INSIDE A CANADIAN ALT-RIGHT GROUP

BY CRAIG AND MARC KIELBURGER

Sarah* knew her fiancé was a racist. But she was just 17 and madly in love, so she tried to ignore it.

In the early 1990s, white supremacist groups like the Heritage Front and the Aryan Nation were active across Canada. Sarah watched, heartbroken as her boyfriend Nick was drawn deeper into the Ottawa branches of the alt-right.

One day, a neo-Nazi gang leader phoned for Nick—Sarah, annoyed, hung up on the man. In retaliation for that discourtesy, he came to their apartment with four of his thugs. They beat her so badly, the logos on their boot soles were imprinted on her face and chest.

Twenty-four years later, the 41-year-old single mother is sharing her story for the first time. She risked her life to help disband hate groups, but they seem to have made a resurgence. With white supremacist recruitment posters appearing again across the country, she hopes her experience will inspire Canadians to fight back.

After her assault, the police officer handling Sarah’s case invited her to a meeting. A CSIS agent was there. Would she be willing to go undercover, inside a hate group, using her fiancé’s connections to get information?

There would be no pay. No police protection. Still, Sarah volunteered.

From then on, whenever her fiancé got a call about a meeting or rally, Sarah went out for a smoke—and a quick call to her police contact. She smuggled copies of recruiting pamphlets, and instruction manuals on how to commit acts of violence without getting caught. Names and addresses of hate group leaders found their way into police hands.

Maintaining the charade of support was hardest, she says. Hate group leaders watched like hawks for any sign of dissent among followers. Even a misplaced facial expression, an eye roll or look of disgust could lead to another beating—or worse.

“Those kinds of people are rage and anger and hate. They have no love. They have no mercy,” she says.

But Sarah was a good actor.

Unfortunately, Sarah lost many friends who believed she truly was a hate-monger. Cartoons depicting her in Nazi garb appeared in local independent magazines.

Sarah served as a spy for seven months, until the stress and fear of discovery became overwhelming. “I no longer felt safe. I began to doubt my sanity.”

Sarah left her fiancé and went into hiding. Her short stint as a mole had a huge impact. Innumerable meetings were disrupted because police were forewarned. Leaders from American organizations like the KKK were intercepted at the border before they could speak at Canadian rallies.

By the late 90s, these groups were all but disbanded, thanks to new hate speech laws and police arrests, supported by brave individuals like Sarah, now an artist.

Most of us will never be spies. But we could all stand to be a little braver, to speak out against racist comments online, or befriend the immigrant harassed on the bus. To do our part in ridding Canada of hate.

*All names changed for privacy