Ragamuffin Soldier Records & Dirty Kidz Records Interview

Not many people may remember this label, but this about to change after you read this fantastic interview with Stephen Perry (who sang in One Blood and Countdown to Oblivion). He still has copies left of the Mexican Power Authority album “Haiku… Gesundheit!” on CD and 2xLP. You can contact him to get copies! equalizingXdistort@ciut.fm



Crisis of Faith “The American Dream… A Global Nightmare”



“Blunder on Bikini Island” tape edition, Ragamuffin Soldier Records, November 20th 1993.



Mexican Power Authority “Haiku…Gesundheit”
Ragamuffin Soldier Records Catalog:

- Ragamuffin 1 Crisis of Faith – The American Dream… A Global Nightmare 7″ (1992)
- Ragamuffin 2 Blundermen – Blunder on Bikini Island tape/10″ (1993)
- Ragamuffin 3 Mexican Power Authority – Haiku… Gesundheit! CD/2×12″ (1993)

Ditry Kidz Records Catalog:

- Dirtykidz1 Acrid – Eighty-Sixed CD (1997)



Ragamuffin Soldier Records logo

-Where was the label founded and where did you run it from when it began?

Well I have always lived in Toronto. I grew up in North York and so the label first started out there. And a lot of the releases that came out on the label came out while living in various parts of North York. But I did the Blundermen and MPA releases after re-locating downtown. And maybe these subtleties are lost on folks outside of Toronto, because North York is just a suburb of Toronto. But if the question is about figuring out what releases happened when I think the first release was a comp tape called “Ontario: Yours to Discover”. I did this tape when I still lived with my parents in North York. Technically this wasn’t on Ragamuffin Soldier Records, but it led to the label and was the first

thing I put out. The reason why I did a comp tape at the time was because there hadn't been a tape comp in some time from the Toronto area but there was a whole new generation of bands. So the first wave of the Toronto scene was captured on the "Toronto Hardcore '83" comp which was a comp put together by Brian Taylor of Youth Youth Youth. By the time I was getting into the local scene none of these bands were around. I was reading MRR pretty religiously by this point and was ordering tape comps in from other parts of the world. I had no idea how to do a record and just figured it was way beyond my means to do something like this, but a tape comp seemed like it was something I could tackle. I started getting to know all the bands playing in our scene and I started finding out that they had songs that they had recorded but didn't have anything to do with. A comp seemed like it needed to be done. So I did one. And as I started compiling tapes and artwork from bands, I also started gathering advice from other folks who had some experience with doing a comp. The best advice I got was by a guy named Ken that did a comp tape called "How to Tune a Guitar". This had a lot of the more rock based punk bands from Canada on it. He gave me some contacts of some other people to include in the tape. He told me about Flag of Truce and Porcelain Forehead from Ottawa so I was able to get them on the comp. This was helpful because I didn't have a lot of bands on the tape that didn't play in the Toronto scene. These contributions made it more representative of the other scenes in the province. Ken also put me in touch with an industrial band named Sucking Chest Wound. Not only did they have an interesting hardcore song, but they were also artists and were totally into sharing experience with me on how to duplicate tapes. They told me a lot about how to do the tapes myself. So I bought a double tape deck and some metal quality tapes which were the highest sound quality tapes that you could buy commercially and I used those as masters. They also told me not to duplicate more than 50 copies from one tape so I kept count of how many times each

tape was used. They had great advise on how to make the master as well. When all was said and done and the tape was together, I bought an ad in MRR and sold the comp. I also sent in a copy to get reviewed and I gave each band a copy of the comp. I was able to get my dad to photocopy the book at his work as I needed copies. I don't know how many got sold but I didn't take into consideration all the expenses of the tape so it sold for less than what it cost to make. But I didn't care. It was just great to get something out and to feel like I was doing something to help the scene.

Then I moved out and we started a punk house in North York. It was called I Ata Pi, the anti-frat. Everyone in the house had a band and we started to practice in the basement and then started doing some shows down there. One of the bands to develop out of that basement was Crisis of Faith. Not many people knew about them, but I was in a band called One Blood and our guitarist and drummer started Crisis of Faith. I thought they were a great band and they had just recorded some material. I had saved up some money from a job that I had so I offered to do a 7". Then I had to figure out how to do a record. By this time we moved out of the anti-frat and had a new punk house near a place that would become Downsview Station on the Toronto subway line. So the address on the back of that record was where we lived. At this time we were influenced by the political nature of the scene. Vermiform had just started up and we brought Born Against and Rorschach here. The drummer and I did a zine called Drastic Solutions that had some political stuff in it and Crisis of Faith had a political message while still retaining a raw hardcore sound. I was a production manager at the university newspaper at the time and was able to use their light tables at so I put together the cover and centrepiece artwork for the record. Everything was cut and paste back then. So this became the first official record on the label.

I moved downtown a little later and then we put together the Blundermen 10” and later the MPA release. But you can say this has always been a label out of Toronto. One of the many to come from here.

-What made you want to start a label? Were you a musician yourself? If so, what bands have you played in before and since? What exactly does Ragamuffin Soldier stand for? Is it a political stand?

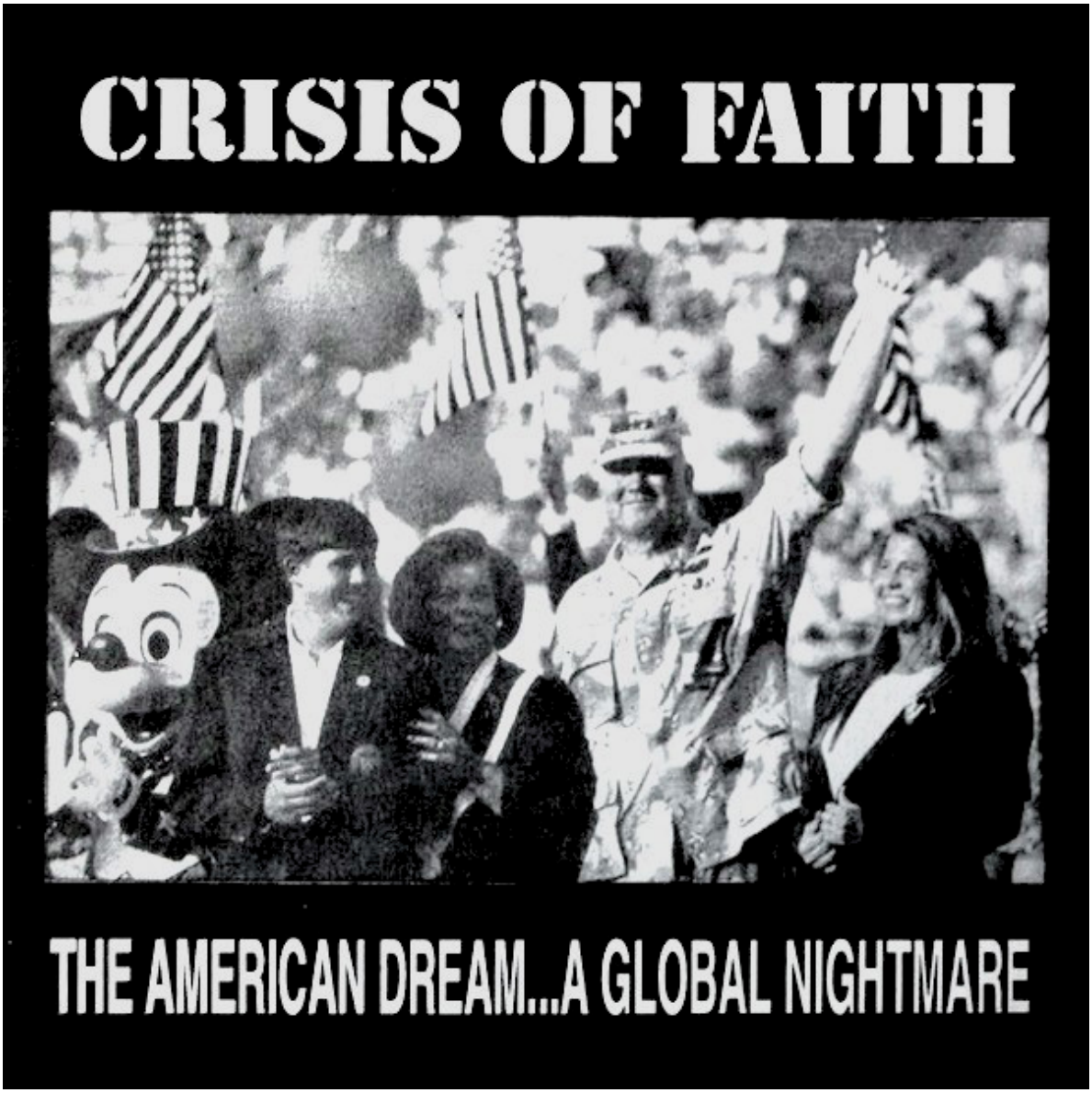
When I did the comp I was not a musician or in a band. I just wanted to be able to contribute to the scene. Fair Warning from Montreal had released an LP called “You are the Scene” which was a real expression of the DIY ethic that is so much apart of the scene. Bands like Sons of Ishmael and the Nunfuckers and Problem Children, and Negative Gain and Social Suicide were so awesome. Very few people knew about them outside of our area. The intention has always been to bring some attention to something great happening in our area.

As for bands I sang in a band called One Blood. This is where the name of the label comes from. Ten years after One Blood broke up I would co-sing in another band called Countdown to Oblivion. But at the time when One Blood was going I had dreads. The dreads were a way of me committing to the anti-racism cause. I had just gone to Jamaica with a friend of mine who was from there. When I was leaving to come home I walked to the airport and a security guard started laughing at me and called me a Ragamuffin Soldier. I thought this would be a great name. My friend Chris Iler, who would later start up Fans of Bad Productions Records label was an awesome artist. He made me a logo. It was me mixed with the Circle Jerks skank guy. I loved the logo. Anyway the name is more personal and partially political.

-Sometime then you released a cassette tape compilation called “Ontario: Yours to Discover”. I don’t have the compilation, so

could you tell us what bands were on this comp? What motivated you to release this compilation? How many copies were made?

The bands on the comp include the bands in the late 80’s who made up the Toronto scene like Sons of Ishmael, M.S.I., D.O.G., the Nunfuckers, Hype, Negative Gain, Problem Childrne, Social Suicide, Godcorp. and some others. I was finding that a lot of these band had releases, and they were great bands. It was time for the city to have a new comp which would capture some of the music from this time. But some of these bands weren;t really from Toronto, like Hype and Negative Gain came from Oakville. And the Nunfuckers were from kitchener. Social Suicide were from Brantford. So I started thinking of the comp as a province wide comp. Ken Rentner had some material for his old comp by Porcelain Forehead that he said I could use when I got in touch with Porcelain Forehead they recommended Flag of Truce and the Trapt. So the comp just grew. It took two and a half years to make. It was the first release. I think I made about 150 copies of the tape. A while back Chris Iler, who did the artwork for the comp, transferred the tape onto CD. Ed Pyves was telling me about how the “New Breed” comp was up as a download from a blog. And when your interview came in I thought I should make the tape available for download. So you can now download the comp song by song and the booklet up at our blog under http://equalizingxdistort.blogspot.com/1988/07/various-artists-ontario-yours-to.html. When I made the comp I think I sold about 150 copies so not very many.



Ragamuffin Soldier Records #1 – Crisis of Faith "The American Dream… A Global Nightmare", 1992

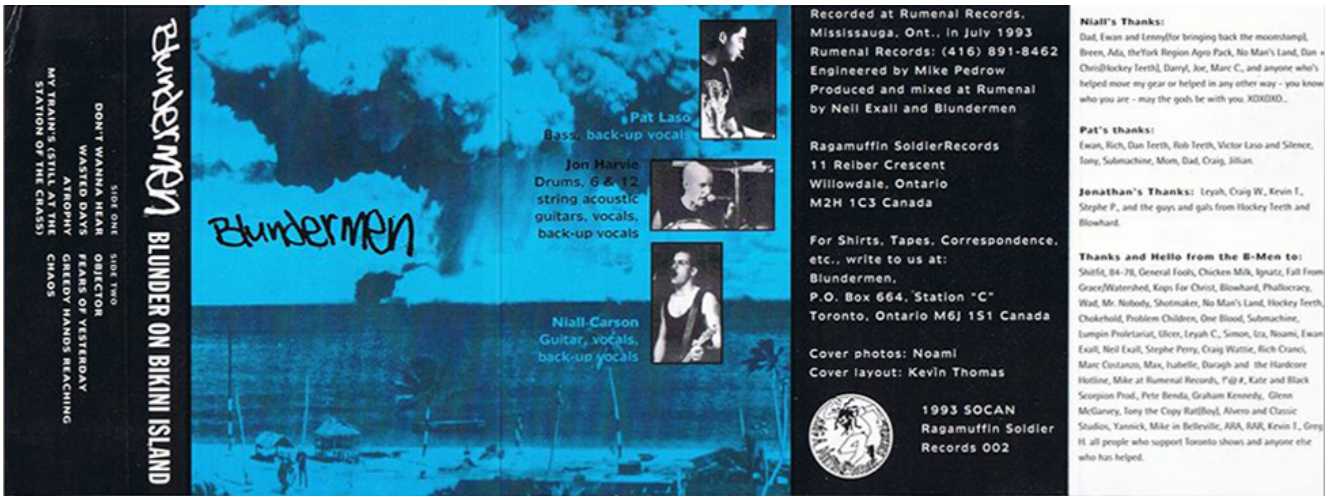
-Your first release was Crisis of Faith's "The American Dream…A Global Nightmare" 7″. How did you come to work with Crisis of Faith? Was this before or after they had done their split with Chokehold? How many copies were pressed?

So when we lived on Embro Drive, One Blood practiced in the basement. Crisis of Faith started working out their line up and they recorded ten songs in a studio. Dave Lake had replaced Heath on vocals and Lee, the bass player left. I released an ep. But the split came out at the same time and was from the same recording session. The drummer, Paul Abrash and I and Chris Iler all did a radio show at York

University. Ted Wong was one of the other co-hosts. Ted decided to do a label with Spencer Mak, who was a DJ after our show. He also had a history of releasing tape comps. But both releases were sort of a product of being part of the radio station, CHRY. We all came to know each other through campus-community radio.

-How was that 7″ received? Was there a buzz at the time about COF?

I think the 7” was sort of received. But they didn’t play out a lot and they broke up shortly soon after so that didn’t help either. But the recording was great. I still loved the recording. It was still worth putting out.



Ragamuffin Soldier Records #2 – Blundermen “Blunder on Bikini Island” tape/10′, November 20th 1993

-Your next release was the Blundermen 10″ vinyl /tape”Blunder on Bikini Island”. This band was more punk rock than Crisis of Faith. Was this a genre you preferred? How did you come to work with them? How many copies were made of the vinyl?

The Blundermen was from the next generation of bands to come out. Those guys were totally into older punk and oi and so were there followers. They used to do a 4-Skins and a Stiff Little Fingers cover. They did an awesome demo which I loved and went and recorded some new material. They were having

trouble trying to get someone to release it. So they approached me about doing the release. It had been quite a few years since I had done a release and I wasn't really thinking of continuing to do anymore records. But they were having such a hard time getting someone to put this out and I thought they were a great band that should not go unreleased. I was really busy with work at the time and so the band really did all the grunt work on making the release happen. The record had to be a 10" because we didn't have enough songs for 12" vinyl and we had too much for a 7".

-I really love that record. Do you think a lot of people have unfortunately forgotten about them? Was this the bands only release? I don't think they toured very much…

I don't think many people know about them unfortunately outside of their friends and the scene at the time. But I mentioned that the band recorded a demo. More recently Jon had made me a CD with a number of other recordings that the band did. They have loads of recordings that would make for an awesome CD release. Someone needs to do a discography for the band. I was hoping that the band would take it on, but they have all gone their separate ways. John still dabbles with music and I have even heard of a possible reunion show. I think it might happen. John would go on to start two more bands along the same lines as the Blundermen. He is super talented. One of those bands was called the Blastcaps and they self-released a CD.



Ragamuffin Soldier Records #3 – Mexican Power Authority "Haiku…Gesundheit" CD/double 12″, 1993

-The label's final release was the Mexican Power Authority compilation "Haiku… Gesundheit!", which was a compilation of 3 or 4 of their demos and eps I believe? Who's idea was it to make this compilation?

My friend Chris Iler had moved to Victoria, BC. One Christmas I decided that instead of hanging out at my folks house I would go to see Chris and his partner Jenn. They were doing Fans of Bad Productions out in Victoria. I had ordered the MPA cassette "Haiku Gesnundheit", but didn't really think about going out there to meet these guys. I was starting to learn about the Neos and the significance of

this band, but figured that they were part of a scene gone past. The singer Jason, found out I was coming and so he arranged with Chris for me to come over to his place and hang out. Jason was showing me some of the old tape releases from Victoria and we got along great. And I started realizing that MPA were so much like the Neos and that was because Kev Smith was in the Neos. I knew how great the Neos were. They were funny and unpretentious but they were also fast as shit and I was into bands like Larm and Heresy at that point so I knew this was Canada's answer to this kind of hardcore sound. We just started talking about how the first three cassette releases were so great and one thing led to another and again I thought it was such a shame that nobody knew about this band outside of Vancouver Island. I figured by putting this on vinyl the release would bring some attention to the band. I was not into doing CDs but the band talked me into it. So reluctantly I released the CD at the same time. The band did all the heavy lifting with getting the recording mastered and developing the artwork for the release. I got everything printed. But a double LP is expensive. And MPA wound up breaking up. They weren't much of a touring band. I still love the band and this material in particular. I just don't think people made the connection.

-MPA was from BC, compared to the Ontario bands you had previously worked with. How was it working with a band all the way on the west coast? Did you find it difficult to make it to their shows or sell their merch?

Normally when distance is involved with a release it becomes an obstacle. And there was periods of not knowing what was happening with the release, but Kev and Jason really took the bull by the horns and got everything done. There was a lot of stuff I didn't even think about that they did to make the release a quality sounding release. Same is true of the artwork for the covers. One week I thought this was going to

take months to get out and the next week they called me and were just finishing up the final touches on the art files for the covers and sending me everything. These guys had thought of everything right down to getting a test press sent directly to them. These are the kind of details that might get lost on a band, but MPA were totally excited about getting this out. And so was I.

-This came out on CD and double 12″ vinyl. To this day it's probably the most available of all your releases. How many copies of each were made and how well did this sell?

I only did 1,000 of each. I printed 2,000 jackets.

-How was the label doing at the time? Was it getting recognized, and were you getting contacted by many bands?

There was so much time between each release. In thinking about it now, I think there was different generations of the scene happening between each release so there was no continuity to ever establish the name of the label. Plus I didn't have a lot of money to get more releases out in between. You really had to rely on saving enough money from your job because none of these releases would ever pay for themselves.

-But the label ended up going under… How come?

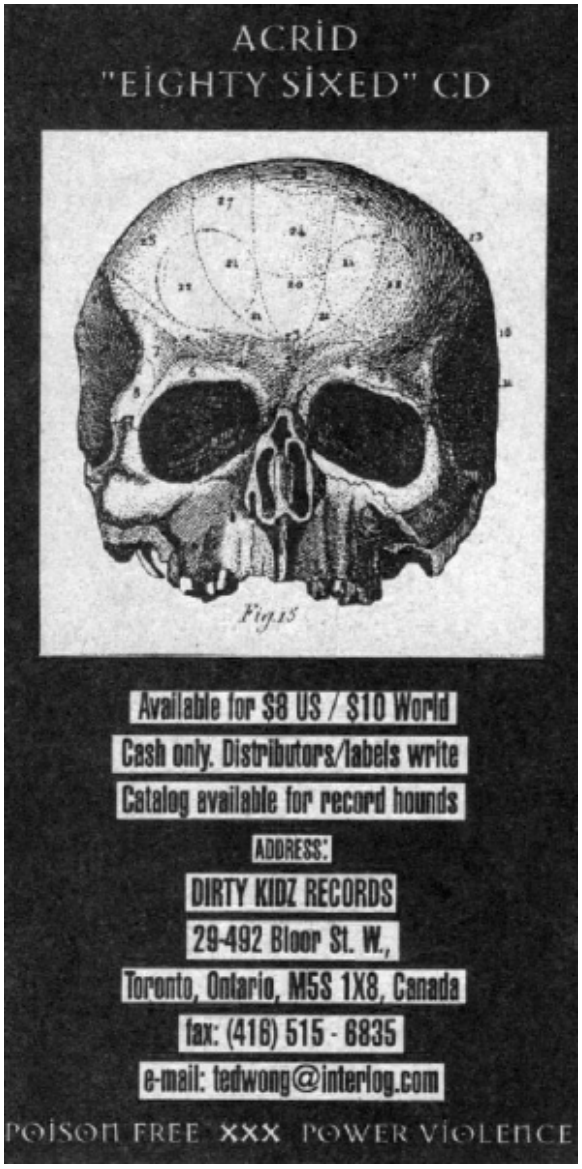
The label didn't really go under. I just needed to put my money into my life. I got married and bought a house and couldn't really afford to keep a label going.

Dirty Kidz Records #1 – Acrid "Eighty-Sixed" CD, summer 1997

-In 1997 you started a new label with your friend Ted Wong called Dirty Kidz Records. This label ended up only releasing one CD, Acrid's "Eighty-Sixed". Was it intentional for this

label to only release this or it just didn’t happen as well as you hoped?

Mexican Power Authority came out to Ontario and played a few shows before Jason moved to Europe. I put on the show for them here. There was a short lived space in Kensington Market called the Laundrymat. Only a few shows took place there, like a Danko Jones show and a Deadly Snakes show and a Teen Crud Combo show. It seemed like a great space and the show could have beer and be all ages. So I tried to get a good cross section of the scene having Armed and Hammered play the show with Acrid who were a new school straight edge band that used power violence for their sound. All the bands were very different. I even had one of Toronto’s first hip hop DJs come spin some records, but he spun hardcore records instead. It was a crazy night. Anyway, that show kind of made me appreciate Acrid. Those kids went in to the studio and recorded and Kyle Bishop said why don’t you put it out. I didn’t have enough money and so I asked Ted Wong if he wanted to help me with it. I think Kyle came up with the name Dirty Kidz for the label. He was designing the artwork with Matt and they just came up with the name. I don’t think we were going to do anything else after the Acrid release. Kyle convinced the guys from No Idea to release these recordings onto vinyl so we sent them the files to Var and he put everything together for a vinyl release but that was a year or two later.



Dirty Kidz Records ad in the HeartattaCk magazine, November 1997 for Eighty-Sixed

-That album was huge! And Acrid is still well talked about nowadays, partly due to The Swarm and Cursed connection. But that album was a masterpiece, and the fact that No Idea repressed it just shows you it was well worth material. How many copies of it was made? How did you handle this release? Did you tour with the band to support them and help sell the album?

Well the original line up for the SWARM had Mike and Kyle from Acrid in the line up. ACRID formed with Kyle leaving

that original line up. And the drummer Mike played in both. The singer Neil was a guy who used to do a lot of the shows out in Oakville. They were great kids. Very enthusiastic about the scene and did everything to make it happen. It was great to be involved with them. And they did tour but I didn't go with them. I was working and couldn't get away and I don't think there was room anyway. We were never asked to go on tour but it was understood that we couldn't go. The band just took the CDs and sold them on tour. We trusted them completely and had good reason to. I think we only made 1,000 of the CDs. I was recently doing some research on the vinyl pressings on the No Idea site and I think Var pressed 1,500 of each record. The Acrid /Left for Dead split had loads of different presses, which is all available on the No Idea site.

-Have you ever made any other merch other than the albums for any bands you worked with, such as shirts, posters, etc?

I never really did merch for any bands. I did have a job as a silk screener but it was for a guy outside of the scene so we didn't do jobs in the punk scene. And I have done loads of zines. *Drastic Solutions* was the first one that I helped with and the radio show zine is the one that I still do to this day.

-How do you look back on the days you had in the record label business? If you had to do it again would you change anything? Were there releases that were planned but never happened? What bands would you have really wanted to work with?

It was a lot of hard work. And it was pretty thankless. But you did it to try and help the scene. I did want to try and do a compilation of bands doing songs that were criticizing Coca Cola because I did a lot of research on how awful they were. And I put some time into trying to do a bootleg LP that would have the Toronto punk bands on them. Kind of like a Killed By Death comp for Toronto. That one should come

out. And now that the Toronto scene is being written about, the comp is overdue.

-And finally, what are you doing now with your life?

Every Sunday we do a two hour radio show. I spend loads of time putting work into that. We host a blog site related to history on the scene in Toronto and throughout Canada and we do a zine whenever we can get them out. You can tune in at 89.5 FM in the Toronto area every Sunday night between 10:00pm and midnight or you can check out the blog at http://equalizingxdistort.blogspot.com for downloads of the show and other tidbits on the scene.