



Keeping the edge

BY PAUL BOWERS
Ink contributor

No drugs, no drinking, no promiscuous sex. Within the movement known as "straight edge," these three tenets are the widely accepted guidelines for decent living.

But what is straight edge all about? It has established itself as a veritable high school subculture, yet it frequently is misunderstood. It isn't a gang. It isn't a club. It isn't even organized.

"There's nothing formal about it at all," says Jacob Pelton, a 17-year-old senior at Summerville High School. He has been straight edge for nearly two years, and his peers consider him a sort of guru on the topic.

But where to begin explaining a movement with no official membership, no governing body and no rule book? Perhaps the best place to start is at the beginning.

Launched by song lyrics

The year was 1981, and punk rock was still in its formative stage. Washington, D.C.-based punk band Minor Threat released a song titled "Straight Edge," with lyrics such as, "I'm a person just like you/But I've got better things to do/Than sit around and smoke dope/Cause I know I can cope."
The lyrics were simplistic, as was typical during the time period, but the song quickly caught on as

an anthem for American punks who were disenchanted with the prevalent drug culture.

So the drug-free crowd had a name, a song and even a symbol: black Xs drawn on the backs of the hands, adopted from the practice of marking underage concertgoers so they couldn't purchase alcoholic beverages.

Today, straight edge continues to find its greatest popularity in the punk and hard-core music scenes, with bands such as Eighteen Visions, the Hostage Heart and Casey Jones providing the soundtrack for many straight edgers. Keeping with the do-it-yourself nature of the music, there is still no formal organization involved.

Ask a group of teenagers why they became straight edge in the first place, and you'll find their explanations are similar.

"I basically followed those three principles anyway," says Summerville High senior Ben Crickenberger, 17, referring to the trinity of guidelines for the movement.

After seeing others around him going to parties and getting drunk, Ben says he started "thinking that I don't have to be unconscious of my surroundings to have fun."

He notes that straight edgers tend to be avid Dance Dance Revolution players. Other than that, "We do the same things most kids do, except without all the alcohol and everything involved."

Many are involved in so-called "scenes": the hard-core scene, the emo scene, the punk scene, etc. Although there has been a recent backlash against the superficiality of scene affiliation, it is still a way to have some largely

It started in 1981, but the straight-edge movement still strikes a chord in some young people, even when it pits them against the popular culture

against-the-world" mentality because of their unpopular views.

Living with conviction

Ryan Drury, a 17-year-old senior at Fort Dorchester High School, likens straight edge to his own Christian faith.

"They're both strong beliefs. They're something you stand by," he says. "They're really strong things that you don't back down from."

Drawing a further parallel, he adds, "Some people remember the day they made the decision. It's like when people get saved."

Ryan comes from a Catholic family, but he prefers not to pigeonhole himself into a specific denomination. For other straight edgers, the mere mention of straight edge and religion in the same sentence brings strongly held opinions to the surface.

"Straight edge is depending on yourself and no one else. Religion should be relying on other people and not relying on how to do things," says Ben, an atheist.

Please see STRAIGHT, Page 2D

What's ahead on Tuesdays



04.04 petc.

Feed the birds: Want to attract birds to your yard? We'll tell you how.



04.11 Ed. 101

Class rank: The changing trend of how students stack up.

04.18 Get Out!

Shallow water: A closer look at the area's biggest annual canoe and kayak event.



04.25 Ink

Defining a generation: The Iraq war and its impact on young Americans.

