

The Hideaway: 3 Reasons Why Johnson City, Tennessee Needs This Punk Sanctuary



Killebrew, David. Untitled. From Killebrew's *Hideaway* photobook.

As a safe haven for the outcast and permanently decorated, The Hideaway provides a place of solace and community for the punk and alternative scene. The scent of stale beer and sweat pierces your nostrils as you cross the threshold. Your heart quickly syncs up with the beat of the drums as guitar licks vibrate past the amplifiers and into your skin. Looking past the stage, friends pull loved ones into their arms as if they have not seen each other in years, though they are both here every weekend. Strangers strike up conversations and easily exchange laughter. Though rough on the outside, The Hideaway is built on a foundation of warmth and acceptance.

COVER CHARGE:

\$5-\$10

ADULT BEVERAGE SELECTION:

Beer, cider, and seltzer

HOURS OF OPERATION:

8:00 PM – 3:00 AM, daily

PRIMARY WEEKEND SHOWS:

Punk, metal, and hardcore

ADDITIONAL OFFERINGS:

Wednesday Open Mic Night, Punk Flea Market, Art showings, Stand-up comedy

ADDRESS:

235 E Main Street, Johnson City, TN 37604

Established 2002

I. The Personal Matters of Punk: How I Fell in Love with the Genre



Unknown photographer, Untitled. The Hideaway before opening.

In 2018, I walked through the door of The Hideaway as a barely legal adult. Stepping foot into the place that would come to mean so much to me, I was finally able to watch my older brother Drew play in his two horror punk bands: The Cryptoids and Vampyr! Vampyr!, the latter being Johnson City's first horror punk band. Intimidated by the atmosphere and individuals, I stuck to the back and sang along. Now that I am 22 years old, I have found a second home at The Hideaway. Though I am grateful for my appreciation of punk and this gem of Johnson City, I will forever be more grateful for my brother and the nights we spent in his car.

The summer before I entered seventh grade in 2012, Drew tasted the freedom of a driver's license. Forty-five miles per hour felt like flying as we navigated the Appalachian backroads of East Tennessee. It was in this white, beaten up Sunfire in the sweltering July

heat that I first heard The Wonder Years and the unmistakable sound of pop punk. In an upper middle class, predominantly white neighborhood, Drew and I blared their album *Suburbia: I've Given You All and Now I'm Nothing* (2012). Believing we had an unappreciated depth to us for our criticism of the suburban lifestyle (a depth all teenagers believe they have until their early 20s), we listened to this album on repeat hundreds of times.

Due to my interest in this punk subgenre, my older brother decided to finally play Black Flag for me, exploring the foundation of punk that began in the late 70s. After jumping into the heart of this genre, I never turned back. The many faces and forms of punk seeped out of that car stereo as we drove for hours nearly every day, often not returning home until the clock on his dashboard broke midnight. As The Misfits and Neck Deep played in the background, Drew and I connected. In all those hours, we had space to talk, to be open. We challenged each other's beliefs, recounted our childhood, and shared our worries. Our relationship grew as punk played.

Still finding joy in the angst of punk, I quickly flash my ID and step into The Hideaway every weekend. Friends quickly pull me into a hug as I approach Tarvo the bartender to grab a cold Pabst Blue Ribbon (PBR), condensation dripping down the side. Passing the can to my closest comrade, I take off my earrings and jump into the mosh pit.

1. By the Punks, For the Punks: The Only Punk Music Venue in the Tri-Cities



Gentry, Randy. "Tarvo." Photo of Tarvo, The Hideaway's Bartender.

A welcoming face and Johnson City celebrity, Tarvo Renaldo is best known for his role at The Hideaway: bartender. With no liquor in sight, Tarvo slings cans of beers from the fridge and sets the tone for The Hideaway. While this venue is known for its lack of cocktails, patrons typically walk a few doors down to Holy Taco or Tipton Street Pub (often just referred to as "Tipton's") between shows if they desire something stronger, typically shots of liquor. I have yet to hear a complaint about The Hideaway's limited selection due to this easy fix. Understanding the crowd they bring in, the Hideaway sticks to tradition. With small punk bands historically being paid in tallboys, the two became inseparable in the alternative music scene. The Hideaway understands that punk pairs best with beer, and the Hideaway's staple is a cold, freshly cracked PBR.

By creating a traditionally punk space, The Hideaway offers a space that cannot be found elsewhere in Johnson City. By serving a specific audience, The Hideaway hosts popular and well-known regulars such as Jake Moore, musician and barber, and Sam Bowman, the free-spirited genius behind the musical projects Hivehead and Achy. In catering to a specifically punk clientele, this venue finds the same individuals coming back every weekend. The Hideaway hones in on their roots and embraces the punk scene.

This is what sets The Hideaway apart. Occasionally, punk and alternative bands will play both The Hideaway and Capone's, a competing bar and music venue next door. Capone's attempt to cater to all demographics creates a broadness that ultimately alienates everyone. With punk bands playing the day after 70s cover bands or singer-songwriters, no one ever feels truly at home. However, The Hideaway's celebration of punk allows folks in the scene to have a place where they belong.

2. Back from the Dead: The Willow Tree's Open Mic Night Lives on at The Hideaway



Phalen, Kylee. "The Glue of Johnson City." Sam Love stands in front of The Hideaway's ACAB graffiti.

As it was unable to survive the COVID-19 pandemic, The Willow Tree Coffeehouse and Music Room closed its doors in 2020. With the death of this hippy oasis came the end of Wednesday's Open Mic Night. This musical, poetic, and artistic outlet for Johnson City's creatives seemed to have permanently ended. However, Sam Love came to revive Open Mic Night the summer of 2021. Love is known for his involvement with numerous local businesses and events and is often called "The Glue of Johnson City" by locals. Particularly, his fame as The Willow Tree's Open Mic Night's organizer and audio technician precedes him. Seeing Johnson City's now unmet need for Open Mic, Love brought it back from the dead and across the street to The Hideaway.

At a recent visit to The Hideaway's Open Mic Night, Love was kind enough to step aside from the sound board and sit down for an interview. As more of a chat between friends, Love

and I recounted our memories at The Willow Tree's Open Mic, shared laughter, and discussed our gratitude for the continuation of this Wednesday night tradition. Love has managed to continue this weekly event while honoring the original spirit of The Willow Tree's Open Mic. In discussing this, Love says, "It's pretty similar as far as that mentality goes, just to support each other. Pretty much anything goes as long as you're not a jerk about it...Another similarity is that we want everyone to feel comfortable and at home" (Love). As more than just words, this sense of support and comfort is shown every week when a performer inevitably forgets a line of a poem they wrote or plays the wrong chord in a song. Even regulars such as Diane the Wicked, known for her weekly karaoke performances at both Open Mics, stumbled over their words as I soaked in the music during the night of my interview with Love. As quickly as an artist missteps, a roar of cheering and words of encouragement overtakes the room as artists get back on their feet with the help of those enjoying The Hideaway's Open Mic.

3. Punks, PBR, and the Pit: A Community for Alternative Folks



Phalen, Kylee. "Blurry Faces and Blurry Nights." Mirror selfie at The Hideaway.

Though often seen as a delinquent's paradise from those who do not understand the importance of The Hideaway, this venue built alternative community from the ground up. There was no safe, central base for the alternative community in Johnson City before, and there may not be one after. With "ACAB" (All Cops are Bastards) spray painted on the side of the building with an anarchy symbol taking the place of "A," it is a welcome sight, a safe haven to those challenging systems of power.

At The Hideaway, punk is more than an aesthetic or musical genre. Punk is a community. Love goes beyond the traditional definitions of the word to describe what punk is at The Hideaway:

Punk is a mentality more than anything else. It's sort of almost like the same idea that as long as you're not a jerk and you're being genuine, putting yourself out there, people will get behind you. It's a cool sort of counterculture that is actually pretty wholesome. You'll see a mosh pit here, and if someone gets knocked down,

everybody stops and helps them up, makes sure they're okay. You don't see that kind of stuff at a lot of other venues. Even though it's a little rough around the edges, it's super supportive and definitely a safe space.

This welcoming community works to take care of one another. Before my first night in the pit, a girl grabbed me as I was about to step in, offering to hold my earrings because she was worried they would accidentally get pulled. When a man hit the ground beside my feet, making an audible thud over the near-deafening music, I quickly offered a hand as others stopped to make sure he was alright. We all quickly gave him a simple pat on the back as he jumped back into the pit. These acts serve as simple reflections of the heart of the community found at The Hideaway.

Despite all The Hideaway has to offer, it is the nearly two decades of community that make this humble building into what it is. Nine teen years as it first opened its doors, The Hideaway has built a sanctuary for alternative community and passed it on to the next generation of punks. Here, individuals looked down on for their body modifications or clothing choices are celebrated. Here, musicians and artists have a place to freely share their craft. Here, punk has found a home. Grab a PBR, meet someone new, and jump into the pit. You won't regret it.

About the Author



Kylee Phalen was raised in East Tennessee and still calls Southern Appalachia her home. With limited entertainment options in the small town of Johnson City, she connected with the local punk music scene during adolescence. This experience helped shape her and contributed to her decision to better Appalachia in her own way (since playing music herself could be considered a crime to anyone nearby). She is now a senior at East Tennessee State University and is pursuing her Bachelor of Arts in English through an honors program. She plans to stay local and pursue medical school. When Kylee isn't studying, you can find her at The Hideaway with a PBR in hand.



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