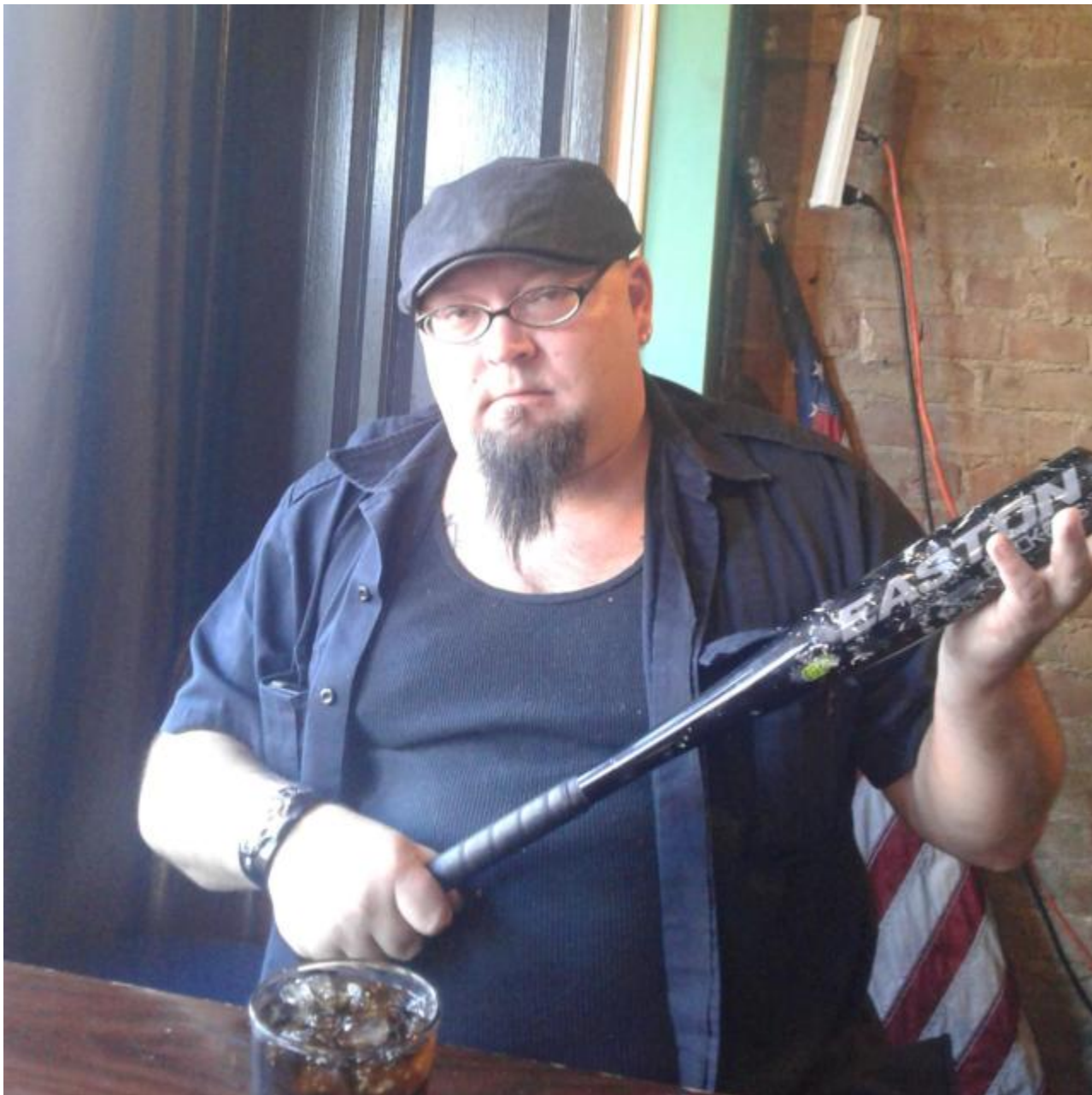


Marine, SIUE students work to make Trump protest a smash

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - A group of more than 100 students of **Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE)** gathered in the campus's quad to take part in a visceral and passionate protest against the inauguration of the 45th President of the United States Donald Trump.

Travis Ware, who facilitated the event, said he was beyond upset upon hearing the news of Trump's victory on Nov. 9, 2016. Ware served in the United States Marine Corps in the early 2000s, and was stationed in Washington, D.C., during the 9/11 attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center buildings. He said that heavy feeling inspired him to want to serve and do something about that feeling. He feels as if young people have a hard time expressing themselves, saying sometimes strong opinions are equated with being negative.

Originally, Ware wanted to dip Confederate flags in ceramic and shatter them in the quad, but he felt as if it would not be enough to express what he perceived to be the collective rage from his peers at the election of Trump. He did not think that would be enough. He also felt his social position as a straight white male would not give him the proper perspective on what he believes to be Trump's dangerous policies.

After Trump's election, Ware said his daughter, who is biracial, experienced her first racial incident at school.

"During the last 16 years, even through George W. Bush, I feel like things have been good for human rights, especially for people on the fringes," Ware said. "There have been tremendous humanitarian advances. My 10-year-old daughter experienced her first racial issue at school when some kid told her that cowboys couldn't be black."

To properly "check his privilege" of being a straight white male, Ware brought a few ideas to a panel of people from different walks of life. In his experiences, performances and jobs, Ware has found friendships among people of many races, sexual orientations and nationalities, often finding himself to be the minority in many situations. Ware pitched the idea to a panel of 20 people and was met with some surprising questions, including:

"You don't think you're going to be some kind of savior white man, right?"

In order to keep a distance from that sentiment, Ware began his art performance protest with some ground rules. The performance would not belong to him, it would belong to

everyone. He would only be the facilitator of the art piece. Another rule would be no straight white American male would be allowed to take part in the smashing portion of the piece.

Ware knew smashing would be a portion of the piece, but he decided against the original Confederate flag plan, opting instead to work with porcelain sculptures, believing it to be more symbolic.

"I chose porcelain, because it represents the finer things in life," he said. "It is bright, white and very expensive."

After he revealed some portions of the piece, Ware said he was given \$165 worth of liquid porcelain from an anonymous donor. Ware has had some experience crafting such pieces in the past and he took quickly to creating 72 more. He then took those 72 to various women and minorities he knew to add some finishing touches to the sculptures.

"I asked them to write something on them," he said. "I told them to write something done to them by straight white men."

What was written on the sculptures ranged from cathartic releases of extreme trauma, including kidnapping and rape to more common messages. Ware said one of the most powerful statements was written by a woman from rural Illinois who simply penned two words he said would resonate with many women, especially mothers. It said only, "Where's dinner?"

Minorities were also invited to write messages on Ware's sculptures. He said an Asian man wrote about being asked for help with math homework and being teased about unfounded perceptions of his inadequate anatomy. Ware said, despite the ubiquitous nature of certain stereotypes, it still jarred him to see them actually written.

Straight white males were not entirely excluded from the protest, however. Ware said they were invited to write an apology for their oppressive thoughts or actions. Apologies such as: "I'm sorry I ever thought women could not be as successful as men," and "I'm sorry for every racist joke I ever told" provided the backdrop for the smashing event.

After the backdrop was in place and the sculptures were all infused with accounts of aggression and oppression, Ware gave students safety materials, such as goggles, and their choice of a mallet or baseball bat to smash the sculptures and all they represented. No straight white male was allowed to write upon or smash one of the porcelain pieces.

When asked about the exclusion, Ware said straight white males have never been institutionally oppressed, but women and people with dark skin have been for millennia.

Trump's presidency is a looming warning for Ware, who believes Trump and his supporters will usher in a new regimen which will return America to levels of racism not seen since the 1950s. He described such levels of nostalgia for those times as "intolerable," citing people of color and women have gained rights progressively since then.

Pro-Trump supporters also went to the smashing ceremony. Ware said one woman wrote on a sculpture, "My father and brother are not racists for voting as they did." Another interrupted the ceremony, telling those assembled they should support the President of the United States. Ware said she was politely "clapped off" by the crowd.