in the pre-Internet age, this was a big deal for an underground band. We sent out hundreds of free promo copies to anyone who wanted them at our own expense, played many shows on the local club scene and the copies we did sell (in-person or through our own mail order), we practically gave away, keeping the cost low enough to cover our basic expenses and that's it. We probably moved, in total, about 1,000 copies of that demo, and it made a big mark. First of all, it got the attention of important people who started to support us. For instance, in the mid-1990s the band Immolation had a manager named Chris

Forbes, who also ran a New Jersey-based fanzine called *Metal Core*. At the time, it was one of the most important fanzines in the world, had a huge distro, and was a place where lots of labels took their cues for what was up and coming in the scene. He was a friend of mine and liked *Darkened Salvation* enough to do an interview with me for issue #18 of the mag, saying that he thought we were the “next band that will get a record deal”. This was one of the things that scored us the record deal with X-Rated Records in Mexico in 1996, which is the label that later released both of Witch Hunt’s CDs. Second, people still remember *Darkened Salvation*, and over the years I hear all these little stories. For instance, in 1996, Erik Sayenga joined Dying Fetus for the first time. He was with them during summer 1996 for their first-ever US/Canada tour, then hung around for another few months doing one-off shows with them on the east coast, while simultaneously playing with Witch Hunt. In autumn 1996, they went up to play a weekend of shows in Brooklyn. While there, Erik met some guy in a record store, and when the guy found out Erik played for Witch Hunt as well, he was like, “Dude, your *Darkened Salvation* demo is the reason I started playing guitar!” Years later, when my brother was in the Army and stationed in Colorado, he went into a music store one day and ran into some teenagers with Cannibal Corpse shirts. He started talking to them, saying how we’d seen Corpse play in 1994 on The Bleeding tour, and he asked them what other bands they liked. One of them said Witch Hunt. Ben told them he was the original drummer, and they didn’t believe him. He had to get on the store’s internet and make them look at his photos on some old fan site that doesn’t exist now. The kid specifically cited *Darkened Salvation* as his favorite recording of the band. And in 2011, I moved to Ciudad Juarez, Mexico for work. After a few weeks there, I went to a local death metal show in this really, really nasty club called La Cueva. There was a guy there selling merchandise for his small record label, and we started talking. I mentioned I’d played for a band, and he asked me which one. I told him Witch Hunt. The dude about jumped out of his skin- he goes, “Man, my wife and I were listening to *Darkened Salvation* yesterday and wondering what happened to you guys!” All of a sudden, I had a small line of Mexicans wanting photos with me! It was hilarious but cool to be remembered for that recording, since it was the best one we did in my opinion. I think that beyond the copies of the demo we put into circulation, a lot of second-and-third hand dubs were made and traveled all over the place, which is how all these random people ended up having it.

3. In 1996, WITCH-HUNT released their debut album *Prophecies of a Great Plague on the little-known label X-Rated Records. How do you look back today on this excellent, under-produced effort?*

Thanks for the compliment, Nicholas. That was a really tough time for the band and you can hear it reflected in the recording, but the songs were good overall.

I first met Mathias from XRR in 1993. We did some tape and merchandise trades thru the mail, and I found him to be a very honest and likeable guy, so we started establishing a relationship. He’s German by birth, and lived most of his early life in Germany, but started traveling and eventually fell in love with a woman in Mexico, so moved there to marry her. He ran XRR in Germany just as distro label, so when he moved to Mexico he took all the stuff with him and kept on doing it there as well. He had a really good rep for being a straight-up guy, and once we did the DS demo and he saw how hard we’d worked on our own to promote it, he approached me

in early 1996 asking if we'd like to record a CD, to be the first release on XRR as he made his transition to record label. Of course, we jumped at the opportunity, and did the whole thing on just a "handshake through the mail", no contracts or anything. I didn't even know what Mathias looked like. We just trusted him since he'd always been cool. It also helped that Frank Rini, who was singing for Internal Bleeding at the time, told me he liked Mathias and trusted him for a new band like us. So that pretty much sealed it. Frank was always very underground-savvy, so his approval meant a lot in terms of reputation. Mathias said that if we paid for the recording, he'd cover all the packaging and distro costs of promoting the CD, and would give us 200 of every 1,000 copies pressed, which we could then use to sell and recoup expenses. It was a good deal, the best any band like us could get in the mid-1990s, when metal was hitting a low in the market. So we took him up on it.

We should have recorded at Neptune, where we did *Darkened Salvation*. Instead, we thought we needed to go to a 24-track studio. In theory, this made sense. But in reality, we made a bad move. First of all, 24 tracks is a lot more sound to manage, so mixing was more complicated. We had little money to pay for the recording, which meant little time in the studio, and we ended up eating tons of time up just trying to get sounds in each channel right, instead of being able to focus on playing the songs and getting our performance right. Second and perhaps more important, we didn't realize that a place like Neptune was better because lots of metal bands recorded there and the staff was metal-friendly. They knew what they were doing. We assumed that a studio is a studio, so what's the difference? Big mistake. The engineer there, a guy named Pete Evick who now plays in Bret Michaels' solo band, was still getting his feet wet in recording metal bands at the time so had some difficulty delivering the sound we wanted, though I know he tried his very best and we never faulted him for trying. The sound on the recording is extremely compressed, which I think Pete believed would work well for a band like us, but instead it just made us sound like we were playing under a pillow, all the life being smothered out of us. My vocals on the CD also sucked. I had been losing my voice, and my vocal performance had gradually gotten worse over the preceding months. But I wasn't willing to admit it, thinking I just needed to "try harder". It's also easy, in a rehearsal situation with the volume going, to hide the vocal problems, since no one can understand them anyhow. But in the studio, with all the individual sounds being isolated and scrutinized, it was clear to me and everyone that I wasn't the singer I'd once been. But instead of stopping the process and getting another vocalist or something, we just pressed through. I wasn't willing to consider someone else singing anyhow, so even if the band suggested it, my ego wouldn't have let it happen.

I remember leaving the studio with the final product and thinking, "Man, we blew it." People would listen to it and tell me it was good and not to worry, but in my heart I knew we hadn't performed up to standard. Had *Prophecies* just been another demo, we'd have been ok. But the fact that it was a CD released meant that it had to reach a higher standard, and we failed. When it was released, XRR pushed it hard all over the world, and it went into magazines in 44 countries, even more radio programs, had official distro in Relapse and all these other big record labels, etc. But we barely sold any copies due to bad reviews. All the people who had loved *Darkened Salvation* were disappointed with *Prophecies*, and they let it be known. I remember getting press clippings from XRR from Latvia, Australia, all these far-off places, and reading the bad things they said about us and thinking, "On one hand, I'm proud we made it into magazines in those

countries. But on the other hand, it's no help to us if the reviews are bad..." That's just how life goes sometimes.

But still, it was our first CD released, and both we and XRR were proud of having achieved it. For his part, Mathias at XRR was a stout supporter. I still have a letter from him where he wrote, "Look, I don't care if the reviews are bad... We love you guys and will do the next CD as well!" Interestingly, the XRR deal did yield some benefits for the band. In early 1997, I was contacted by a guy named Roy Yeo who ran a new label in Singapore called Pulverised Records. They had only done three releases by that time, one of which being the very first release by a then-unknown Amon Amarth (who promptly switched to Metal Blade when it was clear they were going to be huge). Roy told me he loved the band's music, but thought we needed better production in order to succeed. For this, he realized we needed money. So he offered us a three-record deal with Pulverised. He sent contracts, gave us a \$3,000 budget (we considered this big money at the time), and put us on the phone with Jim Morris at Morrissound in Tampa, Florida, which was THE studio for death metal in those days. I just about crapped myself when Morris called me at my dorm room one morning to discuss production values for the album! Then he put us on the phone with a very famous death metal album cover artist to discuss concepts. Roy also told us that after the album came out, he'd bring us to Singapore and Malaysia for some shows, then put us out opening for someone in Europe on tour. So we were pumped. It felt like things were happening after all the work.

But then I began my junior year of college in September 1997 and realized, honestly, that I had a choice to make: I needed to be in school and pursue a normal career, or be in the band and make it my full-time thing. Erik and Seth were ready to go for it, but I had started getting tired of the whole thing. I wanted something else for myself for a long time leading up to that. I loved playing music, but was tired of being broke; I was sick of having to fight for every little bit of ground conquered, and it was clear to me that even if we got to tour and do more albums, we'd never make any money or be able to support ourselves. I was in debt for my college education and would still have to pay it off even if I didn't finish. I didn't have a car so the guys were taking turns picking me up for practice, and this was also getting old for them. I had lost my voice so we needed to get a new permanent singer, and it was proving extremely hard to find. Lots of things like that were happening and I realized something: I don't want it badly enough to keep suffering like this. It's not for everyone, and it definitely wasn't for me. I had met Jake Owen at a Cannibal Corpse show in late 1996, and asked him if he made a good living in the band. He told me that he made "maybe less than a public school teacher", and this was when teachers were not doing too well economically. I thought, "Jesus, if that's all Jack Owen makes, and they're the biggest death band in the world, what are my chances of being able to carve out a living doing this?" My interest and spirit were seriously waning, I started missing rehearsals, etc. It was clear to the guys I just wasn't into it any more. So in September 1997, Seth called me on a Saturday morning and said, "Dude, it's your band so we don't want to kick you out, but I'm giving you the opportunity to quit." It was really cool of him to do that, and I felt the weight off my shoulders immediately. They went on without me and ultimately did the *Souls Enshroud Fire* CD, also through XRR. It's sad, because when I left the band, I wrote to Roy at Pulverised and told him that I'd left but the band would continue without me. His English at the time, I think, was missing an understanding of certain nuances, and what he seemed to understand was, "The band broke up." So he dropped the record deal. So that's how XRR came back into the picture- I

contacted Mathias and told him I was leaving, and that Pulverised seemed to drop Witch Hunt, and Mathias said he'd work with the band again, no hard feelings. It worked out well, though. The next year, Roy got called by the Singaporean government for mandatory military service and had to close the label for something like 2 years, so Witch Hunt would have been shafted anyhow.

I'll also add that in May 2010, I made a trip to Cuernavaca, Mexico to meet Mathias from XRR in person for the first time, by then after 17 years of being pen and Internet pals. I stayed with him for three days. He's a good dude and I had a hella great time finally sitting and talking about all this stuff in person with him.

4. Looking through photos displayed on your blog, with Witch-Hunt you met many familiar faces from the heyday of death metal - Chuck Schuldiner, John Gallagher, Corpsegrinder, etc... who of any of these people sticks out in your mind as your favorite to have met?

Yeah, I got to meet a lot of TON of those guys over the years. Here's the list of the ones that really stand out:

- a. In June 1993 I met all the guys from Suffocation, Vader, and Dismember in Manassas, Virginia when they were on tour together. And the coolest thing ever: Corpsegrinder opened this show, and I saw George singing. He was up there doing his circular head banging and at one point fell over, since he got dizzy. He knocked over a mic stand and tumbled a stage monitor on the way down- it was funny. Then he got right back up and kept going for it! I met him briefly after they played, and he was a cool guy. It was Vader's and Dismember's first tour in the US (they had started a few weeks prior with Decide, then Suffocation took over the headline slot and they finished out the dates). Terrance Hobbes was the one I most remember- just a really nice guy, very polite and humble. I took a photo with him that didn't come out due to not having flash on my camera at the time, but a in 2013 met him again at another Suffocation show, 20 years later, and finally got my photo with him!
- b. In July 1994, met Alex and Paul from Cannibal Corpse. They were on tour with Sinister and Cynic and were playing a metal fest in Brandywine, Maryland at a venue called Wilmer's Park. Alex was cool enough to make a zombie face in the photo, which was the most death metal thing I could imagine him doing at the time. I was 17 years old. WE also got photos with Sinister at that gig, and I became pen pals with their then-bassist, Bart, for a short period after that. Finally, I knew the keyboardist/female vocalist of Cynic, Dana Cosley, since she'd been playing for an all-female death metal band in Florida called Demonomacy and we'd been pen pals before she went on tour with Cynic. Something interesting from this show: Erik Sayenga and I were standing by the stage as Cannibal got ready to play, and Erik goes, "Hey, it's George from Monstrosity!" Turns out George was standing right beside us, just hanging out. He's from Maryland, so was home hanging out. Little did we know that 2 years later he'd be singing for Cannibal.

- c. In November 1994, we brought Internal Bleeding to Virginia for their first show in the state. In December 1994, we brought Dying Fetus to Virginia for the same reason. I'd been pen pals with various members of each group since early 1993, so we knew them well enough to trade shows and stuff like that. They were all nice guys to me, though based on how things were developing in those days, I never imagined Fetus would be bigger than Internal Bleeding. In years since then, I've been in regular contact with Jason Netherton, and see him every time we're in the Washington, DC region together. Between all his touring with Misery Index and my living overseas a lot, we're not always in the same place at the same time, but we keep in touch and make time as we can. I haven't been in touch with John Gallagher; last time I spoke to him in person was at a Fetus show in Springfield, Virginia in 2001. Before that it was at a Monstrosity and Broken Hope show in Richmond, Virginia in 1997.

- d. In June 1995, we met Chuck from Death. I've heard stories about how hard it was working with or for him in the band, but dude, he was a total gentleman and buddy to us. Just a really gentle, nice guy. He let us take a photo, talked to us about the songs he'd play that night, etc. It was the first date of the tour for Symbolic in North America, also at Nick's in Alexandria, Virginia. It was after this show that Jason Netherton from Dying Fetus asked me if I'd like to travel to Quebec City, Canada with them in July 1995 to roadie for a show they were playing up there, which of course I accepted immediately. So aside from the Death gig being amazing, I was fortunate to be there due to the other benefits that came out of it!

- e. In February 2007 and July 2007, I hung out with Kerry and Tom from Slayer. I had a neighbor who told me he'd grown up next door to Kerry King and was buddies with him. I didn't believe the guy... 'Til Feb 2007 when he got us tickets and passes, and we spent two nights in Washington, DC hanging out with Kerry and his wife. Then he pulled it off again in July that year when slayer came through with Marilyn Manson. I couldn't believe it, dude. Had someone told me when I was 14 that I'd be 31 years old and hanging out with my heroes, I'd never have believed it. But my boy pulled it off. Kerry was cool but very private and aloof at times. Understandable given how much attention they get and, frankly, I think Kerry's just OVER it. Tom was the one I liked best. He hung out for about an hour, and we talked about his family's roots in Chile and their immigration to the US later. It was a really personal, intimate conversation. WE also hung with his wife and kids that night, and his kids were showing me card tricks they'd learned from the band's bus driver. Tom's wife and I actually became friends on Myspace after that, and she'd occasionally send me a note saying Tom said hey or something. I later closed the Myspace account so didn't stay in touch with her, but it still cool while it lasted.

5. **Again from your blog, one particular post mentions two individuals whom you attended Quantico High School with - Paul and Dawn. Could these people be Paul Vanderslice of AS THE SEA PARTS (a band Erik was also a member of) and Dawn Desir e of RAIN FELL WITHIN?**

Nope, you got the right people but I never went to school with them. I only met Dawn very tangentially, since she and Erik were closer and they met each other long after I'd left Witch Hunt and wasn't involved in the scene in Virginia any longer. Erik was also the one who met Paul Vanderslice after moving to Woodbridge, Virginia in mid-1994. They went to high school together. I was never close to Paul, and to be honest we weren't really even friends (I think it's fair to say we didn't like each other much, or many reasons), but he did end up singing for Witch Hunt in late 1996 when we did the last show I performed with the band, opening for Grave in October 1996 at Jaxx (now Empire) in Springfield, Virginia. The Dawn and Paul I mentioned in the blog entry were just kids I went to school with and were totally disconnected from all this other stuff.

6. You left WITCH-HUNT in 1999. Following your departure, Erik and Seth continued on, departing from the band's death metal roots in favor of a melodic black metal sound, resulting in 2000's *Souls Enshrouded Fire* album. Were you playing this style of music before you left the group, or did Erik and Seth begin performing this material once you departed?

Actually, I left the band in September 1997. I think the Metal Archives might list my departure date as being later than that, but it was definitely in September 1997 right as I was beginning my junior year of college at the University of Mary Washington. Right before I left the group, we were prepping to record what would have been our first CD with Singapore's Pulverised Records, like I mentioned in one of the previous responses. The music we were writing at that point was, in my assessment, the best we had ever done. It was stuff that was the logical follow-on to the *Darkened Salvation* demo, and which should have been our first CD through XRR. It was very harmony-heavy, a lot more melodic, but some of it was really fast and still had a death feel to it. I think it was similar to a lot of Death's finer, later work. When I left the band, the guy's intended to use some of the material, but ended up reinventing the band to have a more black metal sound, like you noted. This was for a lot of reasons, though it's just my speculation.

First, Erik had been moving toward black metal for a while; he started with Cradle of Filth, then it went onward from there to Dark Funeral and other bands who were the "originators" of that big initial wave of well-produced, mega-theatrical black metal in the mid-1990s. He had toured with Dying Fetus in summer 1996 (their first US tour opening for Monstrosity and Kataklysm) and even though it was a total death fest tour, he came back home with some spiked bracelets that made him look more black than death! I think Erik just liked the black metal sound more over time- especially since death metal had stagnated a lot in the mid-1990s yet black metal was providing new sounds, new imagery, something challenging that seemed to fill death metal's gap. So that found its way naturally into Witch Hunt's sound once Erik and Seth were writing the songs following my departure.

Second, and more importantly, I think it had to do with logistics. When I left the band, I was the only one who knew how to play the guitar parts. I had only recently begun showing the bass parts to Seth, and he knew maybe 2 full songs of the new ones we'd been writing. Erik knew how the guitars sounded, but not how they were played, since obviously he was focused on the

drums. So when I left, not only did they not know how to play the songs, but neither of them was a good enough guitarist to do it at the time. Over the next two years, they taught themselves to play and recorded the material that would become Souls Enshroud Fire. By the time they were good enough to play the stuff on their own, I think they'd moved on and were doing something they found more interesting than, and equally as challenging as, the material I'd wrote before leaving the band. They found their own style and ran with it, and I think they did a fine job with it.

7. The members of WITCH-HUNT seem to have enjoyed bands from the infamous Wild Rags Records - I have seen one photo where every member is wearing a shirt of a band from the label's roster. Were you ever ripped off by Ricardo Campos and his notorious label like so many other metal fans seem to have been back in the day?

It's interesting that you bring this up, dude. I was in touch with Richard from probably mid-1993 to about late 1995, just as I was starting college. I heard all those rumors about Wild Rags as well. Back in the day, I was amazed: nearly half the fanzines you'd read would have "Thanks" and "Fuck you" sections in their intro pages, and Richard from Wild Rags was almost universally featured in the latter section. I never knew what the dude did that upset people so badly. On top of that, if so many people hated him in the scene, how the hell was he able to maintain a record label and store? I mean, if he was such a rip-off and was so hated at the time, shouldn't that have sunk his business? He was always very cool to me, and to the best of my memory Internal Bleeding never had any issues with him, and they were the label's flagship band for a long period of time in the early 1990s. I ordered stuff through Wild Rags and Richard always personally expedited the order, and even included handwritten thank you letters to me with the order. So in my experience, the guy was a pro. But I can't speak for other people, just for myself.

8. Have you been involved with any other musical projects since WITCH-HUNT? Do you still play the guitar often?

Nope, nothing at all. When I left Witch Hunt, my interest in playing guitar almost disappeared entirely. I nearly became a different person. From the time I first saw Motley Crue on MTV in 1987, to the time I discovered death metal then later formed Witch Hunt and did the stuff I talked about in this interview, my only interest was being in a band and trying to "make it". When I left the group and my life went in another direction, I dropped even playing music in general. Maybe it was the pain and disappointment of losing my childhood dream that made me put the guitar down, like a way to protect myself emotionally? I don't know.

But my life really did go in a different direction when I left the band. I focused on finishing school, graduating with a BA in Spanish in 1998. I joined the Peace Corps and spent two years in El Salvador, Central America after that, then taught in China and in the US Virgin Islands for a couple of years. Eventually, I got my master's degree in international affairs, then joined the

government, where I've been working since 2006. I have barely lived in the US during that time: I've been assigned to Iraq, Colombia, Mexico, and currently Brazil, where I'll be until late 2015. I've also been able to travel all over Latin America, parts of Europe and the Middle East, and soon probably Africa for a short-term work assignment. I'm still metal in a big way and try to see bands in the local scene everywhere I go, but as far as active participation actually playing music? Nothing to speak of. I own a guitar and jam at home sometimes for fun, and oddly some of the only things I know how to play are the Witch Hunt songs I was writing right before leaving the band. I never really advanced much beyond those, but luckily it's not my day job so I'm under zero pressure to produce anything new.

9. Closing remarks?

It was a really pleasant surprise to get your interview request, Nicholas. I can't tell you how much it means to me that you went to all the trouble not only to find out about Witch Hunt, but that you simultaneously did so much research before sending me the questions. It's clear to me that you're a detail-oriented guy who really cares about the scene and its history. This will serve you well both as a metal historian, and in anything else you do in your life and career. Trust me, as an almost 40-year old man now with a lot of experience under his belt, you can never go wrong being thorough in the things you do. I respect that about you.

I talk to my brother Ben often, and not a day goes by that we don't remember some aspect of the time we were fortunate to share in Witch Hunt. That band and the experiences we had with it informed countless aspects of our development as people and the sort of adults and professionals we became. I'm literally writing a book right now about how being in Witch Hunt, and the broader death metal underground scene, prepared me for my career as a diplomat, which is what I do for a living now. I told Ben about your interview request and he was also really touched that you would take the time to tell people about Witch Hunt like this- we both truly appreciate it.