Johnny Appleseed

Breakfast, bullets and drugs are religion to John Iverson

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John Iverson has been there, done that: Cooked breakfast for the Black Panthers, railed against the Vietnam War, handed out bullets to those inside South Dakota's Wounded Knee Indian Reservation to fight federal armed forces.

Bullets? Iverson insists the bullets were for self-defense only -- he believes in civil disobedience, decries violence and has even condemned ACT UP/San Francisco for their recent "guerrilla tactics."

The seeds of his activism were planted early by his union-member parents. "I was raised with a low tolerance for injustice and greed, and that spurred me on," Iverson recalls of his childhood in Minnesota. "I've always gone where I can be most effective, given the time in history and where I was geographically."

But his entry into AIDS activism may have pulled less on his lifelong altruism than on his instinct for survival. "I got into the fight against AIDS to save my life," says Iverson, who helped start ACT UP/East Bay in 1989. "I've always let others fight the battles to get drug trials going. I'm more interested in helping people get access to these drugs once they're available."

Iverson now lives in San Leandro, California with a very simple philosophy: "If you aren't trying to make a better world through social change, or creating thought-provoking art or literature, then you're basically wasting your life on the planet. That's sort of my very own religion."

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