

I first met Ray Topping in the eighties, while I was working at a mom and pop record store in Nashville and pricing much of the vinyl that customers brought in and sold to this store. Funny how I remember that the very first time I saw and spoke to Ray we immediately started talking about records, and it was only time constraints that caused us to stop! At that time I was just a kid and had no idea what a true legend Mr. Topping was in the world of vinyl knowledge, although I very quickly picked up on the fact that I could learn a wealth of information from him.

As the years passed, my love for vinyl only increased and I kept working for and eventually managed this record store. Most every summer Ray would fly to the United States and spend a week in Nashville, and many of those weeks he spent much (and sometimes all) of his time at this store perusing through our bins, boxes, stacks, shelves, and any other nook and cranny of our building where we had vinyl! He would often be at the door when we opened and sometimes be the last customer in the store when we closed. By this time I had seen his name on the cover of Ace Records as the author who had written the liner notes, and I was absolutely honored that this man was such a fan of our record store. I coined the phrase "Ray Topping Record" in my mind when I would see an LP or 45 which looked like something that would interest him, and I would often have quite a large "stash" of records waiting for his next visit. Mr. Topping was genuinely appreciative of this gesture, and I always looked forward to seeing the look on his face when I presented my vinyl stash to him!

In 2006 I left my job at this store to start Record Relics, my online vinyl store, and as of 2006 it had been awhile since I had seen Ray. I had thought about him many times and wondered how he was doing. Then just this week I was showing my wife some cool U.K. R&B compilation albums I had purchased and I began telling her about Ray Topping. Seems I could not stop talking about Ray so we decided to google him, and I was very saddened to learn that he had passed away. I then spent a considerable amount of time looking at web pages that matched his name (there are many!) and was pleased to see all the great things that people had written about him over the years.

One of my favorite things I read was right here in the Ace Obituary: *"He leaves behind a tremendous body of work which others have been and will continue to build on and few could wish for a better legacy."* How true it is that few could wish for a better legacy...

As I continue to add records for sale to my website, I will always pause when I see the name "Ray Topping" as the author of the liner notes on a cover. I'll have to stop what I'm doing, read every word he wrote, and reflect on how much I enjoyed the times I spent with him. Two of the phrases I use in my business are "A Vinyl Lover's Paradise" and "Specializing In Cool Vinyl", but when it comes to the topic of cool vinyl there is nobody cooler than Ray Topping in my mind! I'll always be thankful for all the music knowledge I learned from him, but more thankful for what a friend he ended up being.

Mike Stephens, Owner
<http://www.recordrelics.com>
Record Relics