

Love for Sale in One Paragraph and Five Photos...

REDNECK BIKER

Meditation

“Eat Shit and Die, Motherfucker!”

“*Drummer* inadvertently omitted the credits from “Redneck Biker” which appeared in the last issue, *Drummer* 23. Robert Opel was the photographer and Jack Fritscher, the author. Apologies to both”—*Drummer* 24, September 1978, page 69

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Written May 7, 1978, and published in *Drummer* 23, July 1978, to accompany five photographs given to me by photographer, Robert Opel, who, most famously, was the man who streaked David Niven and Elizabeth Taylor at the 1974 Academy Awards. In *Drummer* 22, I had copy-edited a wonderful interview that Robert Opel had conducted with Tom of Finland. Opel’s presence was everywhere, both in Los Angeles, and in San Francisco, where, following the White Night Riots, and a drug deal gone bad, Opel was murdered in his gallery at 1287 Howard Street. I have written about Opel and his Muse, Camille O’Grady, in *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera*. In July 2001, I produced for Gay Rosenthal Productions, Los Angeles, a segment on Robert Opel, for the TV network TNN, and its program *Fame for Fifteen*. In the spring of 2001, former Advocate editor, and major gay writer, Mark Thompson, had come to interview me on tape regarding Robert Opel for a biography of Opel that Thompson was writing. Assessing that TNN was more legit than predatory, I thought it a perfect fit to introduce to TNN Mark Thompson’s journalistic investigations of Opel, the ’70s, and his murder. Mark Thompson, as well as Durk Dehner, whom I had recommended because of Durk Dehner’s long-time connection to Tom of Finland, and the Tom of Finland Foundation, both contributed much to that TV program which I initially endorsed because I will do almost anything to keep gay culture and its people from falling through the cracks of history.

Robert Opel and all of us in that arts circle that moved about—way down South of Market—had a great time spinning the helix of *Drummer* magazine and Opel's Fey Way Gallery, which opened March 1979, a full ten months after this "Redneck Biker" collaboration of his photos and my words. Art followed sex South of Market, long before that area was termed "SOMA." *Drummer* moved its offices down South of Market in 1980. Anyway, that group of us South of Market crossed over at night from the Algonquin group of us who hung out daily at the Castro Café, three doors up from the Star Pharmacy on the west side of Castro Street. The centrifugal force of that circle was the art, writing, photography, and sex that became a large heavy-leather chunk of the liberated energy in San Francisco. There is as much drama in that creative group in that creative time, doomed as most of them were, as there is in Christopher Hampton's play and film *Total Eclipse* which dramatizes the affair between Rimbaud and Verlaine whose presences were archetypes hung over the 70s in ways that the sensitive among us, such as Robert Mapplethorpe, invoked as demon brothers. Mapplethorpe's photographs of the 70's and 80's were harvested, in fact, for an edition of Rimbaud's *A Season in Hell*. The edition, translated by Paul Schmidt, featured not only eight Mapplethorpe photographs inside, but dramatically featured Mapplethorpe himself on the cover, in a self-portrait as a horned satyr, which of course equated him with Rimbaud. On the cover are only three equal lines: *A Season in Hell*. Rimbaud. Mapplethorpe. Just as underground filmmaker, Kenneth Anger, had filmed *Invocations of My Demon Brother*, this invocation on the Rimbaud cover typifies part of the Dark Oversoul of the Titanic 70's. In fact, Anger's *Invocations* was edited in 1969 from *Lucifer Rising*, the negative of which had been buried in Death Valley by the handsome bad boy Bobby Beausoleil (who received life imprisonment as part of the Manson family), and then hidden, so Sam Steward told me in 1972, in Sam Steward's house in Berkeley. Mick Jagger helped see *Invocation* to completion, as did founding San Francisco High Priest of the Church of Satan, Anton LaVey, whom I interviewed in my 1972 nonfiction book, *Popular Witchcraft*. But, omigod,

I'm carried away by the six degrees of separation. On this topic, I might make mention of this Dark Oversoul behind gay lib was triggered by something no one else has ever mentioned. I once connected the dots between masculine gay lib and the June 1964 issue of Life Magazine, and now everyone points to that.

Connecting the dots here, I remember something more startling at the time than Stonewall or the death of Judy Garland. On August 9, 1969, the Manson Family murdered Sharon Tate and several others. The American media went nuts. I was already working on my witchcraft book, and the abrupt change in American consciousness caught me mid-breath. Before August 9, when I mentioned "witches," people laughed and thought of crones on Hallmark cards. After August 9, people booked me on the lecture circuit. I remember August 9, 1969, so well: on that night, driving to a faculty dinner party, with two students in my car, my Volkswagen bug was rammed from the rear by a huge Checker car. The car was destroyed and all three of us were hospitalized.

In fact, in a personal time line, 1969 was an epic year that gave me much to take into editing, writing, and conceptualizing *Drummer*. In 1969, I had been for two years a twenty-something associate professor teaching English on a university campus, and staging anti-war happenings, while serving on the board of directors of an art center, managing its underground film program, featuring Andy Warhol, the Kuchar Brothers, and Maya Deren; I wrote a scholarly article on William Bradford for the Bucknell Review, and I signed a contract for my nonfiction book, *Popular Witchcraft*, and began my research; from January through April, I wrote my second novel, *Leather Blues*; also in January, during one of many return engagements to the Everard (not spelled Everhard) baths in New York, I saw the culture-shifting anti-war musical *Hair* at the Biltmore Theater, and wrote a review published in the *Journal of Popular Culture*; on March 15, I met Blaine Cunningham in Chicago, smoked my first joint, began my first serious affairette, and attended a Janis Joplin concert with Big Brother and the Holding Company; on May 1, I flew to Europe, and while residing at the Argos leather hotel in Amsterdam got

caught up romantically in a revolutionary take-over of a university in Amsterdam, and subsequently stayed for a week in the London home of the legendary Felix Jones, whom I used as a model in my novella *Titanic*; that same May, on Memorial Day weekend, I flew to Denver, climbed on a Harley Davidson with leather priest, Jim Kane with whom I had an ongoing relationship (that included writing for his Catholic diocesan newspaper of which he was the editor in Colorado Springs) and lasted well into my tenure as *Drummer* editor, and with him, while riding the Harley's, met a very young Jim Ward who, sporting the first nipple ring I'd ever seen, became the master piercer and owner of The Gauntlet; with Jim Kane we rode our Harley's down to Taos and Santa Fe where I floated in a swimming pool wearing Ken Kesey's leather jacket; on June 3, I telephoned my frequent fuck and longtime friend art critic Mario Amaya, because it was the first anniversary of the day the year before when Valerie Solanas had shot both him and Andy Warhol at the Factory; in Chicago, in June, for the world-famous gay celebration of 6/9/69, not only was there Stonewall (which no one noticed) and the death of Judy Garland (which people did notice), but there was my thirtieth birthday at a time when you couldn't trust anyone over thirty; on July 4, I met the leather artist Dom Orejudos; on July 5, in the Gold Coast bar I met the dropdead gorgeous 24-year-old David Sparrow who instantly became my lover for ten tumultuous years; in August, I thought I was dead in that slow-motion moment in the middle of a violent accident on the same night as the Manson murders; this was also the year that brought great news to masturbators and actually created the climate that allowed mags like *Drummer* to exist when the news broke that the US Government allowed the mailing and publication of male frontal nudity, a fight driven by Chuck Renslow out of Chicago and Bob Mizer out of Los Angeles; in September, through Jim Kane, I began in Manhattan a three-year on-going affair with the classic S&M player Don Morrison, as well as a five-year on-going liaison with leather photographer and S&M player Lou Thomas who was just then separating from Colt Studio to become Target Studio; that autumn that brought the 60s to a close opened

up the 70s to complete and total gay liberation, which, like life itself, was already up to speed on the New Year's Eve when 1969 became 1970 in the Gold Coast bar.

The point of this detail is that the Manson Family on August 9, 1969, coupled with the totally different stream of satanic consciousness with the immensely charming Anton LaVey in San Francisco, set up the “dark side of sexuality” that infused so much of the leather sex that appeared rather benignly in *Drummer* magazine. I could have written much darker articles and stories than I did. Check out how dark is the narrative in *Leather Blues* which is a picaresque novel that travels from innocence to sexual awakening to severe torture and S&M. *Drummer* never could go that far because of censorship, but gay culture—particularly leather culture—actually did go far more deeply into the demonic than most observers will ever own up to for fear of accusations that they themselves are demonic wiccans. I've never confused my role as journalist, even as gonzo journalist, with actually being part of what I am observing. I am not a part of all that I have met.

Anyway, I wrote this piece, “Redneck Biker,” by inhabiting Opel's photographs, jerking off to the images, so I could find and articulate a voice for the biker in the shots. *Erotica* was finding a new, distinct voice in the 70s. I wanted to integrate images and words, and also reflect in Opel's photographs the emerging theme of tough young leathermen, who like David Hurles' Old Reliable men, seemed to live in the streets of the '70's. During that decade, continuing from the '60s, the “street” played a huge part in gay life, I thought, in the same way that the “street” emerged as a character in paintings by the “history painter” William Hogarth (1697-1764). Sometimes, stoned, in fact, I thought 18th and Castro *was* a Hogarth painting where innocents were so willingly corrupted! But then, the “street” has always been a “character” as much as a “setting” in the history of sex—in the same way that “prison” is both an erotic “setting” and veritable “character” in sexuality. The “street” is where “Love Is for Sale,” where Lili Marlene leans against a lamp post, where men cruise reflections in store windows. I tried to elicit that sense of “street” in *Some Dance to Remember* with

depictions of real life on 18th and Castro; I worked with “prison” in the same way in the feature article, “Prison Blues,” *Drummer* 21, March 1978. Those are all literary devices of art, but it may be of interest to fans of *Drummer* to know what were some bits of the history of art that were driving the magazine.

Six months after I published this photo in *Drummer* 23, July 1978, Robert Opel himself wrote about this particular biker photograph when Efrén Ramirez included him in the profile, “On Gay Photography,” in *The Alternate*, Volume 2 #8, January 1979, six months before Opel was shot to death, July 1979. “I am Robert Opel. I am an artist, a cocksucker, and an anarchist. My life is my art. Sometimes I use a camera. The images I record are diverse, but I especially like to photograph men. Sometimes I have trouble disseminating images I record because people seem to be frightened of sexual imagery. But I persist. Eventually, I believe, I will receive wider attention and acclaim. What makes me different from some other people is that I like to fuck with other men. I believe everyone is different from everyone else. Some of us have different sexual preferences. Men like myself have been feared and persecuted because of our sexual preference. I want to be able to explore my sexuality without fear of reprisals. When people are accepted for who they are and appreciated for their differences, not persecuted for them, the entire society will be enormously culturally enriched. Efrén Ramirez asked me to give him one of my photographs. This is a portrait of a man that I shot in Los Angeles about three years ago. It is originally executed in color. It is titled. ‘You Can Do It Better on a Harley.’”

Opel is correct to lament the reproduction. My observation is that much of gay photography has never really been accurately published, because gay magazines nearly always publish color photography in black-and-white. Even photographs shot in black-and-white lack true fidelity because gay magazines’ low-budget reproduction budgets make the line screen on cheap paper look like Rohrshach ink blots. My own photographs in the British book, *Jack Fritscher’s American Men*, published in black-and-white, in no way approach the intent of the originals. In a sense, all gay photography

that has appeared in magazines needs to be republished true to its original format, so it can fully be appreciated, which is why the internet has become such a crisp gallery of high-fidelity gay images seen in their true glory. —Jack Fritscher, Summer Solstice, June 21, 2002

“Us bike bums are a breed a fuck part, man. Your garden-variety station wagons try runnin’ us off the road. We be just snortin’ on down that long white line. Pigs barrel out to hassle us. When we hit a burg, the asskissin’ citizens lock up their virgins. Ain’t no fuckers fuckin’ like us in the old USA these days. Shit. Usta be all kindsa hippies, crazies, and freaks streakin’ ‘round. All gone. Us bikers is the only freebies left, man. Hell, them Hollywood dudes don’t make no more movies about us for the fuckin’, are you ready, drive-in. No more a them Fonda-Sinatra [Peter and Nancy biker movies] hypes ‘bout us scoot bums “ridin’ straight outta hell with two thousand pounds a hot steel jammin’ between our legs.” Shit. Now we’re just bike tramps on two wheel putts, man. No job. No taxes. No hassles. Some fuckers got come-on crap like come-up-n-see-my-etchings on their wall. Shit. I got me some pictures-to-go. You know what all these tattoos mean? I never crap twice in the same place. I move. I like grease, leather, sweat, piss. I like kickin’ down my hog. I even like a nice pretty little mama—after she’s been passed around a bit among my bros. I like slickin’ it on in where my bros already laid down some wet tread. I like gettin’ my beard down in it, you know? And, man, cranked up enough, with enough a whatever’s shootin’ ‘round, hell, man, I ain’t gonna think twice ‘bout punkin’ up a bit a good bro’s ass. Shit, putt bums ain’t afraid to kiss on the mouth. Fuckin’ two-faced fags’ll only do it in the dark, man, not out on the corner a some Main Street with all them good citizens watchin’. Shit. Layin’ out a good show’s half a what a bike tramp is. Ain’t no fuckers’ outrageous and free as us no way. Other half’s so laid back and private, man, you ain’t never gonna know how dirty and crazy we can get. You only seein’ the

tip a the ol' iceberg. You all frozen out from the rest. Ain't never washed my skins. Toss my socks away every two, three months. Piss down my leg. Piss on my bros' colors. See this overlay, man? Full a piss and I'd die for it. Fart out my friggin' butt. Try wipin' that number up out on the road! Scootscum's the only freebies left. You fuckers know it. That's why you always sniffin' 'round. You always lookin' sideways cruisin' our action. Shit. You can lick my belly, and tongue my hole, and eat my pits anytime I feel like it. You all just gotta get me or me with a couple a my bros, cranked up high enough to let you go down on some fuckin' filthy genuine grease. Shit. Fuck. Just touchin' this ol' hog, squeezin' that tank between my legs. Hot bouncin' ass. You like it, fucker? What you gonna do for it? How low you gonna go for it? You remember you just might meet the right bros, and get what you been lookin' for. And then some. This one dude kept beggin me for "Angel Meat." He kept beggin' me for "Angel Ass." Fuckin' Angels, man. I respect 'em. Most of us bros are just bike tramps. Just trampy enough to make you clean your plate, eat it all, lick it all up, and fuckin' laugh at your dirty mouth. Take my bird and sit on it. Fuck you, motherfucker."

Photos shot by Robert Opel who streaked the Academy Awards.

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