

# THE VELLUM UNDERGROUND

Number 1

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## **THE VELLUM UNDERGROUND**

*The Vellum Underground* is the brainchild of David LaBounty, and he deserves all the blame. It is yet another publication of Blue Cubicle Press (slowly deforesting the planet one zine at a time).

Names, characters, incidents, and places are, for the most part, not the product of the authors' imaginations. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is purely intentional. In no way would we ever go all James Frey on you, but realize that any mistakes, falsities, or downright lies are products of old minds and are recorded without malicious intent. Aging sucks.

There is no cost for this zine. If you paid for a copy, you bought it at one of the few stores in America – or abroad – brave enough to sell self-centered tripe. These people are heroes and should be able to charge anything they want, and you should pay it. We need more people like them.

Subscriptions are not available. This may be the first of many issues or the last one. So read well. I'll most likely kill this in the morning.

We have registered a website for this publication ([www.thevellumunderground.com](http://www.thevellumunderground.com)), but at the time of printing, we have no idea what we are going to do with it, if anything. This is, after all, a print publication.

Comments or concerns? Send an email to [info@thevellumunderground.com](mailto:info@thevellumunderground.com) or stamp-up an envelope and send it to P.O. Box 250382, Plano, TX 75025-0382. (Critiques are welcome, as well. Though if you are just writing to say you can do better, don't waste the energy on us. Prove it.)

Thanks for reading.

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# Why Another Zine?

This project was born from death. Two, in particular. The first was the death of *Zine World*.

*Zine World: A Reader's Guide to the Underground Press* was a fantastic publication started by Doug Holland in the mid-90s. It was a review zine to rival *Factsheet 5*, the godfather of review zines.

Embarrassingly, I didn't read an issue of *Zine World* until #24, published in 2007 (still haven't seen an issue of *Factsheet 5*). It's not like I was late to the game. I had been creating zines since 1999 and reading/collecting them since the early 90s.

Truth is, I was a review zine snob. I didn't care what other people thought about a particular zine, which, some may argue, is a tad hypocritical, seeing as how I've spent the last twenty years making money reviewing books. But the beauty of zines is that they are usually cheap enough to take a chance on. I wasn't going to let some hack filter my reading list. I went straight to the source.

Then I started Blue Cubicle Press, and one of our missions was to promote, distribute, and even help publish the zines and zinesters we enjoyed.

The first zine I wanted to give a wider audience to was the fantastic *Off the Map*. This travel zine written by two friends wandering across Europe captivated me. I liked it so much, I planned an entire imprint of the press around this type of travelogue.

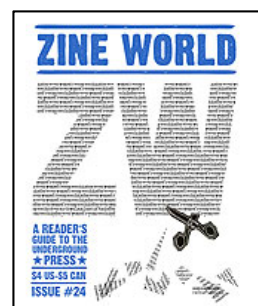
I contacted Traci and Kika to talk about publishing their zine in book form, and I was told I was two weeks too late. They had just teamed up with CrimethInc.

[Fist to sky] *CrimethInc.!*

I was a little disheartened. As the years went on, I found myself missing out on a few other writers who were being plucked out of zinedom before I even had a chance to say hello. I decided that I needed to supplement my increasingly infrequent trips to Quimby's and Atomic.

So, I turned to *Zine World*. I tossed a ten-dollar bill in an envelope and sent it off the Jerriane (she had taken over as publisher back in 2000). And once I received my first issue, I was hooked.

*Zine World* was the one publication I dropped everything to read. The moment it arrived in my mailbox, I sat down with a pen and read it from cover to cover, circling the zines and books I wanted to buy or trade for.



It was indispensable. And though I only found one zine I was interested in republishing (Phil Grech's *Don't Waste Your Hands*), I found several writers and artists I've had the pleasure to work with.

Then I received a note that said *Zine World* was ceasing publication.

All good things come to an end, but I wasn't ready to let go. I reached out to Jerriane

twice, once with an offer to take on the printing costs, and once with an offer to take over all of the publishing duties. But I never heard back.

So I thought I'd start my own *Zine World*. I had it all figured out. I'd contact former *Zine World* reviewers to see if they were interested in joining the new publication. I would get the word out that we were accepting zines. I even came up with a trade system, where if you sent in two copies of your zine to review, I'd send you a random copy of someone else's zine. I was swimming in ideas.

But the more research I did, the more I realized that yes, we'd lost a great review zine, but we still had *Broken Pencil*, *Syndicated Zine Reviews*, *One-Minute Zine Reviews*, *The Zine Explorer's Notebook*, and *Xerography Debt*, which, like *Zine World*, had become must-read material in our office.

All of these people and publications are doing a wonderful job promoting zines, and with Quimby's weekly "New Stuff" list on their website, I always know when new zines are published. There really isn't a need for another review zine. So I set the idea aside.

Then came the second death.

Last December, I received my copy of *Small Press Review*. *Small Press Review* is like the *Zine World* of small, independent publishers. They've been around since the mid-60s, and though the original publisher, Len Fulton, died in 2011, they are still an important part of the indie press world, promoting new books and little literary magazines.

During the early days of our press, I had gotten to know Len a little, mainly through correspondences, and when I found out about his death, I was a little sad for the loss of a person I briefly knew, but I was more upset about the indie press world losing an important voice and advocate.

But Len's death wasn't the second spark for this zine. It was the death of a man I had never heard of.

The front page of the January-February 2013 issue of *Small Press Review* featured an obituary of Harry Smith. Born in 1936, this bear of a man was a poet/publisher. From the obituary, I learned that in the 1970s his press, the Smith Publishers, published books; a literary magazine, *The Smith*; a tabloid arts newspaper, *Newsart*; a muckraking newsletter reporting on all aspects of the underground and mainstream publishing scene, *The Newsletter (On the State of the Culture)*; and an ongoing anthology of Off-Off Broadway plays, *The Scene*.

I was blown away. I pride myself on knowing the obscurity of small presses. Before I began BCP, I studied up on the history of indie publishers. I collected books and articles about the state of publishing through the decades. And yet, I had never heard of Harry Smith. I had never seen a copy of *The Smith* or *Newsart* or *The Scene*, three publications I would have loved to subscribe to. Not only that, but I would have loved to spend an afternoon with Harry, picking his brain about publishing; hell, just listening to his stories of the old days.

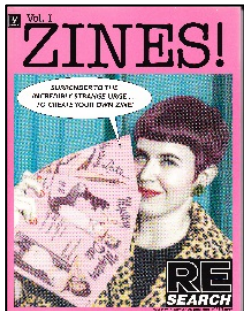
Then it hit to me: Why not take a look back at the zines and zinesters that influenced

and inspired me, zinesters who many people just starting to glue their first clipart to the page may never have heard of?

Earlier that summer, at around the same time *Zine World* was being laid to rest, I was in Florida with the family visiting some friends. We were on one of our annual bookstores and baseball tours (see our zine of the same name), and while in Ft. Lauderdale we stopped by our newer bookstore, Bob's News and Book Store.

I liked Bob's right away (and not just because *The First Line* was on the shelf). It's a small, cramped building filled with all sorts of ephemera and underground publications. But what really got me excited was when I came across the hermitically sealed copies of *ZINES!*

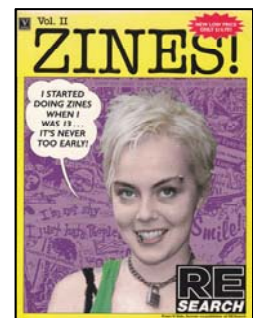
Published by V. Vale (founder of RE/Search publications), volume #1 of *ZINES!* came out in 1996. It's a thick, pink-bordered perfect bound book featuring Lynn Peril's smiling face on the cover as she holds up copies of her zine *Mystery Date*.



This 184-page, 8.5" x 11" book is filled with interviews with famous zinesters of the day, including Sean Tejaratchi of *Crap Hound*, Al Hoff of *Thrift SCORE*, and the aforementioned Lynn Peril. There's even an interview with Ramsey Kanaan who founded AK Press, an article about the history of zines, and a directory of zines.

(Volume #2 was no less ambitious. Published in 1997, its 150 pages are filled with interviews with the likes of Dishwasher Pete, Keffo from *Temp Slave* fame, and Russ Forster of *8-Track Mind*. There also was a section on zine reviews. As far as I can tell, this was the last issue published.)

The reading is absolutely fascinating, especially from an historical perspective. Sure it's less than twenty years old, but so much has changed since the mid-90s. And everyone is so much older now. Some zinesters have moved on to modest mainstream fame, some have steadily published their personal publications for a small audience to enjoy, and some have disappeared completely from the underground.



As I was reading *ZINES!* I thought, wouldn't it be great to go back and talk to these people now, to see what they were up to, to see if their dreams came true?

During our recent trek to Baltimore, we stopped at Atomic Books for a reading of one of our publications. I got to talking to the owner and ringmaster, Benn Ray, about the state of indie bookstores, small presses, and zines, and he said something that surprised me. He mentioned that he'd received more zines in the past three months than the store had seen in the past five years.

It seems zine-making comes in waves. Big pushes of paper publications appear every twenty years or so, and it looks like we may be in the middle of another highly creative time.

Which makes looking back, to me, even more important. To know where we are at, it sometimes helps to see where we've been, to acknowledge the *Dorises* and the *Cometbuses* that came before us and, in some cases, still continue to publish.

So I decided this zine would be mostly about publications past. It would be a look back at the history of underground publications, a tribute to those who came before, even maybe a where-are-they-now look at some of the zinesters and editors who influenced me.

And it will be about our press. The unifying theme of this zine will be the history of *The First Line* and Blue Cubicle Press. I'll begin at the beginning, tell my story of how I became a writer and how a little legal-sized saddle stitched zine sprung into a publishing dynamo (snicker snicker).

In truth, I don't know what this zine will look like past the first issue, or even if there will be another issue. Some things I want to do may not be possible, and some things I haven't even thought of yet may appear in these pages. I don't even know why I'm doing this. Maybe, like most of my writing, this is just another love letter to Robin.

All I know is that there is one thing I can't seem to stop doing: create zines. Not a bad problem to have.

## What's with the Title?

At first blush, the title may sound like an homage to the band with the Warhol banana on their album cover, and though I think it is a cute coincidence, I am not a fan of The Velvet Underground.

I first came across the word vellum in graduate school while studying the British publisher John Newbery (more on him later). The word rattled around in my brain until one day, when Robin said she wanted to start a bookstore. I said, "I have the perfect name: The Vellum Underground."

My suggestion was met with a resounding, "No."

I pressed on, explaining that vellum was the material that books, sometimes subversive, were printed on, and underground was a perfect descriptor of the books and zines we wanted to sell. "Kind of like Subterranean Books in Pensacola, only with our own little twist on it."

"Cute," she said, "but you're the only one who knows what vellum means."

So, I've kept those three little words in my pocket, and when I decided to do this zine, I knew what I would call it.

By the way, for the past twelve years, the paper we've used for the covers of *The First Line* has been Exact Vellum Bristol. Now that's a cute coincidence.



Contact [info@thevellumunderground.com](mailto:info@thevellumunderground.com) for a complete copy.