

# THE LEATHER JOURNAL (/)

The BDSM/Fetish/Leather community publication of record. Founded May 1987 (/)

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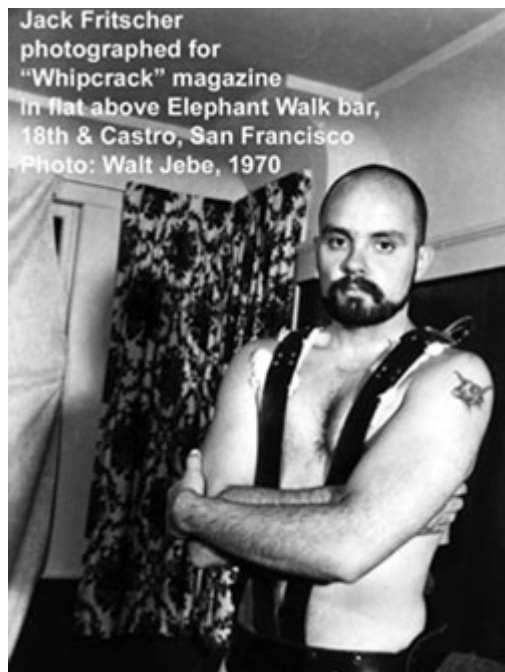
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## Conversations With Leather: Jack Fritscher

🕒 24 February 2015



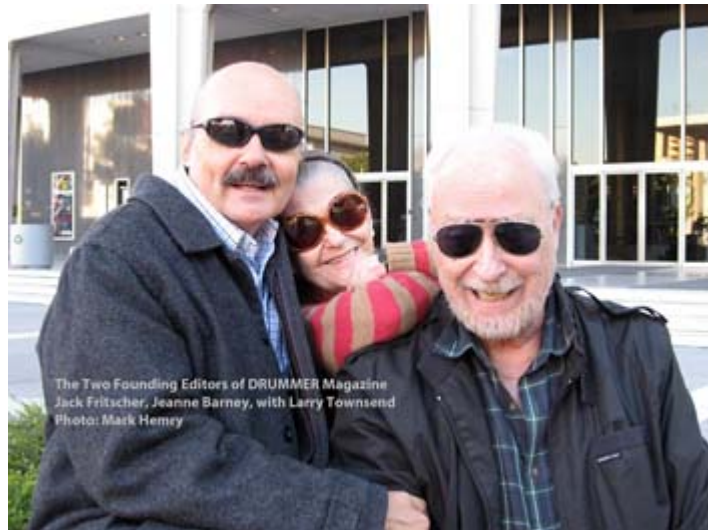
### 1. For those who don't know please tell us about yourself, your titles and how you connected to the Leather community.

I have been a Leather writer, journalist, and photographer since the 1960s, and was the founding San Francisco editor in chief of *Drummer* magazine, as well as its most frequent contributor during its existence from 1975 to 1999. My titles? By the time the first significant Leather contests of "IML" and "Mr. *Drummer*" started in 1979, I was forty, and was more suitably a contest judge, not a contestant. Historically, concerning titles, as editor of *Drummer*, I handpicked the first "Mr *Drummer*" along with art director A. Jay, and publisher John Embry.

Actually, to a writer, "titles" means book and video titles. To entertain us Leather troops, I've authored some twenty books, hundreds of feature articles and short stories, as well as photographs and S&M video features. Some of my Leather-themed books include: *Leather Walk of Fame: The Rise and Fall of*

*Drummer Magazine*; *Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer*, *Leather Blues*; *Some Dance to Remember: A Memoir-Novel of San Francisco 1970-1982*, and the memoir of life with my bi-coastal lover, the Leather photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, titled *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera*.

Some of the Leather and bear and cigar feature videos I have directed and shot include, *Sex My Father Taught Me*, *Cigar*



*Sarge*, and *Sunset Bull* starring Mr. America Chris Duffy. Like other Leather historians such as Gayle Rubin, I am an academic. So, on that level, our professionally appropriate title, for which there is not yet a sash, is, "doctor," the same as *Drummer* publisher Anthony DeBlase. He earned his doctorate in 1973, between mine in 1968, and hers in 1994. DeBlase's dissertation and mine have been made public.

How did I connect to the Leather community? Between coming out in 1957 and becoming editor in chief of *Drummer* in 1977, I paid my dues as all dudes do. The 1950s and 1960s were two decades made cruel for American gays by the government. Despite the witch hunts, I took my education from the Leathermen I met in Chicago, New York, Amsterdam, Paris, and London.

The Swinging Sixties was a time of revolution. In the 1954 movie *The Wild One*, a cop asked Leather biker Marlon Brando: "What are you rebelling against?" Brando shot back: "Whatcha got?" Same for me. Mid-century American laws made all us gays outlaws. Being "Leather" was double-outlaw. We knew how to outfox the cops the way Al Qaeda operates by having no central command that the cops could capture. We knew how to scatter and disappear into the refuge of our own demimonde so we could live to fight another day.

Unlike today, there was no "Leather community" with contests and conferences. Just bars. We were just Leather guys in Leather bars, outlaw strangers, with no names exchanged and no cameras because everyone was suspected of being a vice cop or a blackmailer gathering names or snapping photographs. We did not even want to know about our tricks' real lives because day-job reality killed erotic fantasy. We knew that the tough Leatherman at the bar was a ribbon clerk by day at Bloomingdale's, but it was not cool to talk about our actual daily lives because we preferred to fuck the fantasy rather than the reality. The point of emerging Leathersex was, pretty much, to realize erotic fantasy, not to discuss quotidian reality.

Nightly, we exited bars with total strangers geared up as cops who were more "real" than real cops. Picking up a dude in a bar required little conversation, and less discussion. Tricking was intuitive. As the 1960s sexual revolution spread everywhere, Leather life also grew revolutionary. We exchanged names, first names only, and buddies began networking other buddies using the phone, writing letters of recommendation. That's how I met my Leather playmates in New York: the Leather priest Jim Kane; Colt and Target Studio founder, Lou Thomas; owners of the Anvil, Frank Olson and Don Morrison; as well as the legendary manger of the Mineshaft, Wally Wallace.

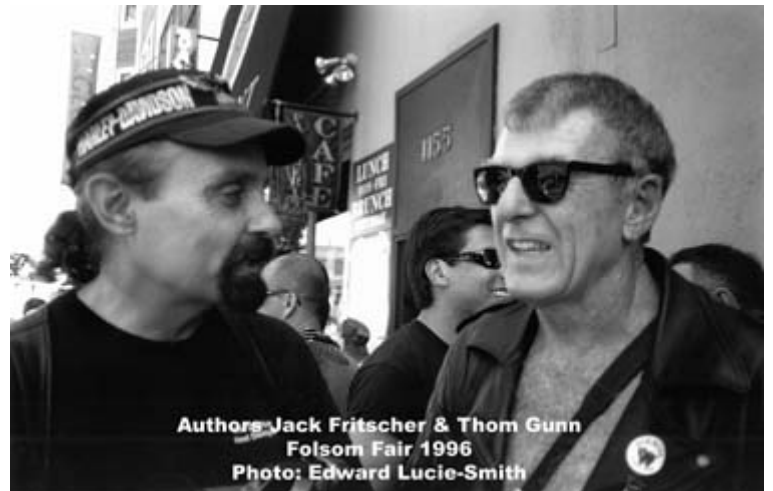
For me personally, I connected to these Leathermen through the wild sex we had, but also through Leather art. After sex, art was our main introduction to each other. The Leatherati in what became the *Drummer* Salon, like Manhattan photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, and author Sam Steward aka Phil Andros, seemed mostly writers, photographers, and entrepreneurs. So, besides the kick that I was a twenty-something new kid in town, the fact that I was a writer and a photographer making Super-8 S&M films on silent four-minute reels, and writing my 1960s novel *Leather Blues* was a calling card. In 1960s, New York, Chicago, **Los Angeles** (<https://www.theleatherjournal.com/news/local-news/los-angeles>), and San Francisco, if you were into sex and art, you were invited places higher than your birth family's caste and class.

That's how we Leather guys got into Andy Warhol's Factory. That's why Andy made a couple Leather-themed underground films, like *Bike Boy* and *Blow Job*, for projections used by his legendary house band, the Velvet Underground, with their typical S&M lyrics from "Venus in Furs," "whiplash girlchild" and "shiny boots of Leather" and "Strike, dear mistress, and cure his heart." In the mix of art and kink: when feminist Valerie Solanas shot Andy, she also shot my pal, the well-liked Leatherman and artist, Mario Amaya, who was an innocent bystander next to Andy.

In 1969, I played the S&M sex card, and traveled around Europe where an active Leatherman was always a welcome guest. That's how I became the houseguest of the iconic British Leatherman, Felix Jones (1914-2003), who was the reigning doyenne of London's swinging S&M scene from World War II well into the late Twentieth Century. In 1998 San Francisco, whipmeister Peter Fiske hosted our mutual friend Felix, 83, on his "Final Farewell Tour" when he played at the 15 Association's Bootcamp.

## 2. What or who got you started in the Leather community and for how long?

In the way I was born genetically gay in 1939, the summer before Hitler invaded Poland, I was psychologically born into Leather during the very scary 1940s when my father, uncles, and all the men in our neighborhood went off to battle in World War II. Their absence created a longing in me, as there was in all of us kids then, for the company of men who, finally, came home the winners. Because these men had endured the rigors and rituals of military discipline they were more than just the victors who had saved us children from the Nazis and the Japanese. Returning home, sweeping us up in their uniformed arms, these heroes had a godlike masculine power both at home and on the silver screen, that was so attractive all we boys wanted to be them.



So we imitated them and the movies about them in the war games we played in our neighborhood. We wore bits of uniform. We captured each other. We tied each other up. We interrogated each other. We young boys were male impersonators of grown men. By adolescence, our fetish for war surplus gear and the men who wore it gave me a boner that lusted after the rough and tumble life of hard men. If you do the math, all us young Leathermen of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s were born war babies, imprinted from birth by all the drama around us of World War II, and then Korea, and then Vietnam.

I played my first S&M game at age six in 1945. By the 1960s, I had served my apprenticeship. So I started looking to come out with like-minded playmates whom I found cruising around in Chuck Renslow's Gold Coast bar in Chicago. I hadn't pieced it together then, but photographer Renslow and his lover, my chum, the artist Etienne, were not just barkeeps. Since the 1950s, I had been rubbing my cock out on their Leather and S&M muscle photographs in sweaty little "pouch magazines" that published their work: *Triumph*, *Mars*, and my favorite, *Tomorrow's Man*. All of which I am happy to recommend to Leatherfolk who want to see our roots.

In Chicago, frankly, I was happy I was born in Illinois and coming out in Illinois because I felt safer. In 1961, Illinois was the first state to declare homosexuality legal. That did not, of course, stop the Chicago cops from harassment and raids.

Long before Stonewall, I was keeping track of all this Leather history in my Leather journals and writing Leather fiction that by the mid-1970s was being published in *Drummer*. In fact, because my coming out in Leather had all the heartland values of Chicago, I imported some of Chuck Renslow's famous Clark Street Leather culture directly into *Drummer* when I became editor.

### **3. Which club or bar are you affiliated with and tell us more about the history?**

Sad to say, I'm the oldest-living founding "Rainbow" in the Rainbow Motorcycle Club, out of the No Name bar on Folsom Street, 1972. Starting out in the 1960s, I associated with several motorcycle clubs, primarily the California Motor Club (CMC) who threw an annual bike run at Rainer Creek in the California Sierra foothills, as well as the orgy of the CMC Carnival that was the forerunner of Folsom Fair. And then with the Satyrs Motorcycle Club on some of its mountain bike run rendezvous.

In 1972, the brilliant poet Ron Johnson and a group of us started the Rainbow Motorcycle Club (RMC) founded in that notoriously sleazy No Name Bar which Ron managed on Folsom Street. "Rainbros" are known for wet and wild sexcapades. (For DNA proof, ask to see any Rainbro's overlay patch! Dip in a mug of hot water, steep, and sip the flavors!) In the early 1970s, Ron and I, with a half-dozen projectors, threw mixed-media Rainbow "Happenings," as they were called then, in the No Name, screening my S&M films and slide shows beamed all at the same time through flashing lights, with Leather bodybuilders tied in cages on the bar, and in the crush, guys being passed bodily along on other guys' hands overhead like a punk mosh pit, and thrown into the long, horizontal, sheet-metal piss trough. Goal!

Also, in 1972, a group of us founded San Francisco's first uniform club, the Pacific Drill Patrol (PDP). One night, walking on Folsom to a bar, we were stopped by a SFPD captain who wanted to know what was with the uniforms and boots. When we explained, he said, "I wish my officers were turned out the way you are."

So, I guess, overall, I was associated with bars like the No Name, which became the Brig (owned by my longtime friend Hank Diethelm until his S&M murder), before it became the Powerhouse. I also liked the wonderful Ambush bar, and the Lone Star bar which together birthed bear culture.

My two favorite night joints on Folsom Street in the 1970s were the Barracks baths, with its Red Star Saloon, and the Slot Hotel. In that Golden Age of Folsom, our gang orgied at both sexpits a couple nights a week. Maybe I should put a brass plate on the Slot's Room 326 where you could find me twice a week and every New Year's Eve. All during the Titanic 1970s, we knew the wild wonderful party could not last. So we lived every night of it as if it were our last perfect night on Earth. For many of us, it was. Not because of Leather sex, but because of a virus. Leather and BDSM should never be blamed for causing AIDS.



#### **4. Tell us about your charity involvement and goals.**

On a civil rights level of racial equality, I began charity and social work in Chicago in 1962 and 1963 while working as a community organizer, tutored by the legendary community organizer Saul Alinsky, in the African-American neighborhood at 63<sup>rd</sup> and Cottage Grove, the same neighborhood Barack Obama worked as an organizer twenty-five years later. That evolved into political work in the Peace Movement in the 1960s, and my lending my faculty support to the first women's liberation events emerging on my university campus in the 1960s.

Since 1995, as a Leather-community service, I have dedicated my work and income to hosting thousands of fact-checked pages of Leather history information at my dual research site, <http://www.DrummerArchives.com> (<http://www.DrummerArchives.com>)

To give free access to all everywhere, I have posted the complete texts of nearly all my books so that no person in the Leather community has to spend a penny to search out our history. Because the Leather world has been so wonderful to me, I give all my Leather writing away free, hopefully to pay it forward, as well as pay it back to those late, great ones who themselves paid it forward supporting me.

Like everyone else, I support various charities and causes, from the political, such as the NAACP and ACLU, to various Leather contests and AIDS support, because so many among our brothers and sisters have suffered so much from discrimination and disease, and we must help our own. There is the Golden Rule of Leather.

#### **5. How would you say has the Leather community changed since the days of the *Drummer* magazine, and also with the use of the internet?**

Always changing toward wider diversity, the Leather community is like a college campus. In the 1980s, Leather discussion groups first appeared and broke the silence of those outlaw years of the mid-twentieth century. All that talk, suddenly, in the formerly quiet cloisters of Leather, changed the community drastically because HIV and gender politics changed everything. We had to talk, just like Hollywood silent actors had to speak when talkies arrived and changed everything.

On the surface, the Leather population and the Leather look changes approximately every four years. You can see twenty-four years of changes in the articles, pictures, and drawings in *Drummer* from its first issue in 1975 to its last issue in 1999.

At a four-year college, the freshmen don't know yet what's going on. The seniors are fixated on graduation and don't care anymore what's going on. That leaves the sophomores and juniors as the core group setting the tone of identity, values, activism, fashion, and lifestyle. I've shot documentary videos of the Folsom Fair since the first fair in 1984, and in that footage, you can see the evolution of the Leather Look.

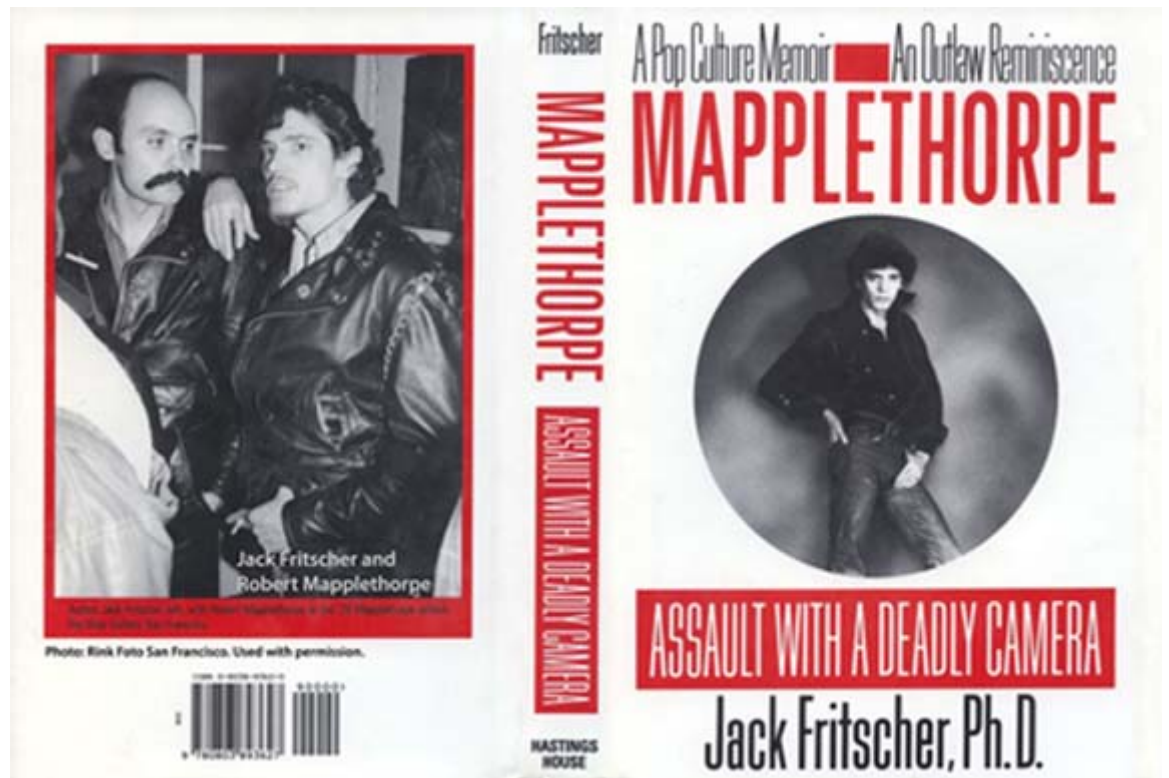
Before 1972, no one came out, for instance, to fuck a "Leather clone" because that identity did not happen until that year. Just so did other fetish categories emerge in *Drummer* and find their niche, such as cigars in 1978, daddies in 1979, and bears in 1984.

Folsom Fair is the measure of Leather evolution. Folsom Fair is Leather's Fashion Week. The street is its runway. There you can see how the new crop of twenty-somethings are diversifying themselves from the graduating forty-somethings.

And, when you get home after the Folsom Fair, that's the time to go JPG-ing on the Internet to see the greatest diversity of sexual tastes in the history of the world. With the growing popularity of 3D TV cameras, Folsom Fair Leather will soon be streaming almost as really on the screen as it is in the actual street. Which is good for seventy-somethings like me.

## 6. Who is the most influential person in your life and why?

After the inspiring John F. Kennedy for whom I had the privilege of voting, there is only my partner and spouse of thirty-five years, Mark Hemry, who is a fully realized human, a fully realized man, a fully accomplished artist, and the soul of my writing on both the personal and the professional levels. Not for nothing was he as a lad a well decorated Eagle Scout! He is so fine that if I weren't born gay, I would have gone gay to bond with him.



I'm lucky that during a peace demonstration the night after the White Night Riot burnt up twelve cop cars at City Hall, we cruised and met for the first time under the marquee of the Castro Theater, May 22, 1979, and have been inseparable lovers ever since. It was a street celebration of Harvey Milk's first birthday after his murder. Mark Hemry, the founding owner of Palm Drive Publishing, is one of the best Leather archivists and Internet gurus on the planet. "Palm Drive" is not a street address; it's what the reader does with his hand to himself.

## 7. In your mind, what's the biggest misconception of the Leather community?

The biggest misconception about the Leather community? It's the same misconception about the gay community. There is one. (Insert ironic "Smiley Face" here.) Different genders and different fetishists have different ideas. There's a Leather community *here*. A Leather community *there*. But a *united* Leather community? A *united* gay community? Not as long as there are revealing examples of LGBT disunity such as the group "One in Nine" that literally stopped the 2012 Johannesburg Pride Parade in its tracks to push its feminist and racial ideals.

I have witnessed since 1975, from the thousands of *Drummer* subscribers, that most Leather folk, living in a worldwide diaspora, never go to a real-time contest or conference or a parade, although they may follow the blogs, books, posts, and pictures of those of us who do.

Leather is like Protestantism: many sects, many schisms, many traditions, many variations on a theme. We, like America itself, are perhaps still divided by issues of sex, race, and gender, and we need to try to bridge those divides. What joyous Leather bonding existed during the 1960s and 1970s was destroyed by the hateful Marxist separatists who hijacked gay culture in the early 1980s turning the joy of gay liberation and leather Liberation into the curse of political correctness.

Even so, the Leather community is at its best a cool idea and ideal. Its founding unity was first realized as a whole in the pages of *Drummer* itself because *Drummer* was the "Leather people's magazine." *Drummer* helped create the very Leather culture and Leather community it reported on.

This is not to say that there are not lovely Leather communities worldwide made up of fabulous Leatherfolk in this town or that, around this bar or that, or around this dungeon or that, or this contest or that. But often those disparate Leather communities, especially the ones centered on contests or events like IML and Folsom Fair, are tent cities popped up for the occasion. They exist only in one place at one time. From these events, Leatherfolk take home a larger sense of bonded community. There's a kind of sharp beauty in that.

Spreading the Leather Love, a fully realized Leather community, in addition to funding AIDS charities, and raising money for this historical society and that, might funnel some of those astonishingly huge piles of donated cash to fund vocational training scholarships or college scholarships for young Leatherfolk, so many of whom today live as unemployables in the real world because they lack our real-time encouragement, our real-time mentoring, and our real-time funding.

Oftentimes, Leather elders play the part of real dads and real moms, standing "in loco parentis" for young Leatherfolk abandoned by their own families. A community that truly exists takes care of its own, especially its young. Besides employment and housing and education, the greatest current challenge to the Leather community, it seems, is healthcare and eldercare. Where do Leatherfolk retire?

## 8. What would you say are the most important strengths to have as a Leather man?

Each Leatherman has his own personal and cultural values. Like all of us, probably, I'm still working on Plato's advice: Know thyself. I'm a humanist who happens to be a Leatherman. Until the day I know myself, whatever else I know counts for little. What I know so far? Just some thoughts while polishing my Leather. Staying fit physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, sexually, and financially. Life is serious business. Know your limits. Live with empathy and love. Learn your path. Know your strengths. Find your own validation. Learn love.

The word “virtue” comes from the Latin word meaning “man, a male.” But applies in modern times to all genders. Without humanist virtues, BDSM pleasures practiced by some Leathermen may be no more than cruel tortures practiced by sick sadists. (Know which one thou art.) You don’t whip guys because you’re mad at your father. “The greatest treason,” T. S. Eliot wrote, “is to do the right thing for the wrong reason.”

We’ve all seen that twisted dynamic, once or twice, late at night, when at play parties in dungeons. A Leather top accidentally reveals he may be mental; or a masochist bottom reveals to your intuition that he is really suicidal. In my world, in both cases: end of scene! Monitoring the psychological difference in one’s self may be the greatest strength in keeping our Leather motives pure.

## 9. You have won numerous awards! Which one, if you can tell us, is your favorite and why?

During World War II in 1942, I won a Cutest Baby in Peoria contest which my Irish mother may have fixed. The prize was a few extra ration stamps so my family could buy meat and vegetables that were in short supply during that long emergency. Even if you were rich, which we were not, cash could not buy food during the war unless you had enough ration stamps. In 1957, I won my high school’s award for “The Boy Most Likely.” They didn’t dare say likely to do what.

In 2009, the National Leather Association granted me two

awards: “Best Nonfiction Book” for *Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer* and for Best Feature Article “Spill a Drop for Lost Brothers: The Obituary of Larry Townsend,” which was published by Rick Storer in the *Leather Times* journal of the Leather Archives & Museum in Chicago.

Meaningful also was the award “Best Gay and Lesbian Book” for *Some Dance to Remember: A Memoir-Novel of San Francisco 1970-1982*. And the award for “Storyteller of the Year” for my novel *What They Did to the Kid: Confessions of an Altar Boy*, which is the pre-quel to the Leather themed *Some Dance*. And, of course, from Dave Rhodes, a little Pantheon of Leather Award!

My favorite award? A couple years ago, a certain academic who is a popular personality on the Leather speaker circuit sent me the nicest letter, awarding me the title “Mr *Drummer*,” not because of peccs and pecker, but because I put my heart and my soul into establishing *Drummer* magazine as the bible of the Leather community. That’s where my Leather identity abides forever. *Drummer* and its legacy are award enough. The letters and emails I get to this day from grateful guys who came out on *Drummer* when they were teenagers in Pudfuck, Iowa, are the best award of all. My work helped kickstart their Leather lives.

## 10. What do you see for the future of Leather in your community and internationally?

Gazing into my crystal balls, I’d say who knows the future of anything without some knowledge of its past? This may be shocking, but Leatherfolk in the 1970s seemed healthier than Leatherfolk now. In the future of the Leather community, Leatherfolk’s health and safety and longevity might be attended to with, say, a “Leather Healthy Living Initiative,” to see to our lifestyle choices, our health care, and our elder care. The Leather Generation of the healthy 1970s was blind-sided by the 1980s HIV virus no one knew was there, and many, all too many, of my generation died, one after the other, day after day.





Minus that stratum of pioneer Leather elders as examples who never lived to be examples, today's young and middle-aged Leather boomers are going to, suddenly, be the first big wave of Leather elders.



If we are a humanist Leather community, and not just a pop-up series of contests and bars, we might think about getting our act together if we are sincere in our announcements that we are a Leather family acting out the duties that families do. With all our whipping workshops, let's whip our act into shape. After the tragedy of HIV, let's try to make all self-inflicted illness part of our past, and health a part of our future.

Old School Leather has evolved into the sensibilities of 21<sup>st</sup>-century Leather the way that 1950s-1960s Leather changed during the first decade of gay lib after Stonewall.

Leather came out loud and hard in the Titanic 1970s when the first-class party-goers cruised on innocent of the iceberg of HIV that lay ahead.

What was once the stomping ground of outlaw males cruising solo is now an omni-gendered community. In an age of social media tweeting everything, Leather might think again about any excessive "Mother May I" mentality that can flatten Leather into a kumbaya circle of control freaks deciding what kind of BDSM permits you have to apply for to practice kink.

Here's a thought for discussion: Ain't it ironic that Leatherfolk generally reject organized religion, yet some then use that very model to set up protocols that, if you don't follow them as commandments, you are some kind of Leather heretic?

In the late 1980s, publisher Tony DeBlase, forsaking Leather fantasy, went this Leather-and-how-to-do-it-properly instruction route in *Drummer*, and confessed that the politically correct tactic nearly drove the magazine out of business. Subscribers did not like, and found fault with, the sheepish kind of "consensus" that sits there without giggling ironically while some expert teaches there is a certain right way "to do" Leather or "to be" Leather. Leather practice is an art. There is no "correct" way to snap a whip. Or wear your Leather. Collar that boy the way you fuckin' want. There is only the evolving art and style of your way.

If a guy has to ask a group for permission, he's not a Leather essentialist who champions Leather individualism. Whether Old Guard or New Guard, Leather, past and present and future, is the *avant garde* of being gay, which is why the vanilla gay mainstream, led by the bourgeois magazine, *The Advocate*, has traditionally hated Leather culture. Leather needs edginess. Without edge, Leather sucks. With edge, Leather leads.

Now and in the future, without a grounded daytime life, Leatherfolk can inflict self-harm, more by omission than commission, when it comes to self-care which is necessary to sustain a Leather person and a Leather community. There's also a caveat that a certain clinical, and not fun, masochism may keep folks chasing a Leather life from living a fully human life. We are all clever enough to be *avant garde*, and clever enough, like it or not, to partake of the benefits of the American mainstream. I am concerned for the future of health in the Leather community.

Here's an irony: Leatherfolk in the 1970s were pro-actively healthier in general than Leatherfolk in the 1980s. And not because of HIV. No offense meant, but my longtime friend, *Drummer* owner Tony DeBlase, who set himself up as a model Leather guru for readers and for workshops, died too young. I respect his choices, but, frankly, he admitted he knew he was jolly-well eating himself to death, smoking cigars as a "daily habit" when *Drummer* itself recommended cigars for "occasional use" in scenes.

BDSM implies discipline not only in scene, but in our Leather lives. I am not my brothers' or sisters' disciplinarian. Nor anyone's judge. Everyone must do what they think best. But is it just too bourgeois for Leather survivalists to try "making it" in mainstream America?

I mean, don't assimilate and disappear. But, after you've spent a thousand dollars on a spiky new harness at a corporately owned Leather shop, why bridle at the concept of the personal discipline of making your way, paying your way, getting an education, buying a house, having health insurance, eating right, getting your legal paperwork together to protect your goods and your health and your partner, practicing first-world hygiene, and then going out to play as hard as you want?

In balance, a person needs to be aware of his or her age and context, and how, as one grows older, the context must widen from the bars and dungeons and contests so you can realistically take care of yourself. Tennessee Williams said, "You can be young without money, but you can't be old without money." (He didn't mean lots of money. Just some.)

Despite the class-enmity of separatist Marxist feminists and the divisive conservatism of politically-correct fundamentalist gays who never stop trying to colonize both male homosexuality and Leather, a career or a day job can support our Leather lives whether we like the mainstream or not. Leather life is part of a real life. For instance, our horizon cannot be the rooftops of Folsom Street, the hills of the Castro, or the end of Christopher Street, or the sunset over WeHo, or the palms of South Beach.

Truman Capote had Holly Golightly remind us in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, "There's such a lot of world to see." New Century Leatherfolk may need to break some of the bad habits of Old School Leathermen and then come to grips with the recognition that we live, for our own good, in a broader culture—just to do banking, and get our annual physicals. We might appeal to our better Leather angels. My wish for Leather people is that we players take care of ourselves, our bodies, our lives. I hope as Leatherfolk begin to assess Leather identity in the challenging new world we live in, we all get to move to better seats.

## 11. What piece of Gay History should we never forget and teach the younger generation?



Teach *Drummer*. Know it lasted from 1975-1999. See in its thousands of evolving pages how *Drummer* itself reached way back into Leather history, way before Stonewall, and taught Leatherfolk who and how we were to influence the way we wanted to move forward. With all its feature articles, short stories, poems, plays, photographs, drawings, and revealing personals ads, *Drummer* is the best textbook yet for the study of our Leather origin story. *Drummer* contains multitudes.

No Leather historian, honestly, can write Leather history without researching all the internal evidence about the people, places, events, and sex mysteries contained in *Drummer*. That magazine is a queer theorist's dream and a fact-checker's wet dream. And it will still be so in 2075, the hundredth anniversary of the founding of *Drummer*.

This is my mantra: *Drummer* was the first draft of Leather history.

## 12. What advice can you give for future writers?

Hmmm. Don't quit your day job. You'll starve. Can I say here what I would tell my students when for many years I taught journalism and creative writing at university? Writing is not typing. Just because your printer can format your laptop text to look like a published page, doesn't mean it's writing. Take some college writing courses, or some kind of principled writing seminar. Be wary of writing groups often so fearful of offending participants that, lacking positive criticism, are

little more than circle jerks. If you feel you are a natural writer, and you don't want your voice to be disturbed by even a junior-college course, rethink that idea. Can any writer just type out masturbatory fantasies and call it writing? Erotic writing is not easy. Writing is erotic when it causes the reader to cum.

If you are already good at what you write, formal education in what you do can perfect your instinct, can perfect your voice.

If schooling is not possible, try an exercise like this to learn how a literary short story is structured with style, character, plot, and dialogue. Read a dozen stories by Ernest Hemingway, or a dozen by Annie Proulx, or John Updike, or Ann Beattie, or Woody Allen, or your favorite author, and then try to write your own "Hemingway" story.

You won't be able to because not even "Hemingway" can override your instincts. But doing pushup exercises in the "Hemingway" voice and style will strengthen your own voice and style. No one does pushups for their own sake. You do pushups to strengthen your whole body, your whole manuscript.

Finally, edit, rewrite, edit, rewrite, edit, polish, and polish, and polish that prose before you format it and print it out. Ultimately, to find if your prose works, read it out loud to yourself or to a friend. Where your eye and voice stumble is where you need to go back and rewrite. Then you're done.

### 13. Tell us what your favorite piece of Leather is and why?

My chaps because they fit and form and enhance the male stance; they present the cock and balls for show, and frame the butt. Chaps are a basic Leather fetish sourced in the practicality of cowboys and bikers. Add boots and a cock ring. Shirt and vest. Good to go. Oh, and tit clamps! Like bondage, tit pleasure is an almost universal guilty pleasure. In my own life, whenever I wanted to seduce some guy out of my league, I'd just grab his nipples and down he'd go. That's the concept behind my signature Leather novel, *Leather Blues*.

### 14. What's the funniest thing that happened to you while writing or taking pictures for The *Drummer* Magazines?



We had great times in the *Drummer* Salon hosting suppers with Robert Mapplethorpe, Tom of Finland, Lou Thomas, Etienne, Oscar-streaker and *Drummer* writer Robert Opel, and Sam Steward who was Leather author "Phil Andros."

One of the simultaneously most comical and most tragic things was the constant fighting that went on between the nasty publisher John Embry and the imperial Leather author Larry Townsend who were life-long frenemies since the days when they had camped out as rival Leather queens in 1950s cocktail bars in

los angeles, before the invention of Leather bars. Over my thirty years eyewitnessing them, it was a howl to watch them go at each other because they both needed *Drummer* mail order: Embry to sell poppers, which was his main reason for starting *Drummer*, and Townsend to sell his books. They did gay business instead of real business, and it hurt them both.

Personally fun and funny? To me? Because the bondage model did not show up for the shoot my partner, photographer David Sparrow, and I were doing for my feature article "Mondo Bondage" in *Drummer* 24 (September 1978), I had to tell the rope top to tie me up, and hoist me high and blow me, to act out the scenario I had planned to direct not star in. (David was not fond of bondage; so I had to suffer for my art!) It was funny because while it was a sexy afternoon, I had to keep my focus as editor to make sure the frames turned out right for the interior photo-spread layout I had in mind.

### **15. In your own words, can you tell us the difference between BDSM and Leather?**

One is not the other. Yet neither is mutually exclusive. You can be into Leather and not into BDSM, and vice versa. Leather is a specific fetish: literal cowhide as metaphor or symbol of sensuality and sexuality. BDSM is a series of practices.

### **16. What are your favorite hanky colors you flag?**

Like a sailor, I'm totally into the semaphore of hanky signaling! In fact, I published the first lesbian hanky code list from Pat Califia's and Gayle Rubin's BDSM group "Samois" in *Drummer* 31 in 1979. I don't drop my hanky for just any guy, but I do find it amusing in a bar when a Leather dude, desperate as a rodeo clown, pulls a rope of twenty different hankies tied end to end out of the sleeve of his Leather jacket hoping one will seduce the hot guy he's cruising. I'm into anything but a white flag of surrender!

### **17. What's your favorite dish, and create a dish that represents the leather community, what would it consist of and called?**

My favorite dish is raw blond bodybuilder, uncut, olive-oiled, served en brochette on my cock, with a side salad drizzled with sweat. My recipe for a Leather community covered-dish supper would be called "stew," cooked in a melting pot. It would be a "heterogeneous stew" because "heterogeneous" means "inclusive" and the word "stew" means, besides "food," a "brothel" or "bathhouse of sex" as well as a state of "heat" or "excitement." "He's so horny, he's in a stew at the stew eating stew." Oh, and a side dish of dumplings—don't ask!—optional.

### **18. I have visited San Francisco before, when I visit again, what 5 places would you show me and why?**

Starting with number 5, I'd drive you to the abandoned WWII bunkers on the Marin Headlands on the northwest side of the Golden Gate Bridge. That's where I drove Robert Mapplethorpe and models to shoot his famous piss in the bunker shots.

The four other places in the countdown:

Number 4. The Slot Hotel which is still standing, no longer a shrine, but a flop house at 979 Folsom Street.

Number 3. The store at 1287 Howard Street which my pal Oscar Streaker Robert Opel opened in 1978 as Fey-Way Studio, the first gay art gallery in San Francisco, showing Leather artists like Rex, the Hun, A. Jay, Bill Ward, Tom of Finland, and Mapplethorpe—and where Opel was murdered in July 1979.

Number 2. My house on 25<sup>th</sup> Street and Douglass, the domestic home of the *Drummer* Salon, where I wrote much of *Drummer*, and most of my Leathery novel, *Some Dance to Remember*. Not because of me, but because I was editor in chief of *Drummer* and liked entertaining in my dining room and my dungeon, sooner or later nearly everyone who was anyone in leather, passed through my place where lots of historical Leather action, Leather art, and Leather community connected.

And Number 1. Tiffany's. For breakfast. After our night together!

### **19. In conclusion, anything you would like to add to this interview for the Leather community of South Africa?**

One summer, some years ago, when Mark Hemry and I were living in Ireland, we collected and published the first anthology of gay Irish erotic fiction titled *Chasing Danny Boy: Powerful Stories of Celtic Eros*. It would be grand if the current generation of South African Leatherfolk might work together to gather your specific Leather stories into

anthologies such as did the more general anthology, *The Invisible Ghetto: Lesbian & Gay Writing from South Africa*. I'd volunteer to help produce that.



In my lifelong awareness of your country, this boy from Peoria in Illinois grew up fantasizing about Pretoria in South Africa. Someday I'd like to fly into Pretoria, Johannesburg, or Cape Town, and have you show me your five significant places! (Show me on the doll.)

And, if I understand this correctly, I have heard that in South Africa, which has had gay marriage since 2006, there is a national custom of periodically donating "sixty-seven minutes" of public service to mark the sixty-seven years of Nelson Mandela's public service. That is admirable, and could transfer to the international Leather community of regular folk everywhere. Of course, we'd have to make it "69" minutes!

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