

Dave Travis



interview by Abraham Gibson (December 2010)

Dave Travis started documenting the live punk scene in L.A. at the tender age of 16. Since then he's amassed a video archive of over 1000 hours of live performances covering the years 1984 to 1997. He is considered by some in the scene to be the "Ken Burns of Punk."

He started his career working with underground filmmaker Dave Markey, and assisted him on his films *Desperate Teenage Lovedolls*, *Lovedolls Superstar* and *1991: The Year Punk Broke*. He also helped to put together MTV's video tribute to Kurt Cobain when he passed away in 1994.

He recently began to digitize his aging videotapes and put together the first of what we hope is many is a series of films. *A History Lesson Part One* Features interviews and live footage from 1984 of Meat Puppets, Minutemen, Twisted Roots, and Redd Kross, and is now available on DVD through [Dave's website](#)

PSF: Let's talk a little bit about where you grew up, and how you grew up.

DT: OK, I was born in 1967 in Hollywood and my dad was a news cameraman. So, he was filming, during the 1960's - he did three years filming the Vietnam war, and he also filmed the India/Pakistan war, which was a war, one of the wars between India & Pakistan - the one in 1965. Then in the 1970's, he was still working on the news, he filmed stuff like the Wounded Knee uprising in the Dakotas, and then he also started working for National Geographic. Then in the mid seventies, the news switched from shooting on 16mm film to shooting on 3/4 inch video, so he at first he wanted to stay shooting film because that's what he knew, so then he moved to working as a camera operator on TV shows like *Charlie's Angels*, *Fantasy Island*, *Love Boat*, *Hardy Boys* and stuff like that. To make the transition, he got a little one tube video camera that he practiced with and as he got good with it, he got a more professional camera and then

starting shooting the news on video again in the late seventies and into the eighties, covering the Iran hostage crisis, the turmoil in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and stuff like that. He was working out of the El Salvador bureau of CBS News, and then out of the Mexico City bureau. Once he got the newer and better video camera. he gave me the older one, and that's what I hooked up to a home VHS recorder, and that's what I started shooting bands on.

PSF: So you had some sort of battery pack hooked up?

DT: Yeah, I had a lighting battery pack. It was a belt with a bunch of batteries around it, rechargeable batteries, that was used for running lights for doing the news that had enough power that I could use it to run the VCR & the camera so I put that around me like a belt and put the VCR in a backpack and then ran the camera off that.

PSF: Michael Azerrad mentions in his book *-Our Band Could Be Your Life-* comparing the L.A. scene to the D.C. scene, that in D.C., a lot of those kids had parents that worked in Government and that gave them their political/activist bent. They were products of their environment. In L.A., a lot of kids had parents involved in the film & in your case, the television industry, and they were also a product of their environment so you saw a lot of people from that scene like Henry Rollins, Chris D., John Doe & Maggie Ehrig from Twisted Roots with film aspirations.

DT: But Rollins was from D.C. though.

PSF: Yeah but once he came to Los Angeles, he embraced it and became a product of Hollywood. So as far as growing up there, do you feel like Hollywood affects everybody in L.A. in a certain way, particularly the musicians?

DT: Well the big industries at that time, you had the film & music industries, and the defense industry, and aerospace were the main industries in L.A., but a lot of people came from the movie/TV/music industry and yeah I think it had an effect. The reason why I was shooting stuff was because my dad was shooting stuff and I had the access to the equipment. The guy who did some of the interviews with me in my film, Dave Jones, his dad was a UCLA professor, so I think that helped influence him in wanting to do research as well. There were a lot of people that had some film or music industry in their family and that was the influence- like the Haden family for example.

PSF: Do you think there were some people that got into music and used it as a stepping stone to get into the film industry?

DT: Not as much, I think they probably wanted to just do music for the sake of doing music, but people starting doing films, like Dave Markey who didn't have any family in the film industry but he was doing the films as kind of an extension of doing the band, something you could just do yourself. But there's always the hope that you can get some kind of job and make money at it later, but it wasn't looked at as much as a career path as just something to do, I think. They do have the background information from having that in their family if they do though.

PSF: What did your dad say about what you'd decided to film?

DT: At first, he was happy for me to be filming anything. I was doing kind of like home movies with my friends first and then starting shooting bands and that had a documentary or news feel. You know, for him, it was the more I practiced, the better I got. So the subject matter wasn't as important, it was just that I was actually shooting to become a better photographer. He was encouraging me, once I started shooting stuff, he got a VHS editing system that both he used and I used, but that was part of his main impetus was to help me learn the editing. He was initially pretty encouraging on it. We did the "Slip It In" video, we edited that at my house, and he was really happy about that. He didn't really have a problem with punk rock that much at that time, he would film stuff with like the moral majority against Ozzy Osbourne, so he'd be filming interviews with Jerry Falwell & interviews with Ozzy Osbourne, so he knew which one was really more scary. Not that Ozzy was super punk but just that, there was a whole anti-punk thing but my parents didn't really buy into that so much.

PSF: I'm sure that being involved with the media, you could probably see through a lot of the tricks

DT: Yeah.

PSF: You've mentioned that your first exposure to live punk. Was catching the bus to an X show after school. What was it that impressed you so much about that show, and about that band?

DT: Just the musical confidence was really amazing. DJ Bonebrake blew me away as a drummer. The whole band was really tight, a super tight band, and before that I'd only seen bands playing parties and stuff, and that wasn't as impressive. X was a really tight band, the music was really good, the energy was really good, it was the first time I really saw people slamming around. Up to that point, I was really into just like, stoner music. Ray Manzarek played keyboards for them on 'Soul Kitchen' at that show too, and the Doors were one of my favorite bands at that time, so that was a really added bonus. The vibe of it too, I wasn't really sure what it was going to be like and then I got in there and I felt at home.

PSF: So you did the Black Flag 'Slip It In' video- How did you get that job?

DT: That was with Chuck Dukowski, Jordan Schwartz, & Dave Markey. Dukowski asked us if we wanted to do a video. Black Flag wanted to do a video. Chuck was one of the people running SST, and Jordan was working there, and they asked Dave & I to work on it. We filmed the exterior. First, we did a little commercial which we filmed in my high school physics class and then we made a video where we filmed the exteriors after school at my high school. The interiors were shot - Greg Ginn & Raymond Pettibon's dad was a professor at Harbor College, in L.A. in the harbor area, so we used his classroom for the interiors. We just kind of winged it and edited it together and then we submitted to MTV for their show 'The Cutting Edge'- that was supposed to be their cutting edge thing but they wouldn't play it there. It ended up getting played on a late night video show that ABC had in L.A.. They also played it in Vancouver and a few other places. The general idea was just winging it and then editing it.

PSF: What are some of your more vivid memories of the shoot?

DT: The scene where they're all running down the stairs, it was just some of my friends. We were all running down there and then the school security came and kicked us all out.

PSF: Can you talk a little about Dave Markey and getting involved with We Got Power films?

DT: He was from Santa Monica, which was like the next little town over, and he was in a band called Sin 34, but then I met him maybe after I'd been taping for about a year. He made a movie that was originally called *Desperate Teenage Runaways* that became *Desperate Teenage Lovedolls*. They were doing a benefit show for that movie that Redd Kross was playing, so I went to see that, and met him and started hanging out and working with him, helping him out. You know he'd get enough money just to buy another reel of film or for processing the film and whatever he could afford to shoot, he'd shoot and then we'd have to raise some more money to do more. The next one was *Lovedolls Superstar* - he was doing that when I was in 12th grade, I helped him out there doing some assistant camera, extra work, & just helping out. I also helped him edit that one too, on my VHS editing system. After that I kept on working with him off and on. I helped him with *1991: The Year Punk Broke*, which he shot in Europe on Super 8. By that time, I had a hybrid 3/4 beta cam system so we edited there. I also worked for him doing *Shonen Knife* takes off, where I was one of the camera operators. After *1991: The Year Punk Broke*, I didn't work too much with him. He played in *Carnage Asada* with me from about 1995-1999 also.

PSF: So all the footage in your film is from May & June of 1984?

DT: All the live footage is, the interviews are from 1995 & 1996. I did some of that with Dave Markey too. They did a *Germs* tribute album and, some of the interviews were originally shot for the press kit on that. Bill Bartell was the guy behind *Gasatanka Records*, and he had me & Dave Markey film a bunch of interviews of people relating to the *Germs*. *Gastanka* had teamed up with *Grass records*, the way me & Dave were cutting it it was more about the content, the history of the *Germs* & why it was important. However, *Grass records* was more interested in celebrities than they were in information so they told us to send them the original footage and then it just got canned. Brendan Mullen used some of those interviews for his book, and some of it made it's way into *History Lesson Part One*. The other interviews were for a book that Dave Jones was doing on the history of L.A. punk that he's still working on, but we were doing interviews as far back as like 1994.

PSF: And the *Meat Puppets* & *Redd Kross* interviews are more recent?

DT: Yeah, we did the *Jeff McDonald* & *Meat Puppets* interview last year. The *Meat puppets* were doing a bunch of press and they let Dave Markey & I interview them at the same time.. Dave & I had been watching them that whole time, whereas a lot of people that they were giving interviews that day didn't really know their story as well

PSF: As far as the live footage goes, why did you decide to focus on 1984?

DT: When I started to digitize my footage, I started from the oldest first since that was

the stuff that was going to deteriorate first and that was the lowest quality so I wanted to work my way up. I had about 30 bands digitized by the time I got to mid 1984 and I thought I should start trying to cut it together to see how to process worked in terms of getting it all cut together. I did the editing in the 21st century non-linear style and all so mainly to see how it worked sometime to try and get things released. So I just started with the earliest stuff I had first as kind of an experiment. One of my concepts, I don't know if I'll do it, is to do a 'History lesson' for each year, 1984 up to 1997 probably. I wanted to do one first just to see how it goes.

PSF: Not all the bands were on SST but they were all involved. Can you talk about the influence and clout that SST had in Los Angeles at that time?

DT: Well, the two bands that were on SST were Minutemen & Meat Puppets, and the two bands that weren't were Twisted Roots & Redd Kross. The Twisted Roots weren't on SST but that lineup of Twisted Roots turned into DC3, who were on SST-Dez Cadena, Paul Roessler, & Kurt Markham on drums. The earlier lineup on Twisted Roots had Kira Roessler of Black Flag, Pat Smear who released two solo records on SST, and Emil who drummed for Black Flag. Kurt Markham also played in Overkill who released a single and an album on SST. Redd Kross wasn't on SST but they were really integrated into the whole South Bay scene. Redd Kross and another band, Nip Drivers were always playing with those bands, and parties and various venues, they just weren't a part of the label. Nip Drivers were on SST sister label New Alliance Records- that was a label that was run by D.Boon & Mike Watt.

PSF: And SST released the Soundtrack records for Markey's *Lovedoll* films, so SST released some Redd Kross music on the label, just not any official releases.

DT: Redd Kross used to practice at the (Black Flag owned) church, I think. They played their first shows with Black Flag. Their first show was playing someone's junior high graduation party- that was Redd Kross & Black Flag. Redd Kross also played the infamous Polliwog Park show with Black Flag, with was one of the first Black Flag riots where people started throwing stuff at them. Redd Kross was the opening band, so they were always pretty strongly connected.

PSF: So what was it about SST that drew people to the label, why do you think they had so much clout in the city?

DT: I don't think they had that much clout, they just had good bands. L.A. was a big enough city where they had several different punk scenes. A lot of the other scenes were focused more on violence & thuggery. There was another whole big scene Suicidal Tendencies and bands like Circle One. SST was more psychedelic too. They weren't so generic sounding, each band sounded different, and they didn't throw away the influence of the '70's bands that they used to listen to. Whereas some of the other bands tried to convince you that this was the "new music" and we're not listening to the old music. You'd go see Black Flag and they'd be playing ZZ Top over the P.A. before they hit stage. They did have the clout of SST being the label of Black Flag, that did have a serious amount of clout in L.A. in the '80's.

PSF: Joe Carducci, talking about the Meat Puppets has said that they were the only

band that everyone at SST could agree on. What appealed to you about the Meat Puppets?

DT: They were really psychedelic. I liked Grateful Dead, I liked CCR, and bands like that, and they were like an acid eaters punk band, I guess. That was what was appealing. It was kind of outside music. Black Flag was pretty psychedelic too in their own way, but more like a Black Sabbath meets the Doors. Whereas the Meat Puppets was more like Grateful Dead meets Captain Beefheart, or something.

PSF: Do you think they were held to a different standard because they were from out of town?

DT: Not really, not to me and the people I hung out with. There were always bands coming from out of town and either you loved them or you hated them. D.O.A. was from out of town, or Bad Brains. The different standard was that more people would come out to see a band from out of town, because the chance to see them didn't come up as often. Meat Puppets played more often than a lot of out of town bands since they lived so close to L.A. in Phoenix. If Bad Brains or someone came to town you'd go because you didn't know when they'd be back. Meat Puppets & Husker Du were the early SST bands from out of town. Meat Puppets were a lot more related to the L.A. scene because they played a lot more often.

PSF: Minutemen are also featured in the film and the film takes its name from one of their songs. Can you talk about how important they were to the L.A. scene and what made them different from Black Flag?

DT: I think they were super important to the L.A. scene. They weren't as big as Black Flag but for the people that saw them, I mean just talking to the people that have seen my movie, a lot of them had a really emotional reaction watching D. Boon again. Minutemen were really down to earth people- they were easy to talk to, they weren't trying to be different than you. The music was really intense, you know the power trio. They were a band that was constantly playing. They'd be playing gigs almost every week anywhere they could. D. Boon had a spiritual quality to him, almost like a Bob Marley type aura around him. They were a really intense band to watch live, certain people really got into it, and for other people, it just passed them by.

PSF: People talk about how things really changed in the SST/L.A. scene when D. Boon died.

DT: Yeah, that really did change things. He wasn't the main guy behind SST, that was Greg & Chuck and people like that but he had this presence and once that presence was gone, it did change things. The punk scene as it grew drew more and more violent people, not really the SST scene but the some of the other bands who played the same venues. So if you went to a bigger show, there was a greater chance of there being a violent incident, and bully type people, that got kind of irritating. Part of the SST thing that was good is that they kept it going at smaller venues like the Anti Club where you could see the SST bands without having to deal with that kind of bullshit.

PSF: Twisted Roots are another band that appears in the film, and they're probably the

least known of all the bands that you feature in *A History Lesson Part One*.

DT: Yeah, there WAS a period of time after Dez left Black Flag before he started DC3. He didn't start of DC3 right away, after he left Black Flag. He was actually playing in Redd Kross. Redd Kross early on had Dez playing guitar. I think Ron Reyes might have been in Redd Kross at one time. After playing guitar in Redd Kross, he was briefly in Twisted Roots and that kind of became the DC3, and the original bass player of DC3 was Kira but she got plucked up by Black Flag so they got Ceasar Viscarra, who used to play in the Stains.

PSF: Do you think Twisted Roots would have been more popular and had more success if that had their records released by SST?

DT: Yeah, but you know, when they first came out they were pretty popular, like Paul says in the movie, it was a combination of the Screamers & The Germs and people expected big things from them. That was 1981. As time went on, the Screamers especially became really obscure because they didn't have any records out. The Germs had the *G/* record out on Slash. People like me that were too young to see the Germs, but almost everybody had that record and knew them because of it. It was a legendary band that everyone knew about, and then Slash eventually got swallowed up by Warner Brothers, and everyone REALLY had that record. Whereas Twisted Roots was on Iridesence Records, so there wasn't that much promotion or distribution I don't think. Those SST bands toured a lot, I don't think Twisted Roots really played that much outside of L.A., except for maybe like San Francisco or something..

PSF: So would you consider Twisted Roots to be one of the great, lost L.A. bands?

DT: I don't know, it was just interesting to document. There's so many bands that people remember but got lost for one reason or another whether they didn't record much, or the records didn't sell, or they didn't tour very much. It was an interesting band and it was a band from that time that was forgotten, that should be remembered. I don't really think they made as big an impact on the scene as Minutemen. Paul & Dez both, what they did before & after Twisted Roots had a big impact, and was really important

PSF: The last band featured in the movie was Redd Kross, and these guys were friends of yours that you toured with 1985 & 1987. They had involvement with the label but were never on it. In the film, Jeff McDonald says that SST was a cult. Would you agree with that? What do you think he meant by that?

DT: At the time, a lot of people working there, were living there too. So it was their whole life. So there was a strong core of SST people. Redd Kross didn't want to be a part of that. Besides, playing with the punk bands, Redd Kross was also playing gigs with bands like Poison. Redd Kross were trying more to "make it" as a successful rock star band. Although, they weren't really changing their sound or anything- they were evolving but they weren't really selling out of anything, they wanted to be like Kiss or Alice Cooper. A lot of the SST bands didn't really have rock star fantasies- they knew they were playing a sort of obscure music, that only a small amount of people were going to listen to. Success would be great for them, but if it didn't happen, oh well. Redd Kross wanted to appeal to a larger audience.

PSF: They had a sort of glamorous rock star image but it seemed to be mostly tongue in cheek.

DT: It was, but Kiss was tongue in cheek too. Most of the SST bands didn't care about fashion or pay attention to what they were wearing. Redd Kross certainly did care about what they were wearing.

PSF: The footage of Redd Kross also features the one time appearance of future Bangle (and Jeff McDonald's girlfriend at the time) Vicki Peterson.

DT: That what Jeff says in the interview, is that they didn't even really jam together when they were going out, that was the one show they did after Dez left and before they brought in Robert Hecker. For just playing one show, you can't tell by the footage that she hadn't been playing with them. It's amazing that they're so tight being as it's a one off for her. They probably didn't rehearse all that much with Vicki before they played that show.

PSF: Originally you intended to include several other bands, and you couldn't get the rights cleared. What exactly were their objections to appearing in the film?

DT: The ones that objected at all, either they didn't want to be in documentaries, or one of the members got upset by what another member said in an interview got all mad and didn't want to participate. A lot of it though, was various members of bands refusing to communicate, so I don't even know why they didn't want to do it. I couldn't wait forever, I was trying to clear the bands for eight months and after that point, I couldn't really wait any longer. I got the Hollywood veto, where they won't say no but they won't say anything.

PSF: So was that the case with Black Flag & October Faction? Did Ginn respond at all?

DT: I went and talked to him when he played in Long Beach recently, and he was friendly and seemed like he might do it and said to send him the DVD. I sent him the DVD and kept on emailing him and never got any response. I would have liked to include Black Flag, but I don't know how to get through to him. The other people would at least say no - like Mike Muir & Paul Cutler- and I'd say OK and just move on, and I wouldn't have to keep on worrying about it. The Flag segment ran about a half hour and was actually the best part of the film. It mainly dealt with the Kira phase of Black Flag. If I can't get it cleared I can't get it released.

PSF: So you've had a residency at the Redwood Bar in L.A., featuring live bands and screenings of the film each night as well. Wow's that been going?

DT: It's been going really well. Last night, I thought it was going to cave since it was raining really hard but a lot of people showed up. It's a good combination- the movie with the bands. Originally, I tried to show it in the theaters but there was a hesitancy to have live bands in the theaters. Approaching the clubs was no problem, since I'd played with Carnage Asada there, there's usually no hesitance about including the movie. They leave me to be responsible for the technical end of things. They want people drinking

because that's how they're making their money and they're having bands anyway. The Redwood already had a screen hooked up to show basketball games and other sporting events. So far, the residency has been going really good, the bands are really good and it's a nice vibe combining the two, kind of like a little vaudeville thing. It's continuous entertainment from 8PM to 2AM. Each night of the residency has a special event too, like the Probe's CD release, or Sylvia Juncosa's birthday party. We've had a lot of SST related bands involved like Dos, Sylvia Juncosa, Saccharine Trust, & Fatso Jetson.

PSF: What sort of lasting influence do you see L.A. punk having today?

DT: It inspired a lot bands all around the world. It's something you have to listen for like tracing blues roots, or seeing the influence Chess Records had on the Stones.

Also see the website for [A History Lesson](#) and more info about Dave Travis

Abe Gibson made the horrible mistake of moving to Tucson, AZ a few years back. He is currently hard at work on his book *SST Records: The Blasting Concept*, a history and critical assessment of the mighty SST record label. He prefers Dez to Henry, but who doesn't?



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