

Leather Christmas 1977

Written Christmas 1973, this feature essay was published in *Drummer* 19, December 1977.

- I. Author's Eyewitness Historical-Context Introduction written March 11, 2002
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I. Author's Eyewitness Historical-Context Introduction written March 11, 2002

In this nonfiction article, "Leather Christmas," for the benefit of historians who tally up lists, I introduced several "firsts": the first use in *Drummer* of the high-concept homomasculine phrase "man to man"; the first use of my portmanteau word: *perversatile*; the first mention of women in S&M scenes; the first gonzo report on sex written in, and reported "live" from, a gay bath, specifically, the spectacular Folsom Street Barracks at 1147 Folsom with entrance on Hallam Street; the first of my many sexual-identity word plays on Descartes' "Cogito; Ergo Sum"; as well as first use of two of my early 1970s theoretical concepts of leather S&M defined as "Sensuality" and "Mutuality," and of leather S&M as "a second coming out." *Drummer* contributor, psychologist Guy Baldwin, later picked up on my "second coming out" and theorized further about my concept; for this I thank him because not all leatherfolk bother to credit the source of their information. In this article, I also began introduction of the popular culture of movies into reportage and analysis of queer sex, including the primitivism of the Sun Dance ritual and BDSM. As glossary, the terms "lude" and "714" refer to the drug, Quaalude.

"Leather Christmas" with its irony, neologisms, and flaming Levi's is the first gay postmodern leather-sex article. Or perhaps it's a Duchamp parody. (What is more Cubist than a hand descending a cock—jerk-jerk-jerking off while reading?) Or perhaps it's a note found in a bottle, a journal entry of gay sex as it once was.

Oral History Transcription: When I was thirty-four, I wrote this true and erotic autobiographical feature article in 1973, two years before the advent of *Drummer* (June 1975), after spending many holiday nights at the Folsom Street Barracks, 1147 Folsom with entrance on Hallam Street, and at the Folsom Prison bar, on Folsom at 14th Street, which in the 1977 feature I updated to the Brig bar, 1347 Folsom Street.

The Folsom Prison bar opened 1973 and closed January 2, 1977 as the Brig opened. The closing was noted with a photo in *Drummer* 12, page 69:

FOLSOM PRISON, at the beginning [the west end] of the Folsom Strip in San Francisco has been torn down..... Closing night festivities included the ripping down of the famous prison bars over the big horseshoe-shaped bar, and dismantling the beloved fireplace, brick by brick. A lot of people went home the night of January 2 with a lot of Folsom Prison souvenirs.

Drummer 19 (December 1977) was the first issue of *Drummer* to list “Jack Fritscher” signed in as editor in chief, even though I had also ghost-edited, uncredited, *Drummer* 14-18.

For a brief fulcrum of time in 1979, I had edited half the *Drummer* issues in existence.

I was editor in chief through *Drummer* 33, although publisher John Embry stripped my name from the masthead of issues 31, 32, and 33 while they were in production and at the printers.

Embry did this because in the time leading up to the day *Drummer* 30 was published, my lover David Sparrow and I dared request all the back salary owed me for my writing, and owed us (aka Fritscher-Sparrow) for our photographs. I was owed \$4,000 and David around \$2,000—which in 1979 was a lot for our two-person domestic household to absorb.

John Embry also switched out some of my writing after *Drummer* 30, but published some pieces without my byline.

He kept my photos going through *Drummer* 33 which was the last issue Fritscher and Sparrow, under the name of “David Sparrow” and “Sparrow Photography” contributed to *Drummer*—until Anthony DeBlase purchased *Drummer* and hired me back for *Drummer* 100.

David Sparrow never returned to the pages of *Drummer*; nor did others of my *Drummer* “salon” including my bicoastal lover, Robert Mapplethorpe.

However, in the rosy beginning, I arrived as editor in chief at *Drummer* with portfolios full of my writing including my S&M novel written in 1968 and first published in 1972 as *I Am Curious (Leather)* by Lou

Thomas of Colt Studio and Target Studio in New York. Within this *Eyewitness Drummer* project, confer Lou Thomas' September 20, 1968, letter to me in my thumbnail introduction to *I Am Curious (Leather)* in *Son of Drummer*. I chose that *Curious* title as homage to the first truly ground-breaking and hugely popular commercial porno film *I Am Curious (Yellow)* shot in Sweden in 1967.

With the fading of the ubiquitous catch phrase "I Am Curious (fill in the blank)," I re-titled my leather identity novel into the list of Allen Ginsberg "blues" journalism I was creating for *Drummer*, and its title became *Leather Blues* to fit with my articles, "Prison Blues," "Rodeo Blues," "Jockstrap Blues," "Castro Street Blues," and on into fiction like "Wild Blue Yonder" which was published in several magazines and anthologies, including *The Burning Pen: Sex Writers on Sex Writing* (2001), a collective autobiography of authors compiled by M. Christian. *The Burning Pen* is as important to erotic literature as Mark Thompson's *Leatherfolk* (1991) is to leather culture.

In March 1977, when publisher Embry arrived at my San Francisco home on 25th Street home to interview me for the editor-in-chief job, I showed him, and Al Shapiro who was with him, the list of stories and articles I had already written which could be adapted to *Drummer*. (At the time we met, I was already deeply embedded in writing with a publishing career begun twenty years earlier as a magazine editor with several published books.) Embry's eyes lit up at my stack of stories and photographs—as well as my personal "sex" Rolodex of writers, artists, and photographers.

Always starving for material to fill a hungry monthly magazine, Embry saw me as a way to fill pages. Even so, I must clarify, he hired me as editor in chief only. My \$200 per month was pay to edit the magazine; after a year or so, he promised me \$400 per month for editing.

That's why I never gave up my day job while editing *Drummer*.

My writing for *Drummer* was totally independent of my editing and was sold freelance with one-time publication rights to Embry's Alternate Publishing. Embry propped up the lack of cash salary by promising that, as part of my hire, *I Am Curious (Leather)* would be serialized in *Drummer*, and then *I Am Curious (Leather)* would be published as one of the first of a new line of *Drummer* novels. From that, he said, I could earn royalties. This plan is mentioned at the end of the first serialized section of *I Am Curious (Leather)* in *Son of Drummer* (September 1978), page 47, where the excerpt—soon after renamed *Leather Blues*—was published with the original 1968 title, plus a subtitle for the opening chapter: "I Am Curious (Leather): The Adventures of Denny Sargent."

The irony was that soon after I started editing and filling the pages of *Drummer*, John Embry, who liked the “upside” of publishing my writing and photos, began disliking what he saw as a “downside” in crediting so much of my work: “It looks like you’re writing the whole damn issue.”

This was not, for me, an arm-wrestle over ego as much as it was an issue of law—specifically of the new 1977 copyright law and how it protected my intellectual property in *Drummer*. Always a notorious scofflaw (I thought), Embry balked at having both my byline and my copyright notice which the new law stipulated had to appear at the end of my articles in order to protect my copyright. I didn’t want to surrender the one, and I couldn’t surrender the other. He did not understand, or did not care, about the specifics of this change in the law requiring specific copyright notice to be published. Irritated by my insistence on following this inconvenient law, Embry, himself the seeming king of Byzantine intrigue, became suspicious that by doing the very thing I’d been hired for—fill each *Drummer* issue—I was hijacking his baby. After Jeanne Barney in Los Angeles had been the first editor in chief of *Drummer* and had fallen out with Embry, *Drummer* fled to San Francisco and Embry—made so initially suspicious of self-starting editors—had to deal with me who was no babe in the woods. Not counting the pro-tem editor “Robert Payne” aka Embry himself, I was the first male editor of *Drummer*, and a San Franciscan to boot. Embry who was very LA had a lot to learn in San Francisco where most of his business troubles around *Drummer* occurred because he acted, San Franciscans thought, “too LA.”

It should be noted that when the names “John Embry” or his pseudonym “Robert Payne” appear listed on the *Drummer* masthead as “editor in chief,” it means Embry was actually between editors and was himself stuffing the mag with all manner of writing that seemed—at least as some of us then gossiped—“stolen” from straight men’s magazines (e.g.: *Saga* and *Argosy*). His *faux* editorial layouts were all too often masked advertisements for his mail-order sex toys. In my theory, Embry’s 1970s concept of *Drummer* was that the magazine was little more than sheet-sugar to fold around his all-important mail-order brochure. In all my years of working with him, I was never of the opinion that he ever really much cared about the editorial content of *Drummer*. From start to finish, Embry was the tinker king of mail order. He has written that he never expected *Drummer* to take off and be anything much.

John Embry was not prepared for the *Being* and *Becoming* of *Drummer*.

How clueless was Embry about the essence of *Drummer*? In *Drummer* 1, Embry, acting as “Robert Payne,” offered for sale through his Alternate mail-order “Leather Emporium” a set of bed sheets made from

Naugahyde (!) which remains anathema, taboo, and camp joke to genuine leather fetishists. Among 1970s bar buddies, one line of code tossed off to dismiss a leather wannabe who was too new or too plastic to “dig the scene” was: “Lips that touch Naugahyde will never touch mine.” (See *Naugahyde* as insult: *Drummer* 1, page 9.)

In 2003, Embry, the first publisher of *Drummer*, told Robert Davolt, who in late 1997 became the last editor and nominal publisher of *Drummer*, that he, Embry, “never foresaw the impact that *Drummer* would have. ‘It was a big surprise to me....I’m amazed.’”

Embry’s 1975 purpose for *Drummer* was to sell popper-like inhalants, cock rings, and butt plugs. He was, at age fifty-something, almost a generation older than the Youth Culture of the 1960s and 1970s. He seemed unmotivated to deal with the vision or the meaning or the content of the psychedelic convergence of drugs-sex-leather-and-gender that happened when *Drummer* met San Francisco. Sensing his disconnection, we drove *Drummer* as a vehicle of the newly liberated Titanic 70s.

In other places, I have mentioned that in the 1970s everyone spent so much time and energy having sex that not many guys wanted to take time out to contribute to a gay magazine which was then such a new phenomenon no one took the genre seriously. To build a network of reliable contributors took me a year, and during that year the only way I could keep up with our thirty-day production schedule was to work late into the night. Many a time I gave up going to the tubs or to the gay parade because I was churning out primary writing for *Drummer*. I wanted other authors on board; and I took time to develop them in various tutorials including my “Writer’s Aid” program. Even so, I had always been, in my twenty years of freelance publication before *Drummer*, and have always remained, during and since, very strict about maintaining ownership of my intellectual property in writing, photographs, and videos.

That proprietary attitude was reinforced by the advice of my longtime pal, veteran gay writer Sam Steward. It was seconded by my eyewitness experience of seeing the work of Tom of Finland pirated left and right. Both Sam and Tom—when I met them—ranted and raved how their work had been famously and often ripped off. Durk Dehner gallantly rode to rescue Tom of Finland and his copyrighted work by founding the Tom of Finland Foundation. In the 1970s, I set out to champion a “New Generation of Gay Writers” resolved not to be exploited in terms of copyright and royalties as had authors like the young Larry Townsend. In 1968, I had not let Greenleaf Press rip me off for \$300 for all rights to *I Am Curious (Leather)*; and in 1978, I wasn’t about to let Embry rob me either. The 1972 limited edition printed by Lou Thomas nailed down my copyright just fine while I waited for gay book publishing to invent itself

as a business. I had to be patient until 1984 when former Catholic priest Winston Leyland published the novel as *Leather Blues* at his Gay Sunshine Press, San Francisco; that 1984 edition sold 10,000 copies which made it a huge best-seller in the gay press where the standard press-run is 3,000 to 5,000 copies printed.

The following tale of one poetic little boy's "rise and calling" represents how a generation of boys grew up to converge as men in the leather culture that needed *Drummer*.

Was I prepared by my pop-culture and human nature to ride into *Drummer* in 1977? I'd been a leather cultist in Chicago even before I arrived for the first time in San Francisco in August, 1961. Recently I came across a bit of writing, some juvenilia—a poem—that I wrote in the 1950s when I was eighteen years old, May 14, 1957. I was well aware of the poetry scene in San Francisco and was in awe of Ferlinghetti, Corso, Spicer, and Ginsberg. That little beatnik poem, "Cry! The Young Hunters," written in those early years in my closet, when I was beginning to learn the extent to which homosexuality and leather existed, positively drips with my teenage desire for edgy, muscular, gay sex. The poem was one of two published in the teen poetry anthology, *America Sings 1958*, edited by Dennis Hartman for the National Poetry Association, 3210 Selby Avenue, Westside Village, Los Angeles 34, California. Was that then where WeHo is now?

I confess my poem's imagery was influenced by black-and-white beatnik and rock-n-roll movies. At that time, I played bongo drums, grew my first chin-strap beard, and was a great fan of *The Wild One*, *Blackboard Jungle*, and *Rebel without a Cause*. In fact, I was perhaps the first mid-century teen author to write a serious published article about the legend of James Dean whose death to me, when I was sixteen, was like the end of the my teenage world. My 1,500-word feature—which was my first pop-culture article—was titled "James Dean: Magnificent Failure" and was published in *The Catholic Preview of Entertainment: The Family Entertainment Guide*, June 1962.

The 1950s did not end until the world changed on November 22, 1963. So when I analyze my "1950s" James Dean piece now I am amazed at how intuitively queer I was as a teenager at writing code to mask the homosexual longing that simmers under the text. I was at the time a closeted "altar boy" who thought I could save the "bad boys" who attracted me. At least, that was my plan. It was the usual queer transposition of all the then-new teen movies and songs in which a good girl falls for the wild heart-throb of a bad boy. I bought tons of 45rpm records themed like Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller's 1955 hit "He Wore Black Denim Trousers (and Motorcycle Boots and a Black Leather Jacket with an Eagle on the

Back).” By the time Kenneth Anger released *Scorpio Rising* (1963), I was so overheated I nearly fainted when in 1966, with a crowd from the Gold Coast bar, I saw his film mixing Jesus and leathersex!

My teen-poetry may be raw, overwrought, and embarrassing, but it is real. The writing and psychology show how my peer-group leather pioneer personalities—John Embry, Larry Townsend, and Fred Halsted, and all the rest: Terry LeGrand, Roger Earl, and others—came from adolescence in the repressed 1950s to working on *Drummer* in the 1970s.

The poem, “Cry! The Young Hunters,” is reprinted below, after this “Leather Christmas” feature, as a peephole into us “leather boy” teenagers who grew up to invent *Drummer* and to read *Drummer* after spending our boyhoods anticipating the precise world of leather that would emerge from our psyches in *Drummer*.

Drummer was not created from nothing. *Drummer* was created from individual personalities who spoke for themselves and mirrored the times. We *Drummer* creators, born in the Art Deco 1930s, were children during World War II, teenagers during the repressed 1950s, and college age during the Swinging 60s when JFK’s assassination changed everything and all we head-feeding hippies dropped acid with Timothy Leary, Ken Kesey, Allen Ginsberg, and Thom Gunn at the “Human Be-In” in Golden Gate Park, January 14, 1967, the winter before the Summer of Love.

Before I actually came out with another person, I had come out solo-handed with several 1950s magazines including my favorite, *Tomorrow’s Man*; in the 1960s, I was seduced by *Rawhide Male*, and the one that eventually influenced me in *Drummer* the most, *Leather!* That was a small-format ’zine featuring a short text with photographs compiled under the direction of Avery Willard, Guild Press LTD, Washington, DC, 1965, 72 pages. *Leather!* was an archetypal collection of photographs from the 1950s and 1960s from six studios: Chuck Renslow’s Kris Studio of Chicago, Avery Willard of New York, Bob Anthony of New York, Scott of London, David of Cleveland, and R. A. Enterprises.

Another studio that in the 1960s formed my taste—that led to me homomasculinizing *Drummer* into being about male identity as much as leather—was the inimitable Royale Photography, 110 Denbeigh Street, Victoria, London, England, with glorious photographs of muscular young military men disciplining one another in a fetish display of military kit with no frontal nudity.

The Guild Press’ *Leather!* photographs featured leather, whips, chains, rope, and motorcycles, again, with no frontal nudity—yet how they steamed in 1965! The Willard model, Gary Adams, featured on four pages, including the first photograph, I was certain then and now, was

also, under the name of Gary Lockwood, the star of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968).

Leather History Alert: The opening essay of the Guild Press *Leather!* was, I think, the first “leather manifesto.”

Upon its homomascularity I found the solidarity to build the attitude and plot of *Leather Blues*, which is, despite its publishing odyssey, very much a quintessential *Drummer* novel. The Guild Leather “manifesto” was the masculine-leather ethos I injected into *Drummer*, and then dramatized politically in the very *Drummer* novel, *Some Dance to Remember*, with its plot about a leather magazine with its own controversial “Masculinist Manifesto.”

I chose to write “Leather Christmas 1977” in a mix of present and past tenses to intensify its immediacy. This essay is not fiction. All of it, including the “Bible-sex scene” at the Folsom Baths, is true. The man who called himself, “Thumper,” was the San Francisco actor, David Baker, and should not be confused with my other pal, the famous San Francisco barber Jim “Thumper” McPherson, pictured in *Drummer* 115, page 32. The leather S&M priest was the Reverend Jim Kane.

II. The feature essay as published in *Drummer* 19, December 1977

S&M’s New Definition...

Leather Christmas 1977

Christmas gives me fucked-out eyes. Lots of looks at lots of parties. Terrific tumbles at the tubs. Men visiting San Francisco for the Holidays. Remembrance of the whole year’s close encounters of the male kind. Man-ghosts of Christmas Past. Eyeing wise men in threesomes. Enduring inevitable S&M Christmas cards that say: “ChriStMaS: Two “S’s” and one “M.” Have a well-hung Holiday.” Omigod.

Christmas celebrates toys, toy soldiers, and men of good and consenting will. Estranged lovers decide to speak. Love is found with the proper stranger. Childless men celebrate the birth of the Basic Male of Western Civilization.

CHRISTMAS DRUMMER BOY

Already this holiday season, at the new Folsom bar called the Brig, which was the No Name before it was the Bolt, a guy named Thumper, says “Hi” to me. We talk. I buy him a Lite. He rubs my chest. I spotted him

a moment before as across the bar a hot man in full leather toyed with Thumper's ass through his jeans. The man reached around, loosened Thumper's belt, dropped his denim to his knees, and kissed his butt in the shadows of the bar. Flattered by the compliment, Thumper prolonged the moment of his tonguing, then re-dressed himself, tucking the tail of his Rudolph-the-Red-Nosed-Reindeer T-shirt into his jeans, moving slowly my way.

He rubs my chest again. I stroke his bicep through his leather jacket. He is bearded. His red hair is clipped short, cut by the other Thumper [whose real name was Jim McPherson] who barbers up on Castro. A gap between his two front teeth makes me a sucker for his kisser. There's mistletoe in his green eyes.

A Top Man, we agree, should be believable.

He claims to play Top.

Later in his van we eat fresh strawberries. Again he touches my chest. He lights a Marlboro. In the glow, his tan deepens. His van smells of freshcut pine branches.

I wonder the same old wonder we all wonder: Is this guy believable? Maybe. He's offbeat enough. Looks like a genuine *BSF*: Bent, Sick, and Twisted. We cruise specific types and read iconic fantasies in their faces: ranchers, truckers, bikers, linebackers, cons, mechanics, mercenaries, Mafiosi, and Marines. Symbolic men with a husky taste for celebrating male sex: whiskey in a glass, a baseball chaw of Red Man chew, a two-day beard, a cigar butt—bizarre, but exciting!

As the song goes, "All I want for Christmas is..."

At my house Thumper rolls a couple jays. We pass the sweet blue back and forth, lust rising with the high. "You got good arms," he says. "Want a 'lude? It's fun. We can sleep when we want."

Down with the 714s. Down with the wine. Down to my cellar.

He eyes the rack, stocks, cage, hooks, eye-bolted bed, and footlocker filled with toys. "I like imagination," he says. He grabs my chest twisting my tits too heavily, too painfully, too little sensual build-up.

We're hardly beyond the foretalk.

But I let him grind my peccs because of the delight in his eyes. My cock is hard. My head analyzes his moves. Judging. Taking—in this raw situation, in this pared-down human relationship where everything is upfront—the measure of us two men.

JINGLE BALLS

Recently on a night around Thanksgiving, at Allan Lowery's Leatherneck Bar on Folsom, with only twenty guys or so, I approached a man in a

leather jacket, cap, jeans, no shirt. We nodded. He grabbed my crotch. Hard. Rough.

Men do to others what they really want done to themselves.

I grabbed him back. Never do nothin' nice and easy. He moaned. "Take care of my balls," he said.

I pushed him up against the empty back bar. He spread his feet. I laid forty, maybe fifty, kicks with my boot into his groin. *Think* of scuffed black leather against warm denim crotch. Balls bouncing hot in his big sac. He moaned out a smile. We minded our business. The crowd minded theirs. One last kick and I pulled his bruiser body into mine, jerking my knee up into his piss-soaked crotch.

Once. Twice. Three times. He made a low pleased sound and pressed hard into me. A direct hit. He shot hot and slick through his torn denim into my hand. "Thanks," he said.

Don't know his name. Don't need to. Wouldn't recognize him again. But for what it was, an honest engaging moment, we worked some meaning into the meaninglessness of what passes between people over holiday tea and ices. Something hot, maybe blessed, passed honest between us. Man to man.

I do remember he was a tourist, because he surprised me. He did what a tourist would do: he hugged me, shook my hand, and wished me a Merry Christmas.

WE FUCK. THEREFORE, WE ARE

Being men who prefer men has never been our problem. Society's problem, maybe. We never set ourselves apart. Society did. We are who we are.

We are worthy, worth something.

We can touch men or be touched by men in ways most people go their whole lives-long untouched by anyone. We are worth much. And we don't live our lifestyle out of show, sham, or shame. We live for ourselves. Honestly. At least most of the time. So here's to some kind of special merry little Christmas to us!

WON'T YOU GUIDE MY SLEIGH TONIGHT?

Thumper held on to my chest. I to his. But then began that hypnotized look in his eyes, falling back, down, and away from the Top position he projected in his macho bar pose. Grab a dude's tits and down he goes. That old black magic: I saw it happening. The way it usually does. Fuck. In sex or out of it, almost always stuck playing Top. Not that I am only a

Top. Who is? Just that in sex, business, or relationships, I usually end up dominant, not by my choice, but by others' deference.

Keys worn on the right always mean *Bottom*. Keys on the left mean no more than *Negotiable*. Get the picture?

To balance our scene's energy I turned on the negotiable Thumper. He glided gladly out of his Top space. A real down-hill racer. I tied his arms with rope behind his back.

"I've never been tied up before," he said.

"I'm not tying you," I explained "I'm making you secure." I attached his bound wrists to a pulley in the ceiling and hoisted his hands up toward his shoulders. His feet, booted on the cool cellar cement, ferreted for a footing.

"Be good to me," he said.

"I'll be very good to you. Very good."

S&M: A NEW DEFINITION

S&M does not stand for *sadism* and *masochism*. *S* and *M* stand for *Sensuality* and *Mutuality*. *Sensuality*: the action must feel good to both men. *Mutuality*: both men consent to a definite energy exchange.

Sensuality and Mutuality, as practiced in San Francisco, LA, New York, and all the farmburgs in between, is not only healthy sexual encounter, it is very often extraordinarily good therapy. One man, for example, gets very nervous when he hasn't recently played a bottom scene. He works as a radio dispatcher for a police department, and every six weeks or so, when his hunger and his tension peak, he submits himself to a Catholic priest [Jim Kane] who is one of the heaviest leather disciplinarians in the USA and gets his body well worked over, his head nicely shrunk out, and his "sins" conveniently forgiven.

THUMPER BOTTOMS OUT

"Come on, Thumper," I said. "Give it to me." I looked directly into his beautiful eyes. He focused on mine. His mouth fell slack. Receptive. I came in to him through his eyes. Talking, in through his ears. Close enough in the candlelit heat of the cellar for him to smell my body hot in my leather. Massaging his tits, to come into him through his sense of touch. "You are," I said, "Where you want to be. Say *yes*. Say *yes*."

And he focused through the "Vitamin Q" [Quaalude] on the reality flooding forward from his pituitary, from his adrenaline, from his *cojones*, from his subconscious. He said *Yes*.

"Yes. Yes. Yes. Anything."

Because the reality was he hung helpless, tied and hoisted, not by Superman, but by another quite ordinary man who had the will, inclination, and hardon to string him up.

Torture. He repeated the word five or six times. Rolling it in his mouth. "Please torture me."

What a man-with-a-hardon says, especially in night-games, needs subtitles. "Torture me" means "Give me heavy sensation on my body." There is no real torture and no real pain and no real humiliation in ritual. It is suggestion more than reality. But the truth is you can play plenty hard without physical damage. Without a mark. *Heavy* is measured by sensual and mutual respect for limits.

When a man contracts with a consenting man for a heavy trip, the possibilities begin as basic as clamps on his tits, balls, and cock. All the obvious places. Then a few not so obvious: in a circle around his asshole as foreplay to fisting, on both his lips and his tongue, across his eyebrows, and in his nose. If a guy lives in his head, use his head. The clamps and clothes pins get his attention. His hardon holds his interest.

In this way Thumper hung, treated with the great respect due a man, but worked over. Heavy. In a delicate balance.

STRAIGHT RITES OF PASSAGE

Working over straight guys is a whole other trip. I've topped several because movies like *Rollerball*, *The Holy Mountain*, and *Marathon Man* raise the ritual fantasy-consciousness in their hetero heads. Richard Harris, hanging by his pecs in *A Man Called Horse*, all for the love of a girl, awoke an "endurance hunger" in quite a few completely straight guys. They wanted their own personal rite of passage, their own initiation into adult masculinity, in our society that has never definitely signaled when a boy is definitely a man.

Mostly these dudes were macho athletic types. To the ones I agreed to conduct through ritual passage, I indicated they had to mutualize the energy by putting out sexually. So hungry were they for a safe experience they knew no other way to satisfy, they each in their own turn agreed.

For their head's sake I kept their sexual involvement fairly passive by simply fucking the shit out of them near the end of the scene. Jocks, used to hard coaching, seem the most susceptible to this kind of man-to-man ritual sexuality. Trained to accept the orders of another man, they follow those orders at even the greatest hardship and pain to themselves in order to make the team. They are ripe and ready to deal with a masculine Top who will modify his gayness to accommodate their needs while still satisfying his own. And these men are truly sexually straight. It's just that for

once, in our too-soft society, they feel they must endure with all manly fortitude the primal therapy of the ritual vigils, pains, and humiliations endured by every ancient warrior worth his manhood.

THUMPER HANGS ON

Thumper began to moan. I turned on even more. The sight of his tanned muscular body hanging taut led to a truism: every body looks better in the strain of bondage. The sculpture of bondage. Definition of muscular bulk becomes clearer. Sweat rolls from under the arms, glistens down the trim sides. The cock, a length of rawhide tied tight around its base, distends, hard-veined. A clear string drools from its anxious mouth.

Electrical clips clamp his tits. Chains from each clip run up through eye hooks and dangle down to the lead weights swinging opposite his erect cock. This magnificent man whom girls turn to cruise in the streets hangs strung up in back by his wrists between his shoulder blades, strung up in front by his tits stretched up toward the ceiling.

WORKING ON WOMEN: 'ROUND YON VIRGIN

Working on women or married couples can be fun. For a fee. Because my hard really isn't totally perversatile. Women tend to be more dramatically masochistic in a psychodrama situation. On one extreme, a woman will play the innocent virgin captured and abused. On the other, she will play the outraged bitch who when she gets loose, you motherfucker, will barbecue your cock *en brochette*.

With husband-and-wife scenes, after she has called Palo Alto to double-check with the babysitter, the couple can be strung up opposite each other for who-loves-who-more games: "Who gets the next ten lashes? Who gets the dildo? Where?" Or spouses can be worked on one at a time. The most frequent scene is to tie, say, the wife into a chair and make her witness the abuse of her husband. Many women get hot and enraged at their old man's getting tied, degraded, and fucked. They yell and scream and attack his manhood as cock goes up his ass or down his throat.

She cums. He cums. I cum.

Later, all shrunk out, they kiss and hug and carry on like they've spent a week at Esalen. [The Esalen Institute founded south of San Francisco, 1962, is a human potential "sensitivity" movement based on Aldous Huxley whose gonzo-journalism book of mescaline-enlightenment, *The Doors of Perception* (1963), inspired Jim Morrison to name his group "The Doors" and gay men by the millions to drop acid. In 1970s San Francisco, gay men, particularly leathermen, considered Esalen a joke

for its perceived excess of touchy-feeliness, especially as merchandised by CEO David Goodstein at *The Advocate* in “*The Advocate Experience*.” As HIV and AIDS terror struck, it was this kind of corporate “sensitivity training” merging with the Marxist “politically correct” that in a perfect storm, a perfect hurricane, ruined the gay liberation movement and the gay press.]

THUMPER’S SECOND ROUND

I took Thumper down from the hooks and led him obediently across the cellar to the rack and tied him down again. For a good hard bellydown fuck. Leather restraints tighten around his ankles, his thighs, his waist, his neck, his biceps, and his wrists. His butt shines like Christmas ornaments in the candle light.

“I’m secure,” he says.

I smile and plunge on in. Like quicksand, the more you wiggle, the deeper you go.

NEAPOLITAN SEX: 3 FLAVORS

Sex is Neapolitan ice cream. *Vanilla* is for plain old kissy face. *Strawberry* is for *S* and *M* exotica, because a “strawberry” is jocker talk for the bruise you get on the playing field. *Chocolate* covers the currently trendy, but understandably closeted, interest in scatology. (See *Salò*, Pasolini’s last film before a Roman hustler caved in the side of his head with a two-by-four.)

Lovers of vanilla sex often have as much fear of strawberry sex as straights have of gay sex. Vanilla fans fear, or fantasize, that if they hit a leather bar or bath, they will be attacked like Sebastian Venable in *Suddenly Last Summer*. Hardly.

While men sometimes get pantsed, spread on pool tables, beaten with belts, and maybe fisted, you can believe they gave their consent one way or the other. As long as you don’t wear cologne or deodorize your pits, you’re safer in a leather bar than in twink bar where All-American boys might toss you and your leathers into a Lacoste alligator pit.

As Joel Grey said in *Cabaret*: “Live and let live.”

NEW YEAR’S NOSTALGIA: FOLSOM STREET BARRACKS

Sometimes places like the classic Folsom Street Barracks conjure so much energy, they go up in flames. When the Barracks was golden [from 1972-1977], not only were you safe, you were transported. For guys liking the

best bodies mixed with the farthest fantasy, the Barracks was Christmas every night of the year. You entered expectant that something lurid, raunchy, wild, even slightly dangerous might happen. And it did. But, generally, except for the reborn Jesus-freak who tied a guy up in his room and browbeat him for two hours with a Bible until his screams brought rescue, Barracks behavior was all within the realm of sensual mutuality.

Barracks guys suffered no failure of imagination. Fistfuckers inched their knuckles into rings Ripley would not believe. Men created trips of leather and sweat. Hides spread on the bed. Three layers of Crisco-ed leather wrapping a man's hot body. Bodybuilders poised to be touched, worshiped, fucked. S&M types with guys hanging upside down in the doorways to rooms. Spontaneous gangfucks. Wrestling in one room. Boxing next door. Big pecs. Big dicks. Smooth buns. Long hair. Crewcuts. Shaved heads. Oink of Crisco and chocolate. Piss and denim. Jockstraps. Uniforms. Armpits. Tongues. Asshole. Dim red light. Loud acid rock. Bodies laid back on asphalt-tile stairs. Uncut cock flipped up on a tight belly inviting a sucking. Easy access man to man. Dance: 10. Looks: 10. And the vibes, good.

But now, this holiday season, I flash: "Think tonight I'll hit the Barracks." Then comes the pang I can't. No one can. Except the local filmmaker who wants to shoot a porno, rumor has it, in the Barracks' charred halls. Love, I guess, among the ruins.

The Barracks' burning broke up that bunch of boys. No more hot new Year's Eve's like 1973 with the muscleman standing on a sink, stroking his meat, rubbing his oiled chest, while thirty men knelt on the tile floor, worshiping him, jerking off, reaching toward his golden calves straight out of some C. B. DeBiblical movie [Cecil B. DeMille: *The Ten Commandments*]. Gone are the days. San Francisco this Christmas has no pansexual High Place. [The Barracks was remodeled and reopened and burned down one last time in the great Folsom Street fire in July 1981.]

The best bodies currently check into the Technicolor Club Baths at 8th and Howard. [I used the word "Technicolor" because gay men enjoyed the fact that the previous tenant of the building had been the Technicolor Processing Lab, South of Market.] The best bent, sick, and twisted trips slide into the Slot on Folsom. The fistfuckers descend to the Catacombs, a private handballing palace, so elbow-decadent that if you want to leave your heart in San Francisco, you can probably store it there in a footlocker. The jerkoff/oral fans now hang ten, or less, or if you're lucky, more, through the gloryholes in the maze at the South of Market Club on 6th Street and Mission where Wino Country raunch reigns supreme. ["Wino Country" acknowledged that getting to the gloryholes required stepping over the skid-row drunks on the sidewalk.]

SWINGING NIGHTLY ON THE CHANDELIERS

My sweat drips down on Thumper. Two space heaters run to warm the perpetual San Francisco chill off the cellar. Nothing worse in a scene than a discomfort not intended. A Top has to be sensitive. I figure to move the one space heater away from the rack. Over it I notice—fuck!—my best faded Levi's hang on the heater's edge, scorching. Without pulling out of him I yank my jeans free of the heat. I don't care. All that counts is this man and me. Higher and higher.

We may never see each other again. But for what it is, for now: bliss-out! Too much of a good thing is great. Less isn't more. Only more is more. Ask any Medici.

DAYS MERRY AND BRIGHT

But, cuming, butt-cuming, with too much great sensuality, I think on this night before Christmas of the daytime street of that straight world so many gay men insist on functioning in so well, because we are—Thank God—not just creatures of the night. I hope people will be able to see in our eyes, in our fucked-happy eyes how we love the men we've laid and the men we've yet to lay; that they will see in our fuck-filled eyes what we have experienced, what we look and live for; that they will see in our eyes the dimension of human sex and sensuality and mutuality that we recognize in our gay brothers' eyes when we pass them on straight streets; that our fuck-full eyes will be forever the badge of our identification to those who should know, and our badge of fulfillment to those who barely imagine where our heads are, but yet love us enough to hope we're having a good time, the time even of our lives.

The only fucking immortality any man can expect, after we play it as it lays, is to be a story told in beds around the world on nights before Christmas. And even nights after.

Ain't that right, Thump, old buddy?

Editor's Note

The following poem, written August 14, 1957, offers a profile into the adolescent feeling and writing style of one teenager who grew up to be a formative editor in chief of *Drummer*. Jack Fritscher was an eighteen-year-old Catholic seminarian out in the world on summer vacation in Greenwich Village when he wrote this poem of shock and admiration. Many lines of the 1957 poem forecast a description of gay life in 1970s bars and baths, as well as give a nod to the author's

1950s teenage awareness of leather, hustling, drag, transgenders, and drugs. — Mark Hemry, editor

CRY! THE YOUNG HUNTERS

I did not think they searched for God
When on weekends they razed the neon world
Or in the nights poured out in screaming emergency
Wards carbohic and tiled echoing
The surprised stares of the suddenly mangled.
Him they carted in — then brought his legs
Still the bloodied wheels railroad along impersonal tracks
Morphine and plasma for a dirty drunk?
He can sell pencils (RR's compliments)
Outside amber bars till some young tough
Kicks in his head for condom quarters.
All the king's horses foul the city streets
And dogs drink in the gutter
Petticoats Petticoats see the petty pretty coats, inviting.
The bruised once-woman tumbled from the stained bed
Fainted in her own vomit
Desecrating, they seek empty gods
In the arched chapel of a crotch
Eternal syncope of ends open to the pubic public.
Dead seed of dead seed.
Mechanical march through a vast
Urinal flushed of hope.
Adrenalin in full flow
Panting down a running alley they flee
Thinking that they chase. Stop.
Breathe in dark doorways.
Young muscle flexed hard against limp city dryads
Bistrodeep in beer, worship the golden hubcap.
Scream of jazz and rag of rock.
Anguish of breath strangled saxophonically.
Dancing shadows of aborted fullness.
The beat and black and blare
Drug with false strength the zombie faces and secret
The driving atomic fear. Unknowing,
Adonis dies fearing
Only that someday he shall die. Missing
The point. Dying like seconds in

Dark theophany ecstatic with a fix a fifth a fuck.

Searching

Fetid darkness, fleeing fear, thinking

He must be here somewhere but

Too tangled in frightened running searching

To find him.

©1957 Jack Fritscher

III. Eyewitness Illustrations

Detail of page from *Son of Drummer* (September 1978) showing first serial publication in *Drummer* of Jack Fritscher's 1969 novel, *I Am Curious (Leather)* aka *Leather Blues*, which was first published in a limited private edition by Lou Thomas of Target Studio, New York (1972).

Opposite page. Right and left: "Jack FritscherX8, First Beard," photo-booth strips, San Francisco, August 15, 1961. ©Jack Fritscher. Center top: "Jack Fritscher," Los Angeles, 1970. Photograph by David Sparrow. ©Jack Fritscher. Center bottom: "Jack Fritscher, Editor in Chief of *Drummer*," Castro Street, January 1978. Photograph by David Sparrow. ©Jack Fritscher

Excerpt source: ©Jack Fritscher, *Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer*, San Francisco: Palm Drive Publishing, 2008

© Jack Fritscher

Excerpt source: © Jack Fritscher, *Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer*, San Francisco: [Palm Drive Publishing](#), 2008

“Jack Fritscher, University Professor,” May 1968, photographed during the writing of *I Am Curious (Leather)* aka *Leather Blues*. Auto-photograph by Jack Fritscher. ©Jack Fritscher

Like a vocation inside a vocation, coming out to oneself in specific homomascularity is the same epiphany as coming out to oneself in generic homosexuality.

When Jack Fritscher’s character Ryan O’Hara wrote his controversial *Masculinist Manifesto* which was so pivotal to considerations of “body fascism in GLBT culture” in *Some Dance to Remember: A Memoir Novel of San Francisco 1970-1982*, he was a fictive dramatization of the leather identity movement of the twentieth-century in which men self-fashioned masculinity as legitimately as feminists self-fashioned their identities.

Homosexuality is a primordial Old Religion more ancient and wise than Druidism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Among its sects, homomascularity is perhaps the most unexpected “click” on the Kinsey Six scale. Always present and almost invisible, it existed for millennia before its recent outings in Adolph Brand’s 1896 magazine *Der Eigene*, William Carney’s 1968 epistolary novel *The Real Thing*, Jack Fritscher’s 1969 novel *I Am Curious (Leather)*, Larry Townsend’s 1972 *Leatherman’s Handbook*, and the 1975 debut of the leather-identity magazine *Drummer*.

In the 1960s, Fritscher was a practicing eyewitness in porno bookstores on the legendary 42nd Street in New York. When he was twenty-six in 1965, three years before he wrote *I Am Curious (Leather)*, he found the one-issue booklet, *Leather!*, compiled by Avery Willard for the pioneering homomasculine Guild Press, Washington, D.C. Willard was also the 8mm filmmaker who created the classic 1960s film, *Leather Narcissus*, starring New York leather icon Fernando.

Avery Willard’s editorial essay, “Men of Leather,” was the first American “Masculine Manifesto” of Leather Identity, and was an essential influence on Fritscher exploring the frontier of his own homomascularity personally and in *Drummer*. In 1965, Avery Willard’s “Men of Leather” was as important to the leather subculture as Susan Sontag’s 1964 essay “Notes on ‘Camp’” was important to gay culture.

Avery’s leather-defining essay was precisely the kind of enthusiastic identity-fiction and nonfiction Fritscher went on to write for *Drummer* (1977-1999).

© Jack Fritscher

Excerpt from Avery Willard's "Men of Leather" essay in the 1965 Guild Press booklet *Leather!*

"The part that Marlon Brando created in *The Wild One* has had an incalculable influence on the Leather world. His contempt for the square world, his scorn...., his love for the thrills of the moment, for life at its highest pitch—these became holy virtues in the eyes of boys and men who found in this way of life more excitement and meaning than in their own humdrum, monotonous, repetitious existence. All of his gestures, originally meant to be cruel and loutish, became, in the eyes of a million restless boys, the actions of a hero. In Leather and its rites, the Leather men find an escape from the marshmallow-soft, cloyingly sweet, TV, synthetic, deodorized, almost dehumanized everyday way of life promoted by this age. In Leather, with its sensuous touch and smell, they have found a symbol which helps them escape from the over-feminized present into a past where men of strength and muscle, power and determination....were admired and emulated. Through Leather, a small but intensely dedicated band of men are trying to capture and preserve the value of innate virility, and by doing so they could very well be performing an important service for us all." ©Guild Press

Excerpt source: ©Jack Fritscher, *Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer*, San Francisco: Palm Drive Publishing, 2008

The Rawhide Male, Issue 2 of Four Issues (1966-1969). There was a mid-twentieth-century thirst for gay magazines years before small gay book publishers were founded in the late 1980s. In 1945, Bob Mizer of AMG in LA began publishing *Physique Pictorial*. In the 1950s-60s, Chuck Renslow and Etienne of Kris Studio in Chicago showcased their aggressively homomasculine photographs in the pre-*Drummer* magazines they published: *Mars*, *Triumph*, and *The Rawhide Male* featuring men such as Mike Bradburn, and the redheaded and bearded Irish lumberjack Don Dunne. It is a gay popular culture truth: millions more people read the 214 issues of *Drummer* during twenty four years (1975-1999) than have read all that period's best-selling gay novels combined. Used with permission of Chuck Renslow and the Leather Archives & Museum.



Captions: Eyewitness documentation of the existence of graphics providing internal evidence supporting Jack Fritscher's text are located in the Jack Fritscher and Mark Henry GLBT History collection. Out of respect for issues of copyright, model releases, permissions, and privacy, some graphics are not available for publication at this time, but can be shown by appointment.

Eyewitness Illustration

Photograph. "Thumper Stradling Motorcycle, South of Market." Blue-eyed biker and wrestler Jim McPherson aka Thumper was the most popular barber in the Castro in the Titanic 1970s. He was upbeat and dripped virile sex appeal. Men wanted his strong hands on their heads. He was exemplar and participant in "Gay Jock Sports," *Drummer* 20 (January 1978), and was the star of Jack Fritscher's Super-8 film *Thumper* (1974). He appeared in *Drummer* 115 (April 1988). Photographer unknown.