

Willona Sloan interviewed by John Davis
May 2, 2018
College Park, Maryland
0:00:00 to 0:44:23

0:00:00

Davis: My name is John Davis. I'm the Performing Arts Metadata Archivist at the University of Maryland. Today is Wednesday, May 2nd, 2018. I'm speaking with Willona Sloan. I'm going to be asking you primarily about your fanzine, *Scorpion*. I suppose I just want to first ask you, how did you get into punk music and the subculture?

Sloan: I'm trying to think very specifically. I was always into rock music growing up. I grew up in the NoVA area. The normal way—Nirvana, Red Hot Chili Peppers concerts. Finding out about their influences. And then someone at high school was just like, "Oh, you should come to "Jam for Man." It was like Reston Community Center. Avail was playing. And like you had to bring—it was five dollars and a can of food. And that was like it for me; I was sold.

Because I always wanted to be involved in activism. I was about 15, 16 at the time. And I was like, "Oh, music that is really activist-minded? That is for me." So I went. The Reston Community Center was where I took jazz, and so it was a very sort of community space. The show was amazing. The energy was amazing. And ever since then, I started learning more about local bands and going to shows.

Davis: When you say Red Hot Chili Peppers concert, which one was it?

Sloan: I went to the one at George Mason. '91?

Davis: I saw that tour also, in '91, at American University.

Sloan: Maybe it was American University then.

Davis: With Pearl Jam and Smashing Pumpkins?

Sloan: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Davis: Yeah.

Sloan: So good, right?

Davis: Yeah, that was...

Sloan: It was—fshoop! Door just like flew open.

Davis: Yeah. It was like, “Who...?” I knew the Chili Peppers at that point, but...

Sloan: Yeah. I didn’t know Pearl Jam. I didn’t know Smashing Pumpkins.

Davis: I didn’t really know Pearl Jam or Smashing Pumpkins. I was like, “What is this stuff?!”

Sloan: Yeah! That was it for me!

Davis: And another sort of thing I remember about that show was that it wasn’t super crowded. Like it had not sold out.

Sloan: No.

Davis: And I feel like I remember Flea, I think, or someone commenting about that it wasn’t exactly full.

Sloan: [laugh]

Davis: Like, “Nice of you all to show up.”

Sloan: [laugh] Oh yeah! I think he was a little snarky!

Davis: But anyway. Not to jump in, but...

Sloan: No. That was it for me. That was probably my second almost punk show. I think the first being—that might have been the first one. So for me it was just the energy. I had always been into rap and go-go and after that, it was just like punk became my major thing. Like alternative grunge, punk, became my main focus.

Davis: As far as getting more into the local scene, I assume Fugazi was a part of that?

Sloan: So Fugazi—what happened with that is Fort Reno. That’s what it was. So again, that high school—a little bit older people would say, “Oh, you have to go to Fort Reno.”

0:03:03

And I couldn't stay out late. My parents were very strict. And so that was like my only chance to see them. And so I went to a couple Fort Reno shows. And the other thing is my brother—he’s four years older than me, so he had just gone off to college in

Richmond, and he was really into punk. Richmond Punks was like a thing in the early '90s, so he would send me tapes kind of thing.

Davis: Do you remember which year—maybe the first Fort Reno show you would have seen?

Sloan: That would be '92.

Davis: Did you see anyone else there at Fort Reno in any of those years other than Fugazi?

Sloan: Just Fugazi. I'm trying to think—it was about getting a ride, so I think that was the only time—yeah, I think those were the only ones I got to see.

Davis: How would you describe the scene at that time? What was it like for you to walk into this new world?

Sloan: It was cool because in high school, I was a cheerleader, and I was like on board with American subculture. Not subculture—popular culture, mainstream culture. But I also knew there was something different. I was one of the only few African American students at my high school. I just felt like I was fitting in, but I just always felt a little bit on the outside, even though I was on the inside.

So walking into the park, I just remember that feeling. First of all, the people who drove me were a little bit older, and they were listening to Nation of Ulysses on the way over. So I was like, "Oh my god!" So many—like stimulation, you know? So I remember walking in, and it was just like all this energy, and all these people who just—maybe people would have said they looked different, but to me, it was just like, "These are my people!"

They were friendly. I just remember thinking, like, "I don't know these people. They must be like cool D.C. kids." But they were just like, "Hey, what's up?" So I just really wanted to know more about that. But living out in Herndon, I didn't get out very much. [laugh]

Davis: How did you find out about additional shows from there?

Sloan: I didn't really. I think just following Fugazi, so then seeing them at the Washington Monument in the summer. I think I didn't really go to a lot—the Avail show was—so Avail was from Richmond. At that time, they lived in Richmond, so I would just see them whenever they played. I really didn't go to a lot of shows until college. So it was really just kind of listening, and getting tapes, and then starting to go to record stores like Yesterday & Today. There was the Fairfax Tape Exchange. Do you remember that?

Davis: Mmhmm.

Sloan: So I would go there and get records.

Davis: I was going to ask—where were the places you would go?

Sloan: Yeah, so I would go there. There was the Fairfax Tape Exchange. I feel like there was another one in the Fairfax area that I would go to.

Davis: Record Convergence?

Sloan: Yeah.

Davis: It was in Springfield, I think.

Sloan: Yeah, the Record Convergence. I didn't get out there as much, but those two. And then I don't think I even started reading zines—my brother sent me my first zine, I think when I was either a senior in high school—no, I was in college.

0:06:11

So my first zine was in college. And once I started reading zines, I would write to bands directly and get their music that way.

Davis: What were some of the zines that kind of started it for you?

Sloan: Oh, I do have to put in a plug for Charlottesville. They had Plan9 Records, which was amazing. So so many records and tapes. So the zines—OK, this is my like definitive zine story. So Will went to VCU for one year, and mostly just messed around and listened to music. And he sent me a copy of *Suburban Voice*, and it was their anniversary issue. I think it was like the 10th or 11th anniversary issues.

I didn't know what zines were. I didn't know what this amazing thing was. But what Al [Quint, editor of *Suburban Voice*] had done is he had interviewed—he had recapped all these interviews he had done over the last 10 or 11 years. I remember my favorite one was 7 Seconds. And I hadn't heard any of these bands, but I just loved the interviews. I loved that you could interview people. I loved the energy of the interviews.

I started to get really anxious. I was like, "I have to do this." Like, "I'm really shy. I don't know how I'm going to do this. I don't know how I'm going to call people up. I don't know how I'm

going to ask them. But I *have* to do this. And I also have to listen to this music.”

So I wrote to Al, the guy who did the fanzine. He lived in Boston. And I wrote him this letter, thinking—this was my thought process: I will tell him why I love his zine, and then he’ll tell me I should write for his zine, and it’ll be amazing. And so I wrote this letter about like blah blah blah my life, being Black, being punk, and finding my way. I don’t know. I honestly don’t know. But I was just so excited.

And I sent it to him, and he wrote me back, and he was like, “Oh, you should start a zine.” And I was like, “I don’t want to start a zine! I want you to, like, give me a forum!” So I put that aside. And I don’t know, it kept eating away at me. I was like, “Maybe I should start a zine.” But mostly I just started reading more. Like he would review a lot of them, so I would write to other zinesters and other bands and record labels and just kind of for the first couple years, just kind of get into it that way.

Davis: And that was sort of your prime—so *Suburban Voice* would have been your sort of prime source for things at that point?

Sloan: Yeah. Because it was very comprehensive. His issues were like 100 pages.

Davis: Yeah, they were huge.

Sloan: They were really long. [laugh]

Davis: As far as any D.C. zines, was there anything you came across in that time that stood out to you?

Sloan: I don’t think I read any D.C. zines at that time. I’m trying to think. Not in the beginning.

Davis: So would it have been a few years then before you actually did wind up starting your own zine?

Sloan: Yeah. So I still wasn’t convinced until—my second year of college, I did an internship at the Women’s Institute for Freedom of the Press.

0:09:04

It was amazing. It was basically like one woman’s house, and she was just like a pioneer. And so I sat on her couch, and I said, “I really want to be a writer and I want to go into publishing, but I

don't know how." And she was like, "Great. Your summer project is to write a pamphlet about how to start a magazine." And I was like, "Cool!"

So I went into her archives. She had these archives of women's media from the '70s forward. And it was just like she helped me research how they did it, the content of them, and we were going to send it to the University of Michigan for their archives. But in preparing that collection, I had to learn how to write this pamphlet. So I wrote the pamphlet, and she was like, "OK, so now you'll start your magazine when you go back to school." And I was like, "I don't see why not!" [laugh] At this point.

So I went back, and a friend of—my roommate and I did like a short one. We called it *Eek A Mouse*. She didn't even know what the hell I was talking about. She was just, like, my friend. She didn't know why we were doing it. We were putting all these ridiculous like humor stories in it. We'd pass it out on campus. No one read it. But we felt good about it.

And then I was like, "OK, you know what? I want to get serious. I want to really do this, really plan it out." So that's when I did my own. So it took a couple years and a lot of encouragement, but that's how I got it going.

Davis: And so that would be *Scorpion*.

Sloan: That would be *Scorpion*.

Davis: Why did you title it *Scorpion*?

Sloan: I'm a Scorpio, born October 28th. It's really important to me. I feel like it is a defining characteristic of my personality. And I like it, because lots of people sent me scorpion-related things, and I always liked that.

Davis: So the first issue was when?

Sloan: The first issue—I have to look at it for reference. The first issue was '92. I was in my third year of college. [*Willona later told me that she was incorrect about the date of the first issue and that, in fact, it was released circa 1995 - John*]

Davis: So the first issue was more sort of essays and...?

Sloan: Really personal—so it was basically the things that I was interested in, that I was learning about. So I had become a feminist in like my senior year of high school. Part of doing that internship with the

Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press was that it was really important to me, but nobody supported me in it. My parents were like, "Don't be a feminist because you're a Black person and being Black is the primary issue. Being a feminist divides the issue." And so I just felt like I had all this knowledge and I really believed in women's rights, and I couldn't put it into words.

So when I did that internship and I read all those publications, when I went back to school, I started taking a lot of like women's studies classes. And so part of what I did with my zine was put in all of this information about the feminist movement.

0:12:06

But specifically what I did during the internship—the second part of my thing—I did the publishing thing. The other thing was to do a pamphlet about ethnic women in the women's movement, and the ways that women of color had been left out of the narrative by the media. And so I did this pamphlet about it, and so I wanted that to go into my zine. So I have a piece about the Iranian feminist movement, which is like really academic, but it was like, I learned about it, I didn't think other people knew about it, so I put it all in there.

I was taking a class about the civil rights movement and the history of the civil rights movement, so I put that in there. I also just put in my daily life. I had a love-love relationship with UVA, but if there was a hate side of it, it was the early '90s, and race relations were just complicated, and so I talked about that a lot using humor.

And again, I got all of my friends who didn't really know what I was doing or anything about punk to just contribute or write something from their perspective. Because I really didn't think anyone was going to read it, other than these people that I lived with, so I wanted them to be involved. So it was more personal, feminist, at that time, with a punk-like feel, just because I was punk. But I didn't really start interviewing bands for a while.

Davis: How many copies would you have made of, say, the first issue?

Sloan: Probably 50 and then another 50. I kind of did them in small batches. But a lot of those, I gave away. I never tried to sell it, even though it was for sale. I would trade with people, so that it would be like, I would write them a letter to get their zine, and I would just send mine like, "In case you want this..." [laugh] You know?

Davis: Mhmm. Do you remember much about the process of actually assembling the fanzine?

Sloan: Took forever. I didn't know how to do it. It's a lot of cut and paste. It's a lot of like waiting on other people to write their things. Because none of these people were like writers. And I wasn't really in a rush, so it probably took a good year to get it together.

Davis: So then the second issue, when did that come out?

Sloan: So the second issue came out my—it's this one. The second issue came out my senior year, and this also took a good year. So looking at this, I did an internship at WHFS—you remember that?

Davis: Of course.

Sloan: I love that place. I have an interview with my friend who hated UVA, mostly for like race reasons. She just felt like—and it's good to read these, because this came out in '93. [*Willona later told me that she was incorrect about the date here and that the correct year was 1996 - John*] So many things haven't changed. And the things that she was frustrated with I thought were a little bit not that big of a deal at the time, but when you're 20 years later and it hasn't changed, it is a big deal.

0:15:00

She was the first person I knew to sit down during the anthem at a football game. She was like, "I can't stand for that." So it's amazing to kind of go back and see that.

And this one, I was really preoccupied with sexual assault awareness. I had become a sexual assault trainer. We would train fraternities and sororities and just general students. And so I have a lot of information about what to do if you're assaulted. Because I started to see my audience as college-age at that point. I knew people were reading it. I knew a lot of women were reading it.

And I started to get a lot of letters from people. And a lot of them were sexual assault survivors. And so there were people of color. There were feminists. There were sexual assault survivors. And then there were like punk guys that I was trading with. And so it was like I have all this mishmash in my issues. But in this one, I think that was kind of the thing that stood out to me. Like there's a lot of interviews with people at school, but I wanted it to be educational as well.

Davis: These hand-colored covers—did you do that for all of them?

Sloan: Yeah.

Davis: Did you just do that yourself or did you have help?

Sloan: I did it myself. This one, my dad let me use his copier at work. He owned his own business. And my best friend's dad let me use her copier. And they both felt—my dad I think just was being my dad. But her dad was like an ex-hippie, and I think he felt like, "This is your art." [laugh] Like you have to support it. And it was expensive. I feel now so grateful to people who supported it, not really understanding it. So yeah, I would run them off and then color them by hand.

Davis: Did you feel very connected to the D.C. punk scene when you were away at school?

Sloan: No. I got really into—there was a small Charlottesville punk scene at that point. And by punk scene, I mean not punk at all, but we would call ourselves punk. The occasional touring band would come through. So in this one, The Warmers came through Charlottesville. But I just really—I didn't come home a lot as far as like to go to shows. I never came to D.C. for that. And in the summers, it was—then it was like the full Fort Reno series, going to the Black Cat. And like, no, I still didn't get in—I was going to say that church basement, but that wasn't even—First Congregational?

Davis: I don't think I ever saw anything there.

Sloan: Oh, yeah! So that was after college, and it was—Fugazi played there a few times. The Make-Up played. I started going to church there, actually, for that reason. It was like a really cool space right on I think 9th—I think was around 9th and G, like the old 9:30 Club area. And they would just let shows—free shows. A lot of the things that I have pictures of are from those basement shows.

Davis: So the next issue, issue three looks—you're now using newsprint.

0:18:01

Sloan: Yeah. So I decided to relieve all of my friends and family of having to pay for this hobby. So I went to this small publisher's co-op, and they did the printing for me. It has a nice—it comes off on your hands, but it was great, because I could get a lot, and it felt very official. So this was the first one where I felt like, "I'm going to go after the interviews that I really want."

And so with The Warmers coming to town, this was also the first interview—when I started doing reviews. So number two, I started doing reviews, which meant I had to start writing to record

companies and saying, “Look, I’m doing this zine. I’m really serious about it. Can you just give me free stuff?” Like, “Do you mind?” And people sent it. And I was amazed.

And the one person—I was like, “If I could get Dischord to send me a record, like, drop the mic.” Like, “I’m done.” Right? And so Cynthia [Connolly] put me on the list, and she arranged The Warmers interview, and she came down to Charlottesville with The Warmers. And ever since then, she has been sort of like my zine angel. Like anything she could help me with, she always did.

So the third issue, I wanted to focus on interviewing label heads about why they started their labels. I was just really interested in how DIY punk labels start, how they operate, and how they keep going. So obviously the one I really wanted was Dischord Records. I asked Cynthia—I ran into Ian [MacKaye] at like a flea market, and I was too scared to ask him. So then I called Cynthia, and I was like, “Can you help me put together an interview?” And she said, “You can walk up to him and ask him at a show, or you can call him and leave a message.”

So I called and left a message, and my parents didn’t believe in call waiting or like an answering machine. So he called me a few times and I guess I never got it. And so I asked Cynthia again. She’s like, “He has been trying to reach out. He’ll get in touch with you.” And so I did the interview. And he came—I remember he came down to meet me. I was working at a law firm, and I was wearing a suit with like block colors, and like at an angle. And he laughed. He was like, “That’s not what I was expecting. But hey!”

So it was great. We had coffee and I got to ask him all these questions. The two things I wanted to know was how he started Dischord Records, and Fugazi and go-go—I wanted to talk about that connection. Because I knew they had played some shows with go-go bands. And that being the two kinds of local-grown music, I was very curious about that. So I got to ask him those questions.

After that, everything got easier. That was the one interview—I didn’t think he would ever agree to it. So I just started calling other record labels. Of the six issues, my second favorite interview I ever did was with Shawn Stern from BYO.

0:21:00

He was just a really cool guy. He was the singer for Youth Brigade. Loved their band. But he had just an amazing generous energy. I say generous because I’m always amazed at the time

people will give to you. And I felt that with Ian and Shawn and a couple other guys, they were a good ten years older, and they had been in the scene a long time. And I remember they treated me as a professional, like I wasn't just some kid calling them up and wasting their time. And they were very busy, but they really saw it as like, "This is our media, and we're going to respect that."

Davis: I remember the feeling at the time with newsprint fanzines of—and I think you mentioned it—it's sort of like that's the serious way to do a fanzine is to put it onto newsprint.

Sloan: Because you had to—it was like you had to do a lot of copies, too.

Davis: Yeah. And previously I would just—I worked at Kinko's so I could make them there.

Sloan: [laugh]

Davis: Or yeah, or you had a friend or a family member or someone or somewhere you could make copies. And it just felt a little more like you had your act together if you... [laugh]

Sloan: I thought about getting a job at Sir Speedy. [laugh] I was like, you know, "I can copy."

Davis: Yeah, I called everybody. I called like Alphagraphics and...

Sloan: [laugh]

Davis: ...and then finally Kinko's. And I knew that like Jenny Toomey had worked at Kinko's, and someone from Superchunk.

Sloan: That's hilarious.

Davis: That was just sort of...

Sloan: Yeah. It's like what you did.

Davis: ...this indie rock job that you would have, so you could make flyers. And I took full advantage. I mean, I made catalogs for my distro...

Sloan: That's awesome. [laugh]

Davis: Record label ads. But then the time came to go to newsprint.

Sloan: Right. So did you go to newsprint?

Davis: Yes.

Sloan: Oh, you did?

Davis: Mhmm. That was part of—when I started that second fanzine that I mentioned, it was newsprint from issue one. It was like, “It’s not going to be...

Sloan: Very serious. [laugh]

Davis: ...photocopied anymore. It’s going to be newsprint.” And it’s funny to see them, because obviously the newsprint doesn’t age as well, so 20 years later it’s just...

Sloan: It like disintegrates a little.

Davis: ...it’s sort of starting to come apart a little bit, whereas the...

Sloan: Where did you get it printed?

Davis: It was in Wisconsin. It was whatever was the cheapest I could possibly find at the time, and some record level probably recommended it, or someone who had made a catalog or a fanzine, and I just went with it. It wasn’t the best quality, but I would make however many, a thousand, or something like that. But there would be more. You’d have more then, because it was newsprint. And do you remember when you would do these issues in newsprint—which it looks like three, four, and five are newsprint—typically how many copies would you make?

Sloan: Probably a thousand.

Davis: And then how would you get rid of a thousand copies of a fanzine?

Sloan: Oh god. Didn’t. Didn’t. [laugh]

Davis: Yeah, it was hard.

Sloan: So like hand them out a lot.

Davis: Were you selling them in stores?

Sloan: Yeah, I was. I never sold—I never sold them in stores.

0:24:00

I had distributors who would write to me at that point, and they sold them in stores. I probably got like five dollars out of all of that. And it was just the—I felt honored. Like, “OK, take it. What am I going to do with it?” I would sell a lot of them by mail. People would write me directly through reviews. So one of the

things that—people say, “I don’t like to promote myself.” I didn’t mind sending my zine out and asking people to review it.

I got a lot of bad reviews. What would happen in the beginning is like hardcore guys would be like, “What is this crap?” Like, “Why are you sending this to me? It’s like all not punk at all.” But then people started to get it. I never fit in one category. Like a personal zine wouldn’t totally get it, and a punk zine wouldn’t totally get it, but then I think people got used to me. So they would just kind of give it a fair review and be like, “This may not be my thing, but I like her take on this, or I like the interview on that.” So I started to get a lot of people asking to buy it.

Davis: Once you kind of became more established as a person who made zines, were there other zines that you felt some sort of kinship with at that point?

Sloan: Yeah. So I actually—I had pulled them out, but then I found out I made a list in here. My memory is not as good as it used to be, so I—the one person that she wrote me really early on—and it was Pisces cata-zine. So that was the other thing, which I haven’t said what it is, but I started meeting a lot of people in person, when I would travel, and I’d let them stay with me. Because a lot of bands would come through D.C.

So she was the first person that wrote me, and it was like this really personal zine. She had been like sexually assaulted by her father, who was a pretty famous studio musician. And so she wrote about it, like just kind of openly. She was biracial, and so she wrote about race issues. She wrote about growing up Jewish. She grew up in Hollywood. And she was like—she felt this really strong kinship with me. And I was like, “That’s so weird.” Like, “I wrote something that someone I don’t know really, really strongly...” She really understood it.

She wanted to sell it through her distribution. She wanted to contribute to it. She wanted to meet me. So we’re still friends. It has been—it was a really intense thing. But she introduced me to a lot of other people who had small distros, and they did like personal zines. When I was in LA, I got to meet her, and like so I would go—she had like a zinesters gathering, so I would meet a lot of zinesters there. So one of the people I met there was Ker-Bloom! She was from Alabama, but she lived in California. I really got interested—do you remember *Clamor* zine?

0:27:02

Davis: Yeah.

Sloan: Yeah, so Jason [Kucsma] and Jen?

Davis: Jen Angel?

Sloan: Yeah. So I met them.

Davis: They're from Ohio, I thought.

Sloan: They're from Ohio, yeah. So Jason and I used to correspond a lot. And they came to D.C. and stayed with me. They had like a small publisher's conference, so I took a Greyhound bus all the way out to Bowling Green. It was awesome. So that started to become a really big part of my life—just meeting zinesters, exchanging with them. So *It's Alive* was another one of my favorites. That was Fred [Hammer]. He was in Oxnard [California]. He was a really good photographer. Have you seen that one?

Davis: Yeah. Also with a lot of flyers in those...

Sloan: A lot of flyers.

Davis: ...fanzines.

Sloan: Yeah. And he did a couple like books and compilations. *Hanging Like A Hex* was from Syracuse. *Suburban Voice*. *Giant Robot*, I really liked. *Fracture*. There was this zine from Brazil called *Academiad Punk Rock*. And so that plays into zine five. *Punk Planet* was a huge one for me. *Turning the Tide*. And I would say—there's one I forgot, but *Spank* is another one, from Iowa.

Davis: That was one of the first zines that I got into was—like Michelle and Doug Daugherty, I think, from Des Moines?

Sloan: Yeah. Something like that. Yeah!

Davis: Which I definitely read in high school.

Sloan: It's weird. Yeah, they're from Des Moines. I got really—I don't know, yeah, I just got really interested in just—oh, I got really interested in swapping things. One of the things I didn't put in here is *Book Your Own Fucking Life*. That was basically how I put together issue five, like just going through that and just contacting everyone. So that's *Maximum Rockroll*, obviously.

Davis: Yeah. I bought a copy of that at Tower Records, whatever summer that came out, and then I used that to—exactly, to sort of like—

OK, who's interesting in this corner of the country and would then send them zines or...

Sloan: Yeah. It worked!

Davis: ...or my demo tape or something.

Sloan: Yeah. People were really responsive through that!

Davis: I'm sure that led to something at some point.

Sloan: Yeah.

Davis: And yeah, that was just so cool to hold this kind of guidebook, and obviously it's sort of quaint now when you see it.

Sloan: Oh, I wish I still had it. I don't know what happened to my copy. But yeah, so I live in Foggy Bottom, right by that Tower Records, which is now a CVS. It like breaks my heart all the time. [laugh]

Davis: Yeah. I was actually just by the one in Rockville that I used to go to. I was just by there, and was just sort of like, "Wow." The first one is a Buy Buy Baby now.

Sloan: Oh, really!

Davis: And it had had a second location in the same mall which is now—it's like a Nieman Marcus home furnishings store.

Sloan: It's like the ghost, yeah.

0:30:00

Davis: And I was like, "Damn, what a bummer!"

Sloan: [laugh]

Davis: But, you know, I'm glad it was there for the short period that it was. But yeah, actually Tower was a place that I would definitely get fanzines. Not just Y&T [Yesterday and Today Records] or Vinyl Ink or any other places.

Sloan: They had a lot.

Davis: That was a good source at that time.

Sloan: Mhmm.

Davis: And I would get them at shows too. People would have merch tables set up.

Sloan: I would get them at shows, and I would go to zine fairs and stuff. But I was really bad about approaching people. Unless I was also tabling, I just felt—I just was so self-conscious. Just like, [sheepishly] “Oh, I have this zine too. Heh heh heh.” [laugh]

Davis: Sure. I understand. So last issue...

Sloan: Oh, so yeah. So five though is—this was my world issue. So I used the *Book Your Own Fucking Life* and wrote to just all different people and got scene reports. I just was curious to see like what women are in the scene, what people of color are in the scene, so I tried to get as much diversity with that as possible. So then with the last issue, that was kind of just wrapping it up. It had been about two years I think since I had done an issue. I thought it was over. Like I was in grad school. I just didn't really have the momentum anymore. But I wanted to finish it out, so I kind of recapped some of my favorite experiences, some of the letters I had gotten, just as a way to say “Thank you.” And then just some pictures, and just tying a bow on it.

Davis: And you went back to just regular old paper?

Sloan: I went back to regular—yeah, because I was just going to do a few. And that was when I started asking for flyers, and so I ended up doing the flyer e-book. Within the last couple years, I finally put it together. But that was kind of like my last call for people to send me stuff.

Davis: So as far as stopping the fanzine, it was really just kind of a matter of you had been doing it for a long time, didn't really have the time or resources anymore?

Sloan: Yeah, I don't know. Now that I look back, I don't know why I stopped. I was in graduate school. I wrote in there that I wanted to write a novel, which I didn't even really do. Like it took me ten years, and then I picked it up again. I think I was just tired. And I think I was scared that I wouldn't know how to make the transition to like a career? So I had to stop doing this thing. Which is fine. I ended up—I still—I write for a living, so it ended up working out. But I missed it immediately when I stopped it.

Davis: Do you remember much of how you felt about the music scene at that point? Was it still exciting to you?

Sloan: I loved it. Yeah, I loved it. It was great. I went to tons of shows. I always—yeah. At that point, I was probably—in 2001 is when I stopped it, and I was probably at the Black Cat four nights a week. That was like my mainstay.

0:33:06

So I honestly don't know. I think I thought I was growing up. And I regretted it. I almost restarted it, and then I said, you know, you have to really invest energy in it. Like people send you music, they send you things, and if you're not going to take it seriously, you have to stop. So I think I was sort of conflicted within myself.

Davis: Did you have advertising?

Sloan: I did. When I started going to print, I did ads.

Davis: What was that process like for you? Was it sort of the same...

Sloan: Very easy.

Davis: ...way that you would ask for records to review?

Sloan: Yeah.

Davis: You'd say, "Hey, here are my ad rates"?

Sloan: Yeah. People would just send me stuff and money. It was weird! It was weird. I was like, "I don't fully understand, but I'm going to take myself seriously." So that was the other thing. Like if you're not going to use this stuff—like people are paying you, or giving you records which cost them money—you have to stop. Because I mean, two years is a long time to hold onto people's stuff. So that was it.

Davis: Did you alert people when you were doing this last issue, like "I'm done"? Did you continue to get review copies?

Sloan: I think people kind of tapered off. I'm trying to remember. I think people kind of tapered off. But I definitely sent everyone—whenever I would review something, I would send it to people, so I think I probably sent a note with the last issue. But I think naturally if you don't review something for a long time, people stop sending. I didn't get any more Dischord records; I can remember that. So I must have officially alerted people.

But I did transition into doing freelance writing and doing more interviews of bands, but it's not the same. I realize that having

control over all the editorial and interviewing bands that aren't the coolest or people know anything about—you can't pick that when you're pitching stories. So I missed having that control. And then people would say, "Oh, you should transition into blogging." I actually don't like blogging. I don't like it at all. It just wasn't the same for me.

Davis: Yeah, I was wondering—it was around early 2002...

Sloan: Yeah, I hated blogging.

Davis: ...that you stopped doing the print fanzine. And I wondered if the emergence of the internet as a way to talk about music...

Sloan: Nope. Because it felt really—I realized that I couldn't put my arms around the internet in the way that I could around the punk scene or the zine scene. Like I knew who was in it. I couldn't just have internet people come to my house. You know? So it just didn't feel as inclusive to me, and it wasn't as fun. Like getting random spammy comments wasn't quite the same high as going to my post office box, and seeing a letter in there, and like getting postcards. I remember I used to write the lead singer from Avail all the time. I don't know why; I just did. And he would send me postcards from the road, or pictures, and I'm like, "You don't get that on the internet." [laugh]

0:36:01

Davis: It seemed like as far as other D.C. fanzines go, it seemed like you didn't really have that much connection to that?

Sloan: I don't think so. Now that you're mentioning it, what are some...?

Davis: I'm trying to think of like who you might have thought of as your peer fanzines at the time.

Sloan: I don't think I knew a lot of D.C. fanziners.

Davis: It's sort of a long period that you were doing this. '91 was the first issue? '92?

Sloan: So '92 to 2001. [*Willona later told me that the correct date range of Scorpion's publication was 1996 to 2001 - John*]

Davis: So basically a decade of making zines. And in the early '90s, you have the riot grrrl fanzines. You have—there's *Who Cares* and *Fake* and *Whack* and *Uno Mas*.

Sloan: No, I've never read any of those. Are those in your collection here?

Davis: Yeah, we've got a bunch of stuff if you want to see it.

Sloan: Nice. [laugh]

Davis: And then I suppose by the late '90s, it trails off a little bit, but still some of those were running into that period. But yeah, I guess I was wondering if you had had any sort of...

Sloan: No.

Davis: ...people you sort of viewed as peers that might have influenced, but I guess not.

Sloan: Not locally. All of the people that were like my zine friends were spread out over the country. And I would just find them through other people's zines. So that's why I was saying—like with yours, I think someone sent that to me. Because I would just—other people would send me zines, and I would just read them. But most of the people I knew locally were just band people, but not zine people.

Davis: So it was close to 10 years also between you stopping the fanzine and then publishing the e-book, "Come To Our Show."

Sloan: Longer. Probably 15.

Davis: So during that gap, you were starting a new career, or you just...?

Sloan: So when I stopped doing this, I was working at the Corcoran doing PR and magazines for them, and then went on to a public affairs firm. So I've always been doing writing for different companies or non-profits or something like that. I think I just missed the zine. And so I was like, "You know what? I should do these show flyers."

And also I had gotten a lot. Like Mark Andersen had given me a lot. Martin Sorrondeguy from Los Crudos had given me a lot. And it was like again, people gave these to me with the intention that I would do something with them. So I kind of pulled them out and scanned them. But I don't know—I tried blogging in between. I tried doing, like I said, interviews for other magazines. But it has never been the same. So I think doing the punk show flyer thing was a way to like remember that energy.

Davis: And how would you say that the work you did on the zines back then impacts who you are today? It was sort of the beginning of how you got started writing?

Sloan: It's literally the beginning of all of it. Like I'm still friends with Al from *Suburban Voice*.

0:39:03

We're Facebook friends. And I told him, I was like, "You were the one that I use as the model." And the only thing I really ever wanted—I wanted to become a writer, but it was once I started doing the zine, I was like, "I am a writer." I started telling people I was a writer, and not being afraid to say that. I now know that I can interview anyone. Like I can pretty much get to anyone. They'll either say "yes" or "no." I'm not afraid to ask anymore. I just—I don't know. It was like a really great foundational experience for me, and it just—it has affected everything.

So even when you emailed me, I was in Iceland doing a writer's retreat. And I had just said to someone that day—she asked me—I taught a class to like these old Icelandic people. They were lovely. And someone asked me, "How did you get your start?" And I said, "Oh, I used to interview punk bands and do a fanzine." And she was like, "I don't know what that means." I was like, "It's OK! I do! I know what it means. It's very important to me."

Davis: So regarding the e-book, I had wanted to ask you sort of about the process of putting that together. There's hundreds of flyers in that book. And so that is entirely your collection that you had physical copies of, and scanned...?

Sloan: I had physical copies.

Davis: Wow.

Sloan: But like you were saying with Sharon Cheslow, some of them are copies of copies. So basically Mark Andersen said, "I have all these flyers from Positive Force shows," and things that he had collected. "If you want to come look at them—if I have two, you can take an original. If I don't have two, you can make a copy." And he just like let me have them.

So I started putting out a call through the Worldwide of Punk — that fifth issue—I asked people whenever they sent me stuff, to send me local flyers. So they did that. I wrote to Martin, because I was in this group like with Radio CPR and did a lot of shows at La Casa, and so Los Crudos came, and so I started writing to him, and

I told him I was doing this thing, and just asking if he had collected any flyers. And he sent me his whole collection, but he asked me to send them back because people would write letters on the back, or you know, they were personal things. He said, "Please don't read them, but you can copy them and send them back." So that's the reason why I had to put it out, because it was like, people trusted me with these things that are very sentimental to them.

Davis: Have you thought about doing a sequel, essentially?

Sloan: I have thought about it. I haven't collected enough. I haven't connected hardly at all. I told people, if you have flyers that are left out, send me your flyers." And most people are just like, "I love it." And I'm like, "No, but send me your flyers." [laugh] I want to do another one. But I want it to be different than the one I already have.

Davis: How would you make it different?

Sloan: Just get a different collection. So I already have—there's things I weeded out, so I would love to get like a new set.

0:42:02

I feel like I have a lot of early D.C., but I don't have a lot of '90s D.C. I don't have any 2000s D.C. I have like one Q And Not U, and I think Bald Rapunzel—I think played a show together. But like I don't have anything from that era. So I would love that. I would love to get more—like even with the international scenes, those scenes were very small. And so now they're bigger. I would love to see some of the other bands in the scenes.

Davis: We were talking earlier before the interview a little bit about rights issues of reproducing someone else's artwork, and I think you're fairly insulated from that, because it's an e-book. And I'd be surprised if someone would have a problem, but were there any issues with that?

Sloan: My original intent was to do a printed book, and I rethought it for that reason. I don't charge money for it. I say that I don't own the copyright to it. If anyone has a problem with it, I would take it out. But that's why I left it as an e-book, and that's why I don't charge anything for it. One time, I got an email from someone saying she thought someone was selling it on eBay. But it wasn't my collection. It was actually someone else's. But I was like, "I'm definitely not selling it." And a lot of the stuff is cut and paste. There was like one graphic specifically from a movie poster. I think it was from "Deer Hunter." They didn't own it when they did

it. I don't own it that they did it. So I just—I don't charge money for it.

Davis: Have any of the creators of any of the flyers gotten in touch with you at all?

Sloan: No.

Davis: Just pro or con?

Sloan: No.

Davis: Just nothing at all? Interesting.

Sloan: No.

Davis: Well, I don't really have any other questions. Is there anything that you think we haven't touched on, that you'd like to talk about?

Sloan: I will say that one of the things I'm extremely proud of as a female, as a woman of color—there just weren't a lot of other zines doing what I was doing. And I felt like that was a space that I could inhabit, and I was really happy to see people, like I said, sort of come around to that and understand what I was trying to do, even though it didn't fit into the little categories of zines that people read. A lot of people read the same types of zines. Mine kind of crossed a couple different genres, so I was really pleased to see people kind of getting into it.

[End of recording]