

BOOK BY EX-TOLEDOAN DETAILS BOUTS WITH DESPAIR

Former cutter wants to help others

Originally published in **The Blade** on **Sunday, March 12, 2006**

By RYAN E. SMITH
BLADE STAFF WRITER

Jolene Siana's tale is one of a razor and a rock star.

First came the razor. As a senior at Waite High School in 1987, she cut herself repeatedly on her wrists - at first because she wanted to die, later because she wanted the rush.

Like thousands of teenage cutters, Miss Siana used a blade to deal with feelings of depression.

But what happened next was unique. Miss Siana - a pseudonym she uses to protect her family - wrote extensively about her teenage hell to Ogre, the frontman for her favorite band, Skinny Puppy. He only wrote back once, but his encouragement let loose a stream of dark letters and artwork that Miss Siana continued to send.

READ MAIN STORY:

[Scars relate stories of teenage torment;](#)
[Emotional pain drives some to cut selves](#)

Years later, the industrial rocker returned a box of her scribbles, journals, and letters - some unopened, some written in her own blood. The result is *Go Ask Ogre: Letters From a Deathrock Cutter* (Process, \$18.95), a compilation of many of those writings that reveal Miss Siana's rambling state of

mind through her suicidal depression, family troubles, and experimentation with drugs.

Those are over, thanks to years of therapy. Miss Siana, now 36 and living in Los Angeles, hopes the book, which follows in the tradition of the 1970s story of a teenager's battle with drug addiction, *Go Ask Alice*, will aid others growing up.

"I'm hoping I can call more attention to it," she told a group of students at her alma mater during a visit to Toledo in November. "It's a symptom of something deeper."

Few would have guessed that Miss Siana could be such an inspiration when she was growing up on Toledo's east side, a troubled high school kid sporting black clothes and pale skin as part of the Goth scene. In one year, she parted ways with her best friend, broke up with her boyfriend, and lost both of her beloved grandparents. She never knew her dad and didn't get along with her mom.

"I was in a pretty dark place," she said.

This was about the same time that she saw a music video for the dark, avant-industrial group Skinny Puppy on MTV. She bought the group's album and identified with its lyrics about pain. Then she noticed an address and a note printed on the back of the album: "For those who make up their own minds."

"Seeing the address seemed like an invitation," Miss Siana said.

So she wrote to Ogre (aka Kevin Ogilvie), whose band was famous for its bizarre and bloody performances. She thought he was attractive and seemed like someone who wouldn't judge her.

Her first letter, dated Valentine's Day, 1987, began straightforward enough: "I'm Jolene. I'm 17. I'm a senior at an extremely boring school. It's packed full of heavy metalers. Do you like heavy metalers?"

Writing in class, at home, and in the wee hours of the morning, she slipped her suicidal thoughts in between talk of school, music, friends, and frequent mood swings.

"My mother hates me. I hate myself," she wrote in one early letter. "Life really pisses me off, you know? I'm on the verge of doing something. It's not funny. I'm about to do it. ... Why am I even living? Why can't I be dead? Why

was I born? I'm going to do it."

Ogre, despite or perhaps because of his own problems at the time, immediately recognized the pain in Miss Siana's voice and empathized. Lots of kids wrote to the influential Canadian music star, but no one like this.

"She was the darkest of that whole group of kids, the emotional kind of groupies," he told The Blade by phone from his home in Los Angeles. "There were these kids that were really young and really going through some stuff in their lives. She seemed like she was the one who took things to the farthest degree."

Ogre wrote to her only once, but he met her several times at concerts, where he gave her backstage passes. He tried to encourage Miss Siana to keep writing, keep letting out all the pains and anxieties inside, keep pursuing her creative outlets.

"There's really nothing I could do. There was no way I was going to be flying down to save her. My only thing was just in seeing that she was kind of creative, was to try and push that and tell her to hang in there," he said.

Just as importantly, it turns out, he kept much of what she sent - 73 letters, 14 post cards, and five full notebooks.

"I was a collector," he said. "I couldn't throw things away that people sent me."

Miss Siana contacted other bands - Clan of Xymox, the Descendents - but it was never the same dynamic she had with Ogre, who was about 25 years old at the time.

She didn't kill herself - "Thankfully, I was always too afraid to cut very deep," she said - but her disturbing behavior didn't go away. A dark ritual grew up around her habit of cutting herself, a practice that can release endorphins and leave scars.

She made intricate art work for Ogre, some of it with her own blood that sent its own message: I'm real. I bleed. This is my pain.

Eventually, a college roommate noticed and she met with a counselor, which was the beginning of regular therapy. Ultimately, though, she said it came down to a conscious decision that she needed to change.

"I knew it wasn't healthy," said Miss Siana, who continues to write and also works as a waitress. "I was very embarrassed and shameful about it. I wanted to be healthy. ... I just decided I don't want to do this. It's not healthy. It's not mature."

Contact Ryan E. Smith at: ryansmith@theblade.com or 419-724-6103.

[< previous](#)