

## The Newborn Dead: David Hess—The Man Behind the Icon

Written by Marla Newborn

Monday, 10 October 2011 14:04

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Back in the 1970s, there was a poster for a movie. At first, I didn't even notice the name of the film; the poster showed four young people standing around what I presumed to be a dead body. The angle was such that it was looking up at their faces rather than straight on them, as they gazed down. Again, not even registering the movie's title, I did note that one of them was what I back then called "a cute guy," which made me want to see it.

Much to my chagrin, disappointment and major pouting, my parents would not let me go to see THE LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT, which I believe may have been rated X back then. My parents claimed it was "too scary." I just wanted to see the cute guy. Years later, when VHS tapes were around and available for rent, I was finally able to watch LAST HOUSE, and not only did I love every minute of the violent shocker, but I *still* thought Krug was a cute guy...besides his being quite the psychopath. But that was that and my life moved forward. End of chapter.



One day, I was at a FANGORIA convention in LA, doing a webcast with my colleague Rebekah McKendry. It was getting late when suddenly, someone was escorting two men to our area for an interview. I looked up and said to myself, "Oh my God, that's the guy from the poster!" I didn't even connect him to Krug. He was older now, but all I saw was that young person from

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that one-sheet. He was with LAST HOUSE's Marc Sheffler, and it was Marc who was to be interviewed; David Hess was there for support. Our other colleague Sam Zimmerman did the interview, and I tried to think of a reason to talk to David, but I was tongue-tied. It was a no-go. I just could not make my presence known.

Therefore, when we had another Fango convention just three months later in New York, I was determined to grab the opportunity no matter what. This time it worked. There was strategy involved: There was a party that night in the hotel where David was staying. He didn't show at the party, but my co-conspirators Drew Tinnin and Debbie Rochon knew I was on a mission to meet the man, and so we kept going from the party to the lobby bar, back and forth, looking for David until we realized he was likely out on the town in Manhattan. Plan B: We'd wait at the bar until he returned through the lobby, and then ask him to have a drink with us. It worked. He was tired and resistant, but I turned on all my charm and he had that drink with me. I told him my story of my crush on the guy in the poster, to which he asked, "What am I, chopped liver now?" That was my first glimpse of the real David Hess. He was funny! And flirty—he insisted that the next night he would be staying with me, and not at the hotel. I told him he was dreaming.

That next morning, I invited him to be on our webcast, and as all of you who knew David will remember, he started to flirt, and heavily. But this was on camera, and it went on for a while. I didn't care; I was just happy to get to know him. That night, he invited me to join the casts of LAST HOUSE and SMASH CUT (the Lee Demarbre film in which he co-stars with Sasha Grey) for dinner in Little Italy. I had so much fun being out with my heroes, laughing and feeling so included. And true to David's prediction, that night he did stay with me.

That was the beginning of a beautiful relationship and friendship that lasted until this past weekend. We were romantic for a period of time and transitioned to the best of friends, who spoke weekly thanks to the memories we created. We spent weeks in New York together, always discovering new restaurants, and David liked to go back to Central Park (about which he wrote a published song) over and over again. For me, it was like seeing my city through new eyes every time. Once I flew out to spend a week with him at his home in Corte Madera in beautiful Marin County, California. David had a motorcycle, and we'd bike for hours. I was terrified and thrilled at the same time. We went to his friend Chris' winery, and to many beaches where we'd take long walks. David was a doer; we never sat around. And we never talked about LAST HOUSE—he would yawn when I'd bring up the subject. Life was always about a new day for him. He was waiting for a new role.

Our best trip was to Cabo San Lucas in Mexico. David was the most relaxed person I have ever known. Absolutely nothing bothered him—while I was totally neurotic! I was constantly

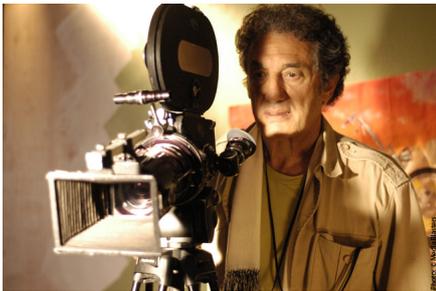
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fussing with the air conditioning, trying to set it at a perfect temperature, and it never was good enough for me. He would just watch me and laugh and laugh, which in turn made me laugh and laugh—at myself, of course. We never butted heads. If I complained about the heat, he laughed. If I complained about the food, he laughed. If I complained about *anything*, he laughed. I never knew someone who accepted me so unconditionally.



Ultimately, I did have to interview him for Fango, and he did have to answer some questions about Krug, as the role always came up throughout his life. But this was an interview about SMASH CUT, and of his starring role, he said, “One thing that comes forth in this film perhaps more than anything is the fact that I’m pretty good with comedy. On reputation alone, nobody would have gone to that place with me. How many times have I heard, ‘Hess scares the shit out of me?’ ” He laughed about that, because he knew how gentle he really was. I was always talking to him about how important he would be throughout the ages as the seminal baddie. He agreed that LAST HOUSE would probably be taught to students studying horror, but always—I mean *always*—added that he’d rather be remembered for his music.



David went to Juilliard, played rugby and had no ambitions as an actor when Sean Cunningham approached him to be a part of what was to go down in history as one of the scariest movies ever. David composed the soundtrack for LAST HOUSE, but went on to compose THE NAKED CARMEN, which won a Grammy, with John Corigliano, along with hundreds of other songs. In fact, his first job brought him into the Brill Building music scene, where he wrote several songs for Elvis Presley himself. But alas, we are horror film fans, and David will always be Krug to most of us.

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For me, he was David Hess, my special friend who would not let two weeks go by without checking in on me. He cared about my career and my personal life. He was always asking me where we were going next. Even when he wasn't feeling well two weeks ago, he said, "But I'll be fine"—always looking on the bright side. And that is how I hope everyone who met him will remember him: as someone who only saw the good in everything and everyone. You were taken too soon, David Hess. And you will be so surely missed!