



Top Stories



Thousands of Monks in Burma to be imprisoned

Thousands more reported dead.

Patron of Republican Sinn Féin Dan Keating dies at age 105



Dan Keating, life-long Irish republican and patron of Republican Sinn Féin has died today after a short illness. he was 105 years old.

Featured story

Bat for Lashes plays the Bowery Ballroom: an Interview with Natasha Khan



Musician Natasha Khan spoke recently with Wikinews about art, transvestism and drug use in the music business.

Wikipedia Current Events

More than 3,000 gold miners are trapped underground in a mine at Elandsrand, northwest of Johannesburg, South Africa,

Wikipedia Current Events

owned by Harmony Gold Mining.

- The United States and Russia sign a pact to use Russian technology on NASA missions to hunt for water on the moon and Mars.

- United States President George W. Bush vetoes an expansion of the State Children's Health Insurance Program.

- Edward Pietrzyk, the Polish ambassador to Iraq, is hurt and his bodyguard is killed by a bomb attack in Baghdad.

- Former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto says that the corruption charges against her have not been dropped, and that Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmad's announcement is part of a disinformation campaign.

- Lal Masjid mosque opens for public three months after being seized by the Pakistani army.

- 2007 Burmese anti-government protests:

- The State Peace and Development Council releases 80 Buddhist monks and 149 Buddhist nuns.

- United Nations envoy Ibrahim Gambari leaves the country, while arrests and intimidation of demonstrators continue.

- Soe Win, the Prime Minister of Myanmar, dies of leukemia.

- 2007 Pacific typhoon season: Vietnam evacuates 400,000 people from the provinces of Nghe An and Ha Tinh ahead of

Wikipedia Current Events

Severe Tropical Storm Lekima (Hanna).

- The President of South Korea Roh Moo-hyun and the leader of North Korea Kim Jong-Il commence talks in Pyongyang.

- Kim Jong-Il proposes to extend the talks by one day, but Roh Moo-hyun refuses.

- At the six-party talks in Beijing, North Korea agrees to fully shut down its nuclear program by the end of the year.

U.S. Rep. Duncan Hunter introduces bill to cut federal funding for Columbia University

On September 26, United States Representative Duncan Hunter (R-Calif.) introduced a bill to prohibit federal grants to Columbia University in response to Columbia's decision to allow Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to speak on campus. Titled the "Restore Patriotism to University Campuses Act", the bill states that "[t]hrough their invitation, Columbia University provided a public, prestigious platform on United States soil from which on September 24, 2007, President Ahmadinejad spoke and defended his wide-ranging support for terrorist activities."

Hunter, who is seeking the Republican Presidential nomination, argued in favor of the bill last week. "If the left-wing leaders of academia will not support our troops, they, in the

very least, should not support our adversaries," he said. "By hosting President Ahmadinejad, Columbia University openly insulted the thousands of servicemen and women serving in Iraq, most of whom are direct targets of the munitions that he is sending across the Iraq-Iran border."

Prior to Ahmedinejad's speech, U.S. President George W. Bush expressed a different view, saying that Columbia's invitation "really speaks to the freedoms of the country." "I'm not so sure I'd offer the same invitation, but nevertheless, it speaks volumes about the greatness, really, of America. We're confident enough to let a person express his views," he said.

3,200 trapped in South African mine

As many as 3,200 mine workers are trapped in Elandsrand mine, a gold mine in South Africa about 50 miles west of Johannesburg in Gauteng province, after an incident at 8:00 GMT. The mine is owned by Harmony Gold Mining Corporation.

The mining company says that a lift electrical cable broke on a basket that was carrying miners, trapping thousands at least 2,200 meters below the earth's surface. There are no injuries, but some reports say that rescuers have not been able to contact miners. Reports from MSNBC and the Guardian Unlimited say that the shaft may have collapsed when a water pipe burst.

"They were underground when the accident happened and they were not able to surface because an electric feeder cable that is connected to the mine lift was severed," said a spokeswoman for the mining company, Amelia

Soares. The snap was caused by a "fatigued" water pipe which fell down the shaft damaging the "steelwork and electrical feeder cords," added Soares.

"They are all safe," said CEO of Harmony mining, Graham Briggs who also said that the miners have been contacted and have been given "food and water."

However; according to Lesiba Seshoka, a spokesman with the National Union of Mineworkers, the miners have not been heard from for hours.

"This is a terrible situation. The only exit is blocked, probably by a fall of ground," said Seshoka.

Rescue workers will use a mine shaft that is next to the damaged one in an attempt to reach the trapped miners. The company says that a few hundred can be lifted to safety at a time and that most should be rescued within the next 24 hours. There is no emergency exit in the shaft which is reported to have "not been maintained for ages," added Seshoka.

"An escape route is the most important thing and they have failed miserably. They need to ensure that the shaft is maintained. This is why we have this disaster. Our main worry is for more than 3,000 people who are underground," said National Union of Mineworkers for S. Africa chairman, Deon Boqwana.

The Elsrand mine is currently under development and has been since February 2001 when Harmony bought the mine.

The mine is located in the Witwatersrand Basin of South Africa, which is said to be the location of the largest area of raw

gold on the planet.

Ontario Votes 2007: Interview with Libertarian candidate Alan Mercer, Scarborough—Rouge River

Alan Mercer is running for the Ontario Libertarian Party in the Ontario provincial election, in the Scarborough—Rouge River riding. Wikinews' Nick Moreau interviewed him regarding his values, his experience, and his campaign.

Stay tuned for further interviews; every candidate from every party is eligible, and will be contacted. Expect interviews from Liberals, Progressive Conservatives, New Democratic Party members, Ontario Greens, as well as members from the Family Coalition, Freedom, Communist, Libertarian, and Confederation of Regions parties, as well as independents.

Why have you chosen to involve yourself in the political process? Why did you choose to run in this constituency?

I live in Scarborough—Rouge River. I'm involved in the political process because of my desire to promote the message of individual liberty during provincial and federal elections, and to help build the libertarian political movement in Ontario and Canada. There is more information about me at http://www.libertarian.on.ca/Elec2007/A_Mercer.htm and <http://www.thestar.com/ontarioelection/ridings/candidateprofile/252984> and <http://www.canadianliberty.com/blog>

What prior political experience do you have? What skills and insight can you bring to office, from other non-political positions you may have held?

I ran in the provincial by-election

in Scarborough—Rouge River in 2005, and I was a candidate in the 2006 federal election for the Libertarian Party of Canada. I was elected to the Board of Directors of the Libertarian Party of Canada in May, 2005, and I was appointed president of the LPC in February, 2006. I have also served on the executive of the Ontario Libertarian Party. I have had opportunities to explain libertarian principles and positions to various media.

I helped to write the Ontario Libertarian Party's current environment policy and the Libertarian Party of Canada's current platform

I have contributed press releases for both the Ontario LP and LP of Canada, which include "Scarborough-Rouge River Libertarian on crime, restitution, foreign policy and civil liberties", "Block the Extradition of Marc Emery: The War on Drugs is a War on Liberty", "Libertarian Party Rejects 'Smart Growth' as a Dumb Idea", "Ontario Organ Donation Bill Seeks Government Ownership of your Body", "Response to the Liberal Government's Agenda", "Response to Statements in the Liberal Throne Speech Concerning Education", and "Thalidomide Cancer Drug Only 9 Cents in Brazil while Canadians Spend their Life Savings".

Which of your competitors do you expect to pose the biggest challenge to your candidacy? Why? What makes you the most desirable of all candidates running in the riding?

The incumbent has all the advantage, and after that the NDP candidate and Conservative candidate in that order. Literally, there is no other candidate in the riding who is even going to come close to presenting a libertarian message. My candidacy represents

liberty and allows the electors to hear this message. The Conservatives do not even come close to voicing free market positions or any opposition to infringements on personal liberties and property rights – such as the Smoke-Free Ontario Act or the Greenbelt Act or the Liberals forcing teens to stay in school until they're 18. The major political parties still advocate price controls on the economy and the Greens are just the most extreme kind of control-freak mentality that the major parties represent with their corporatist-socialist policies. There is a complete vacuum and libertarians need to get involved right now and get their own pro-liberty message out to the Canadian public which is starved of this.

What do you feel are the three most important issues to voters in your riding? Are these the same top three issues that are most important to you? What would you do to address these issues? I'd say that poverty, education and the economy are all important issues to both myself and to voters. The welfare state mentality, along with forced wealth transfer through taxation, and restrictions on people through ever-increasing authoritarian regulations are just going to push us towards worse conditions. I advocate the separation of school and state. People should not be forced to pay for the public or separate school system if they do not want to use it. Property tax is highly unjust and oppressive and should be abolished. I oppose the Tory plan to impose government control over faith-based schools.

What should be the first order of business in the 39th Legislative Assembly? Rolling back government taxes and

regulations. Increasing opportunities for health care and educational freedom. Liberty in all areas of life. Justice reform so that the needs of victims of crime are addressed through the principle of restitution.

Are the property taxes in your riding at a fair level for the amount of services received in the municipality?

No property tax is fair. Property tax violates property rights, and they oppress those who are least able to afford them. People need to be able to pay for the services they use and opt out of those they don't.

How can the province lead the way in stimulating job creation?

Free up the economy. Eliminate price controls such as minimum wage and rent controls, which respectively stop people from finding low-wage employment and stop landlords from being able to maintain low-income housing. Eliminate the professional monopolies that impose one standard for certification and lock out immigrants from the economy. Let young people into the economy and stop imprisoning them in schools if they would rather work or start their own businesses. Reduce taxes and reduce the size of government drastically right now.

What are your views on the mixed member proportional representation (MMP) referendum? If MMP leads to more diversity in the legislature and allows more representation by smaller parties (they need to pass 3% which is still a real obstacle), that may be a positive thing, but the proposed system may also decrease the level of representation in parts of Ontario, and there is a problem with accountability to the

electorate. Unfortunately, MMP is a distraction from freedom issues, i.e. personal sovereignty vs. authoritarianism. To reform our society in a libertarian direction, since we have to appeal to the majority anyway, I think political libertarians should consider the pros and cons of direct democracy. In other words, each citizen being their own representative in a virtual legislature. This may act as a check on the power of government through allowing more voices of dissent, more ideological diversity and more opinions to be heard in the legislature. I don't believe things are really heading this way with MMP. MMP might have the opposite effect and empower the establishment parties even more. But a movement towards direct democracy could open up an opportunity for libertarians to appeal more directly to the public rather than to the special interests who use the major parties to milk the public.

What role, if any, does "new media" play in your campaign, and the campaign of your party? (websites, blogs, Facebook, YouTube videos, etc) Do you view it as beneficial, or a challenge? I think new media is a critical element in our campaign. Our website www.libertarian.on.ca is central to our campaign. We use mailing lists. I make use of my personal blog www.canadianliberty.com/blog as much as possible. Also we have started to make use of Facebook through the "Libertarian Party of Canada" group. The OLP and LPC are still small parties, but I think we can make more and better use of the Internet if we grow in our volunteer base.

Of the decisions made by Ontario's 38th Legislative Assembly, which was the most beneficial to your

this electoral district? To the province as a whole? Which was least beneficial, or even harmful, to your this riding? To the province as a whole?

There is some really destructive provincial legislation from the point of view of people who care about the liberty and personal responsibility of Ontario's citizens. One example is Bill 52, Education Amendment Act (Learning to Age 18), 2006 which suspends the drivers' licenses of 16-18 year olds who don't stay in school. And also of course the infamous Smoke-Free Ontario Act [1] which copycats the rest of the world's efforts to crack down on personal freedoms. I could go on and on. Bill 56, Emergency Management Statute Law Amendment Act, 2006 is a direct threat to civil liberties in the event of a flu pandemic or other excuse. The Greenbelt Protection Act, 2004 interferes with the rights of landowners. The Clean Water Act, 2006 interferes even more with private property rights.

Bills can be found here: http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/bills/bills_all.do?locale=en
Bottom line: the government of Ontario is giving itself more and more power over our lives – over land, over homes, over educational decisions, over personal decisions. As a libertarian, I fundamentally object to this whole massive system of centralized control which has been growing for decades, and believe it's time for society to move in the opposite direction towards decentralized person-to-person systems of rights protection.

Ontario Votes 2007: Interview with Freedom Party candidate Wayne Simmons, Don Valley East

Wayne Simmons is running for the Freedom Party in the Ontario

provincial election, in the Don Valley East riding. Wikinews' Nick Moreau interviewed him regarding his values, his experience, and his campaign.

Wayne did not answer "Of the decisions made by Ontario's 38th Legislative Assembly, which was the most beneficial to your this electoral district? To the province as a whole? Which was least beneficial, or even harmful, to your this riding? To the province as a whole?"

Stay tuned for further interviews; every candidate from every party is eligible, and will be contacted. Expect interviews from Liberals, Progressive Conservatives, New Democratic Party members, Ontario Greens, as well as members from the Family Coalition, Freedom, Communist, Libertarian, and Confederation of Regions parties, as well as independents.

[edit]
Interview

Why have you chosen to involve yourself in the political process? Why did you choose to run in this constituency?

I was inspired to enter politics by reading authors, Ayn Rand and George Orwell. Soon after, I looked at the political landscape in Canada and noticed it was - and still is- a haven for Statists. I felt that those of us that understand the ideological roots of liberty need to involve ourselves in the political process. I'm running for Don Valley East because Don Mills has been my home for 31 years.

What prior political experience do you have? What skills and insight can you bring to office, from other non-political positions you may

have held?

I've been studying philosophy, history, politics and economics for approximately 20 years. I bring the insight of having a historical understanding of individual rights in the West.

This knowledge has armed me with the ability to make sound, principled, policy decisions.

Which of your competitors do you expect to pose the biggest challenge to your candidacy? Why? I have no illusions about winning in this election. I'm running so that those living in my riding have an opportunity to vote for a principled, non-statist, candidate.

What makes you the most desirable of all candidates running in the riding?

I'm the only rationally principled, non-statist, candidate running.

What do you feel are the three most important issues to voters in your riding? Are these the same top three issues that are most important to you? What would you do to address these issues?

There's is no way for any Politician to know with certainty what the three most important issues are in their riding. The question has smuggled into it a collectivist premise that a Politician is some kind of Rousseuian grand legislator who has mystical insight into the "General Will" of his community. Many people are concerned about excessive taxation. Many are concerned about the lack of choice in Education and Healthcare.

What should be the first order of business in the 39th Legislative Assembly?

Cutting taxes, specifically, property and income taxes.

Are the property taxes in your riding at a fair level for the amount

of services received in the municipality?

No. There is no "fair" level. Who can determine the "fair" level? This question presupposes some kind mystical collective way of determining fairness with regard to taxation.

How can the province lead the way in stimulating job creation?

Abolish the provincial income tax and scrap property taxes, for starters.

What are your views on the mixed member proportional representation (MMP) referendum? MMP would make majority Governments difficult - if not impossible. It is only by Freedom Party forming a majority Government where the necessary uncompromising changes can be made to restore Government respect for the individual's right to life, liberty and property.

What role, if any, does "new media" play in your campaign, and the campaign of your party? (websites, blogs, Facebook, YouTube videos, etc) Do you view it as beneficial, or a challenge? They're all beneficial. The party uses practically all methods of new media.

Ontario Votes 2007: Interview with Family Coalition Party candidate Kirsten Monster, Willowdale

Kirsten Monster is running for the Family Coalition Party in the Ontario provincial election, in the Willowdale riding. Wikinews' Nick Moreau interviewed her regarding her values, her experience, and her campaign.

Stay tuned for further interviews; every candidate from every party is eligible, and will be contacted. Expect interviews from Liberals,

Progressive Conservatives, New Democratic Party members, Ontario Greens, as well as members from the Family Coalition, Freedom, Communist, Libertarian, and Confederation of Regions parties, as well as independents.

Why have you chosen to involve yourself in the political process? Why did you choose to run in this constituency?

I chose to involve myself in the political process in order to address the deficiency of integrity and morality in government. This province has suffered from irresponsible leadership and management for too many years. Now is the time to step forward, become involved, and demand accountability. That is why I am running as a candidate in this provincial election.

I chose to run as a candidate in the riding of Willowdale in this election on account of being a student at a university which is situated in the riding (Tyndale University College). In the past four years of study, I have become acquainted with the riding, the people who live there, and the issues they face. With the insights I have gained, I believe I can serve the people of Willowdale.

What prior political experience do you have? What skills and insight can you bring to office, from other non-political positions you may have held?

I grew up with politics. Even from a young age, I can remember discussing events and issues which were affecting the province, the country, and the world. As a teenager, I assisted in grassroots campaigning for the Christian Heritage Party. I have attended a number of political conferences, joined pro-life and pro-marriage rallies in Ottawa, and have

participated in Show the Truth demonstrations in both Oshawa and Toronto. In 2006, I was nominated and elected to the position of Secretary of the board for the CHP riding association of Durham.

In addition to this political experience, I have held leadership positions in discussion-based groups, positions that require tact and the ability to mediate controversial topics, as well as organization and communication skills, and also compassion and understanding. I have a strong work ethic: I am competent, thorough, and pursue excellence in my work. Furthermore, attending a university which attracts students of different cultural and religious backgrounds, I have had the unique opportunity to interact with and establish friendships with a wide variety of people, and thus I have confidence that I can relate to and serve all the different people of my riding.

What makes you the most desirable of all candidates running in the riding?

Of all the candidates running in the riding of Willowdale, I can offer my constituents honesty, integrity, and morality. I am not making campaign promises to be broken later, as others have done. I am not pledging millions of dollars for the sake of buying votes. I am simply presenting principles and reforms for managing government affairs responsibly, efficiently, and fairly, and am offering my services to the people of Willowdale. Whatever this office asks of me, I will seek to do the best for my riding.

What do you feel are the three most important issues to voters in your riding? Are these the same top three issues that are most important to you? What would you

do to address these issues?

The three most important issues to voters in the riding of Willowdale in this election are transportation, senior care, and education. One or two of these issues are the same as, or related to, the issues that are most important to me (protection of all human life, protection and promotion of the family, and parental choice in education).

For Willowdale's issues, I would propose the following solutions: Transportation. Recently, Toronto's budget shortfall made funding for the TTC and the quality of transportation in this riding into serious issues. I suggest as a possible solution that the provincial government pursue having the TTC buses (and other public transit systems) privatized, and encourage competing bus companies to become established. This would contribute to lower fare prices and better service, and would most likely attract more consumers and create more jobs. The money that was originally being used for the TTC buses could then be invested in improving and maintaining the subway system (for the present).

Senior Care. Seniors are valuable people, who deserve respect and proper treatment. I believe that, on a general basis, the best caregivers are their family members. I will provide tax breaks for persons who support and properly care for their aged parents, and will create incentives for others to do so. I would rather see seniors at home, being cared for by family members who love them, than in long-term nursing facilities.

Education. The education of a child is not something for the government to decide: parents have an inalienable right and duty to oversee the education of their children, and the provincial government should respect and

promote this. The education system should be opened to parental choice and free market competition.

What should be the first order of business in the 39th legislative assembly?

The first order of business in the 39th Legislative Assembly should be to address the issue of the right of women to be informed. At present, women opting for the elective procedure of abortion are not informed of the risks this procedure poses to their health and the health of the child in the womb. Medical practitioners should be required to make this information available to women patients considering abortion.

Are the property taxes in your riding at a fair level for the amount of services received in the municipality?

Property taxes need to be reconsidered. I believe cities should be subject to the Taxpayer Protection Act. City and municipality budgets should be cut back to focus on the essential services and operations of government. The Family Coalition Party opposes the proposed additional provincial land transfer tax in Toronto. Our direction is exactly the opposite: a reduction of taxes. In addition, we are considering removing the collection of the education portion from property taxes, which penalizes home ownership, and we would use general revenue to fund education. This would be a big incentive towards property ownership, personal savings, and would improve the economy in general.

How can the province lead the way in stimulating job creation?

The province can lead the way in stimulating job creation by

removing some of the tax burden placed on small businesses and individuals.

What are your views on the mixed member proportional representation referendum? I support mixed member proportional representation. In the current first-past-the-post system, a politician can win a seat in a riding even when the majority voted against him. In such cases, the votes cast have unequal value, the majority of the constituents are not receiving representation, and the politician can avoid accountability to his riding. MMPR provides a fairer voting system that will ensure that everyone's vote counts, and that everyone's voice is heard. This new electoral system allows greater voter choice, fairer election results, and stronger representation.

What role, if any, does "new media" play in your campaign, and the campaign of your party? (websites, blogs, Facebook, YouTube, etc.) Do you view it as beneficial, or a challenge? New media has played a major role in my campaign. I have taken advantage of websites (h: ad my own made), and utilized the other internet websites (mainly newspapers). New media has proved beneficial for my campaign.

Patron of Republican Sinn Féin Dan Keating dies at age 105

Dan Keating, life-long Irish republican and patron of Republican Sinn Féin has died today after a short illness. he was 105 years old.

Keating, born on January 2, 1902 and raised in the townland of Ballygamboon, Castlemaine, County Kerry, received his education in local schools, including the Christian Brothers'

School in Tralee. Tralee was also the place where Keating did his apprenticeship. During this time he became a skillful Gaelic football player in his native Kerry.

Keating joined Fianna Éireann in 1918. In 1920, during the Irish War of Independence, he joined the Boherbee B Company, 3rd Battalion, 1st Kerry Brigade, Irish Republican Army. On 21 April 1921, Royal Irish Constabulary Constable Denis O' Loughlin was shot dead in Knightly public house in Tralee. Keating, Jimmy O'Connor and Percy Hanafin were suspected of the killing, and were forced to go on the run. On 1 June Keating was involved in an ambush between Castlemaine and Milltown which claimed the lives of 5 RIC men. On 10 July, a day before the truce between the IRA and British forces, Keating's unit was involved in a gun battle with the British Army near Castleisland. This confrontation resulted in the deaths of four British soldiers and five IRA Volunteers.

Keating opposed the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty and fought on the Republican side in the Irish Civil War. He was involved in operations in counties Kerry, Limerick, and Tipperary, before his column was arrested by Free State Forces. Keating spent seven months in Portlaoise Prison and the Curragh Prison before being released in March 1923.

Keating remained an IRA member for a long time after the Civil War. He was arrested several times during the thirties on various charges. Keating was active in London during the 1939/1940 IRA bombing campaign.

Keating subsequently returned to Dublin and worked as a barman in several public houses. He retired

and returned to his native Ballygamboon, Kerry in 1978. To this day he refuses to accept a state pension because he considers the 26-county Republic of Ireland an illegitimate state which usurped the 1916 Irish Republic. In 2002 he refused the state's standard €2,500 award to centenarians from president Mary McAleese. After former IRA gun-runner George Harrison died in November 2004, Keating became patron of Republican Sinn Féin.

PTS Taiwan holds "Why Democracy?" the Movie Pre-launch Seminar to examine the democratic process in Taiwan

Before world-wide launch of the political documentary film "Why Democracy?" on October 8, Public Television Service Taiwan (PTS Taiwan) held a preview seminar on this movie and invited professional from politics and academics at Eslite Bookstore Tung-nan Branch, Taipei City today.

Yuan-huei Hu (President and CEO of PTS Taiwan) hoped that governments, academics, and organizations in Taiwan will learn some of good experiences from the movie imported by PTS Taiwan. "Without democracy, Teng-hui Lee and Shui-bian Chen won't be the elected President of the Republic of China." Ron Rong-chuan Chen (Executive Director of Newtownaiwanese Cultural Foundation) remarked at opening.

At the Executive Panel, Thomas Chin-peng Peng (Secretary General of Taiwan Competitiveness Forum) pointed out the problem of politics and democracy in Taiwan, and mentioned the disadvantage such as bribery at voting and process of a election on the movie "Please Vote For Me" ever happened in Taiwan. "Democracy has its advantage or not." Peng

said.

"A leader should play a suitable role after elected by others with their anticipation and understand what they need." Chi-chang Hung (Chairman of Straits Exchange Foundation, Taiwan) said.

Even though the documentary film "Please Vote For Me" is directed by Wei-jun Chen (Producer of Wuhan Television), but due to the political problem, this film is available world-wide except China. Wentang Cheng (Film Director in Taiwan) mentioned that without the content but to review accomplishment of this film, he hoped that spectators should experience the difference from every country in the series film.

By the Way, Chien-jen Tsai (Chief Editor of Taiwan Lihpao) remarked that this series film may be hopeful to someone who has anticipation on democracy and politics, if governments in Taiwan respected the process and learned their experiences, maybe this is hopeful in the process of democracy in Taiwan.

After the seminar, PTS Taiwan predicted that more than 300 million people in 200 countries will watch this series film and attract some discussions and topics on politics and democracy.

Frank Messina: An interview with the 'Mets Poet'

In the early Olympic games, athletes used to run a mile and then recite a poem. The first poet-in-residence of an English football team, Ian McMillan, remarked that football chants are like huge tribal poems. Generally, though, sport and poetry have never seemed natural companions in human enterprise. Until the New York Mets baseball team suffered in

2007 arguably the worst collapse in Major League Baseball history. To describe the anguish fans felt, The New York Times turned to a poet, Frank Messina. "Nothing was really representing the fan's point of view," Messina told Wikinews reporter David Shankbone in an interview. "There's a lot of hurting people out there who can't express what happened."

And to those who read the Times last Saturday, Messina wants you to know his father never apologized for raising him as a Mets fan. "I never asked for his apology, and he never apologized, nor did he owe us one. I was misquoted in the New York Times."

Messina's parents taught him about opposite ends of the spectrum of life. "My mother was supportive even when I made mistakes. She taught me to never give up no matter what vocation you choose in your life." Whereas Messina's mother taught him to never give up, his father taught him how to die with grace. He passed away from cancer in 2005. "I got to see a man who accepted his fate. He was like the Captain of the Titanic. My mother was also calm. I was the one freaking out inside. I saw someone who had acknowledged his own demise, accepted it, and died at home. He was a tough old guy. It takes a lot to accept that; it takes a very strong person. Some of the special moments toward the end was sitting with him and watching baseball games."

It is baseball that has garnered Messina attention now. He has performed in 32 countries and 40 states, and in 1993 he founded the band Spoken Motion, a spoken word band. What is striking about Messina is that his work has branched two worlds that often

don't interact: downtown coffeehouse denizens of poetry and the denizens of Shea Stadium. It is Frank Messina who has personalities as diverse as Joe Benigno, the archetype of the New York sportscaster at WFAN, reflecting on love and poetry. "No one would question a poet writing about love for a woman," said Benigno, "but when you're a fan of a team, the emotional attachment is even stronger...." Benigno sounded similar to avant-garde writer and musician David Amram, who said Messina's poems paint "the stark beauty of the streets, the pain of 9/11, the joy of everyday life, the mysteries of love all fill the pages of this book. It's a feast of images and sounds that stay with you."

I spoke with the person Bowery Poetry Club founder Bob Holman called the "Rock n' Roll Poet Laureate" recently in Washington Square Park:

DS: You have received a good deal of attention recently.

FM: Even though I'm not Michael Jackson or somebody, when people come up to me and introduce themselves and say, 'Hey Frank, my name is John,' I say, 'Hey John, my name is Frank' and they laugh. It's a funny phenomenon.

DS: What goes through your head when that happens?

FM: I understand it. I've gone to readings and concerts. I look at it as human interaction. Over the years I have performed in 32 countries and 40 states. I've been doing this professionally since I was in my twenties, and before that since I was sixteen doing little tidbit poetry readings in coffeehouses. The band I started in 1993, Spoken Motion, received a lot of recognition as a spoken word band born out of the New

York spoken word scene. I worked with some great musicians and performed around the world. I remember signing my first autograph to a kid when I was 25 years old. As time went on, I came out with books and CDs, and I became used to that kind of thing. To me, the ultimate feeling of success as an artist, is to move somebody enough where they thank you. When someone comes up and says, 'Frank, thank you, your work is great.'

DS: You have a long career in poetry, but as of late the attention you have garnered is for the Mets-inspired work. How do you feel about having a lot of your work overshadowed by the Mets work?
 FM: It's ironic. Some of the greatest poetry has been born out of failure and the depths of adversity in the human experience. Walt Whitman, the first great American poet, wrote about the Civil War. He went looking for his brother, George Whitman, after he a telegram telling him his brother was injured in the South. When he started out his poems were about beating drums, and blow, bugle, blow. Real patriotic. Then he started to see the real horrors of war. He was able to tap into the human condition and the situation at that time. Eventually when he found his brother he had resolution. I experienced that kind of adversity during 9/11 being a civilian volunteer. I loaded ferry boats in Jersey City across the river to deliver goods to Ground Zero. I turned to Whitman to find some understanding of what is happening in the world right now. When I wrote my 9/11-related poems, that was true adversity. I realize baseball is just a game.

DS: Can you recite a stanza that expresses how you feel right now?

FM: This was a piece that the Times only quoted one stanza, but it's about preparation for a battle, and being prepared to either rise to the occasion, or go down:

Do you know what it's like
 to be chased by the Ghost of
 Failure
 while staring through Victory's
 door?
 Of course you do, you're a Mets
 fan
 caught in a do-or-die moment
 in late September at Shea

As one that's battled hard
 through many a broken dream
 Let me say, "in order to rise to the
 occasion
 you must be willing
 to go down with the ship",
 Have no fear, no hesitation,
 for Winning shall be it's reward!

Don't let them get in your head!
 you've kept it up this long
 You're a Mets fan in late
 September
 and you'll fight til the glorious end
 Cheer the team today;
 (your boys in orange and blue)
 Let them hear you shout
 as they fight for what's mightily
 due
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DS: Sports fans aren't known as patrons of poetry. Have you had interaction with 'new readers' through your Mets work?

FM: This one person who I never met took a picture of me and sent it to me in an e-mail. The e-mail said, 'Frank, I have never bothered you during the game, but I just wanted to say thank you for your work and thank you for making some sense of the successes and failures and I wish you much success with your work.'

Last year in my section at the stadium I had a banner that read

We Know'. That's all it said. Then earlier this year these shirts started to come out that said, "Poet says We Know". It was amazing. We didn't use the banner this year, though, because we didn't know. The team wasn't so far ahead that we knew. Last year we just knew we were going to the playoffs; we knew we were going post-season. This year we weren't sure. We were walking on eggshells.

There was a woman, a season ticket holder and a die hard fan. She was staggered by the loss last year to the Cardinals. Last year she came up to me during one of the games late in the season; she was so happy we were going to the post season. By that point we had clinched it. She handed me a shirt she bought at the stadium and she gave me a big hug. With tears in her eyes she said, "Thank you, Mets Poet, thank you." It's cool...it's like another family.

DS: Moments like that must make you realize you have touched people who aren't normally touched by poetry.

FM: It's opened up a new fan base, so to speak. For the last year SNY has broadcast footage of me with my poems, so quite a few fans known about the 'Mets Poet'. I have never called myself that, by the way. The back of my jersey says 'The Poet' because growing up that was my nickname. My brother was a runner and they used to call him The Birdman-- Birdie--and they called me The Poet. It was a natural thing, but I never coined myself as 'The Mets Poet.'

DS: Jack Nicholson once said, "The fuel for the sports fan is the ability to have private theories." What are some of your private theories?

FM: The fan is always right. No matter if he is wrong, he is right.

The fan always has an opinion. That's why we have talk radio and people call Joe Benigno and Steve Somers and Mike and the Mad Dog all day long. That's why we have 24/7 sports-related talk. If you were to come from another planet with only three hours on Earth to find out what human beings are like, to discover how dynamic life is as a human being, you would take them to a baseball game. A season is like a life, but a game is like one day in that life. A season has its beginning, its renewal, its innocence and its arch into maturity into the season. Panic sets in when it hits the middle-age of the season. Will it we have success, or will we have failure. At end of season, fans have to accept whether we have failed or whether we have achieved victory. Kansas City Royals fans know at the beginning of the season that, more than likely, nothing is going to happen for them. As Mets fans, we want to win, but we never expect it to be easy. It's always going to be a fight; it's always going to be hard.

DS: The second-class citizen in a first rate city idea that is found in one of your poems.

FM: Yeah, you're going to get pushed around. People are going to disagree with you. It's not going to be easy. You're going to have to take a lot of pills, take an extra drink, go to the gym an extra day to run off some energy.

DS: You and poet Ron Whitehead embarked on a "War Poets" tour of Europe. You as a pro-war poet, and Whitehead as a pro-peace poet. Forgive the crude terminology; I realize there is probably nuance in there. In the over four years since that tour has your outlook evolved at all?

FM: I've never been for any war. I try to avoid altercation on any

level, be it emotional, physical, or political. But there are some wars I think that are necessary. History has shown this. Was this one necessary? I don't know. Twenty years from now we'll have to figure that out. I hope that we've all learned something from it.

DS: What is your feeling toward the Iraq War now?

FM: It's a mess. It's a mess. We went in to get a job done, get Hussein out of there, liberate the Iraqi people as was dictated in the 1998 Liberation Act that Senator Lieberman helped draft and President Clinton put out there. President Bush, Congress and the American people supported going in there. I'm not going to backtrack: I did support going in there, and even as an artist and a poet, and as a freak, I made a decision, that it was time to take this guy out. I spoke with many Iraqi Americans who live in my neighborhood who also supported that. Lebanese and Iranian friends I have supported it. One of my childhood friends, Adel Nehme, came out of Beirut, Lebanon around 1972. We met in kindergarten and we've been friends ever since. He was someone who escaped that turmoil. His family brought him to New Jersey specifically to pull him out of that hell, like the way my father took us out of the gangland hell of the South Bronx. Like any father would do, to protect his family.

DS: Do you still feel the Iraq War is protecting us, and that the original reasons you supported it are still valid?

FM: It's a mess. The original reasons? Yes. Looking back, hindsight is always 20/20. Unlike many artists, I have vocally supported the war. Many artists who support this war won't say

that. Ron Whitehead is a dear friend. We have mutual respect for each other but we disagree on a lot of issues. Nevertheless, there's only one man I want fighting in the trenches of life with me, and that's Ron Whitehead.

DS: When you look at the state of the world, what five descriptors come to mind?

FM: Chaos. Yearning for peace. Confusion. Desperation. Hope.

DS: And are you hopeful?

FM: Yes.

DS: Where do you get that hope from?

FM: My faith in the human spirit. I think people are inherently good.

DS: Joe Benigno said, "No one would question a poet writing about love for a woman, but when you're a fan of a team, the emotional attachment is even stronger, because women come and go, but your team never changes." Do you think that analogy really holds, because you are attracted to the Mets, and you are attracted to women, and the players on both of those teams in your life change.

FM: Loving a baseball team is having to put up with the imperfections, the routine of what kind of mood is it going to be today. It doesn't come down to whether we are going to win or lose, it comes down to: is the player going to perform this way? Or, is the pitcher going to be ambivalent? Am I even going to have enough strength to watch this game? Am I going to wash my hands? Am I going to lay in bed all day? What am I going to do? The game becomes a reflection of true life in that way.

DS: The difference is that you know what to expect from the

players on the Mets. They have defined roles and there is some certitude. With women, as the players change you don't know what they are going to do; whereas in baseball the players have roles and you know what to expect of them.

FM: It's a dangerous proposition being any fan, but particularly a Mets fan, because you are going to have to accept you will fall in love with imperfection. When you fall in love with a woman, you are accepting them for all their flaws, those elements that make them human, warts and all. And I accept my team warts and all. They have given me a great deal of joy, a great deal of entertainment, exhilaration, and a hell of a lot of pain like in any fan. This isn't the Brady Bunch, this isn't Leave it to Beaver. Few things are, if anything.

DS: You were the recipient of the 1993 Allen Ginsberg Poetry Award. In 1996 I met Ginsberg at the Naropa Institute in Boulder. I asked him about NAMBLA, the North American Man/Boy Love Association. He told me to follow him into the bathroom. As I stood there he peed and told me he wasn't for having sex with children, but that he thought that age-of-consent laws were outdated, that he knew what he wanted when he was fifteen and that he thought everyone does at that age. He said he wasn't for sex with children, but that it should not be illegal to have sex at that age. When you accepted the Ginsberg award, did you have an issue with some of his political stances?

FM: I was too young at the time to realize what he thought. I never knew what went on behind closed doors with Allen, and aside from meeting him a few times, I never knew him on a personal level. I

accepted the nomination, like young people do each year, because of his poetry, not because of his politics. I was proud. That is what the award was designed for. There are laws in this country for a reason, to protect children and to protect people from predators. Whether Allen was a predator or not, I don't have any idea.

DS: All evidence is that he was not a predator, but that he was a voice for change of age-of-consent laws. FM: To me, it's a non-issue. Put your hand on my kid and believe me, it's all over for the predator. That's my policy. When someone's 18, that's the deal. I'll stick with the law on that one.

DS: What's a lesson your mother taught you?

FM: To never give up. She was supportive even when I made mistakes, as a good mother will do. In school my parents were called up a lot. It was not easy being a parent of Frankie. Teachers were constantly calling. I was disruptive, I would talk out of line, I was a class clown. She taught me to never give up no matter what vocation you choose in your life. My mother was never critical of my poems and writing. We're good friends and she's a lot of fun.

DS: How would you choose your death?

FM: Either in battle or laying in bed with family around me.

DS: Have you ever had a moment where you saw your death?

FM: Yes, a couple of times. Once I was on one of those small planes flying to Pittsburgh last year—to see the Mets, actually—one of those 25 seat airplanes flying out of Newark in a lightning storm. We had ascended over Newark and the plane was struck by lightning.

There was no panic on the plane at

all, but something, we knew, was terribly wrong. I saw a flash of light when it hit the plane and a fellow across the aisle said, "Did you just see that?" and I said that I thought we were struck by lightning. He said it felt like something got ripped off the plane. There was so much turbulence. The stewardess came out with one of the co-pilots, who announced we were struck by lightning, but that we were going to continue the flight. There was a moment there, I think a good 30 seconds, where I was certain the plane was going to break apart.

DS: Did you have any realizations?

FM: I thought, this is it. This is it. There was acceptance. When my father was diagnosed with cancer in June of 2005 and I got to see a man who accepted his fate. He died two months later. He was like the Captain of the Titanic. My mother was also calm. I was the one freaking out inside. I saw someone who had acknowledged his own demise, accepted it, and died at home. He was a tough old guy. It takes a lot to accept that, it takes a very strong person. In this culture we value life very much, and some people look at death as a failure, but it's going to happen to all of us. My theory is to help yourself, and help others in life.

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Third day of 2007 NSW fire season sees 46 fires burning

The official New South Wales bushfire season for 2007 has been declared for only three days and already 46 fires burn across the state. It is believed that at least some of the fires have been deliberately lit.

Weather conditions are hampering

firefighting efforts, with high temperatures and strong winds helping to fan the flames.

Major fires are currently burning at Little Pittwater Bay on Sydney's West Head, Cowan North of Sydney, Port Stephens and at Evans Head on the NSW North coast. The fire at Cowan has caused transport chaos as it caused the closure of the Pacific Highway, F3 Freeway and the Northern railway line for several hours this afternoon.

Residents around the fires at Port Stephens and Evans Head have been advised by the NSW Rural Fire Service to prepare their properties for the onset of fire.

With many of the fires thought to of been started by arsonists, NSW Premier Morris Iemma warned that arsonists would face imprisonment. "It makes you sick. There are sadly too many people out there that don't get the message," Mr Iemma.

"They are sick minds who deliberately light these fires, or even to recklessly do it".

A police strike force with 10 officers and two support staff to investigate the fires had also been set up with Mr Iemma stating that if more resources were required, the strike force would be provided with them.

Vivien Goldman: An interview with the Punk Professor

Vivien Goldman recalls with a laugh the day in 1984 when she saw her death, but the laugh fades as she becomes lost in the memory. She was in Nigeria staying in Fela Kuti's home; she had just arrived hours before and found people sleeping everywhere like house cats when Muhammadu

Buhari's army showed up to haul everyone to jail. Kuti was an opponent of the government who was in jail, and they came to arrest his coterie of supporters. They grabbed Goldman and were about to throw her in a truck until Pascal Imbert, Kuti's manager, yelled out, "Leave her alone. She just arrived from Paris! She's my wife! She knows nothing! "

Goldman stops for a moment and then smiles plainly. "They thought I was just some stupid woman.... That time sexism worked in my favor."

Vivien Goldman has become a living, teaching testimony of the golden era of punk and reggae. She is an adjunct professor at New York University who has taught courses on the music scene she was thrust in the middle of as a young public relations representative for Island Records. She writes a column for the BBC called "Ask the Punk Professor" where she extols the wisdom she gained as a confidant of Bob Marley; as the person who first put Flava Flav in video; as Chrissie Hynde's former roommate; as the woman who worked with the The Clash, Sex Pistols, The Slits and The Raincoats.

As Wikinews reporter David Shankbone found out, Goldman is one of those individuals that when you sit in her presence you realize she simply can not tell you everything she knows or has seen, either to protect the living or to respect the dead.

DS: The first biography of Bob Marley, *Soul Rebel*, *Natural Mystic*, was written by you based upon your personal experiences with him, and you have recently written a book about Marley called *The Book of Exodus*. How difficult is it

to continue to mine his life? Is it difficult to come up with new angles?

VG: The original biography was written in a weekend and it was based upon my extensive interviews with him, whereas the *Exodus* book took two and a half years. I must have been a year past deadline, because it kept on growing. Even I had to acknowledge it was a more mature work. After I wrote the first one, all these other people came out with books. I read them, and they were all good in their different ways, but there was a story that had not been told but that I had lived so intensely, a deep story that had shaped my whole life. It demanded I write a book about it. Nobody else has the experience, and I still have that oompf.

DS: You were there with Marley through that time when he really caught on; was it obvious to you then that there was something amazing and unique happening? VG: It was really something, and it was huge, but I didn't examine it then. I believed in Bob with every fiber of my being, but it was hard to realize how everybody in the world would get it in the end, and just how towering a figure and enduring he would prove to be. He deserves everything and more; the role that he occupies is so central. It would have been hard to envisage how huge he became, though.

DS: Warhol's Factory photographer, Billy Name, once told me he knew that what was going on was amazing, but he never thought Warhol would become the entire fabric of the art world as he is now. VG: Especially in New York. Warhol was so associated with the punk scene.

DS: But Marley has become a fabric of sorts...

VG: Oh, he's beyond the fabric of reggae, he's the fabric of the rebel spirit. Now everybody just puts on a little red, green and gold and they feel it identifies them as being there in the struggle. Even if it is someone flying to the Hamptons for the weekend, they bring out Marley to express the rebel aspect they don't want to completely lose.

DS: How do you define punk?

VG: There are two things. First, the aesthetic: harder, faster, louder. But the second thing is what interested me more, which was the rebel spirit and attitude. That free spirit of punk; that implicit sense of wanting to change a system that is always unfair wherever you are, except for maybe in the Netherlands. But it's become so commodified

DS: What is the commodified version of punk selling?

VG: Edgy and dangerous. It is amazing: you open the New York Times and the free bits fall out and you get Urban Outfitters or Old Navy with lines of punk kiddie clothes. K-mart, even. I was trying to see what was so deeply punk about those clothes. They were maybe more colorful or something, but they weren't punk. It's like the Swarovski crystal take on punk, I mean, please!

DS: That aesthetic is everywhere, as though if one spikes his hair he is punk.

VG: Well, the punk is in the heart, to paraphrase Deee-Lite. I was writing about Good Charlotte and The Police. They adopted the trappings of punk. They aren't bad groups, but the punk aspect is more manifested by somebody like Manu Chao. He's one of the punkiest artists out there I can

think of. It's an inclusionary spirit that is punk.

DS: Your philosophy is that punk is not just musical, but also an aesthetic. That it can imbibe anything; that it stands for change and for changing a system. Let me give you a few names, and you to tell me how you think they are or are not punk. Britney Spears.

VG: Oh, no she's not punk. Punk is not just about wearing smeary black eyeliner, but some sense of engagement. That's it in a nutshell. She doesn't have that sense of engagement. She is society.

DS: Dick Cheney.

VG: He is the essence of Babylonian, old structure capitalism, which is about greed and how much one can take for himself. I could see capitalism that is mutually beneficial, such as 'I want a bigger customer base,' but they don't. Take a place I know well like Jamaica. I don't know if you have seen that documentary Life and Debt, about how the INF squeezed everything out of Jamaica, but that's a typical thing that happens. Instead of building these people up and paying them a living wage for their work, where we could sell more to them, we just want to suck everything out of the place. Suck the sugar, suck the labor. And that is not very punk. It's the opposite of punk. That's what Dick Cheney represents to me. He tries to bring about change, but change that just fattens his pocket. It's not thinking of the community, and that's what punk is about.

DS: Kanye West.

VG: He seems to be a positive force. In that sense, I would file him slightly under punk.

DS: Osama bin Laden.

VG: He thinks he is a punk, but he's too destructive. If I was sitting in the madrassa in the desert chanting the Koran seven days a week, I'd think, yeah, he's a punk. But I'm not, so I don't.

DS: Is the definition of punk relative, then? He's a Madrasah punk but not a Manhattan punk?

VG: Having said that, they would loathe punks, so I think we can safely say, not a punk.

DS: Pete Doherty.

VG: Oh yeah, I think he's a punk. He's a punk and he engages with the system in terms of how a powerful a presence he's become. He is the Keith Richards of his day.

DS: If punk is about change, then why the maudlin sentimentality over the closing of CBGB's, which at times turned into demonizing a homeless shelter?

VG: Yeah, and they had not paid their rent, had they? I sided with the homeless shelter in a way, except I thought the whole thing was ridiculous because somebody should have stepped in and bought it and paid it and fixed it up, in the sense there is no shrine. They don't think about the tourism, do they? I expect that of America now. Los Angeles just destroyed the Brown Derby, and the modernist architecture. That's the thing about America. There seems to be very little regard for legacy. I think they should have kept CBGBs, but I think that more cynically. My students had a huge debate about it.

DS: I felt it was what it was at a certain moment, but it wasn't that anymore. They were charging eight dollars for a beer. That's not very punk, and that wasn't attracting the punk crowds. It was like people who move to the Bowery because they think it's so

edgy but it's really a boulevard of glittering condos.

VG: Nostalgie pour la boue: nostalgia for the mud. Not all of them, though. Patti Smith. Anyway, the spirit had moved on to Williamsburg.

DS: Where do you think New York's culture is going? There are so few places on Earth with such a large concentration of creatives who meet and influence each other, but the city is becoming less affordable and cleansed of any grit. Is there a place for punk in the Manhattan of the future?

VG: They are flushing out the artists. Manhattan is now a ghetto for the very rich. When punk started it was in weird places, places you broke into and that had never been used for shows. It was never in regular venues, but now every nook and cranny is a regular venue and it doesn't leave much space for the old punk spirit. ABC No Rio, I think they manage to work it in the system. And there are places like The Stone, John Zorn's place, which has avant-garde free form jazz. He subsidizes that place, so it remains a little haven. There are a few little pockets, but it has a lot do with the rent. Realistically, there's loads of stuff happening in places like Brooklyn, more than there seems to be in Manhattan. When I jammed with The Slits, that happened at some after-hours thing in Brooklyn in some warehouse. I remember loads of things in funny places. The first time I heard Public Enemy I was on the rooftop of a building.

DS: You're friends with Flava Flav, right?

VG: Yes, although I haven't seen him in a very long time. I remember how I met him. I was doing this video for I Ain't No Joke with Erik B and Rakim, and they

weren't very vibey in terms of the stagecraft, as it were. The projection. Not to diss anybody, but I needed someone to bring a bit more life into it; it was very low-budget, a vérité kind of shoot. We were in a playground in the projects and there were all these blokes hanging around, and there was one who was super-sprightly, like a live wire. I didn't know it was Flava Flav and I shouted out, Hey, you, will you come over and be groovy for us? and he did and a lot of the action in the video is Flava Flav spinning around, doing a Dervish in the middle of the playground.

DS: At the time he wasn't known?

VG: Well, it turned out he was in a group called Public Enemy. The first time I heard them was at a rooftop party, and it's one of my great New York memories. It was a warehouse building that's still there behind Houston and Bowery and I remember it was amazing because you never heard music like that before. It was blaring. It was so hot and we were in the middle of the city with graffiti on the walls, people smoking spliffs. It was very free. You don't see that anymore. Everything is more heavily policed.

DS: Do you think apathy is a problem today?

VG: There's less intelligent, critical content in general, and celebrity magazines pay the most and sell the most. It's the Lowest Common Denominator. Britney Spears is an unbelievable example. She's so young with no good guidance around her, and she is fodder for them to sell more magazines. There's a gladiator aspect of it: the worse off she is, the better for that industry. But I'm still looking for the people who have conscience. Michael Franti, he's one of the only ones I look to now. He had that

band Spearhead. I'm looking around for conscious artists.

DS: What about G. G. Allin? He used to defecate on the stage to make a point.

VG: That's quite extreme, and very unhygienic. I wouldn't need to see that. I don't think that's necessarily punk, it's just scatological. Some people might think it's punk, but I personally wouldn't dig it. It's outrageous, but not in the way I find interesting.

DS: Well, he's dead. Do you think people are afraid to speak out today?

VG: I guess in Vietnam you did, but now the culture isn't nearly as organized.

DS: Is violence for the cause of social change punk?

VG: Violence will occur in social change. Violence has always been associated with punk, although punk wants peace in a way. When you look at all the bands in punk, like No Future and Blank Generation, it has implicit an aspiration to a place where you don't have to be violent. Often it happens. The punk era was violent. Very, very violent. So many people were beaten up during those days. I'm very much a peacenik, but violence often happens, one observes, on the road to social change.

DS: Sandra Bernhard once did an homage to what she called the Big-Titted Bitches of Rock n' Roll: Heart, Joan Jett, Stevie Nicks. She mourned that there were no big-titted bitches left. Who are the big-titted bitches of Rock n' Roll today?

VG: M.I.A. Tanya Stephens. Joan Jett, still. The Slits, who still suffer from the system and they are still brilliant. Male bands of that statute

would have more deals. Big-titted in terms of cojones, as opposed to cleavage as such.

DS: Do you have moments of extreme self-doubt where you wonder if anything you do matters to anyone?

VG: I have a lot of moments of extreme self-doubt, but you have to be humble and listen to what people say. Although I was never top of the New York Times book chart, I know people have liked my stuff, and that keeps me going. The classes have been amazing. I had done a lot of television and media, but it was the first time I had done something one-on-one. It was the old cliché that a person learns as much as they teach. Loads of my old students keep in touch with me; one wrote to me to tell me he is free-lancing for XXL and some other rap magazines, and how the classes really have been useful and he always refers to them. Even just one person is gratifying and encourages me to continue my work.

DS: You have worked for two corporations that are seen by many as the least punk in their respective communities, the BBC and NYU. How does one remain punk in such environments?

VG: I'm a freelancer. I go in, do my thing, and if they don't like it then I don't do it anymore. I stay true to myself, and if it doesn't work out then I guess 'fuck off' on both sides. I haven't had to compromise myself; nobody has asked me to. BBC America is a different animal than the BBC. As long as I can say what I want to say; I think people come to me because they know what they are getting.

DS: Have you ever been in a situation where you feared for your life, where you thought, this

may be the way I go?

VG: There was a lot of violence in the punk times and I got beaten up in street brawls. I particularly remember once in Nigeria... I was there to make a documentary for Channel 4 about Fela Kuti. He was in jail at that time and he wanted to draw attention to his plight to showcase what was going on in Nigeria. It was hard to get through customs because my guides weren't there to meet me. I found them hiding in the carpark because the police were after them.

We went to Fela's house where I was going to stay; we went to the shrine and it was amazing. The whole house was covered in people sleeping. I was woken up by this little girl very early in the morning, only about two hours later. She was tapping me on the shoulder and when I looked around there was nobody there, whereas it had been covered in people. She said, "Come! Come! The army is here!" I went outside and there was the army arresting everyone. People were lined up against the wall. Pascal Imbert, a French guy who was managing Fela, was already on the truck and they were about to take him away. There were all these really serious, heavy Nigerian soldiers with machine guns around. Not friendly, more like stone-faced Belsen guards. It was like that Bob Marley song *Ambush in the Night*: there were four guns aiming at me. They all turned their guns on me and said, "What should we do with her?" From the truck Pascal shouts out, "Leave her alone! She's my wife! She's just arrived from Paris! She doesn't know anything!" The combination of the words "She's my wife, she doesn't know anything" were enough. Of course, I had neither arrived from Paris nor was his wife. But they just left me alone; they thought I was just

some stupid woman. That time sexism worked in my favor. [Laughs] She doesn't know anything! They were about to take Pascal away and I rushed up to the head guy very bravely—Pascal always gives me props for this—and I said, "Where are you taking my husband?!" They were actually taking him to a secret jail.

DS: What happened to him in the secret jail?

VG: There's a documentary about it. He got very thin, he contracted dysentery and he got various diseases. No food, or terrible food. Luckily for him after some months there was an amnesty and he was amongst the prisoners who were released. That was a very heavy moment. I thought I would die, either right then or in a Nigerian jail.

DS: In Jamaica there was so much violence during the civil war.

VG: I've seen a lot of death. Many of the people I knew in Jamaica are dead. I think of them a lot; like my very, very close friend Massive Dread. He did so much for the community. At Christmas he'd hold a big party for the kids, and all the rival gangs would come. He was trying to break up some of the coke runnings. They started to have crack dens in Trenchtown and he worked against those. He was opening a library called the Trenchtown Reading Center, in the middle of this broken down ghetto, where kids could sit down to do homework and read books in this nice courtyard. It was really worthwhile.

Today in History

1830 – Belgian Revolution: A provisional government in Brussels declared the creation of the independent and neutral state of Belgium, in revolt against the United Kingdom of the Netherlands.

1910 – Manuel II, the last King of Portugal, fled to the United Kingdom when a revolution erupted in Lisbon and his palace was shelled. The Portuguese First Republic was proclaimed the next day.

1957 – Soviet spacecraft Sputnik 1, the first artificial satellite to orbit the Earth, was launched by an R-7 rocket from the Baikonur Cosmodrome near Tyuratam, Kazakh SSR.

1985 – Software developer Richard Stallman founded the Free Software Foundation to support the free software movement.

1993 – Russian Constitutional Crisis: Tanks bombarded the White House in Moscow while demonstrators against President Boris Yeltsin rallied outside. October 04 is Simchat Torah begins at sunset (Judaism, 2007); Independence Day in Lesotho; Feast Day of St. Francis of Assisi (Catholicism); World Animal Day.

Quote of the Day

I'm an optimist. In order to be libertarian, you have to be an optimist. You have to have a benign view of human nature, to believe that human beings left to their own devices are basically good. But I'm not so sure about human institutions, and I think the real point of argument here is whether or not large corporations are human institutions or some other entity we need to be thinking about curtailing. Most libertarians are worried about government but not worried about business. I think we need to be worrying about business in exactly the same way

we are worrying about government. ~ John Perry Barlow

Word of the Day

ruddy; adj

1. Reddish in color, especially of the face, sky, or fire.

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