

Kurt Sayenga Interviewed by John Davis
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Pasadena, California
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Sayenga: I'm Kurt Sayenga.

Davis: And I'm John Davis. I'm the performing arts metadata archivist at the University of Maryland. Today is June 13th, 2017. So, we're here to talk about your work that you did with fanzines in Washington D.C., particularly in the...

Sayenga: My juvenilia, yes.

Davis: Yes, [laugh] in the 1980s. I'm basically trying to speak to people to hear their stories about why they did zines, how they did zines. What were the experiences like? What did they take from it? You today, how do you connect to it? All these things. I'm just kind of trying to review that with some people who have done fanzines, who are from D.C. and just see kind of where it took them, as well as how they did it. So as far as *Greed* goes, first issue was I think 1985? Let's consult.

Sayenga: Good question. I'm going to look it up here. Let's see. Oh, there's a picture of—man, late Winter 1986. [laugh]

Davis: OK. Very specific.

Sayenga: So basically probably almost 1987, which makes it—no, '86 is right though, because I know it took a while to actually pull it all together. So, well, sort of relatively—it seemed like a while at the time, because everything seemed to take forever. But actually when you look at it, it all flowed together with amazing speed.

Davis: So why did you do it?

Sayenga: OK. First, I moved to D.C. at the end of '83. Moved back to D.C., basically. I was actually from the suburbs of—and my father was in the—hmm. My father did secret things, [laugh], and so therefore we lived around the D.C. area. And I would drive in to see shows and bands and stuff, although I did not know anything about the local music scene. I was driving—as it was, it was enough of an effort to try to convince anybody to go in with me to see like The Tubes or The Kinks. Things like that. And

The Tubes concert, when I was in high school, is where I saw my first punk rockers, which were two young women who were like full-on—this is like 1976 or '77 or whatever. And my best friend thought they were prostitutes, and I thought they were the coolest girls I had ever seen, basically.

Davis: [laugh]

Sayenga: And that was kind of a dividing point, [laugh] for everything else. I was really into Roxy Music, and Bowie, and all that kind of stuff there. And through that, I started getting magazines like *Trouser Press*, when I'd go to visit my brother, who was at the—there's a record store in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where I went to school—University of Michigan—called Schoolkids. And Schoolkids had a great record—just great everything.

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I actually wound up working there in college, which was also a big part of how I got into all of this stuff, and scene stuff. Because at first, it seemed very—particularly being a kid in the suburbs and whatever else, and completely disconnected, there seemed no way into that. And then punk rock happened, which was great and amazing, but it still seemed remote.

Then, once I actually got to know people who came in and did in-stores and records and whatever else, and you'd see these kind of things rising up—and we would get the Dischord releases and things like that too, which I found very exciting. It was actually one of the reasons why I decided to move to D.C. after college.

Well, I was very happy working at the record store. Then I got the student loan bills and then realized I had to get a real job. [laugh] So, thus moved to D.C. and wound up working in basically a double life, essentially. So working at the day on Capitol Hill, and then I would go to see bands—9:30 Club, d.c space, all the usual hangouts, and plus all these horrible holes in the wall where people would play and just—Wilson Center, et cetera, et cetera.

Which is not necessarily—there was a place called the Complex, that was like up above—it was in Adams Morgan, I think? It was basically just—it would be the second floor of something. Actually, it was downtown on I Street. D.C. of course was radically different back then too. So I'd take the subway, unless it was closed, and walk back, or whatever, from wherever I was. So I rarely slept, basically. So [laugh].

And kind of in the first year, I was alone. The year after that, I started living with a woman who's—Ann Chervinsky, who's listed as the—let's see—what was her official title? Chiefs of staff. Basically like assistant

editor, I think. And yeah, we went to see bands all the time. And I just sort of got to know people, through going to record stores.

That's how I met Brendan [Canty] and Eddie Janney, and a bunch of other people. Danny Ingram I think was one of my first friends when I came to D.C.

Davis: Was Yesterday & Today the main store?

Sayenga: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Well, I had to do the mecca to Yesterday & Today, but that was a real pain, because I lived like in Adams Morgan, and so it involved taking the bus and all this other stuff. So it was—yeah. So that was a big deal. More often, I would just walk from where I lived down to Melody Records, when Howard Wuelfing curated it, and buy stuff from them. And Olsson's, which is where I met everybody, basically. Because everybody worked at Olsson's—one of those two Olsson's locations.

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Which was also one of the first places where I took *Greed* to, once we published it. Once I started figuring that whole thing out. And when I was first living there, I was also doing—in college, I had been doing comics and things. So kind of one-panel things, and some more slightly longer things which were more oriented around that subculture. So I first published them in Gordon Gordon's *DC Period* [*WDC Period*].

Davis: Sure.

Sayenga: I got to know Gordon [Ornelas] and those guys—Gordon and Dan—and submitted stuff to them. I liked *Truly Needy*, and was actually interested in contributing to it, but I literally stepped on Barbara Rice's toes, and then later figuratively. [laugh]

So at some party, where I was going to volunteer my services, except I was like—back then, I was draped in like full, you know, leather and huge boots and whatever else. And yeah, stepped on Barbara—and Barbara's an interesting person anyway. So she didn't take that so well.

And that was actually probably the moment where I realized, [laugh] "I'm going to put out my own magazine," I think. Which was weird, because then I put it out, and then I don't think *Truly Needy* ever came out again, after that point. She also made her displeasure known to me, personally.

Davis: Hmm. That you were doing a fanzine?

Sayenga: Once I put it out, and she basically equated it to sort of—"It's interesting how an old band's around, everybody likes it, but then the new band comes out, and everybody is really all over that, and suddenly the old

band...” [laugh]. Like, hmm. Not quite sure what veiled message you're sending me here, [laugh] Barbara, but—which was too bad, because again, I thought they—*DC Period*, *Truly Needy*—they all did very different things than what I was doing.

Davis: Yeah. They were definitely sort of distinct entities.

Sayenga: Yeah. *DC Period* was doing regular coverage like, “Hey, here’s what’s happening next week.” Or next month or something. Which was great. And they were really nice about it. *Truly Needy* was more of like a—it comes out when it comes out, and it kind of chronicled more of the hardcore scene.

And essentially, I came out exactly at the point of Revolution Summer and all of those kinds of bands, where there was a real sea change in D.C. and what people were listening to, and kind of more of a willingness to embrace the fact that they were artists interested in art. Whereas before that, that was considered suspect and possibly—there was a lot of homophobia also in that culture early on too. Not necessarily in the D.C. part of it, although it might have been. I know in Detroit, it was horrible.

Davis: You can see it in some of the interviews.

Sayenga: The Meatmen records—look at those. I mean, they're a fun band, but at the same time, it was just like, there would be so much stuff that was just god-awful embarrassing.

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Davis: Yeah. And there was this element of like, “We're just kidding. It’s just a joke. Can’t you take a joke?”

Sayenga: Yeah, and I get the idea of being obnoxious on purpose as a statement, because god knows *Greed* had stuff in it where I look at that, and I’m just like, “Oh, you're just being an asshole to provoke [laugh]—just to wind people up.” And where was that coming from? I know where that was coming from, which was like an enormous wellspring of anger, basically.

Davis: And certainly that age that we were all at when making those magazines, you're all the more likely to sort of be spouting off about things.

Sayenga: Well, and you also assume a persona. I don’t know about you, but I very much assumed this persona essentially of just being—it was very much inspired by the—again, the stuff I used to like to read was—I grew up with *Creem*, and Lester Bangs was editor. That was a huge influence on what I thought a rock magazine should be like, which is essentially nothing is sacred, and also it’s essentially a joke. I mean, I always considered *Greed* a humor magazine...

Davis: Hmm.

Sayenga: ...more than anything else! [laugh] And the people I knew who actually liked it, which wound up turning out to be all people who I'm very happy I became friends with, they all got the joke, fortunately. But if they hadn't—I tried to take the attitude as “I don't care if you don't get the jokes.” [laugh]

Davis: Did you read, like, *Punk* fanzine and stuff like that?

Sayenga: Yeah, sure. I read—yeah, *Punk* was great. Mostly I liked it because the cartoons were great, [laugh]. [John] Holmstrom—he was—yeah, that was great. And I also—I had a couple of *Search & Destroys*. Yeah, I bought everything I could. I read *Maximum Rocknroll*, even though I hated *Maximum Rocknroll*, partly because it was just so like...

Davis: It was dogmatic and...

Sayenga: There's that aspect of it, like the humorlessness of it. It also—more than anything, just I was offended by just how ugly it was. [laugh]. And that was one of those things that I was reacting to, essentially. Although again, I understood why it was there and why it looked that way. So I don't want to make it seem like—you know, I consumed those things, and I thought they were interesting. At the same time, I looked at it, and I thought like, “Well, this sort of props up this idea of punks being illiterates with no sense of taste.”

Davis: Not appreciating aesthetics.

Sayenga: Yes, exactly. And I was very much opposed to that. Then again, also this probably says a lot about me, is that one the reasons why I actually embraced more like the dressing part of it, and becoming part of it, was because I read a book by a Marxist philosopher [laugh] called “Subculture and the Meaning of Style”...

Davis: I've read that too. Yeah.

Sayenga: That changed my life, basically.

Davis: Interesting, yeah.

Sayenga: Because I had always been interested in the music, but I always thought, “Well, the dressing up part seems kind of like—eh, you know, do I really want to do that?”

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And then I read that, and I thought, “OK, great. Now I have a [laugh]—I have an ideology.”

Davis: [inaudible - crosstalk]

Sayenga: Oh, good. I’m so glad to meet somebody else who has read it. Yeah.

Davis: Yeah. Well, within sort of academic circles, with punk and academia, it’s the sort of the urtext for that study of things. Of taking it seriously and actually applying serious thought to what’s happening, to semiotics, and all these kind of things, that are at the core of that book. And it still gets talked about today.

Sayenga: Good. It should. I thought it was—yeah, it was an excellent book. And it was so rare to find stuff. Just incredibly rare. I mean, I stumbled upon that in the back of some little store that was around very briefly in Ann Arbor. And they’d get in these books from wherever, and they’d also get in the much coveted pair of black jeans, which were impossible to find in the Midwest. You know? So things like that. All the stuff that got me having frat boys throw beer bottles. All that good stuff.

So, very small [laugh]—very small little scene in Ann Arbor. Very few people. Although lots of people who actually liked the music. Again, all this changed so quickly. Like the more years out you got, the more you got into the 1980s, the more the underground scene at least became a group. Or maybe it was just because I met more people and became friends with them.

Because in D.C., it’s not like there was a huge explosion of it. And yet, there were those people, and those people were great. And you could identify each other through all those subcultural signifiers, and talk and then—yeah. And then have a group of people. It was good.

Davis: Yeah. And that wave that I guess I sort of associate you with—I don’t know if you would call it like a third wave of D.C. punk, sort of emerging with Revolution Summer and that bunch of people, it does stand apart obviously as being sort of more pro-art, more pro-aesthetics. And because it’s called emocore, or whatever...

Sayenga: Oh god. Yeah. Uch.

Davis: Exactly. And it becomes this thing that’s just like—it’s almost—it’s embarrassing or something. This sort of misinterpretation of what’s happening.

Sayenga: And that seems so far—because I haven’t listened to hardly any of the descendants of that music. I mean, I just like—I got that’s just what was happening at the time. And it was great, because it was sort of like a fresh

breeze basically. So much of that probably has to do with Guy [Picciotto] also bringing in his very literate sensibility to everything, and that kind of made everybody else up their game. I mean, Chris Bald wrote a lot of the lyrics for Embrace, for example. But that was very—and yet it was—those were the shows that I saw, like the first Ian MacKaye shows were basically all the post Minor Threat bands.

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Basically I got there when Minor Threat broke up. [laugh] Which is like the one band who was clearly the standout band of the bunch. The Faith, I got to see, and The Faith were great. Then they broke up, of course. And then I became used to the D.C. cycle of like—I didn't realize, oh, they're actually the old bands. Every other band lasts more like a month to six weeks or something. Which is actually something I made fun of in this issue, with the scene report, because I just kept—every time the reporter went to report on a band, they had broken up while he was in the bathroom, or whatever else. So it was just—yeah.

Davis: And that never changed.

Sayenga: No. [laugh]

Davis: I mean, in the nineties, when I was doing fanzines, I would have a section like essentially news bits or something. And every single issue—it got to the point where it was like, “Here's the list of bands that broke up.” It's just—there were always four or five, six bands that broke up. One or two were pretty consequential. There was always this really quick turnover for some reason. And I don't know if it was something specific to D.C., or it was just—I don't know. But it's been like that for a while.

Sayenga: Yeah. Some of it was. Some of it was things like just willful perversity on the part of like—well, when the whole Rites of Spring into One Last Wish—when Mike [Hampton] came to play guitar, and then they reformed again after they had a fight in the studio, and then became Happy Go Licky, because they couldn't be Rites of Spring again. Although they did have a completely different playlist and completely different aesthetic, which is more like improvisational and whatever. And those are all bands where I saw almost every single—I definitely saw every single show they played in D.C., and some, a few, outside. I always liked One Last Wish the best, for what it's worth. So they were amazing. Next to Fugazi, they're like my second favorite D.C. band.

Davis: Did they play shows?

Sayenga: One Last Wish? Yeah! Yeah. Six. [laugh] But they were great. Like really great. Like amazingly great. And then Guy had this thing where he would always leave the stage by crawling up something and like climbing away

somewhere. So anyway, it was very theatrical. And they were also very stylish sort of, too. They had this almost kind of semi-moddish thing about them that got definitely dropped in any—it wasn't there in any previous band, and it was not there in any subsequent band.

Davis: In what sense?

Sayenga: Just that they were in nice coats, and be more like—particularly that was Eddie's—because Eddie was becoming more like this French artiste, basically. [laugh] So that became more of his vibe, and I think everybody picked up from that.

Davis: So, as far as starting the magazine...

Sayenga: Ah, yes.

Davis: What is it that—you talked about your interactions with Barbara Rice, and then...

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Sayenga: Well yeah, that was just one more thing basically. That was like one of those sort of turning points. That may have even happened before—I can't remember if that was before or after *DC Period* popped up, and then I started contributing to them. That may have been actually pretty early on. The real thing was I decided—I got it into my head to interview the Hernandez Brothers, because...

Davis: *Love and Rockets*.

Sayenga: *Love and Rockets*, yeah. Because *Love and Rockets*, when that came out, that's another thing that changed everything for me. Like just the first issue, just seeing the promos for Jaime's first cover of that, was just like, "This looks so great."

And that was something you did not see at all. Nobody had approached punk in anything like that way in comics. And then when this first came out, it was just like, oh, this is like—these guys are actually living it. It's not like some outsider perspective on it. It's super insider. It became more and more and more that way obviously over the years as they really got more reportorial in some ways.

And so I wanted to talk to them. The funny thing is—I was just mentioning this to my wife, and I honestly don't even remember how I got a hold of them, how I got their number, how I was able to set that up. I don't recall anymore. But somehow I did. Now at the time, I was also working as a reporter for—C-SPAN had also a print newspaper, that I

started as a typist and then ended as editor on, basically, in kind of a fairly quick time. So that was my day job.

Davis: Are you able to say what newspaper it was?

Sayenga: It was just called like the *C-SPAN Update*.

Davis: Oh, C-SPAN had that too?

Sayenga: Yeah, yeah. So we'd write about congressional bills and try to explain what was going on, and interview people, and whatever else. And in high school, this all feeds into this thing, I was also editor of my high school newspaper, which involved a bunch of paste-up and whatnot. So, C-SPAN, the newspaper was actually put out with a—through a proper typesetting company.

And I was like the fastest typist, so I'd wind up doing a lot of that initially, and then going down to the typesetting place, and you'd get these—all this typed beautiful looking type. I had done some graphic design in college just for laughs basically, for Schoolkids. I designed a bunch of ads for them. So I always kind of had an interest in that.

And then I decided if I—I got this interview with the Hernandez Brothers. It went well. And then I looked at *DC Period*, and I thought, "I don't want this to look like that. I don't want to just give Gordon this copy." Because as much as I love Gordon, I still wanted it to look nice. [laugh]

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And I had access to this stuff. So I thought...

Davis: Through work?

Sayenga: Through work, yeah. So I just thought, "Oh, I'll just smuggle the copy in with that." And I did. And then I laid it out and it looked nice, I thought. And then I got *DC Period* and opened it up, and I thought "Oh, there's this thing." And it really stuck out like a really sore thumb. Like it looked completely unlike the rest of it. And I'm sure Ann also said basically, "Maybe you should just do your own thing." And so, I did.

And then I thought, "Well, I know a bunch of people." And I could also go around and talk to people. I sort of barely knew Eddie and Brendan at that point, and so I went to interview them. And that actually kicked off my—Brendan's my best friend, so, this point—so that happened within a couple of years of that, I think.

Davis: And that was their final interview? Is that right?

Sayenga: Yeah. They had just broken up probably like a couple of days before [laugh] I arrived at their group house. And so Mike Fellows is not in it, because Mike was the sticking point, as he often is [laugh] in bands. And yeah.

And the strange thing about that interview is it's the only interview I think in any of *Greed's* band interviews that is any way reverential. [laugh] Because the rest of them just are just sendups of interviews, essentially. Just through every single time, I was trying to find some other way just to make fun of the rock interview format, because I thought it was so hopeless and tired and done, and what's even the point of this.

But at the same time, it's sort of like, well, it's interesting to meet these people in some cases in some cases. And in some cases, it's more—particularly as we went on through the years, it became more like, “Why am I talking to this person? That's not what I set out to do here.” So anyway.

Davis: Is that sort of when you decided to wrap up the zine?

Sayenga: That was complicated, basically, but I think we'll get to that, because it's sort of a process. There were a lot of things involved in it. Part of it being that, and part of it, yeah, that I felt that basically it was getting away from what I set out to do. Essentially it got too big too fast, which is a nice problem to have, in that world. But at the same time, there's certain tradeoffs that come when all of a sudden, in order to pay for like the color covers and stuff like that, I had to sell advertising. But then that started to catch on, and I actually started getting advertising from big labels, which is great, but then with that comes they have some leverage over you essentially, to say, “It would be really nice if you interviewed these guys.”

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And I'd go like, “Huh.” And they'd say, “Well, you know...” And sometimes I'd say—most of the time I said “no” actually, but then sometimes it would be like, you know, “Oh, OK. Full page ad? Color full-page ad?” [laugh] I'd say, “Hmm.” Anyway.

Davis: So you did conduct interviews that you sort of felt [inaudible - crosstalk] about?

Sayenga: Yeah. Well, actually, I think there's only like one of them, and I published it under a fake name, of course. So let's see, because—and I was also not particularly nice about it either, I'm afraid. But then there were people like—like Band of Susans. I didn't know Band of Susans, when they were pressing them, but at the same time, I listened to them and I thought like, “OK, well, they're noisy. That's good. That fits within the New York noise aesthetic stuff that I'm including in this.”

So that was fine, and they were lovely people also. And they were opening for Wire too, as well, which was—Wire was one of my two favorite bands. The Fall and Wire. So OK, let's see. I'm just going to chart this evolution again.

So, I know you asked a little about essentially how things changed or what the collaboration was like, such as it was. And collaboration, basically I can say much like The Fall, [laugh] it started out more as a collaboration [laugh] and then rapidly became less of one, partly because of changing circumstances basically—changing of friendships—and also because of what I was trying to do with it.

Like unfortunately after the first issue, I thought I would get more submissions that were great. And instead, I got like a ton of poetry basically. Which I actually even published in this thing, which was another thing where people said, “You've got to not do that. Don't even bother.”

Davis: [laugh]

Sayenga: Although I think I still did, for issue #3.

Davis: I did that too. The first two issues of my first fanzine included poetry.

Sayenga: Because you're trying to like—OK, you're trying to express yourself, and I was trying to get this thing of like, OK, D.C. isn't—the D.C. scene is more than just kids bashing each other in the head or whatever else, or playing loud guitars. As great as that is, there was also other means of expression, and so let's try to get some of that out there. That was the goal.

Davis: Again, you're trying to set yourself apart from sort of the kind of whatever. The way that most fanzines were at that time.

Sayenga: Yeah. Well particularly at that time, when it was again sweaty hardcore boys, and there was so much of this—like the skinhead thing cannot be understated also, when that was going on, because it was at its worst when I was trying to put this stuff together. And all through even the early days of Fugazi it was just like out of control still, actually. So that was always a looming presence as well. Like one of the most unpleasant encounters I had [laugh], basically about this kind of thing, actually has to do with the “Meese is a Pig” thing, so—which I wrote text for that, and all of my friends—we—it was a bunch of us, so.

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And then I was in DuPont Circle, and let's see. I can't remember who was playing in the middle of the circle. Some D.C. bands basically. And at the

time, I was living at Dischord House, in fact, because that must have been like the summer when I was actually first designing the first Fugazi EP.

So I went to see this concert, and there's a skinhead guy who's selling a t-shirt that's like, "Experts Agree: I Am A Pig." And I said, "Does Jeff [Nelson, designer of the "Meese Is A Pig" logo] know you did that?" Because you know, Jeff was depending on his livelihood for that. And then he went pretty ballistic and asked me to step around the corner. I pointed out we were in a circle. This did not go over well. [laugh]

Davis: [laugh]

Sayenga: So he went—but he basically left me alone ultimately. And I actually asked somebody later—Bert—and he said like, "Oh, well, he figured out who your friends are." So it was like, OK, well, that's one good thing that came out of all of this. I didn't get beaten to death by a skinhead.

So *Greed 1*—I think we can just flip through this. That's my ex-girlfriend, but at the time current. Well she was on and off, [laugh] through all of these things. We lived together, then we didn't live together, then we did for a while, then definitely did not.

OK, chiefs of staff. OK. So this is the evolution of things. Editor, art director—that was certainly always true. Chiefs of staff—Kendall Church. Kendall was more of kind of a slightly older wave punk, basically. And we—Ann [Chervinsky] and I and Kendall and his wife lived together for a few months in a house, and Kendall did a lot on Xerox night, which was a thing for the first issue.

Peter was a friend of mine. He was going out with a woman I worked with at Schoolkids, and so he was my basically best friend the first year I lived in D.C., and that we would go to all the shows together.

Davis: Peter Hayes?

Sayenga: Peter Hayes, yeah. Peter lived in Capitol Hill, in a carriage house or whatever, and so I would often crash there, and we just saw as many things as we could possibly see. And he was a big skateboarder, which I was not, because I was worried about breaking my wrists, which would be an occupational hazard.

Davis: Sure, sure.

Sayenga: [laugh] And Caroline Ely was a dear friend of mine, and Caroline worked with me at C-SPAN. So that was one of those things where she turned out to be just this brilliant super smart fantastic writer, and we kind of helped each other with jobs through the years basically, early on.

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In fact she got me an interview with Discovery Channel when I was just—came in as like a temp job to look at some footage, which essentially I somehow parlayed into a career as a director. [laugh] So anyway. Through some very fortunate things. And Ann. And Ann, essentially, was proofreader, so pretty much for all of these issues, as well as support and whatever the opposite of support is.

And let's see. Yes, the rest of these are all friends. Let's see, Lida [Husik] is another band person. Bert [Queiroz], of course. Chris Bald gave me 20 bucks towards the thing, which that was awesome. Yeah. And Paul Westerberg. Oh, yeah, Lori [Bizer] was Peter's ex-girlfriend. Married Paul Westerberg of The Replacements. Anyway. So hence the Paul Westerberg—"20 Questions With Paul Westerberg" thing—that's in issue #1.

So I was trying to work whatever connections I had here. So it had things like, yeah, Kendall reviewing "Ginger Ale." Chris Bald drawing. OK, even then, I still never wanted to publish proper record reviews, so I'd try to sort of outsource them to a bunch of people. That was also inspired by a magazine called *Matter*.

Davis: Sure.

Sayenga: I loved *Matter*, particularly [Steve] Albini's articles. And again, you read Albini's articles, and I also like hunted down his Big Black record, like "Cables" when it first came out, because I just wanted to see whether this obnoxious but great guy...actually could play. Then it was sort of like, he's the one rock critic who can actually make me—[laugh]—who's really interesting!

Davis: Yeah. That's interesting.

Sayenga: Yeah, so *Matter* was a big deal to me. And I sort of aspired, sort of in one way—that's why kind of—it's also called *Greed Magazine*, although it doesn't say it on the front, which is good. But I kind of also deliberately tried to use the word "magazine" as well, just to—because I had in mind—even then, I think I was kind of thinking, well, I want to differentiate it from just a zine, and also maybe how can I reach the most people? And so that meant trying to figure out distribution and stuff, which was a whole other tangled thing.

Davis: Did you read *OP*, or the early issues of *Option*?

Sayenga: Yeah, sure.

Davis: Particularly with *Option*, I was wondering that, in looking at this—to me, there’s some overlap in terms of the...

Sayenga: I don’t remember seeing *OP* at the time, though, so—that’s what I mean. That’s...

Davis: *OP* was more like—is a little more like a—*Descenes* was before your time, right?

Sayenga: Mm.

Davis: I don’t know if you ever saw that one.

Sayenga: Nope.

Davis: But *OP* was a little more like a big old tabloid-sized thing.

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But those first—when they changed to *Option* and then those first couple issues are a little more “magazine-y”.

Sayenga: Yeah, I remember those when they came out. But when it was *Option*, basically.

Davis: But that didn’t make much of an impact on you.

Sayenga: No, no. The ones I remember—the one I know that was really instructive was *Matter*, more because again, I thought the writing was good, and they actually proofread, and it looked good. And yeah, let’s see. When we talk about—actually, I wanted to show you the boards, which I have back here. But mechanically, there’s like a huge—this is basically the early history of desktop publishing [laugh] written over six issues essentially. Issue 1, there is no desktop publishing. [laugh] It doesn’t—that technology is not in the reach of the masses yet.

Davis: So how do you set that type?

Sayenga: So I set that type all through work, of course. The same way actually I started setting—doing typography for Jeff Nelson, basically, at Dischord. Who is also important to say I became friends with somewhere in here. By this time, Jeff did the color separations in #4, so sometimes after issue #3, we were tight enough to do that.

I had started setting type for whatever else, like let’s see, the *Minor Threat* CD and things like that. So just whatever he had that I could smuggle through, until it became a parting of the ways, let’s say, with my place of employment.

So the first one, which actually did happen right around here—oh, so it must have been [inaudible phrase] wrote—OK, geez, sorry. This old memory is—yeah, so I must have been doing it as early as this, between this and this, because basically this is all—this is the first desktop thing. This is all done with a genuine typesetting place, and then printed it out.

And the front couple of pages, we actually took to a lithography place or something I think, and had it like properly printed. A place Peter knew. And I think Peter picked this cover stock, I think. Or no, I think we both went there, and picked it out. Anyway, we wanted something that was nice and a little heavier, but was—had its own—but not grotesquely expensive, of course, because again, this is all done for no money. Because I was like—it's important also to say here that I was not a child of privilege in any way. I put myself through school and lived on very little until about 1991. [laugh]

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Anyway. So yeah. So the first bunch of pages were actually run off, and then the rest, we bought some really nice paper, and then went into my office at 2:00 in the morning, and jammed on the Xerox machine for hours until we killed it. [laugh] Like the machine was dead. And then we beat a hasty retreat. And then we had a stapling—like a collating and stapling party, and put together—I think it was like 1,000 issues the first one.

Davis: Yeah. I was going to ask the circulation of this one.

Sayenga: Yeah.

Davis: So the first few pages in it are...

Sayenga: Yeah, properly printed. Yes.

Davis: Printed. And then the...

Sayenga: And the rest are Xerox.

Davis: Interesting.

Sayenga: Which is why I can see—I can tell exactly what hour—like how far into the Xerox room each issue is done. Because there's definite fading and weirdness and stuff. And we had to throw out—some were just shot. But this is a pretty good version of it, actually. Oh, and this has one of the original "Hyperboy"s. OK. Which actually wound up eventually—I kind of finished doing that for Steve Niles' *Fly in My Eye* collection that he put out.

Davis: So that's yours? That...?

Sayenga: Yeah. Oh yeah yeah yeah yeah. So, in some ways, like I say, this actually started as—this one’s actually—I don’t mind the art, but some of the other stuff is kind of embarrassing. It’s really more about this panel.

Davis: I was struck by [“Hyperboy”]. I thought that that was really sad.

Sayenga: [laugh] It’s actually based on a true story, of course. [laugh] So just me walking through D.C. So yeah.

Davis: Yeah. Just in reading—the first time I read this. There are a few comics—there were a lot of comics in punk zines at that time.

Sayenga: Oh yeah.

Davis: And not just sort of a John Crawford kind of thing, of like the—was it “Baboon Dooley” or whatever?

Sayenga: Yeah. That guy, yeah. He actually wrote me and sent me stuff eventually.

Davis: [“Hyperboy”] stood out to me as like, “Oh this is really sad.”

Sayenga: Oh! Thanks. They get sadder.

Davis: OK.

Sayenga: They get a lot, lot, lot sadder, particularly the one in—let’s see, in *Fly in my Eye*. And also *The Boogins*, which is actually another thing that I actually contributed comics to, and that was very, very early on, when I first got to D.C., I think.

Davis: Yeah, I was going to ask about that. Because there is that crossover with, like, *WDC Period*, what you were doing, *The Boogins*. That was a real force there, I thought. Like the sort of punk and comics crossover that I don’t think I really noticed until sort of I started to investigate this a little more.

Sayenga: Mmhmm.

Davis: And maybe that had sort of faded by the time that I got into things.

Sayenga: Probably. I think there are only a few people—Rene Farkass and Steve Niles who were like hard into it. And Steve was like one of my—a very, very, very good friend in those early years as well.

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And partly because we were in this together, and also we actually wound up going to Comic-Con in 1989 together, which was actually great. Because at the time, nobody went to Comic-Con but comic book nerds.

And then they would hire these like kind of cool young women who were working for the stores, and then they'd be surrounded by guys dressed like Thor or whatever, who were not in any way like Thor. So, made a lot of friends in that one. That was good. A lot of nice people who were kind of a—anyway—and who were actually helpful with getting distribution and stuff for this thing.

Because the thing that I glommed onto early was that OK, there's music distributors, and you can approach them, but there are only a few. And you can—the big thing for me, it was like, "Oh, I got Tower." And then Tower eventually took like thousands and thousands of them, which was fantastic. So I'd start getting letters from all over the world, or whatever.

But then the thing I did that was unusual at the time was I also started going to comics distributors, and actually went to a convention of—let's see, in New Orleans—of comic people who—I sort of met some of the Fantagraphics guys, and basically just found out who the big leads in that were, and began—and they would take small quantities, but they would still be taking them.

Davis: That's great.

Sayenga: And again, that got bigger and bigger essentially. Which is kind of why at a certain point it switches from—Peter did the first three covers, which are all beautiful, hand-tooled. Then with the color issue, this is the one where *Greed* became—publishing a lot more, basically. So this would be I think—well, it's all relatively speaking, but still, this is something like 5,000, and then by *Greed* six, it's 10,000.

Davis: Wow.

Sayenga: All of which did really well, actually. And the *Love and Rockets* issue, which is a beautiful thing I think, sort of anyway. So as I said, desktop publishing evolved. So first one, completely typeset. Then a drastic decline in quality here, as we reach *Greed* #2. At this point, I have left C-SPAN, and I'm now working for a lawyer, who was supposed to be putting together non—well, he was putting together non-profit groups as [laugh]—as it turned out, he had rather flexible morality when it came to who he was representing and why, which led to my abrupt departure [laugh] from the firm right around this issue.

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But when I got there, basically he had a Macintosh, which I had never seen before, because they were new, and then PageMaker one-point-whatever. Zero. You know, 1.2, which at that point couldn't even justify text. And you had maybe five fonts to choose from tops. And so I picked like the least offensive one and put this thing together, which actually

came out reasonably well. That's another one of mine. Which is again, very D.C. experience. "Note to girl with Rites of Spring shirt"—based again on an actual girl who I did not know but saw on the subway.

Davis: Who had a Rites of Spring shirt?

Sayenga: Who had a Rites of Spring shirt. Sure, yeah, exactly. So it would be like, "Who is that?" Anyway. And oh, Peter did "Covered With Bugs" every issue, which was his comic. Don't try to make sense of it, because nobody [laugh]—nobody could. Let's see, let's see. Robyn Hitchcock. OK.

The weird thing also about *Greed* that's strange is actually I deliberately left out a bunch of things that I was interested in or do or wound up doing professionally, almost kind of deliberately. Like I never wrote about film, and I never put in—other than this, but I never credited myself for it—photography, which I do a lot of. But I never did that, basically.

I never took pictures of bands, ever, which is—given how many bands I've seen and what close proximity [laugh] I've been to them, is peculiar. I took pictures once of Fugazi, because I had a new camera, and I was backstage when they were playing at the Washington Monument. And which I thought, "Well, that would be a good one," basically. And mostly just pictures of Brendan, because Brendan was always hilarious looking, so you could get these freeze frames of him.

Davis: Sure. But why not other ones?

Sayenga: It seemed to me, first of all, that there were lots of other people doing it, and that was their thing. And also, I had this thing about seeing live music, and that I did not want to mediate the experience through a camera. I just wanted to go there and feel it, and be in the moment. And the camera was something between me. And it was something again that professionally now I run into this problem all the time, essentially. That I have gone around the world and I've experienced everything pretty much with something, a piece of glass, between me and it.

So it's a little—anyway. But [laugh] so, at least I liked my music experience to be as intimate and there as possible. And I don't know why else why not. I think also there's an aspect of it where—I know later on in particular, it became something where I didn't want to be taking advantage of my position in some ways.

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I should mention there were going to be two more issues of *Greed*, one of which was a Fugazi issue, which I had interviewed them and had tons of pictures from Jim Saah, basically. And that was the core of the issue, and I could have sold a boatload of them, because this was like early '90s or

something. Particularly since they didn't give interviews [laugh] with people in anything like this. And basically I didn't do it. I just decided it would—I just felt like, well, they're my friends, and I don't want to be perceived as or feel like I'm making money off of them, or something. So, I don't know. That was...

Davis: Hmm. I mean, no one would perceive that.

Sayenga: I know. I would have.

Davis: But you would have.

Sayenga: [laugh] I would have felt—yeah, just the fact that I felt conflicted by it was enough basically. Because then I said OK, wait a minute, again, why am I doing this? What's the point of this? Like people know they're great. I would like to publish this thing that actually sort of shows another side of them, so maybe I should have done that. But at the same time, they had a very firm attitude about ads. It's not like I was going to take a Seagram's ad and put it on the back cover or something. It still would have been comic book ads and whatever. But anyway, for whatever reason, I decided that was some line I didn't want to cross.

Davis: Do you still have that recording and the documentation of that?

Sayenga: I actually have the recordings. I know I've got the interviews with Ian [MacKaye] and Brendan [Canty]. I'm not sure where Guy [Picciotto] and Joe [Lally]'s are. I mean, yeah. Getting stuff out of Joe—and that's actually one of the things is just I thought like OK, it will be an actual interview with Joe, who never talks. So that'll be good too. So it's like getting an interview with Robert Gotobed in Wire. [laugh]

Davis: Yeah. How was that interview with Joe?

Sayenga: Fun. I lived in Joe's room when he was on their first European tour. So yeah, I felt we had a connection. He's a nice dude.

Davis: And he is the quiet one, but it's one of those things where...

Sayenga: He is, but it's relative...

Davis: Yes, yes.

Sayenga: ...to Fugazi. You're in a band with Ian MacKaye. Good luck. And Guy—god knows.

Davis: And Brendan.

Sayenga: And Brendan. When you get Brendan by himself, absolutely. So yeah, they're all very expansive. So [laugh].

Davis: Wow. I'd be interested to hear—I wonder in the context of today, how—would that interview sort of—would you be able to sort of contrast it with other interviews they were doing at that time, or...?

Sayenga: Yeah. I don't know, because there's another dimension to that interview, which would have been also my personal experiences of them essentially, which is something I wanted to draw into it more. So just basically of how I saw them and what it was like, and what completely different people they were to how they were being perceived, particularly at that time.

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I mean, before “Instrument” came out, no one knew that anyone in that band was funny, basically. And they're all funny, Like really funny. All of them have terrific sense of humors. I also, previous to that, lived in a group house with like everybody, basically, at that point. It was Guy and Brendan and Michelle [Cochran] and Ian Svenonius when he was 18, so that was something. Who I love, also. Another great guy. But he like hit his moment right after *Greed*. Otherwise, I would have had a huge Make-Up feature, because I loved The Make-Up. And his earlier bands. Cupid Car Club was great.

Davis: I loved that band. And Ulysses I guess was kind of getting...

Sayenga: Ulysses was starting, but at the time they seemed more like the junior band almost. They were more like the cute boy band in a way. [laugh]

Davis: Even by the time that the first record came out?

Sayenga: No. By the time the first record came out, that changed the perception, because Ian's politics became much more to the fro because of that. Before, there was some question of how much of this is a pose, basically. Of course with Ian, it's all a pose.

Davis: Yeah, that's how he is.

Sayenga: But it's hard—he walks a fine line.

Davis: He's “in character” at all times.

Sayenga: Yeah, absolutely. And Peter designed that record, and boy, did they put him through the wringer on that. Because you look at those, and those are hyper-designed records, but they were also like, yeah—they were super controlling. So anyway. That's a whole—and I had a somewhat different—I had a very different experience with Fugazi other than just—

the only thing we would get into it about would be the covers, which they wanted just to be super simple. And somehow, Jem Cohen talked them out of that, I think probably because just like clobbered them with his art school background or something.

Davis: But it's interesting. When you sort of step out of that, all the stuff you designed is I think pretty simple, with the covers and everything.

Sayenga: Yeah.

Davis: And then I think [Fugazi's 1993 album, *In On the*] Killtaker is the first one that you didn't do. Is that right?

Sayenga: Yea, that's right.

Davis: And that one is much more sort of dense, compared to the previous ones.

Sayenga: Yeah. It also benefits from Photoshop, which again, I did not have. [laugh] So there was nothing like that at the time. I mean, there was something like that, but I couldn't afford it. So yeah, all the stuff I did was physical stuff or stuff you sent out. And the one cover I had the most control of, actually, would be *Repeater*. Which even then they said, "We want to use this picture." And I'm just like, "Oh fuck, another picture of Guy's ass," So that's great. [laugh] And so...

Davis: Yeah, that *is* the same as the first one.

Sayenga: Like how am I supposed to—yeah, what am I supposed to do with this?

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And then basically I just thought of it—"Well, I'm just going to do total negative space." And also because the printing was so god-awful on those early records. Like now on the CDs, they're finally printed correctly, because they're actually using correct Pantone colors. The early things weren't remotely close to what I specified. It was heartbreaking. Which is one reason why *Repeater* is a white [laugh]—a white thing with a duotone cover essentially, because it's like OK, you can't fuck this one up too much. So thus, that actually helped basically, making it a cleaner package. So anyway.

Davis: So Pagemaker.

Sayenga: Pagemaker came along. Oh yeah. Because I thought, "Well, that's it for *Greed*." Because I took this other job basically. And then it's like, "Oh, this guy has this thing. Cool. And I'm going to use that." And he basically was sort of like, "OK, well you can work on that stuff, but make sure you do all the legal stuff for me, and write this congressional testimony,

blahblahblah. But you can do this thing.” I said, “Oh, cool. OK.” So I did. And this came out, and it doesn't look as bad as I thought it did.

Davis: No.

Sayenga: Because when I first got this, I was just like, every weakness in the type and whatever, every little thing just seemed liked a screaming obscenity to me. And now I'm like, “Oh, it's not so bad actually.” And this looks more like a higher-end fanzine essentially. Whereas actually I think *Greed #1* looks better basically to me. Just yeah. Just because it does, basically, because of the type and whatever else. And then I think also because the paper is nice.

Davis: Those bylines that you used in the first issue are very pro, you know what I mean?

Sayenga: Yeah.

Davis: It makes it look more...

Sayenga: Meant to be. Yeah. Whereas like this is what Pagemaker could handle. Like just getting a line above and below my name was like—[singing].

Davis: This is all pretty good though, still, for that era. That's pretty....

Sayenga: Oh yeah, this is another—oh yeah, OK. Oh. [laugh] And the Pussy Galore interview.

Davis: And these are interviews you did. You interviewed Pussy Galore?

Sayenga: Yeah, yeah. Absolutely. Well, I met—yeah, I had them over, let's see, in my house, something. And I think Peter actually wound up playing guitar for about five minutes in Pussy Galore. Oh, and that was basically because of Cristina [Martinez]. That's right. So, Cristina, besides being just like stunning basically, and super cool, she was—she took like the most issues of *Greed #1* for Olsson's in Georgetown, for instance. Very supportive. And also said, “I have a boyfriend who's got this band,” which turned out to be Pussy Galore.

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Oh! That's when—yeah. [laugh] All these people. Yeah, we also knew the people who became Royal Trux, too.

Davis: So you were a fan of the band, or this was just sort of...

Sayenga: I liked Pussy Galore, although again, I was sort of on the—being a literature person, therefore I probably tend to read too much into the lyrics.

And at the time, speaking of deliberate provocation lyrics, Pussy Galore was at the top of the list in D.C. Very much deliberately, and it was very much part of his art school aesthetic, essentially. Which is something he kind of grew out of.

And I liked them as people. They were actually nice people. But I was on the fence about that, basically. I was kind of sort of like, is it really necessary to do that? It's sort of like—it struck me the same way that—even in some things I hated about early Big Black. It's just like, OK, another song about decapitating a woman and frying her in pig blood or something. It's just like, "What's the f...?" You know, is this necessary?

Davis: The point has been made.

Sayenga: Yes, exactly. Again and again and again. Let's see. Oh, rock star syndrome, OK. There we go. Yeah, so these are all just comedy, and this is—oh. Of the things I liked the most, back here is always like the weird small humor pieces that are unsigned, that are things I'm the proudest of. Like again, old show reviews which I really like. And this is deliberately like *Maximum Rocknroll's* format. It's based on that entirely except just—let's see. Yeah. Don't remember...

Davis: Dag Nasty did not actually open for Culture Club.

Sayenga: Not so much. No. [laugh] Not so much. Could happen. One Last Wish opening for Bon Jovi. Yeah. You know. Let's see. Oh yeah. Then I had this whole thing about trying to track down Ian [MacKaye] and telling him why he should sing about eggplants and whatever. Yeah.

And at that point, I didn't know Ian basically. I began to—Ian's like one of the last people—even though we're just talking about a few years, but he was toward the end, and then became, again, one of my best friends in the bunch. Oh yeah, So the Sonic Youth interview is written in the style of Larry King. He used to have a newspaper column.

Davis: Sure.

Sayenga: "Did you ever notice it's either way too hot or way too cold in the subway?" Things like that. Just boredom. Let's see. I guess the main thing that changed about it was with success, with the weird success of it, it became more of a problem to keep the fun in it basically.

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And since that was sort of the whole point of doing it—it's not like I started it with any intention of it being a career in any way. And even

though in some of these issues I talk about, “Oh, we got financial support,” blahblahblah, well, I just meant mostly the computer.

The thing about the [laugh] financial support is around after this issue, my employer and I had a disagreement in that he—I was working on setting up a non-profit organization that was like pro-animal that he was interested in. Then he looked at it and decided there was more money in doing anti-animal. [laugh] Because that way he could get money from the drug companies. So he wanted to start that.

And I was not cool with that. So that led to a certain amount of misbehavior. Of me just not turning in certain forms for certain groups that were maybe up to stuff that they shouldn't have been up to. Anyway so I left, was asked to leave, and was also presented a bill for—\$11,000, was it? Let's see, basically it was he calculated all the time that I would have spent working on *Greed*.

Davis: Wow.

Sayenga: Therefore, [laugh] any profit I would have made basically wound up me paying him back for that.

Davis: So you had to follow through. That was...?

Sayenga: Well you see, I did, because I thought—he was a lawyer, and I signed something that said that I would. And I just thought, “Well, that's what one does.” And when I actually wound up—I had benefits and all this stuff, and I put out another magazine, another issue which sold well and whatever else. I caught up. And also Ian and Jeff helped me out, like out of nowhere offered me a loan basically, which was fantastic, so I could keep the magazine going, because they liked it. And then I found I was able to present this guy with a check, which he took with a laugh and said, “Oh, I wrote that off years ago.” Anyway.

Davis: [laugh]

Sayenga: So just like, “This is great! Free money! Free profit!” I'm like, “Oh, you're such a wonderful guy.” So anyway. So that also had part to do with it, in that the money I was going to use to make the next issue vaporized, essentially. [laugh]

Davis: And also just I think that stuff like that would kind of sap the fun from doing this.

Sayenga: Sure did. Yeah. A certain amount of painful memories become attached. But anyway, so yeah, here we see that Pagemaker is coming along. Oh yes! OK. This is good news. OK! This is the big change between #3 and #4. Besides #4 having this nice color cover, which Jeff Nelson did the

separations on, and now we can see that people have finally figured out how to—that I'm able to take the type, set it in Pagemaker, and then give it to a printing place, and they will print it out. That was like a huge leap. But then so suddenly the type looks good again. And also, we're now able to do multiple columns. [laugh] So things like that.

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Sayenga: So James [Wu], who's a really good friend of mine—and he actually worked at Barbarian Comics. Well, no it was Barbarian Books back then, in Wheaton.

Davis: Hmm!

Sayenga: And is also like a genius and was getting his doctorate in English lit, and was also really into comics. Same things. We had very similar tastes. Big Thomas Pynchon fans. And he got an interview with Chester Brown, which was a big deal.

OK, Sydney Carton's me. That's the name of, let's see—it's from Dickens, from "Bleak House." Let's see. And yeah. Because this is a guy interviewed as a favor, and then I wound up being—kind of like, eh. Anyway. Unnecessarily contrary.

Davis: So Photoshop was all entirely after this?

Sayenga: Yeah. Well again, couldn't afford Photoshop, particularly after getting fired. [laugh] So did not—and living with, anyway, a bunch of miscreants in Arlington.

Davis: You had a scanner.

Sayenga: No.

Davis: No?

Sayenga: Did not have a scanner.

Davis: So you're using...?

Sayenga: I'm using a photo—Jeff's—let's see. Geez. Photostat camera, in Jeff's basement. So we'd have screens. I learned to use the Photostat camera at C-SPAN, which is how I screened the early pictures for that. And then Jeff had a stat camera, which was awesome. So using Jeff's camera, I was able to put all of this together, essentially. So without that—yeah, the stat camera was also a huge, huge, huge thing, as far as actually doing—because this is all physical layout.

So a lot of the stuff was not all just done in a—see, things like the reader survey are the things I liked the most. [laugh] So it's just the really—anyway. And I was getting more and more into the design with each issue, which led directly to my being asked to design the Fugazi stuff and some things for other bands. Gray Matter and who else? A couple of other people.

Davis: Did you do [Gray Matter's 1992 album] *Thog*?

Sayenga: Yeah, I did *Thog*. Yeah, that's right. Which again, Steve had the art for, so it wasn't that hard.

Davis: So the cover image on that record is designed by—or is...

Sayenga: It's by Jon Muth, right? Is that...?

Davis: I don't even—yeah, I don't know. [*Thog* cover artwork is by J.K. Potter]

Sayenga: Oh, here's promotional posters.

Davis: Oh! Awesome.

Sayenga: You're welcome to have a few of these if you want...

Davis: Yeah.

Sayenga: ...because they're certainly not going anywhere. Yeah, getting [Charles] Burns to do the cover for this was also just a score, because as much as this issue looks great—again, this is my favorite issue, mostly because we all—my friend Chip [Drake] from college and Peter Hayes and I drove to Memphis for the tenth anniversary of Elvis's passing, and so that's my favorite piece of writing for this.

1:03:23

And I actually took all these photos too. And yeah, this is my favorite thing in *Greed*. Because it's much more like just this insane feature story, which is semi based in reality. [laugh] Oh. And the Fire Party thing is almost like I ran out of time, and was trying to figure out what to do. And they I think were on tour, so I was sort of like, "OK, I'll basically just wind up designing that." So there's a thing.

But Amy [Pickering] was al...remains a good friend too. And there are not enough—of course back in those days—I mean, Caroline [Ely] was in a band. An all-woman band called Broken Siren. But again, they broke up by the time we were putting stuff out. There were still—it was right before obviously all the Riot grrrls happened. So I wish there was more

representation that way, because I would have really liked female-fronted or female bands.

Davis: Did you know Sharon Cheslow?

Sayenga: Sure, yeah. I knew Sharon. Uh huh. Let's see. [pause, going through storage bin] Oh, gosh. Worked big back in those days. [pause] Let's see. Ah yes, the boards. So, OK. Some are cut up and some aren't. So first Rites of.... so that was done just classic, traditional paste-up.

Davis: Hmm!

Sayenga: And, OK, yeah, I would have scanned these with C-SPAN's camera. And I ... Joke Band —yep. Oh, here's an infamous poetry page from the Sick and Tired issue. Oh, OK.

1:06:00

So I'm not sure that any of this is particularly—a resume, that's good. Yeah, not sure that any of this is particularly revelatory.

Davis: It's just so rare to see this, though.

Sayenga: [laugh]

Davis: This is not...

Sayenga: Actual—yeah, physical...

Davis: Almost no one keeps...

Sayenga: Somewhere, I know Ian has the boards for a lot of the Dischord records, but I'm pretty sure I still have the *Repeater* boards somewhere. Downstairs, I think. So actually, I know for sure I've got the *Steady Diet of Nothing* boards still. I'm just trying to see if there's actually any of the unpublished issue in here.

Davis: What was the story with the *Steady Diet* cover? Sort of another cryptic...?

Sayenga: Well, those are photos that Lucy Capehart, who was Brendan's brother Kevin's wife at the time, did. So all of the photos there—and everybody just really liked her photography. Brendan definitely took the lead on that record as far as saying, "Hey, let's use this instead of another photo of Guy's ass." So yeah. [laugh]

Davis: Actually, that's true. It is quite different from...

Sayenga: [laugh] It was very different, yeah. And that album was very different too. It had a much different sound.

Davis: Yes.

Sayenga: A real dry sound. Was that the one that Albini did the...?

Davis: *Killtaker* is the one where there's an Albini version.

Sayenga: *Killtaker's* the one—the Albini version yeah. Which was like a—I haven't heard. As far as designing those things, I'd say the most fun designs were actually cassettes.

Davis: Hmm. Why?

Sayenga: I don't know. It's just in laying them out, when you do three different packages. It would be the album, which is great. It's great doing the big package. Those were always great. CDs—terrible, pain in the ass, hated it. And cassettes, there's just something about them. You could—particularly when they would have big fold-outs and whatever else.

I did a lot of stuff with the cassettes where each package was also unique. Where I'd like try to change things up in little ways that wouldn't be apparent, the most notorious of which is I think—in the cassette version, I like scratched all the words in the first—you know, so—and where all the lyrics are out there, I like took bits of the words, and then I would change—like take key lines, like you know—what was the classic? Oh, I'd change “can't” to “can.” Things like that.

Davis: [laugh]

Sayenga: Just going through scr...and the most egregious was on the cassette, which Ian knows—yeah, he pointed out. So, I'm glad he looked. And I guess the one you wanted to ask is how this affected the rest of my life, I suppose.

Davis: Yeah. And another question is, why title it *Greed*?

1:09:00

Sayenga: [laugh] I think I was originally going to call it *Uptight*, because it was sort of more like Velvet Underground-ish. And then I was playing around with different words, and for some reason, *Uptight* got vetoed, I think, maybe because I was afraid there was something else out there like that.

And then I just stumbled upon *Greed* because it seemed just very representative of the times, which again is laughable compared to where we are today. But again, all that crap started then, around this time. This was like full bore Reagan administration. And so yeah. It came out of that.

And also, I wrote somewhat as a joke saying that it would be also great if maybe some rich yuppie scum person just picked the thing up just saying,

“*Greed!* I respond to that!” And as it turned out, the lawyer I worked for actually said he had bought a copy of it because it had the word “greed” on it.

Davis: There you go! It worked.

Sayenga: So yeah.

Davis: [laugh]

Sayenga: Yeah, it’s just designed to attract attention. And also the [Erich] von Stroheim film, which I hadn’t seen, but I had a book. It’s like 16 hours long.

Davis: Yes. You mentioned being into film and I suppose that’s a whole ‘nother thing.

Sayenga: Yeah, it was always a goal. In college, I majored in English and film and history. And now basically, all of those things come into play with what I do. And D.C. isn’t exactly the best place to move if you’re looking to get into certainly fiction or scripted stuff, but it turned out to be a good place for documentary. So I was fortunate enough to land something at Discovery, and then parlay that into something. And then for the last whatever ten years, it has been National Geographic, since Discovery went down the tubes, quality-wise. Content-wise, actually.

Davis: Yeah, it changed.

Sayenga: Yeah.

Davis: This is kind of the foundation in a way? Do you feel that there’s much at the core of what you’re doing now that connects back to this?

Sayenga: I think the core of what I do still ties back to my belief in the essential principles of the punk rock [laugh] movement and manifesto, at least as I interpreted it. I was also actually a really big supporter of the straight edge philosophy for a number of years. Certainly the drinking part of that went by the wayside for a while, but generally speaking, I liked their kind of Spartan interpretation of it. It was interesting.

And this notion that you can do it yourself. Because *Greed* absolutely came out of that concept of just like, “Well, what’s stopping me from putting out some—if these other people can do it, I can put out something interesting and good that maybe other people will want to get.”

1:12:09

And then I sort of applied that to television, essentially. So it was just like well, we can do—I had my own production company for 12 years, and it was very much run in sort of a small operation. We were all friends and working toward a common goal. Wouldn't work on projects that we didn't agree with. Things like that. Which is one thing that has been very consistent. I've never worked in reality television, for instance. Would never take those jobs. Which was money-wise, kind of a questionable decision [laugh] but...

Davis: Well, so much of television is centered on that.

Sayenga: No, well now it got—now it's worthless because of that, because they tilted so hard into it. So now actually they're going towards more higher-end content again, at least the people who are hiring me are. So that's good news. So I like to think that sticking by one's guns helps in the long run. Is worth it.

And I think the other thing that was great about *Greed* is it just let me meet a lot of interesting people, and just through that front of saying, "Oh, I've got this thing. Can I talk to you?" And they were all like, "Oh, sure." For the most part, everybody was like, "Yeah, OK" or whatever. Or they'd see it and like it, and actually that was also great.

And since then, I've interviewed thousands and thousands of people professionally. And part of that came out of just realizing that I could talk to people and not be intimidated by them.

Davis: And creatively, you're not still collaborating in any way with anyone from this era, or...?

Sayenga: Brendan and I still talk about doing stuff.

Davis: What?

Sayenga: Well, more of like a film project.

Davis: That'd be cool.

Sayenga: Since obviously he got into it. I actually kind of drafted him in by having him do a soundtrack for a series I did. And then that became kind of a thing. I did the same thing with Mike Hampton, in '92 or something, and had him do a bunch of soundtracks for me. Because musicians have a very hard road [laugh], particularly these days. And so if I can help, I'll do that.

Davis: Cool. Yeah, is there anything else that you feel should be addressed?

Sayenga: Do I have anything else to get off my chest?

Davis: [laugh]

Sayenga: I suppose I guess for the end, I did wind up publishing a couple of the interviews I did. They were supposed to be in subsequent issues of *Greed*. Like one with ... in Jim Saah's thing [*Uno Mas*], which Jim started after it became apparent that *Greed* was not coming back, I think.

1:15:00

Because Jim had been starting to contribute a lot, and he had taken all these photos of, let's see—we went to interview the Pixies, which was a nightmare.

Davis: I've read that interview.

Sayenga: Oh god. I feel sick—[laugh] uch.

Davis: I think that's in the first issue...

Sayenga: Yeah. Uh, it was the second.

Davis: The second, yeah.

Sayenga: Yeah. Because the first issue was my Three Johns interview, which I enjoyed basically. I know I published The Three Johns one and that one. The greatest thing about that is Jon Langford did a caricature of the band while I was interviewing him, and it's fantastic. [laugh] And that was up in New York. And so that was worth it.

And the Pixies was just one of those disappointing things, where it's like, you go and you meet the band, and I just wasn't used to that—the band being assholes, except for Kim Deal, who was super cool. But the rest of them were just like—oh my god.

So you know, it was sort of like, "I thought you guys were good." And the fact that they've risen, like now have this mythic reputation—I'm not sure if they've maintained that since they came back and haven't been...

Davis: Well, it has been more than a decade of...

Sayenga: Them firing bass players. [laugh]

Davis: Yeah. I think that they may be into...

Sayenga: OK. Well yeah, I just, you know. And I understand that the guy was probably stoned out of his brain when we talked to him or whatever else. But it was still really unpleasant. I regret ever putting that out there though in a lot of ways, so...

Davis: Why?

Sayenga: Because it's unnecessary. And that's actually one thing I actually tried to do was not to run negative pieces on people if I could avoid it, because what's the point basically? It's really easy to be—particularly if you're clever with words, it's really easy to be horrible.

And that's something I always try to fight in myself, and it still comes out, because basically I grew up reading the *National Lampoon*, so it was like second nature. But at the same time, it's sort of like, these people are trying to do something here. It's like when you read—and also, the more I got to know musicians and see their process, the more I was just sort of more inclined to cut them a break, which is kind of how I now feel when I read movie reviews.

Working out here for so long and meeting people in it, you realize blaming this on the writer or the director is ridiculous. Because you don't know who else was leaning on this person, or whether they even wrote it at all, or had their baby butchered and mutated into some hideous thing that nobody ever intended. So that's kind of why. So even if the Pixies, some of them were jerks, so what? [laugh]

Davis: I still see the—you went and you spoke to them. “Here's what happened.”

Sayenga: It was an experience, and yeah, I sort of regret writing just about it, basically, I guess.

1:18:00

I regret the first paragraph, basically. So the interview itself was a faithful documentation, but it did help to sour me on it.

Davis: And then was that sort of about it as far as those are the issues of *Uno Mas* ... after that...

Sayenga: Yeah.

Davis: That was pretty much it for you?

Sayenga: That was pretty much it, yeah. Exactly. And at that point I was—I had a career and suddenly had film, which eats—it will take everything you can throw at it. So I had all this obviously energy, because I was working all day and then working on this stuff at night, and going to see shows virtually every night. And until suddenly I was writing and directing, then it was like, oh, here's something where I can again just throw it all in there. I still went to see shows all the time though.

Davis: Do you miss that at all?

Sayenga: Yeah, absolutely. Sure.

Davis: What aspects?

Sayenga: Well, living in L.A., any show you want to see, you're not going to show up and there will be 25 people, 50 people. There'll be, no matter who the band is, if they're any good basically, it's going to be crowded or it's going to be a very selective guest list that you have to somehow gain access to. Be asked. And it just changes it all. It's just basically no fun. [laugh]

I still go see bands and stuff. But it's different now. I can rarely see them in small spaces. Like the last really good show I saw that was more like seeing something—not at the 9:30 Club but more like the new 9:30 Club—not the real 9:30 Club, but the new 9:30 Club—was seeing Shellac. They played a place called The Grand, which is an old movie theatre here. And that was just like five or six months ago.

And that was like the old—that was like the same—because they were so great, and they were so funny. And it was so like postmodern meta commentary on what it is to be in a band and play also. So they're doing just some really absurd stuff.

Davis: I haven't seen them in a long time.

Sayenga: Well yeah. If they're—if you do—because that was really one of the best shows I've seen in years and years.

Davis: Huh, OK.

Sayenga: Prior—mostly because again they had a wit about it. But otherwise, yeah, here—and then I go to like the Greek Theatre which is an outdoor thing which is several thousand, at least. It's good. It's a nice place.

Davis: Do you keep up with D.C. punk at all?

Sayenga: Not so much, actually. I mean, if Brendan tells me about something, I'll listen to that.

1:21:02

But Brendan keeps up with new things. So if Brendan has produced somebody or whatever else, or if I'm D.C., and there happens to be people playing, I'll go out and see them. So again, if somebody like Brendan's like, "Oh, let's go see this"—or [Ian] Svenonius.

Yeah, Ian's less like that. I see Ian like when I drop by Fort Reno. So the last time I was—no, not the last time, the time before that, I happened to

take the train going in the wrong direction, and [laugh] wound up in D.C. So I was just like, “OK, I’ll stay here tonight.” And then, as it happened, there was a show at Fort Reno, so I went to the Fort Reno show and some young bands who...

Davis: Do you remember...?

Sayenga: Do not remember the names [laugh] at all. But a couple of them were good.

Davis: Good.

Sayenga: So that was heartening to see. But it’s also weird, because then you’re sort of like, oh, there’s Ian and whatever, and we’re all in our fifties. [laugh] And the kids playing are all your children! [laugh]

Davis: What does that feel like for you?

Sayenga: Oh, it’s mostly good actually, because actually things have changed in a way that that stuff is accepted in a way that at the time—part of what made it interesting was that it was very outsidersy and a small thing. But I get the sense going back that it still is basically the same thing. It’s still—it’s hardly the dominant culture in Washington D.C., you know? And it was nice to see that there was still that sort of community vibe without all of the bad stuff that used to be there. So going to Fort Reno, I did not see a bunch of skinheads cracking people’s heads or trying to mix things up or whatever. That was all gone.

Davis: Yeah, that is gone.

Sayenga: Good. [laugh] I still listen to all kinds of music, but it’s more avant-garde stuff or electronica and whatever. I’ll listen to anything, basically, ‘cause I get bored easily [laugh].

[End of recording]