

GLEN E. FRIEDMAN

Interview and portrait by JOEY GARFIELD



GLEN E. FRIEDMAN IS A GREAT PHOTOGRAPHER. HE IS, IN A SENSE, WAY TOO PROFESSIONAL, BUT I HAVE ACTUALLY SEEN HIM LAUGH BEFORE, AND WE’VE MADE HIM CRY ON OCCASION. DURING *CHECK YOUR HEAD*, YAUCH WAS LIVING IN A LOG CABIN IN THE LA HILLS. GLEN HAD TAKEN A PICTURE OF MINOR THREAT ON THEIR FRONT PORCH, AND YAUCH RIPPED THAT OUT OF A MAGAZINE AND HAD IT ON HIS WALL. HE LOVED THE WAY THAT PICTURE LOOKED. YAUCH TOLD GLEN, “WE WANT A PICTURE THAT’S AS COOL AS THIS MINOR THREAT ONE.” SO THAT’S THE ONE. I’M SURE GLEN HATED THAT IT WAS A FAX... —ADROCK

Joey Garfield: Let’s start with a brief background.

Glen E. Friedman: I grew up here on the East Coast and moved to California in second grade, but was back here for school vacations and summers because my dad was here. I came here for school for 11th and 12th grades. I would go to LA for the summers and school vacations. I went out there for college but then moved back to New York by ’86.

Was there a big difference between schools out West and here on the East Coast?

School was a lot harder out East. In California, I was in public school my whole life until I was suspended on the last day of eighth grade and was put in private school.

Why did you get suspended?

Alleged theft was the charge. I had been in trouble before at school for gambling, you know, flipping coins. Back then there was still corporal punishment at Paul Revere. All I did was steal some punch from a party. But they made it like I stole a teacher’s purse.

So what made you pick up a camera?

Actually, it was at Paul Revere. I took a photography class because I had been in a typing class, originally, but this girl in front of me had the worst body odor of all time, so I switched to photography. I only had

a pocket instamatic at the time. I studied lenses and how to make prints and develop. I learned the basics, but my grade was a D. Although I wasn’t following the assignments, I was taking pictures of my friends skateboarding. The mecca of skateboarding at the time was at Paul Revere Junior High.

I found this pool that no one ever skated before. I called up Jay Adams and borrowed a 35mm camera with the widest-angle lens he had. Not even six months after Photography 1, I took pictures at that pool and they came out really good. I eventually showed the photos to Stacy Peralta, who said I should send the photos to *Skateboarder* magazine. So after a big song and dance with the editor on the phone, pretending I was older, I sent a bunch of my original slides down with my credit on the side of the mount. A couple months later, I got a tear sheet in the mail with a forty-dollar check. I couldn’t believe my eyes. I had a full-page subscription ad in the magazine with my name written on the bottom. And I was only fourteen.

I think being a skateboard photographer helps you become a great photographer because skateboarding is so much about the environment, architecture and personality. Balance of elements is the foundation to great photography. The decent ones know that.

Talk a bit about the ability to catch the action.

It’s about getting that precise, right fucking moment,

ONE

Photographer for Check Your Head and several decades of Beastie Boy images

TWO

Shot generation-defining works of Fugazi, Black Flag, Public Enemy, RUN-D.M.C., Ice- T, and Dead Kennedys, as well as skateboarding icons Tony Alva, Jay Adams, and Stacy Peralta

THREE

His photography works are in the collections of the MET in NYC and the Smithsonian in Washington DC

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top
Beastie Boys and RUN-D.M.C.
1987

bottom
Beastie Boys
From the book
Fuck Your Heroes
1985





capturing that edger right at its peak. I knew how to capture that energy from skateboarding and brought it to Punk Rock, which was just as energetic.

When did you meet the Beastie Boys?

I first met them in front of CBGB, introduced by our mutual best friend Arabella Field. I remember Yauch had a skateboard. I don't think Horovitz was even in the band. They were opening for Bad Brains. The Beasties, to me, were a bunch of pranksters, and I didn't think they were a very good band. I wasn't a fan of their hardcore, which, to me, was a social movement I took very seriously. It was not a joke. Arabella shot the photo for the 7-inch *Polly Wog Stew* EP, their hardcore record.

That summer of '82 I went with Arabella and Yauch, and maybe Mike D, to the Roxy roller rink for the first screening of *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle* in the US. It was on a TV set. After they showed it, these guys called The Rock Steady Crew were practicing in the middle of the rink while people were roller-skating. That was my first time seeing Hip-Hop in the flesh. That summer I went down to DC and saw Minor Threat at the 9:30 Club. My mind is being blown.

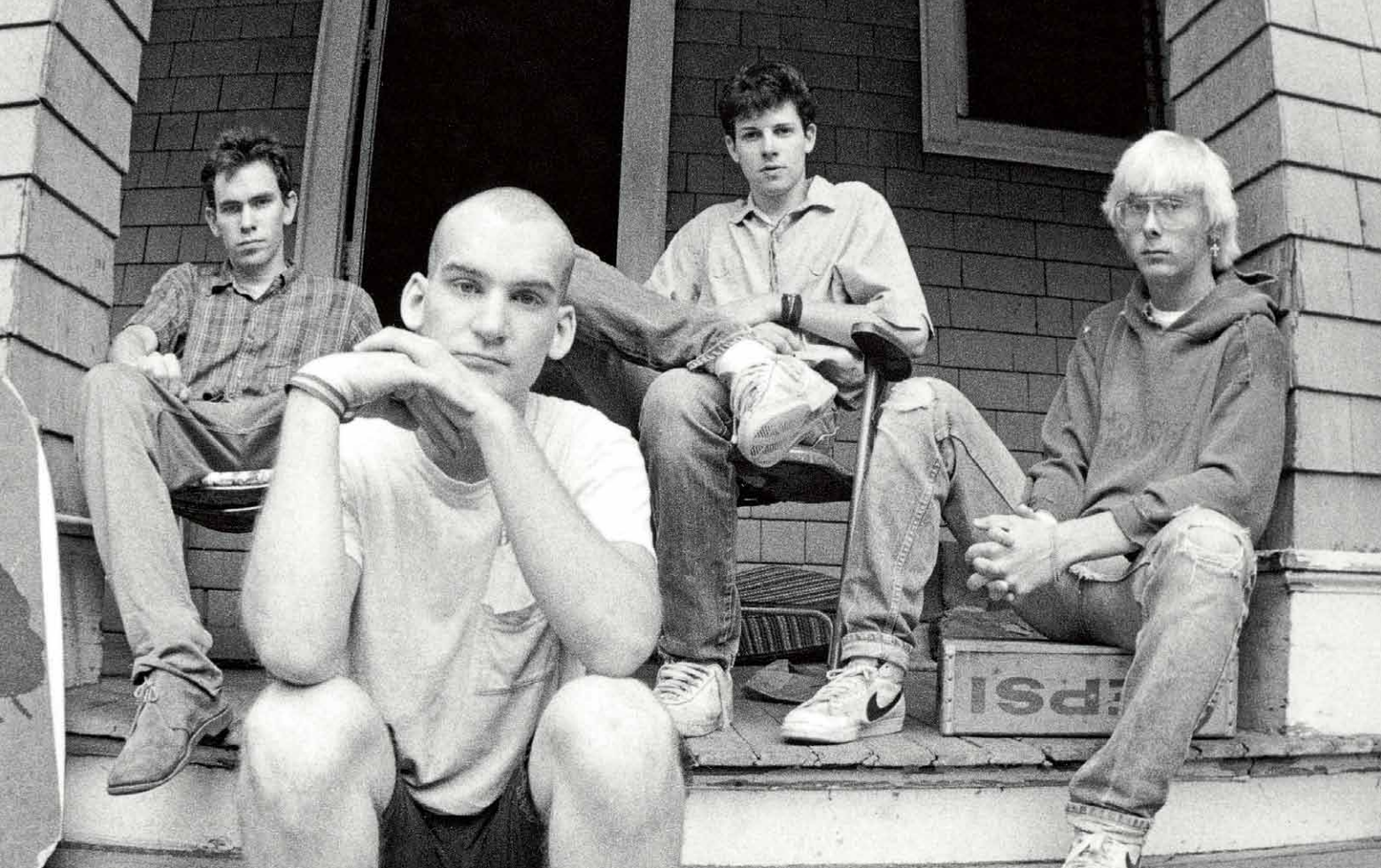
A lot is going on in '82: The Dead Kennedys and Black Flag are out, and I'm doing the Suicidal Tendencies album. On the underground level, if you were aware in

'82-83, Hip-Hop was coming around for real. This is not about some Disco beats but some hardcore shit, and when I heard RUN-D.M.C.'s song "Jam Master Jay," the dynamic set me off. I was like—I am going here.

A year later I hear the Beastie Boys had made a Hip-Hop record. I saw Hip-Hop as a black kid's version of Punk Rock and seeing these white kids doing it even though it was a black art form, was new and street and had its own credibility. It still had a lot of integrity at that moment. I was inspired that they made a Hip-Hop record while being a Punk Rock band.

They were totally funny guys and always made me laugh. But I was taking things more seriously. Why they got upset that people didn't take them seriously later is, like, what did you expect? "Cooky Puss" had just been a continuation of their prankster thing. The next thing I hear, the Beastie Boys are coming out to LA on tour with Madonna on her *Like A Virgin* tour. They didn't know anyone, so I took them around and took pictures, just driving around in this Lincoln Continental, ruling the world. Obviously we were being complete idiots and I was pissing on myself because those guys made me laugh so much. We got good photos because of that. I did have an assignment from their publicist to get a photo with Madonna at the concert, but she wouldn't pose with them, so instead we took all these ridiculous photos of them backstage with other celebrities.

Check Your Head
photo shoot
1992



Minor Threat
Salad Days cover
1985

It was really fun and an entry point for me into Hip-Hop. The proofs came out great and we sent them back to NYC to Rick Rubin and Russell Simmons, who I didn't know yet. They loved the pictures. From that point on, I was an unofficial West Coast rep for Def Jam.

Is there a shot that stands out from that first session?

The one of them standing on the back of the car was great at the time, but I'm making them look iconic and tough. There are other shots on the roll where they are goofier, and some of those photos are just as good.

So how did you link up with them for *Check Your Head*?

I had come to LA for Thanksgiving and decided to call, and they invited me down to check out their skate ramp and play basketball and see the studio. I came the night after Thanksgiving, and while we are playing ball they are playing what was to be *Check Your Head* before it's sequenced, and I just stopped. This is amazing. I'm in awe of the creativity that has come out of them now. *Paul's Boutique* was cool on some B-Boy tip but this was some Punk Rock roots. It wasn't guided by Rick or the Dust Brothers' tracks. This is the real Beastie Boys. It was really unique. I was, like, "This is dope! I am leaving tomorrow night but let's do some photos tomorrow." Mike's saying, "We already have an album cover," and I say, "It's all good... I'm shooting

your new album cover, what are you guys looking for?" It turned out that what Yauch wanted was for me to shoot a photo like I did for Minor Threat's last EP, *Salad Days*. He said, "I want our version of that". And I said, "It's done man. I just gotta think."

I wasn't planning to shoot out there. I was just visiting my mom but was thinking, "Okay, we aren't fucking around, this is going to be a real photo session. We are going to spend the whole day. I'll have my friend Amery drive us around in his van, meet me at Capitol records and bring guitar cases and a bag of drumsticks. I had this vision of hardcore kids walking with instruments in the '80s, up Avenue A or Broadway going to rehearsal. And that was how I saw them now, but with style and a new attitude. So that was my contribution to that day. I wanted to show people that we were bringing it back to the base.

So we met up on Franklin, and I shot pictures of them just walking up and down the sidewalk. Then a shot of them just sitting on the curb. I had a feeling this was going to be their *Salad Days* shot. This was their attitude, the feel, this was it. I only shot three frames, and that was the end of the roll. One was used on the album cover, which wasn't the best composition, and Adam had his face covered. The other had Adam smiling, which wasn't the attitude. After that we went up to Yauch's log cabin to create the more obvious

*I TELL PEOPLE, “IF YOU DON’T LIKE WHAT I DO
YOU DON’T HAVE TO PAY ME.” THAT’S IT. PARTICULARLY
WHEN I DECIDED I WOULD CHARGE A LOT MORE.*

top
Yauch
Santa Monica, California
1991

bottom
Beastie Boys
From the book *The Idealist*



Salad Days photo on his porch. I got a great shot with Yauch’s cat’s tail in the frame, but it was too obvious. We were trying too hard. The sitting-on-the-curb shot was the real feel and had the same integrity. Then we went to the school on Wonderland, up the canyon, cruised Mulholland, then to the beach to where we shot back in ’85, which was down by Arthur Lake’s pool where I shot in ’76!

We finish that session and all go our separate ways. I head to the airport to get the red-eye back to New York.

I get the photos developed and make 8" x 10" prints, and I call Mike who says the cover is already done but to send them over anyway, so I faxed them. I had a really good fax machine that was great with halftones. It made a dot-patterned, pixelated look and the quality wasn’t that bad. Mike calls me back and says, “We are on deadline but we love this photo. It’s the cover.”

There had been a cover of a general or something with a check on his head that got pulled. If you have the vinyl version of the record, you can see it’s a fax on the cover. Whether it was mine or they replicated it from the print, I don’t know, but it’s a fax. It had the rough look.

This was all from a photo session we did for fun. With me, it’s very spontaneous and I can feel it. I did it because I was inspired and I wanted photos of these guys at this time when they had done this record, and they paid me later for it. I tell people, “if you don’t like what I do, you don’t have to pay me.” That’s it. Particularly when I decided I would charge a lot more.

As difficult as it might be to be in front of my lens we are going to get some dope photos. If people aren’t there to cooperate with me, it won’t be a good photo. They were in a good, comfortable place with themselves, and we got great stuff.

So tell me about that one shot of Yauch that was recently on the cover of the *New York Times Magazine*.

We took those pictures towards the end of that same day, across the highway from the beach. We come down the ramp off the Pacific Coast Highway and pull

over by this wall where an old building was torn down. It just looked good. I didn’t set out to shoot the guys individually. Knowing Yauch, he was most likely just walking around surveying the area. I might have asked him to crouch down. I never thought about it twice until this year, when *The New York Times* called looking for a special shot of Adam. I thought it was a little disingenuous to have a picture of him from LA on *The New York Times*. He was a born and bred New Yorker. I wanted them to keep it real.

Eventually, I scanned and sent it, and they liked it. To me it was a very special moment with Adam Yauch at a very special moment in the day. That golden light is very unique. I’m still disappointed it wasn’t a New York shot, but I was happy to be honoring him on the cover of his hometown newspaper in the year-end magazine section. I waived all my rights and regular crediting issues. Let’s just do it and be respectful.

As much as I call them pranksters, I still respected what they did. They are not idiots, I am not dissing them, and that’s not the case. Yauch was a very particular dude and he went to the sound of his own drum. He really was a sweet guy in everyday life. When it came to his art, he was serious. They were all great artists.

How do you know when a photo is right? Not just technically, but internally, and especially without shooting digital.

Instinctually, the feeling I have when I take a photo means the most. But you don’t *know*. You may have fucked up the focus, or the film may be bad. You are nervous until you get it back from the lab. Sometimes you get back better than you imagined. It’s really a mysterious art form.

For more information about Glen E. Friedman, visit BurningFlags.com

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