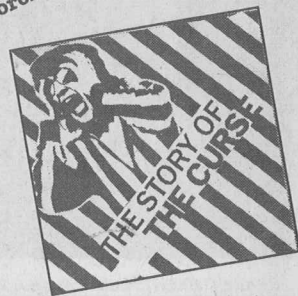


THE CURSE

Treat Me Like Dirt: An Oral History of Punk in Toronto and Beyond
Book excerpt: Chapter 12: Down To Sane
By Liz Worth



IT WAS A REAL TRAIN WRECK. TOTAL CONFUSION TRAIN WRECK.... AND MICKEY WAS SO WILD. SHE'D DRESS UP IN TUTUS AND THROW FOOD AT THE AUDIENCE.

WHO'S WHO:

Caroline Azar: Vocalist, co-lyricist, and keyboardist for Fifth Column. Director, actor, and playwright.

Margaret Barnes-DelColle, aka Margarita Passion: Proprietor of Toronto's first punk store, New Rose. Power Street resident.

Anna Bourque: Bassist for the Curse, and True Confessions. Filmmaker.

Julia "Jula" Bourque, aka Trixie Danger: Guitarist for the Curse, and True Confessions.

Nora Currie: Fan.

Johnny Garbagecan (Zoltan Lugosi): Roadie for the Ugly. Zine maker.

John Hamilton: Drummer for the Diodes. Bassist for the Secrets.

Linda Lee, aka Patzy Poison: Drummer for the Curse, and True Confessions.

Gail Manning: The Curse manager.

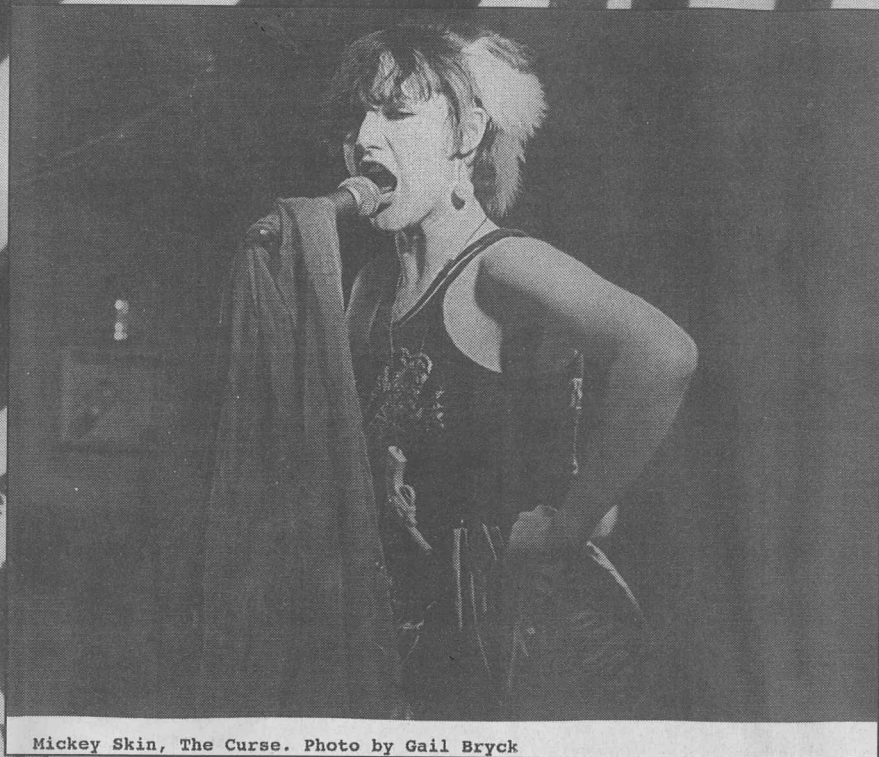
Jeff Ostofsky: Fan. Roadie for various bands.

Mickey Skin: Singer for the Curse, and Bangkok.



Mickey Skin, Patzy Poison
photo: Ralph Alfonso





Mickey Skin, The Curse. Photo by Gail Bryck

Mickey Skin: There was this band called The Tools and they were supposed to play at a free school called SEED. It was on Bloor Street and I was going there. This dance teacher, Rolando Romaine, he kind of challenged me and said, "If you get a band together in three weeks you can do our opening set." Julia had been taking guitar lessons and I just went, "Oh yeah, let's do it!"

I had never thought much about being in a band before then. I always wanted to do acting and performing and I was in dance, so the band thing was just sort of a challenge; it was something fun to do. I was always a performer. I wouldn't say it was the music, it was more the performance opportunity.

It was also convenient because my parents were in Europe that summer so we took over the basement. It was like "Oh great, we can practice here." The neighbors put their house up for sale right away. Hahaha!

Julia Bourque: It was the spring of '77 and our friend Mickey got it going. She had a friend who was a songwriter who said, "You'd be great in a punk band." I had an instrument.

Mickey Skin: Then I met Freddy Pompeii at a music store. I was sort of doing sound so I was going to clubs a little bit and stuff like that. I said to him, "You gotta hear our band, we're practicing." We were just around the corner so I dragged him down there.

Anna Bourque: We had all worked at summer camp together and that's where Julia and I met Mickey, and Mickey and I became best friends. We were living together in a flat on Major Street when Mickey came home one day with Freddy behind her. He followed her up the stairs and she was saying, "We have a gig! We have a gig!" and we weren't anything. Hahaha!

And so it was, "Well, what's that mean?"

"We're gonna be a band and we have a gig with the Viletones."

We just sort of went along with it when she said, "Let's be a band."

"Oh, you're gonna be the singer? Okay."

Julia could play guitar so there were just two choices for me. Linda had been an ex-boyfriend of mine's ex-girlfriend. I was at Ryerson University doing film and I asked her if she'd be in my films and so I just said, "Do you want to be in our band?"

Linda Lee: It was an interesting dynamic because everybody was really different. Julia and Anna came almost from a heavy-duty feminist attitude. They loved Robert Altman films; they shared all of these major common bonds. I felt like I was an interloper, but only for a very short time. After playing together, I think after our first rehearsal, it was like we had known each other for centuries.

Julia Bourque: I was the only one who actually played an instrument,

so I showed my sister how to play the bass. And a friend of ours, Linda Lee, she didn't know how to play the drums so we rented a set of drums and she kind of learned how to play. We had a couple of friends who could play instruments so they came over and coached us.

Linda Lee: Julia was the only one that had actually had musical training. I have a degree in music, but my degree is in voice. I guess they needed someone to play drums, so that was it.

"New Wave Music: No-Star Rock," by David Livingstone [Maclean's, April 7, 1980]: "Patzy Poison was not exactly Keith Moon on drums, but letting drop one of her heavily eyelined lids in a slow-motion wink in the middle of some old '60s boy-girl song, she was living proof that there are other talents besides musical proficiency."

Linda Lee: The first rehearsal, we were practicing in Mickey's basement and the Viletones had heard about us and they came to see us practise. They all came in through the main door except for Steven, who opened the basement window behind me and threw himself in. That was the first time I met the Viletones. I used to see the Viletones walking around Yonge Street in their leathers with their girlfriends and stuff. My boyfriend and I would look at them and think, Who the fuck are these people? Not only just because they were incredibly interesting looking – some of them were seriously cute – but there was also an air about them that if you looked at them the wrong way they could, through telekinesis, slit your throat.

Anna Bourque: After Mickey met Freddy, the Viletones played at the



Ruby t's. Photo by Gail Bryck

St. Lawrence Hall, which is a beautiful room. Nobody knew what punk was then so you could book places and nobody would know what a disaster it would turn into for them.

I know that night I sat on Steven's face when he was singing. He walked out into the audience and I don't know whether he fell down, which was highly likely because he was prone to that after copious amounts of whatever it was, and I didn't wear underpants in those days. But we both got rather a shock because of course no matter where you play, if it's punk, everything's wet. Just suddenly beer's everywhere, everywhere. It was fantastic.

We saw them at the Colonial basement downstairs. It used to be the Meat Market. That was the first bar I ever drank in when I was a young teenager with my fake ID. The Viletones played there and Chris fell off the stage backwards but kept on playing, he didn't stop. He was fantastic.

Steven was breaking glasses then. What he did before he'd break the glass, he'd whirl his arms just to get the blood down there so that when he cut himself it was meaty, it really looked good. But he'd also say, "Cover your eyes," so nobody got glass in their eyes. Isn't that the sweetest thing you've ever heard? And then he'd smash the glass or the bottle and he'd cut himself.

Julia Bourque: I saw the Viletones at the Colonial Underground. That's where I first saw Steven Leckie cut himself. It was so gross. Oh gosh. He was just a kid; I'm sure he was younger than I was. The tough guy image was so silly because he wasn't really tough at all, he was actually from a pretty good background and was quite smart.

Mickey Skin: One thing led to another and the Tools heard the Viletones were gonna come to their concert, so they cancelled it because they were so afraid of them. But then the Viletones told us we could open for them at another gig.

Linda Lee: We were supposed to open for Mickey's friend's band called the Tools. It was at a dance studio or something, and they were so terrified of us when they saw us. I don't know why we were so intimidating. Maybe Anna and Mickey were just a little bit too powerful in the way they felt.

Anna Bourque: We lifted all our own equipment and we didn't depend on anybody for anything. We were solid citizens. No fakery, no girl-ery.

John Hamilton: I remember we had the Crash 'n' Burn open, and this was so long ago in Toronto that you would actually notice a poster on a telephone pole. Literally when the Zoom first started the Colonial Underground, we made posters and put them up downtown, which I think is how [Steven] Leckie and Lucasta [Ross, of the B-Girls] and all those people came to see us.

The poles in Toronto were empty; there were no posters on them. So if you put up a poster about your band, people would stop and look at them because it was something that was really different. So around the time the Crash 'n' Burn was rolling, we were walking down Duncan Street one day and we saw a poster for the Curse. This was a new band; it was a women's band. Paul was always the guy to get right on to anything new; Paul [Robinson] and Ralph [Alfonso] must have gotten in touch with them and booked them for the Crash 'n' Burn.

Julia Bourque: The Diodes had that space for the whole summer. The Liberal Party was a major tenant there so it was quite a scandal. It was a great space, though. It was wonderful because it was so dead; the whole area was totally dead. It was just business, there was nothing else down there. On a Friday and Saturday this place opened up and it was just wall-to-wall people, which would have meant about two hundred people. They got it together and filled bathtubs full of beer. It was a booze can; it was great. It was so much fun. It was better than a

high school dance.

Did you ever go to camp? You know how close you get with all those people you just met a week ago? It was like that: It was like summer camp, and everybody was your new best friend. I'd never seen anything like it. I was at York University at the time and I'd never seen such freaks in all my life.

Anna Bourque: It was fabulous and terrifying – terrifying. I'd picked up the bass three weeks before, I didn't know how to play. I had a book with me that I put on the stage floor that had drawings of the neck and where to put my fingers for each song.

Julia Bourque: We had practiced in Mickey's mother's basement on Major Street for three weeks. We wrote about ten songs.

Anna Bourque: It was pretty scary. I seem to recall I had nine Newcastle Browns that night and I wasn't anywhere near down to sane. It's an incredible thing to do. Oh, and the sound was terrible, we were terrible, and we threw food at the audience. I think the first night we threw birthday cake because it was Linda's birthday, which was kind of fantastic. Because when you're holding a cake in front of an audience, you know what they do? They move like waves. As you sort of aimed the cake they would move away. That's what made it so musical. Ha ha ha.



Patzy Poison, Ruby T's, the Curse photo by Gail Bryck

Mickey Skin: It felt very natural. We were maybe a little bit nervous, but not that much. We were doing it so much in tongue-in-cheek and in fun that I don't think we were thinking of it as, "Oh wow, we're in show biz." It was just, "All right, this is a big party and we're the leaders of it." And that's kind of how it always was.

"Punk Rock: Toronto's Nasties Create a Style That Goes Beyond Mere Posturing," by Peter Goddard [Toronto Star, July, 1977]: "Six weeks ago the city's first, and so far only, all-female punk band played its first gig. The moment the Curse was onstage they started to tell the men what they thought of them — and it wasn't all that nice."

Nora Currie: Meeting the Curse, watching the Curse play — I'm a feminist and I was at that time, and it certainly wasn't a popular word or place to be at that time. So for me, it was very exciting to see women so sensual in music. In writing it, playing it, and telling men to go fuck themselves in a political and productive forum. That, to me, was the thing that drew me the most to them.

Gail Manning: I think we all had a wonderful, marvelous sense of self, that as women we could do whatever we wanted and certainly didn't want to get put down by anybody. We were as good as the boys. They were extraordinarily entertaining. Mickey was just a great, great front person. She was really, really funny. Julia and Anna were a solid guitar and bass player.

It was just pure entertainment. I can't say to you that it was the greatest music in retrospect that I ever heard, but at the time it captured what a girl punk band was all about. Today would they stand the test of time? I can't say that. But at the time they were just great fun.

Nora Currie: I loved their music. They were not accomplished musicians and that wasn't really necessary in punk; it was kind of one-chord music. It was more about performance, which is an essential part of music and the songs and the lyrics and the message. They were feminists in all that true and positive meaning about reclaiming space and asserting the female identity and agency and sexuality.

That was a massive shift, so it was very fulfilling. They were just as capable of smashing things or getting into a fight. They would throw ashholes off the stage.

Johnny Garbagecan actually got his name because the first time



the curse. mickey skin. photo ralph alfonso

they played, he was so offended as a guy—first of all who was already in a music scene—that these women would get up and dare to do that.

Zoltan Lugosi: I had to have an alias because I was wanted by the police. I couldn't use my name; my name sticks out like a sore thumb. So I threw a garbage can at the Curse. They were playing at the Crash 'n' Burn and there was a garbage can that they put ice and beer in. I threw one at them at the stage and I guess it stuck. They were terrible. The Curse couldn't even play. They just used to make noise.

Pop Music Beat, by Gerald Levitch [*Toronto Sun*, June, 1977]: "Mostly, they perform as if they'd never seen their instruments before."

Nora Currie: They *couldn't* play. But they had an energy and a presence that was so strong and so powerful that their ability to play really well didn't matter; it became part of their performance and their charm and their energy and why we went to see them.

Anyway, Johnny was so offended at the Crash 'n' Burn he threw a garbage can onto the stage. So he was called Johnny Garbagecan as a result, but he became one of the biggest fans of the Curse and was intimately and otherwise involved with them. It sounds so negative, that he threw a garbage can onto the stage.

It's kind of a good example of how punk can inherently be seen as violent. There was an outlaw element to punk and it drew a lot of people from different places, including the criminal element.

Caroline Azar: The Curse were outstanding performers and shock rockers.

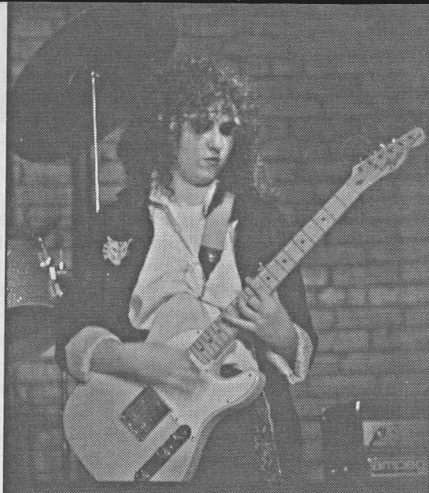
Julia Bourque: It was a real train wreck. Total confusion train wreck kind of describes our gigs. And Mickey was so wild. She'd dress up in tutus and throw food at the audience.



Gail Manning (mgr), Steven Davey (Diebes), Ruby T's, Patsy Poison photo: Gail Bryck

Mickey Skin: I don't know how the food came about. I think we did it from the first time. Everything was basically, "How can we have the most fun? How can we taunt the audience and get them going?" Then we started getting creative. I think at first we had whipped cream, and we did hot dogs, and then Julia started coming up with, "Oh! Let's cook a big pot of spaghetti and we'll throw *that*."

It was just, "What's the cheapest food we can cook and throw?" We thought spaghetti was good because it was gooey and sticky and made a big mess.



Julia Bourque, the curse photo ralph alfonso

Jeff Ostofsky: I was working for a rock 'n' roll band. In 1976 the bar scene, the music scene in Toronto was radically different than it would be eight months later. So we're talking about an era that was post-hippie and pre-AIDS, thank God. I thank God every day for how lucky I got to be to not have had to wrap myself in a rubber tire to meet people.

The first band that I worked for before I became a roadie to most of the punk bands was called Hott Roxx, which was a Stones copy band. At the time we would play a week in a bar or three one-nighters. The thing was, we were working constantly doing a circuit in Ontario and at the time we were one of the highest paid bar bands in Ontario. We made about thirty-five hundred dollars a week. But that money went to the massive expense of carting around huge lighting and sound systems and a road crew. It was the more is more theory.

So that's what I was doing, only because my best friend was the guitar player. When the band got to the point of needing roadies but couldn't really afford them, the guitar player got his two best friends to do sound and lighting and we both evolved into becoming professionals.

In any case, it was the height of disco and playing Rolling Stones music was just great for people who hated disco. There was a big hook. We exploited that. So I was doing this gig and having the time of my life. I was eighteen, nineteen or whatever and living the cliché life. It's funny – the bigger the bands get, the less partying and sex you get because you're way too busy and you're way too tired and you're on an airplane. But when you're a band from Toronto and you pull into some little shit fuck town in Northern Ontario, you're immediately identifiable as *different*. So that was way more fun; that was like being a rock star in your own neighborhood.

As I remember it, in the spring of '77 our band went on a tour which took three months. It took us from here to Vancouver and back. We came back in early summer of that year and I look at a newspaper. Someone picked it up and said, "Look at this, man. *Nazi Dog*? What's that?" It was on the front page of the *Star*. I grabbed the paper and went, "That's not a dog, that's Steve for God's sake!"

I had met him when we were kids, like thirteen-ish, and even then he was one of the funniest and smartest, but different, guys I knew at that point in my life. I loved the guy ... but *this*? I had barely heard of the Ramones let alone cutting yourself onstage and using the word "Nazi."

The funny thing is, the last time I saw him before that front page was a few years previous. I ran into him on the street and he was Lou Reed. And then I met him a year or so later and he was David Bowie. Then I didn't see him for all that time and he was Nazi Dog. So right away I discover that one of my very best friends in life, Anna Bourque, is in the Curse. I said, "Anna, you've never played an instrument in your life. What do you mean I go away for three months and I come back and you're a punk star?" The punk movement was really a whirlwind; like, wow, a lot to absorb in a short period.

Anna Bourque: Those first two shows were fantastic in the way that we were truly horrible. I think you can blame me for most of the badness of our band because I just never got it. I'm just so not musical. I played the viola in junior high school but I just never got it. Everything I did was just by memory, so I never felt that I ever did a good gig because I never felt like I knew what I was doing. Really, that three weeks between getting the gig and playing was this major education of becoming part of it: The school of becoming a punk band in Toronto.