

G. E. (GED) DUNN, JR., RIP 1954-2015

BY JOHN HOLMSTROM

This HOWL! Happening gallery exhibition, which commemorates the 40th Anniversary of the publication of *PUNK Magazine* #1 (and the start of the Punk Movement), is dedicated to the memory of Ged Dunn, Jr., *PUNK Magazine*'s founding publisher.

I always cringe a bit when I see some noob claim that “Legs” McNeil and John Holmstrom co-founded *PUNK Magazine*,” because it’s not exactly true. The truth is: I started *PUNK Magazine* with Ged Dunn. Eddie (“Legs”) was there for everything of course, but aside from a few things where he was involved, I spent most of the time starting *PUNK Magazine* with Ged, and Eddie “Legs” was rarely even involved. This is how it happened:

I ran into Eddie McNeil when I visited our hometown of Cheshire, Connecticut in the summer of 1975. He said our mutual friend Ged Dunn, Jr. was running a house painting business from a small apartment in the center of town and also funding an independent film Eddie was directing, *The Unthinkables* and he wanted me to appear in it.

It sounded too good to be true: Working for Ged meant I had no living expenses for the summer, could make a bit of cash to pay my rent for my Brooklyn place, and have even more fun appearing in a movie. I had nothing better to do, so I agreed to everything: house painting for minimum wage, appearing in Eddie’s crazy film, and sleeping on Ged’s floor. I was impressed by Ged’s ability to run a business, and Eddie’s ability to organize his film. Ged understood how to run a small business (expenses low, revenues high), while Eddie was able to scabble together a lot of resources on a low budget. Filming for *The Unthinkables* became big news in Connecticut, thanks to Ged’s family connection with Bill Higgins, the managing editor of *The New Haven Register*: It became front-page news! It seemed obvious that we had good teamwork, and that we all had abilities and resources to form a great team.

Over that Summer of 1975, I schooled both of them about “punk rock,” especially *Go Girl Crazy*” LP by The Dictators, that we played a lot that summer. I also told Eddie and Ged that there was another band called the Ramones, who I saw at the 1975 CBGB Summer Festival, who were even better: They were going to be like the new Beatles!!! And CBGB was going to be the launchpad for a new music revolution, like San Francisco in the late 1960s and Liverpool in the early 1960s. We had to jump on this soon, I said, or we would miss the mark.

Labor Day: Ged went back to Kentucky’s Transylvania University and Eddie went back to work for Total Impact (a hippie film commune on East 14th Street and Second Avenue). I started selling artwork to *Screw* magazine and Scholastic, Inc. (where I began working with the amazing R. L. Stine, the best editor ever had, for the next 10 years) and continued to work for the immortal Will Eisner as an apprentice. Ged got bored, and worried that Eddie and I were getting our careers together before he could join us after his graduation in a few years. . .

He was correct. If he hadn’t started working with us at that time, I doubt we’d ever get together. For instance, I was offered a high-paying job working for a newspaper comic strip in January 1976. I often kick myself that I didn’t accept it, and instead decided to devote everything to *PUNK Magazine*, but that was because I believed that Ged, “Legs” and I were going to create the new *Rolling Stone* magazine. Hey, we all make mistakes. . .

Ged always said: “Decades define themselves in the middle!” The 1970s were getting old, already. We were desperate to define the decade, since it had been a rerun of the 1960s until then.

The Master Plan, once Ged, “Legs” and I began to work together was:

1. Eddie (“Legs”) McNeil and Ged would start a film company because Eddie had connections for producing and marketing “technical/educational” films. After all, he had won awards for an anti-smoking spot a few years before (ironic, since he has smoked an average of three packs a day ever since).
2. Ged and I were going to start a magazine. I had a printer lined up, and a lawyer.

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We were all “one for all and all for one” in the beginning, so I helped Eddie with his films (producing title screens for *The Unthinkables*), while he supported my idea for a magazine (appearing in a photo shoot, finding a camera crew for the CBGB shoot with the Ramones and Lou Reed, and writing the *Sluggo* interview).

Ged had \$5,000 in startup cash for both projects, which seemed like a small fortune to us in 1975. (In 2015, that would be around \$22,000.) We had modest goals, so that would be a good start. Ged was convinced that his family would allow him to access his trust funds (\$10,000, another \$45,000 in 2015 funds). Ged also figured that through other family connections he could raise much more!

Here is where it all began to go wrong: Ged’s family was totally opposed to his involvement with *PUNK*. They blocked his access to his trust funds and tried to talk him out of working at the magazine. They had a good point, I hate to admit. The magazine didn’t generate newsstand sales until 1979 and rarely enjoyed advertising revenues, but part of that was due to Ged’s inability to sell advertisements. If he had hired a good ad rep, *PUNK* would have become much more successful. Instead, his first ad rep hire was Jesse, a weirdo who was so bizarre and fucked up that the businesses he visited called us up to complain about how obnoxious he was, how they would never, ever place advertisements with us, and to never call them again. I was so pissed off once I heard this that I visited this asshole’s home and threatened to beat the crap out of him! After I was served with a warrant for aggravated harassment I never bothered him again, but it was the beginning of tensions between Ged and I.

Ged definitely had family connections. In November 1975, he brought me to a high-level publishing event at an uptown penthouse, where we were privy to discussions about publishing and the magazine business. Ged brought up our idea to start a magazine based on punk rock and youth culture to the “group leader,” whom quickly shot it down by asking us about our “business plan” and a “demographic study.”

“What’s a ‘demographic study,’” Ged asked? The room exploded in laughter. The moderator skewered us for the rest of the event for our ignorance about big-time publishing, which only made both of us more determined to make *PUNK Magazine* happen. Fuck traditional publishing! Hugh Hefner started *Playboy* with \$500 and an idea, *Rolling Stone* had been started on a small budget, and *ZAP Comix* started with next to nothing. Way back in the 20th century you could start a publishing empire with a few dollars and a dream. Youth culture didn’t depend on shit like “demographic studies.” Tomorrow belonged to us! Just “DO IT!”

So we did it. Ged was impressed that I had access to both a printer (Perez Printing, who had produced a very professional second edition of my comic book, *DomeLand*) and a lawyer, Solomon Glushak (who I met during a murder trial involving a former roommate the year before). Hey, who doesn’t want a lawyer named “Solomon”?