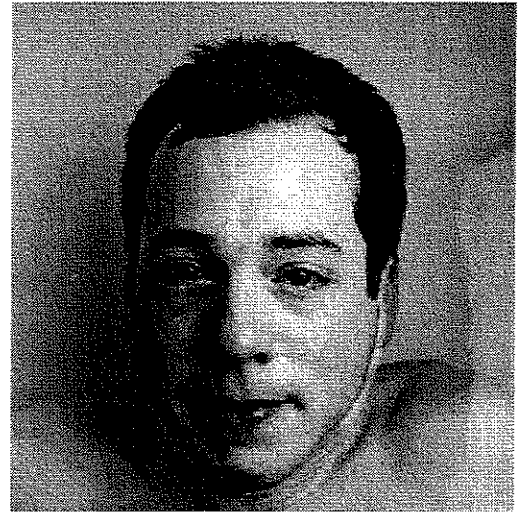


**Blood, Bone, and Zines: All parts of Me
An Interview with Sean Zio**

Sean Zio is an Ottawa-based poet and zinester. Deeply committed to contributing to his community, Sean Zio actively bares his soul both on stage and on paper, encouraging all to participate in thoughtful, heartfelt discussion. Sean Zio works with Ottawa area teens, teaching workshops in all areas of creativity. The following interview was conducted via e-mail on March 20, 2007. To learn more about Sean Zio and his work, visit www.myspace.com/sean_zio.



When did you start getting into zines? What attracted you to the medium?

I first got into making zines when I made my own at eighteen. I thought the idea of having random reading materials in odd spaces like bus stops, library reading areas, and shopping mall sitting areas would make waiting around easier. Also, I was working with a group of poets at high school and we had nowhere to publish our poetry. The only place was in the yearbook. I remember that only a couple of poems could go in the yearbook and the teacher who led our poetry group didn't choose mine. I felt really hurt and I figured she didn't choose mine because I wrote long narrative poems and there wasn't room in the yearbook for that. As a response to my rejection, I decided to make my own poetry booklet. I called it *Litzine*. I had no clue of the zine movement at that time. I just made it up like I was the first one to think of it.

Anyway, *Litzine* had my poetry, my best friend's poetry, my mom's poetry, and my brother's poetry. I drew the cover and my mother and I wrote out the poems with added drawings. I still have a copy somewhere. Thinking about it now, it was cool. My mom and I went to the local grocery store that had a photocopier (this was before the day of Staples) and we figured out how to photocopy double-sided and we made about twenty or thirty copies. We gave it to friends and I dropped a bunch off in waiting areas in my neighbourhood. People liked it. It didn't spark interest like I thought it would and that's why I gave it up as easily as I thought of it.

The next time I encountered zines was in my early twenties. I was at my good friend's place and she had a copy of Francesca Lia Block's how-to-make-zines book. I remember opening it up and finding

everything dangerous in the world - that kind of intriguing, censored, exciting dangerous stuff: riot grrrls ranting, fat girls celebrating, feminists creating. As I flipped through that book, the idea of making a zine was born in my mind. Within that year, my friend and I started our own zine called *Linda-Gay*. It was a feminine feminist zine, or, a "femzine," as we called it. We made five issues of it. My friend distributed the zine through distros on the Internet and I distributed at local independent bookshops, university pride centres, and coffee shops. We gave it away as a free zine and that worked really well. People like good free zines.

When did you start making your own zines?

Working with a co-editor can be frustrating. My friend and I started having troubles communicating and sticking to deadlines. I think our interest in *Linda-Gay* waned and our lives were changing. When I finished university, I faced a whole slew of unknown difficulties and I desperately wanted to work on our zine. I wanted to create something bigger than me. After what felt like months of waiting for my friend to help make a new *Linda-Gay*, I decided I needed to make my own zine. I have always loved quarter-size zines so I made one. I had no money at the time, so a quarter-size zine was perfect. I could make one issue for .42 cents or something. I would sell them for .50 cents to cover costs. For .50 cents I could make a 16-page zine. I loved it.

I called my zine *Electric Mayhem*. The title was props to Jim Henson since it is the name of the band in the *Muppet Movie*. Jim Henson has always been my inspiration to create and I needed him more than ever. Also, the title was how I described my life at the time. It was completely chaotic but I trusted it had an organized current constantly beneath it, like electric mayhem. I bled about two or three years of my life into that zine.

How do you market your zines?

I have always marketed my zines to my local communities. I sold copies to my friends and some of them bought copies for their friends. I traded my zines to other zinesters.

I tried distributing over the Internet through distros. But, I find that process too slow and unrewarding. I like talking to people about my zines and the ideas in them. I love that my zines create dialogue and I like being a part of that dialogue.

How do you find out about new zinesters?

I go to zine fairs and I co-organize my own zine fair. I keep an eye on Microcosm Publishing's e-catalogue. I see titles on distros' catalogues.

Is there anything you want to add about your own personal experience making zines?

Zines were my first attempt at survival in my every day life. When I made my first zine, I was overwhelmed with difficulty. I was facing homelessness and poverty. I was facing ill health and the falling apart of relationships. I felt I had no control in my life. But, when I wrote an article about my poverty and I showed it to my friends, I felt they were getting informed on my pain. I felt like I was helping my community understand where I was coming from so I could gain their support. My zine was my first attempt at having a voice and in exercising that voice.

I know you've done some workshops with teens, teaching them how to make their own zines. What can you tell me about your experience teaching zine-making to teens?

I have taught a zine-making workshop to queer teens and I have taught a whole ten-week term on zine-making and DIY crafts to teens at the arts centre where I work. I truly love working with teens. Teens have a certain mixture of timidity and bravery that is endearing to watch unfold. It's like they get these random shots of shyness or gregariousness. When I teach zine-making, I focus on the students using the medium to express their voices. I teach them how to make the zine or craft and I encourage them to use that tool to shape their voices. You wouldn't believe one group I had. One student was making a zine about pop stars while another was making a homemade journal with her poetry and art in it for her best friend's birthday.

Why do you think that zines and teens go so well together?

I think zines are the best for oppressed or minority group teens. I love how zines encourage a place of discussion for our difficulties, celebrations, and struggles. You ask someone to make a zine and they write about sexuality, death, or love. In my experience, people don't jump to make zines about their pets or boring living habits. Also, most teens are dripping with creativity and drama. Give them a place to safely express that and you can have magic. I think that zines are especially good for shy teens because a zine is private enough not to shame or embarrass the artist with the artist still in the room. For example, people will read the zine

somewhere else and not in front of the zinester and that makes it feel safer to express feelings and personal truths.

Do you think that zines have any place in a library setting (public, academic, special)?

I feel this is a loaded question. I have been thinking about it for a year or two myself. One of the greatest things about zines is that they are fluid and ephemeral. Everybody can make them. There should be hundreds of zines always floating around, getting lost behind bathroom sinks and getting stuffed in forgotten boxes in the basement. When someone starts cataloguing zines, a hierarchy is created. A difference is made between a catalogued and a non-catalogued zine. What kind of zines will a librarian seek out? Will those zines be made by famous zinesters and bought through Microcosm Publishing? Will Microcosm Publishing be the central place for zinesters who have "made it"? Will a zine library reflect only the community it serves, carrying only local zines, or, will it order from across the nation and feed into the status system of canon-making that I wish the zine movement would avoid.

Then again, having a zine library does create a history. A zine library allows several people to read a document that had limited printing. A zine library fosters a sense of a zine-community. These are all reasons to have a zine library.

I would prefer a public library zine collection because I feel they would get read most there than anywhere else. I think zines die when they don't get read anymore.

