

November 2019

# With Only Four Strings



a Dead Kennedys Fan Zine  
by Ray Daylami Frost



## "With Only Four Strings"

Klaus nudged his companion. "Jello, is Ray still on his side?"

Jello rolled over, kneeling on the bench seat, and looked into the back. It was hard to make anything out in the windowless van. In the pale moonlight coming through the back window, he was able to identify their guitarist, curled up on the equipment. "Yeah, he's still on his side."

"Good." Klaus hadn't even opened his eyes.

Having fulfilled his duty, Jello slumped back on the seat next to Klaus. "Next time, let's not be so cheap and rent a motel room." He closed his eyes, pulling his leather jacket over himself as a blanket.

Klaus chuckled. "Next time, let's actually make some money. Get some sleep this shift. Tomorrow, we still have a set to play."

\*\*\*

"Buzzbomb, Buzzbomb, macho appeal," Jello sang and broke out laughing.

"Gross, you say, that's how I feel." Ted finished and started laughing too.

Ray shot them a dirty look in the rearview mirror. "Fuck off."

Jello paused a moment. "You wanted to last night, but you were too drunk."

"Hey," Klaus said, "don't distract the driver." Especially since the driver had a terrible headache.

Ray turned into a dirt lot behind a rickety wooden building. The Silver Spur. Like every other bar they had played, it didn't look like much, let alone a place hosting a punk show in a few hours. Ray pulled Buzzbomb the van up near the "stage entrance."

"Here we are." He looked over his shoulder at Ted and Jello. "The Silver Spur. Maybe it's not a honky-tonk."

Jello sneered wickedly. "Maybe."

"Let's find out," Ted said, getting out of the van. He and Klaus went over to the "stage entrance" and knocked.

After a minute, a startled middle-aged blonde, clearly the bartender, opened the door.

"Hi." Ted waved. "We're the DK's. Your manager booked us for tonight."

The bartender looked them over. The boy talking to her and the bespectacled man next to him looked normal enough, but their band mates; the tall, slender brunette and the stocky boy with spiked black hair; were far more aggressive looking than their musicians usually were. But booking wasn't her job. She checked the list on the wall next to the door. The DK's were on it. "Okay," she said, propping the door open, "The stage is straight ahead."

"Thank you." Ted forced his tan hand into hers and shook it.

"Let's go get the gear." Klaus headed back to the van to help Ray and Jello unload the equipment.

As they set up and began their sound check, Ray surveyed the Silver Spur. The wood-paneled walls were decked out in "old West" memorabilia and the bar stools were covered in brown and white cowhide. A mechanical bull was shoved in one corner with an "out of order" sign crookedly taped on. Definitely a honky-tonk.

"Ray, we should play 'Rawhide.'" Klaus grinned and raised his eyebrows in an imitation of Jello's signature grin.

Ray laughed. "Probably. It'll be the only one they know." He fiddled with the knobs on his amp. He was regretting his 'If you love God, burn a church' sticker and the big 'DK' drawn on in white paint. "Let's play one to warm up."

Jello finished crudely wiring in his cheap P.A. and shrugged. "'Kepone Factory'?"

"Alright." Ted began tapping in on the drums.

Jello walked up to the mic. "K-E-P-O-N-E. A tasty little chemical that gives you crossed eyes and you can't come anymore."

"Are you ready?" Klaus plugged in.

"Oh, come on," Ray sighed, "or fuck off."

Ray smiled at Klaus across the stage, counting in the bass, as he launched into his shred.

They barely got through one bar of the intro.

"Hold it," Jello said, "Too slow." He relished the moment when they all stopped at the same time.

Without missing a beat, Ray, Klaus and Ted broke back into the song at a conventionally unprecedented thrash. This 'too slow' crap was becoming Jello's signature with this song; he pulled it almost every time they played it.

\*\*\*

Jello wiped his forehead with his hole-filled t-shirt. "We should ask them to turn up the heat. We're too cold."

Ray laughed. "You've got some grapes."

"Klaus, tell Ray where to put his grapes."

Ever the mediator, Klaus deadpanned, "In the fridge!"

"Klaus, no!" Jello gave him a mock-serious cross look.

The bar's manager walked in to find three punk boys and a bespectacled older man on his stage. "What the Hell are you doing?" Clearly this was not the kind of band he thought he'd booked.

Klaus grinned. "We're having a wonderful time here."

\*\*\*

Ray walked to the liquor store he saw on the way into town and bought a twelve-pack of Sierra Nevada Pale Ale, which was now sitting behind his amp on stage. A few empty bottles littered the stage, but they hadn't done much for his stage fright. The crowd was better than expected; there were more punk teenagers and newcomers than rednecks in trucker hats. They seemed to feeding off the band better than the crowd in Corvallis.

They'd played quite a few shows in San Francisco before embarking on

their very first tour. Ray and Klaus knew the drill by now. Kids would just climb onto the stage and dance until they were pushed off by others or herded away by Jello. Jello encouraged this by jumping down into the crowd and wandering as far as the mic would allow. Ray and Klaus stuck to the edges and the back of the stage, ducking in and out of the stage lights.

As Klaus played, he watched Ray for cues and to see how he was doing. Every now and then, when he saw Ray slumping over his Strat or swaying more than usual, Klaus crossed the stage, back turned to the crowd, under the guise of verifying what the next song would be. "You okay?"

Every now and then, Ray nodded without looking up. "Yeah." The thought of looking at the crowd made his stomach turn.

Near the end of the set, Ray peeled his axe off and ran back out the backdoor. His Strat landed face up; the strings struck and still ringing, something almost like a bar chord, through the amp.

Ted and Jello both looked at Klaus, but continued with the song. Klaus set his bass down, letting it ring through the amp too. He found Ray kneeling on the concrete steps outside, hurling beer.

Klaus put his hand between Ray's shoulder blades. "You're okay."

Ray spat holding the edge of the step to hold himself up. "I fucked our set up."

"You're fine."

Ted and Jello were standing in the doorway. Klaus looked over his shoulder at them.

"How's Ray?" Ted mouthed.

"Okay."

Jello handed Klaus a milk jug, partially filled with water. "Then get his ass back in here for one last song."

Jello and Ted went back in. They could hear Ted idly drumming and Jello

heckling the crowd.

Ray sipped the water. "We fucked up 'Forward to Death,' thanks to me."

"No."

"Yes."

"The ringing sounds fucking awesome. We should finish 'Riot.' We can write it the song."

Ray forced a smile. "Okay."

Klaus stood up, offering Ray his hand. "Let's go play 'Rawhide.'"

Ray took his hand, swaying a little. "All right."

\*\*\*

After their very brief encore, Klaus and Ted began to load their gear into the van, since they were the road crew.

"Jello, keep an eye on Ray." Klaus directed him toward the alley outside the bar.

Ray had slunk off, probably to take a piss or throw up, but Klaus was worried. He'd counted nine empties rolling around the stage.

Jello rolled his eyes.

"Seriously," Klaus said.

"Fine. I'll fucking babysit him *again*." Jello jumped off stage and became invisible in the crowd of drunk teenagers. They were barely younger than the band, save Klaus.

\*\*\*

Ray leaned against the side of the bar, resting his forehead against his forearm. "Fuck." He realized he'd just pissed all over the toes of his Docs.

"You're in that band, huh?"

Ray zipped his jeans up, before looking for the source of the voice. Two guys with trucker hats were headed toward him. "What?"

The big redhead said, "The band that just played the Silver Spur."

Ray blinked helplessly. "Yeah."

"That last song you played, 'Rawhide.'" The bearded one was close enough to smell the chewing tobacco. "We loved that one. You guys did a *great* job with it."

Ray laughed. "Thanks. We have a good time with it."

"You know any other country songs, boy?" The redhead asked.

"No." Ray shrugged. "But, country songs are stupid simple, so it would be easy to learn more."

"You calling us simple, boy?" The bearded one asked, cornering Ray.

"No." Ray tried to sober up, to see a way out of his position between the rednecks and the wall. Now that it clicked, he realized this was the same cat and mouse game jocks used to play with him back in the high school locker room. The big redhead pinned Ray to the wall with both calloused hands. "I didn't mean any offense." Ray's body may have been toned from years of surfing, but nine beers in, those muscles were about as useful as sacks full of ground meat.

\*\*\*

When Jello got to the alley, Ray was slumped against the wall with his sleeve pressed to his nose. In the dim streetlight, Jello saw blood running down his wrist. "Ray, you fuck up." Jello sighed. "What happened?"

Ray's voice was muffled, nasal, and a little cracked. "Rednecks."

He knelt in front of him. "Jesus, you've got to stop pulling this shit."

"Like I fucking enjoy it."

Jello rolled his eyes. "You okay?" He stood up, offering Ray both hands.

Ray gripped Jello's muscular forearms and pulled himself up. "That fucking hurt." He shut his eyes, took a deep breath. "Yeah, I'm okay."

"Good. We need you for tomorrow night, you jackass."

Jello walked alongside Ray to Buzzbomb. Ray fumbled to unlock the door



and slumped into the passenger seat.

\*\*\*

Klaus locked Buzzbomb's double doors in the back, assured that Ray was safely on his side on top of their gear. Ted had moved into the passenger seat and promptly fallen asleep. Klaus leaned against the van and lit his cigarette. "It's good to be landed for the night." He looked around the area as not a single car drove by. "At least this is a peaceful spot."

Jello lit his own cigarette. "At least."

"Tonight went okay." Klaus flicked some ash. "Better than expected."

"Still not like the shows back home."

"Yeah, but we need the exposure and a bigger following to get a label to take us seriously." Klaus blew smoke.

Jello took a long drag. "With Ray's bullshit, I'm not sure anyone will take us seriously." Jello flicked ash toward the highway. "He can't keep being so fucking stupid. It looks bad to have him like that on stage."

Klaus elbowed Jello. "Don't be so hard on him. He's had it rough."

"So?"

"He's scared."

"He needs to take this shit seriously."

"He does." Klaus took a drag and looked at Jello. "This is all Ray has. There's no safety net for him like the one you have, Jello. He's afraid of fucking up and losing everything."

They both knew that Jello's rich parents would bail him out if he needed it and that Ray had declined a scholarship to be in the band, putting his last cent into this tour. Klaus hoped that Jello hadn't forgotten that it was *Ray's* ad they had all responded to because Ray was the one dying to be in a punk band.

Jello ground his cigarette out in the dirt and got into the van, slumping

into the bench seat. He closed his eyes and pretended to sleep. Klaus got in the van. He looked over the seat at Ray and pulled his leather jacket back over him. Then, picked Jello's jacket up off the seat and draped it over the singer.

\*\*\*

"I can't get over this," Jello sighed.

Everyone in the band held up glass tumblers filled with water. It was illegal to drink alcohol on stage in Portland. They'd barely arrived with time to get set up and do a very brief sound check, let alone figure out a way to smuggle booze on stage or drink before the set.

"It's the water, not much more," Jello sang, almost at the top of his range.

Ray stared out at the crowd as they went into "Drug Me." They looked shockingly like the crowds back home. It felt like set at the Deaf Club or the Fab Mab; there was even some pogoing and slam dancing going on. This was okay. He did his best to watch his hands, not the stage floor.

By "Kill the Poor," Ray was exhausted, so he played sitting on his amp. He wanted to be back home, so he could sleep in his bed again. Everything ached. When he stood up, he still watched his hands, avoiding the audience. But, Klaus caught his eye and smiled. The set was going well. He felt his face get hot, not just from the stage lights. Every note was worth it, nerves and all.

\*\*\*

"Chemical warfare!" Jello jumped into the crowd, almost free falling, since this stage was high.

Ted was drumming at time and a half compared to the bass-line. Jello climbed back on stage and broke out some of his wildest antics. This was their full swing.

But, midway through the song, a snap reverberated through Ray's amp. He headed off stage, axe in hand.

"Ray's guitar broke." Jello paced the stage. "Now, he won't play 'Rawhide.' He won't play anything."

There were no tools backstage, but in his guitar case, Ray found one string. High E. Exactly the one he needed. He struggled to get the broken string off.

"And they got out their clubs and ran after me, yelling, 'We're gonna kill you, you goddamn faggot!'"

Ray smirked. Jello was telling that fucking story about the time he'd come to Portland alone and had encountered his first rednecks.

"So, this is Oregon, huh? Tolerant Oregon?" Jello turned away from the crowd and crossed the stage. "Ray, are you done with your guitar yet?" He was still shouting into the mic.

Ray threw the broken string at Jello. "No."

"He isn't done yet." Jello engaged the kids up front, asked them what high school they went to, while Ray got the string on.

After a while, Ray came back to Jello's sneering face. "And here he is, our reclusive guitar tuner, Ray Valium."

Jello demanded a hat and some kid threw a teal beanie at him, so he put it on and they played "Rawhide," even though this had ended badly in Salem. Ray felt so good that he went from the ending riff of "Rawhide" to the intro to "I Kill Children" without stopping.

"Bye," Jello began to head off stage, but Ray kept playing. Klaus and Ted were playing along. "Well, maybe not."

Midway through the solo, Ray suddenly stopped. Jello glanced at Ray's guitar. He turned to the crowd and said, "God, another broken string. It's probably the same one."

Ray looked down at his Strat.

"Is it the same one?" He was screaming into the mic.

"Two." Ray picked them both up.

"Two, oh joyous popsicles." Jello began to walk off, still talking into the mic. "Maybe we'll finish this song after all."

Ray tore the strings off and threw them in Jello's direction.

Jello looked at Ray standing there; he didn't seem to have any intention of quitting. "Do you wanna hear the end of this song with the wrong strings?" He asked the audience.

"Yeah," Ray said. He looked at his boots, then the strings. He wanted nothing more than to sit on his amp until it was time to go home, but he also wanted to give their audience what they'd come for.

"Or, we can just leave." Jello paced toward the edge of the stage.

Ray stared the strings and looked up at Klaus imploringly. Klaus began to play again, going into the verse. Ted joined in. Ray approximated the riff, fumbled the start of the second solo...then it just clicked and the song came together.

\*\*\*

Jello waved ridiculously to the crowd with both hands. "Nighty-night, Portland." Off stage, he leaned against the wall next to Ray. "That was fucking great."

"With only four strings?" Ray was still breathing hard. Every song had been a huge mental effort after those two strings broke. He was exhausted.

"Even better," Klaus said.

# DEAD KENNEDYS

INTERVIEW:

(east bay ray)

Dead Kennedy .001 - Ray Vallum - Guitar, Echo - Was invisible until 1968. Studied mathematics and for two years was involved in a philosophical-sexual cult. Played in greaser band before Dead Kennedys. Likes film noir, Syd Barrett, lubricants, and electricity.

Dead Kennedy .002 - Klaus Flouride - Bass, Vocals - Parents knew Wally Cox. Ran pirate radio stations in Detroit and Boston, WOMB. Ex-member of Magic Terry. Likes tape recorders, the Velvets, red food, and root canal work. Does not like formica.

Dead Kennedy .004 - Bruce (Ted) Slesinger - Rogers Drums - Played drums since 12 years old. Studied architecture. Came west to find music, but joined Dead Kennedys instead. Likes "Leave It To Beaver", Tony Williams, Jack Dejonette, formica.

Dead Kennedy .005 - Jello Biafra - Lead Vocals - Former and current actor. Performed in the Healers, a disease-rock outfit bent on creating living hell. Has over 3000 records. "I am a human pinball, shot from place to place in a constant search for that which is truly bent."

I think there's one of the most significant, out-rages U.S. Courts around, read

the words and

then agree with me.

Ⓐ + LIBERTY



## "Ray"

Your band may have been known  
for the singer's bad voice  
and those oh-so political lyrics  
—good enough to get Tipper Gore's panties in a bunch—  
but, the first time I heard your music,  
it was the guitar that made my blood run hot.

In my teenage dreams, after the show,  
you were a rainfall of starving kisses  
the mysterious figure in the dark,  
ocean-salted skin in salt air.

But, you're a geeky little voice on the phone  
and the face I lit up in that bar was lined,  
so were the hands that signed my shirt.  
an old man, wearied by the hustle  
of selling records out the back of the van.

Even so, when you took the stage,  
nervous as you were thirty years ago,  
"Holiday in Cambodia" still shot nails  
through my boots, fixed me to the floor.

COMING TO EUGENE APRIL

21<sup>ST</sup>

# THE Dead Kennedys

ALSO APPEARING  
THEATRE OF SHEEP



**W.O.W. HALL** corner of 8<sup>th</sup> + Lincoln

TICKETS AVAILABLE AT DIANA'S, EARTH RIVER, PLAY IT AGAIN, W.O.W. HALL, HAPPY TRAILS IN CORVALLIS





Ray Daylami Frost is a huge Dead Kennedys fan; they're their favorite band and the DK logo was their first tattoo! This is their first fan zine, featuring a short story and three screen prints.

Equal parts research and imagination, "With Only Four Strings" is a work of historical fiction imagining how the events of the Dead Kennedys first tour in the fall of 1979 might have been like for the band. The story culminates in an imagining of the infamous "Night of the Living Rednecks" concert at the Earth Tavern in Portland, Oregon on November 19, 1979.

This story is Frost's proudest work from their time as an undergraduate writing student at the University of Nevada, Reno.

 @raydaylamifrost

 zepzystardust.tumblr.com

 etsy.com/shop/zepzystarduststudios



A Zeppy Stardust Studios Publication