

The Mineshaft

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I. Author's Eyewitness Historical-Context Introduction written March 8, 2002

Over the holidays, the Mineshaft played host to the FFA, UYA, and countless single guys from all over the world. Many of the latter came to us during their New York visit after reading a fine article about the Mineshaft in *Drummer* magazine. Although we did not seek this publicity, it was a positive statement for the Mineshaft and we thank...writer, Jack Fritscher, for his fine words.

— Wally Wallace, Founding and Only Mineshaft Manager, *The Mineshaft Newsletter*, February 1978. All Mineshaft Newsletters and announcements as well as letters from Wally Wallace are copyright Wally Wallace and are printed with permission.

As editor in chief of *Drummer*, I took the opportunity to write the first (as well as the second) national and international article about the “Number One 1970s sex club,” the immediately legendary Mineshaft which orbited Earth at 835 Washington Street, New York, from its opening October 8, 1976, to November 7, 1985, when shut down, shuttered, and slammed closed by the health department of the imperial City of New York. The second article “Pissing in the Wind: A Night in the Mineshaft Bath tub” appeared in *Drummer* 20 (January 1978).

“We lasted nine years and nine days,” Mineshaft manager, Wally Wallace, told me.

(Note: Except as specifically noted otherwise, all Wally Wallace quotations are from the video *Jack Fritscher Interviews Mineshaft Manager, Wally Wallace, March 28, 1990*, recorded at 206 Texas Street,

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San Francisco. A copyrighted excerpt of this article and interview was published with permission of the author in *Leather Times* 1 (2007), the newsletter of the Leather Archives and Museum, Chicago, published by Chuck Renslow and produced by Rick Storer.)

Fourteen years earlier, that second week in October 1976 was a busy one in Manhattan: the S&M Eulenspiegel Society was incorporated on October 14, 1976, six days after the Mineshaft opened. *Drummer*, founded June 1975, was sixteen months old and on sale at gay New York shops.

In leather-heritage synchronicity, Wally Wallace and I knew each other for twenty-three years. Few in the salon around the Mineshaft knew his name was “James Wallace” who to intimates was known as “Jim,” or that he had transferred his theatrical experience—mid-1960s through early 1970s—as actor and stage manager with La Mama to the theatrical set and dress-code costumes at the Mineshaft.

In the zero degrees of separation, it was at La Mama that Wally Wallace first met Robert Mapplethorpe and Patti Smith; and it was at the Mineshaft in 1976 that Jacques Morali saw Wally Wallace’s blue-collar dress-code archetypes that became the pop stereotypes of his disco group, the Village People. Glenn Hughes, the original leather biker in the Village People, was a frequent sex-player at the Mineshaft as well as part of the S&M leather salon around *Drummer* in San Francisco.

My “Mineshaft” *Drummer* article, delivered up in the limited format of our monthly “Men’s Bar Scene” column, is brief because the Mineshaft had been open only seven months when I wrote about it in June 1977, and the legend of the Mineshaft sex circus was just beginning to launch. Mythologizing the Mineshaft was not my point because I was writing frank PR to promote the Mineshaft—as Wally Wallace acknowledged in 1978—with readers who lived outside Manhattan.

Perhaps someday I will write a lengthy, humorous, and scandalous article for *Vanity Fair*, or, better, a screenplay that will reveal the players, the mystery, the comedy, and the sexuality of the legendary Mineshaft. Chaucer would love such a framing of the newer, sexier, raunchier *Canterbury Tales*. Host Wally Wallace fills in as the Harry Bailey of leather and the Mineshaft is Bailey’s Tabard Inn where the pilgrims as sex-tourists meet up. The Wife of Bath becomes the Husband in the Bathtub; and the ass-kissing and red-hot poker up-the-bum in “The Miller’s Tale” recreates itself nightly.

Attending the opening night of the Mineshaft, I recalled Kenneth Anger’s film title *The Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (1954). As a journalist and a sex commuter to New York, I was staying with my longtime pal Jack McNenny who was, in the zero degrees of our salon around

Drummer, also a friend of Wally Wallace and a founding member of the Mineshaft. Jack McNenny owned the scatologically named flower shop “The Gifts of Nature” on the northeast corner of Sixth and Houston where he provided Robert Mapplethorpe with flowers for his photo shoots at his 24 Bond Street loft. (See “Take 2: Pentimento for Robert Mapplethorpe” and “Take 3: Adventures with Robert Mapplethorpe” in the 1994 erotic memoir *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera*; thanks to the request of Tony Deblase, “Take 2” was first published as the lead cover article in *Drummer* 133 (September 1989). Jack McNenny was also the New York distributor for my Mineshaft-like *Man2Man Quarterly* ’zine which I began as a “Virtual *Drummer*” in 1979.

Through hundreds of visits, I experienced the Mineshaft as the 1970s quintessential frame of homomascuine sexuality. Years later in San Francisco, on March 28, 1990, Wally Wallace recalled again that this first *Drummer* article gave the Mineshaft some welcome initial traction because it was like an alert, an invitation, sent out worldwide to *Drummer*’s passionate subscription base which Wally Wallace always considered the house magazine of the Mineshaft where “a regular Saturday night drew five hundred or six hundred guys and I’d have fifteen guys on duty at the door, the coat check, and the bars. The night of the annual Barnum and Bailey Circus, I’d have a crowd of a thousand guys.”

Actually, this *Drummer* 19 “Mineshaft” article is a prequel to a second Mineshaft feature that I wrote for the next issue, *Drummer* 20 (January 1978) titled: “Pissing in the Wind: Wet Dreams, Golden Showers (Or, A Night in the Mineshaft Bathtub).” Writing as a gonzo participatory journalist a month after the publication of the first Mineshaft article, I went into erotic detail about the fabled extreme sexuality of the Mineshaft. These two articles might be read together.

I like to put gay history into objective correlative context that is as sensual and descriptive as possible. I also like to back up my pioneer eyewitness testimony with internal evidence from letters, interviews, and printed articles.

Without initial irony, the Mineshaft was situated in the Meatpacking District of West Greenwich Village. In the pre-dawn hours on the shared loading dock, Mineshaft members, arriving and leaving, crossed steps within inches of butchers in bloodied white aprons shouldering huge, stiff carcasses from waiting trucks into their meat-cutting shops. It was very *Twilight Zone*: two worlds existing in the same dimension, each invisible to the other, one leathery and dark, the other bloody and lit with extraterrestrial fluorescence.

Time Capsule Sidebar: A daytime and deserted view of the street and the warehouse loading docks was used as a location in the Robert

Mulligan film *Love with the Proper Stranger* (1963), which featured Natalie Wood and the leathery biker Steve McQueen in a very long scene shot virtually on the doorstep of what would later become the Mineshaft.

Wally Wallace's Letter of Invitation to the Opening of the Mineshaft (Presented as Written, without Editing, from the Jack Fritscher and Mark Henry Personal Archive Collection)

October 2, 1976

Howdy,

On Friday October 7th [hand-corrected by Wally to 8th] at 9 pm I will begin managing a new club in THE MINE SHAFT [two words at this point quickly changes to *Mineshaft*] at 836 Washington Street by Little West 12th Street. You may have visited it under its present name or as the old Zodiac years ago. In any event you will find it different in terms of decor and concept.

We have taken away the lovely wall-to-ceiling silver foil Reynolds Wrap decor and made the main bar area [up the stairs from the street and built on the second floor] into a comfortable Western style club complete with new murals and a pool table.

From this room you go through a set of swinging doors into a tunnel leading into a cave style bar area with smaller caves for exploring off to the sides. A perfect setting for underground graphic viewing. In the middle of the room is the Mine Shaft [a door in the floor of the second floor that pulls up to reveal rugged lumber stairs] leading down to a lower level [the first floor or ground floor or street floor] for shafting sports. It is indeed different!

Conceptually the club activities will be different as they revolve around special interest groups during the early hours starting at 9 pm. On Tuesdays we have the Wrestling guys and on Sundays the P.G.T. Club. [The meaning of "P.G.T. Club" seems lost to history, but it was probably was a code for piss or grunge activities.] For them we have installed a new shower.

There will also be a SCHOOL FOR LOWER EDUCATION [run by GMSMA, Gay Men's S&M Association, with an occasional show-and-tell by Chicagoan, Tony DeBlase] beginning in early October with limited size classes in subjects

relating to improving one's sexual techniques. I can not for obvious reasons describe this further in print.

We will also have special events such as a BLACK AND BLUE PARTY for our members. Setting the tone for this and the place itself there is a dress code of levi, leather, uniforms, and similar casual attire required at all times. No fluff allowed!

So, come on down and see what we have going on. The sooner the better as the number of memberships will be limited. During the month of October we will be open to you and your friends between the hours of 10 pm and 6 am Weds through Sunday. But for a sneak preview come Friday October 7th [*sic*] at 9 pm.

Try it! I know you'll like THE MINE SHAFT!

Wally

On that opening night, October 8, 1976, Wally Wallace, a protector of male space in Manhattan as was Steve McEachern at the Catacombs in San Francisco, was intent on keeping intact a sanctuary for masculine men. Wally Wallace wrote in his homomale *Mineshaft Manifesto* about sex, identity, performance art, politics, and civil war over gender:

THE MINESHAFT IS NOW, AND FOREVER WILL BE,
A UNIQUE MEMBERSHIP

The MINESHAFT is basically a unique playground conceived by and dedicated to the fun-loving raunchy gay male minority who exist in the underworld of gay society. It is truly a place where many a gay man would never come because it is surely not a place for everyone.

The facilities include three bars, a roof, several playrooms, a [bath] tub room, and various pieces of equipment [slings, bondage equipment] located in a half block long building at 835 Washington Street in the middle of the New York Meat Market. It is all to be used and shared to enhance your wildest sexual fantasy and more!

As a social club, the MINESHAFT provides the opportunity for guys to meet and to play with men of a like persuasion, or with men so rare and so different that they inspire new ways to play, or might even change their entire life. This is mentioned as many couples have first met and found new type lives through the club. Yes, we are ever changing and the changes are due to

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

the various men from all over the world who meet and play here in international play.

Within minutes of opening the Mineshaft, the liberation zeitgeist of the 1970s changed Wally when as a business man he observed a truth of the way white gay males kept company with women at that time. This is an excerpt from the video *Jack Fritscher Interviews Mineshaft Manager Wally Wallace, March 28, 1990*:

Wally Wallace: The night of the opening, the word had got out through my letter and that word of mouth got to people who were looking for something different. The Eagle and the Spike, which were the leather bars at the time...had become rather inundated with people who were not into the leather scene. People were looking for a new place to go. I promised a dress code, although at the time I didn't know what it would be.

Jack Fritscher: Your dress code was like the dress code Chuck Arnett enforced at the Tool Box in San Francisco in the 1960s. The one difference was that Arnett nailed a pair of sneakers to the ceiling with a sign saying "No sneakers." And you..."

Wally Wallace: ...allowed sneakers in as a fetish. [Laughs]...To have the dress code, I had to make the Mineshaft a membership club. Well, the first night we opened—we were on the second floor, and I was standing at the entrance greeting friends at the top of the stairs. Then I noticed an attractive female standing halfway up the stairs.

Jack Fritscher: I know this story. I love this story. It's canonical. She herself told me.

Wally Wallace: So I said to her, I'm sorry but you can't come in here. This is a men's club, a gay men's club. It might be embarrassing for a woman. She said, Well, I go to the Spike and the Eagle. She was dressed in leather and a very attractive girl. I said, I'm sorry but we determined that this was to be a private club for leather men. I was worried about getting into trouble with women's rights groups. We had some trouble at the Ramp...

Jack Fritscher: Nureyev's favorite sex bar...

Wally Wallace: ...with women trying to get into the backroom, but that was a public bar. So this great looking girl in leather turned and walked down the stairs and left, and when she left all these hot men standing on the stairs also left. The hot

guys were with her! So I said to myself, I've got to find out who this woman is....

Jack Fritscher: When legends collide.

Wally Wallace: That's how I met Camille O'Grady who became our sort of token female member of the Mineshaft, but she could only go to the bar area and she couldn't bring any of her women friends, which she didn't. She pretty well stuck to those rules. I know that sometimes when I wasn't there, she would end up in the back rooms, but I wasn't supposed to know. I'm sure she got involved in some pretty hot scenes....

Jack Fritscher: Camille was very involved with your entertainment events.

Wally Wallace: We had S&M demonstrations like bondage and body painting. I remember she was involved in one contest. She was a talented artist.

Jack Fritscher: She exhibited her drawings at Fey-Way Gallery in San Francisco.

Wally Wallace: Where she was almost shot to death.

Camille O'Grady was rivals at CBGB with punk diva Patti Smith who was coupled with photographer Robert Mapplethorpe the way Camille O'Grady was coupled with *Drummer* writer and photographer Robert Opel who streaked the 1974 Academy Awards, and was murdered in his San Francisco gallery, Fey-Way, on July 8, 1979. The gunman mercifully did not shoot Camille O'Grady who was forced to lie on the gallery floor during the robbery and murder. (For dramatized details, see *Some Dance to Remember: A Memoir-Novel of San Francisco 1970-1982*, Reel 3, Scene 1 and Scene 8; for documentary details, confer *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera*, "Take 11: Robert Opelthorpe: Streaking the Academy Awards.") The first Mineshaft flyer for Christmas 1976 advertised: "Upcoming special events include the opening of our new tunnel playroom, a 'Criscomas Party,' and a repeat performance by Camille O'Grady." Wally Wallace also invited Camille to sing her piss song "Toilet Kiss" at the Mineshaft 1978 anniversary party. Patti Smith's own first single was "Piss Factory" — but it was not literal as was Camille's.

Jack Fritscher: When did you notice that the Mineshaft was getting to be a lot kinkier than you first planned?

Wally Wallace: In the beginning, I thought it would be just a basic fuck and suck in the back room. Well, it was fairly early on that we put up slings.

Jack Fritscher: That signaled something new.

Wally Wallace: I remembered seeing a place in San Francisco, a place called the Barracks.

Jack Fritscher: The kinkiest place in San Francisco next to the Slot.

Wally Wallace: It had a bathtub, where somebody was in the bathtub, fully clothed, getting soaked with piss, surrounded by a big crowd pushing in to piss on him, which I thought was kind of hot.

Jack Fritscher: So you put a bathtub on the ground-level floor of the Mineshaft.

Wally Wallace: That bathtub became famous. I didn't realize how many people were into bathtubs.

Jack Fritscher: Into piss.

Wally Wallace: I'm sorry I didn't keep a nightly diary. We had a group, the FFA [Fist Fuckers of America]. In the bar business, except maybe in Las Vegas, there are so many dead times during the week. When the Mineshaft opened there were maybe thirteen leather clubs in the city. Several of them fisting clubs. So we tried to attract them in on the slow nights...The FFA was a very heavy drug scene as I realized when their orgies went on for days...

Jack Fritscher: You knew Leather Rick who shot outrageous, extreme S&M videos at the Mineshaft featuring the club guys from the "Skulls of Akron." The action is astounding as in *Fisting Ballet*, but the videos also show a lot of the interior set of the Mineshaft rooms.

Wally Wallace: I became good friends with Leather Rick...and it was on a New Year's Eve, I think, he nailed somebody's cock down on the back bar. The guy climbed up and sat on the bar...In the Mineshaft for the first four years, I would not allow photos. Although I let George Dudley shoot a poster for our tub room and one of our American flag display that had Christmas lights behind the flag.

Jack Fritscher: It is really unfortunate that so much of the 1970s went unphotographed because it took nearly the whole decade for everyone to catch on after Stonewall that it was okay to be in a gay snapshot. Even in the early 1970s, a camera could empty a gay bar. By 1977, everyone was ready for his close-up. I'm glad that you let Robert Mapplethorpe in to shoot.

Wally Wallace: Yes...he shot one of the Mineshaft Man contests. It was David O'Brien that year, about 1979-1980. Somebody

thought Bob could take pictures of the event. But that wasn't his thing.

Jack Fritscher: He couldn't shoot from the hip in spontaneous conditions. He needed the formality of a studio.

Wally Wallace: ...I liked Bob, although we weren't close friends...

Jack Fritscher: We were.

Mapplethorpe and I were bicoastal lovers from October 1977 until our lovely affair evaporated into simple friendship in the Spring of 1980.

Robert Mapplethorpe shot many photographs in the Mineshaft, including the print he gave me of David O'Brien, "Mr. Mineshaft 1979." Over the years, Wally Wallace grew quite conscious of the documentary value of photography within the Mineshaft where history was made nightly. In his flyer, "MINESHAFT FIFTH ANNIVERSARY, OCT 25 1982," his archetypal sense of Mineshaft identity was evident: "The Men! The Music! The Mystery! The Magic! The Myth!" He wrote that! Most of the Mineshaft photos shot by Mapplethorpe have disappeared, presumably into the vaults of the Mapplethorpe Foundation, because, perhaps, they are not as formal and "perfect" as Robert's exquisite studio photography. (See the outlaw memoir of what happens to outlaw art, *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera*.) For all his bad-boy reputation as an artist as well as his involvement with Wally Wallace socially at the Mineshaft, Mapplethorpe really preferred private sex to public sex, and told me so frequently. With regard to uncloseting gay photography, the Mineshaft truly did break the historical taboo against cameras in gay bars and baths. Thousands of photographs, shot by dozens of photographers in the Mineshaft, actually exist, as do videos such as *Fisting Ballet* shot by the Skulls of Akron and long-since proscribed by government censorship.

Wally Wallace: Bob liked Black men and he had heard of a Black bar in Midtown in the 40s [between 40th and 49th Street] called "Blues"...and Bob was afraid to go there....So I went up there with him one time. He was like a kid so eager to go, but afraid to go alone.

Jack Fritscher: His insecurities were endearing. I squired him around town on his first trip to San Francisco to introduce him to everyone in the leather scene.

Wally Wallace: You might have thought we were headed to the depths of Harlem. The night we were there, there weren't

many hot men, but only a couple of drag queens with their white boyfriends. It was not what he imagined.

Jack Fritscher: “Blues” was not the Mineshaft. [When Mapplethorpe broke through the calla-lily-white ceiling of his racial fear—he had no racist fear—he created brilliant studies of black men. For a consideration of racism in Mapplethorpe, see *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera*, Take 16, “White Art, Black Men.” In his will, Mapplethorpe left the sum of \$100,000 to one of his Black models, Jack Walls.] ...Camille told me she was in a video shot early in the Mineshaft.

Wally Wallace: Before Leather Rick made a video, the first video was shot by a director from France who was a friend of one of the guys who worked for me at the Mineshaft. Supposedly this would only be seen in Europe and not in America. We got a little money, but it was a strange film.

Jack Fritscher: Even in an age of Warhol and John Waters and underground films?

Wally Wallace: It was a French version of the Mineshaft. What the French thought we were about. They tied one guy up and put Christmas lights around him.

Jack Fritscher: Very teenage Kenneth Anger.

Wally Wallace: I remember Camille O’Grady was in it, singing. She was a good singer. But the soundtrack on the video had a terrible echo...

Jack Fritscher: Maybe it was the punk rock sound that had just become so popular from CBGB.

Wally Wallace: The movie did nothing for Camille’s career. She thought it would. I remember her. She did sing at the Mineshaft a couple times for benefits. We did a lot of benefits like after the fire at the Everard Baths in 1978 when so many died. We also did a Casino Night to raise money for Rex...I just love Rex. Our heads are complementary. Very private. But he’s nowhere near as quiet as he seems. He’s a wonderful human being. Rex drew three posters for the Mineshaft. I feel fortunate in having known so many great people in male porn. Rex is our Michelangelo and so is Tom of Finland and A. Jay [Al Shapiro, art director of *Drummer*].

In the zero degrees around *Drummer*, Rex was the official Mineshaft artist who illustrated my “Mineshaft” article in *Drummer* 19. He had drawn the cover of *Drummer* 10 (November 1976) which was on the stands when the Mineshaft debuted. I also wrote a major feature

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

article about his work in my special issue, *Son of Drummer* (September 1978), pages 48-51. In 1980, I formally interviewed Rex who had moved in the migration of Manhattanites to San Francisco. For the excerpted interview, see *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera*, "Take 14: Merchandising the Magical, Mystical Mapplethorpe Tour." Rex moved South of Market and opened up a gallery called "Rexwerk" in his home on Hallam Mews, fifty feet across the lane from the Barracks baths on Folsom. Rex who has rarely had good luck had some very bad luck. An arsonist set the Barracks on fire during the night of July 10, 1981. Rex, along with more than a hundred others, including *Drummer* photographer, Mark I. Chester, escaped with their lives; everything they owned, all their artwork, was lost in the disaster. (For a fictive "documentary" description of what may have happened in Mark I. Chester's studio and Rex's studio as the fire raged, see *Some Dance to Remember*, Reel 4, Scene 3.)

In the *Mineshaft Newsletter*, Wally Wallace wrote:

A "CASINO NIGHT TO HELP A BUDDY OUT"
(Rex Benefit) TUES. OCT 20 [1981] 9-12

In July the largest fire since its Earthquake swept the Folsom Street area in San Francisco leaving 120 totally homeless. One of the victims was Rex, the artist of the Mineshaft logo, who lost all his earthly belongings in one night. The MINESHAFT gave a benefit for him in San Francisco and now we are having one in New York from 9 until Midnight on Tuesday October 20th. It's a Casino Night with lots of prizes for the winners...with some recent Rex work on display.... Please note that another Casino Night will be held in early November for the Gay Men's Chorus and their Bux for Tux Fund.

May I, as an eyewitness participant, alert latter-day researchers, historians, and cynics: anything and everything anyone has ever said or written about the hedonistic Mineshaft is true, including George C. Scott shouting in the 1978 musical camp film, *Movie Movie*: "More sequins! More sequins in the 'Mineshaft' number!" See my review of *Movie Movie* in *Drummer* 27 (February 1979). That kind of camp was not welcome in the sex rooms around the Mineshaft bar. Wally Wallace sent out a flyer that said:

Keep Your Damn Mouth Shut When Playing in the
Playground!

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

The MINESHAFT playrooms are for one purpose and it surely is not the place to gossip, discuss your European trip, or how well Joan Sutherland sang “Carmen” at the Met. This you do in the Main Bar which is a social area. Please remember this simple rule when visiting the Shaft.

He also posted warnings about violence: “This summer has been one of the worst in terms of street crimes in the Village/Chelsea area.”

He told the following anecdote, characteristic of Mineshaft culture, in *Jack Fritscher Interviews Mineshaft Manager, Wally Wallace, March 28, 1990*:

At one of our Mr. Mineshaft contests, one of the judges thinks he recognizes one of the contestants [Michael Garrison] as a man who seven years before had murdered the lover [Tom Strogon] of a mutual friend [Rob Kilgallen] to both the judge and me. So the judge tells me this during an intermission. The two of us go to our mutual friend out in the crowd and he confirms this. [The contestant] had murdered the lover, had gone to trial, and three years later he was out of jail, and now, a few years later, was in the Mr. Mineshaft contest.

On another existing videotape in Wally Wallace’s collection—authenticated by reporter Bob Bailey in *New York’s Gay Newspaper Connection* (June 11, 1985), the unsinkable Wally Wallace can be seen calling winner-killer Garrison back to the stage, disqualifying him, and humiliating him even as Garrison stands stripped to his contest costume of chains, jockstrap, and Muir leather cap. “This is a man,” Wally Wallace said, intoning the shunning to the crowd, “I never want to see again in the Mineshaft because he took home a man who is no longer alive.”

Even so, males of every class, caste, and nationality felt safe and secure under the omnipresent Wally Wallace’s watchful eye, his clothing-check system, and his fire-safety regards.

Wally Wallace: Our building was safe, but the sex definitely wasn’t. AIDS was still in the unforeseeable future.

Jack Fritscher: What was the dominant sexual activity at the Mineshaft? It seemed, “Anything goes.”

Wally Wallace: The most basic thing was cocksucking, then fucking, then fisting, then other things. Oh, rimming. And a lot of tit play. S&M. You know, you start at the top and go to the bottom.

Jack Fritscher: That's gay sex to a T.

Reminding me of an after-hours joint that closed in 1978, Wally Wallace differentiated his integrity from his competition: "The Toilet [an after-hours club] hired pickpockets who worked for the house." He handed me an undated sheet from a *Mineshaft Newsletter* in which he wrote:

Reporting a pickpocketing incident is important, but when you report it, give facts! Where were you when you first noticed something was gone....Who was around? Were there one or more? Were your pants up or down? Who do you suspect? Remember that all pickpockets are not Black or Hispanic! [The Mineshaft was famously international and inter-racial.]Our batting average has been good lately, but we remember a time in the early days when we had a real problem it took a long time to cure. Finally it was discovered that it was a team of three. One was really hot and always nude. His partners were the pass off men. He'd pick the pocket and pass it off to one of the who would relay it to another! Naturally the nude was never the suspect nor was the runner—a naked runner.

The Mineshaft could easily have disintegrated into a den of thieves. In the demimonde of leather, sex, drugs, and *haute culture*, a diversity of outlaws sometimes took advantage of its consensual and permissive milieu. In 1985, sex and art and death collided coincidentally in the S&M ritual-murder of model, Eigil Vesti, detailed by David France in *Bag of Toys: Sex Scandal, and the Death Mask Murder* (1992). As if playing the stabbing "E-E-E" violin notes from the shower scene in *Psycho*, France wrote on page 312, "When the phone rang outside the Mineshaft, on the morning of September 20, 1984...."

Almost from its opening night, the urban legend of the Mineshaft became part of American popular culture. Most urban legends are larger than life, but no urban legend can begin to capture nightlife inside the Mineshaft. According to Wally Wallace's report in the *Mineshaft Newsletter* (January 1977), a member named Howard went "beyond the call of duty [sucking off] 74 loads in one night."

Former *Drummer* editor Tim Barrus tried to capture the private club in his novel *Mineshaft*, and Leo Cardini tried in his picaresque book *Mineshaft Nights* which opened with a good description of the Mineshaft as a theater stage set up for erotic performance. It's what I tried to do for the Mineshaft with my article in *Drummer* which I dubbed on its masthead: "The American Review of Gay Popular Culture."

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

The very word *Mineshaft* grew to connote a certain de Sade-like shock value of sex beyond the pale.

Wally Wallace kept the Mineshaft ship on course. He wrote in his *Mineshaft Newsletter* (January 1977): "...we want to acknowledge the guys who have done so much to make THE MINESHAFT a pleasurable experience; especially the young ones we see growing up into new experiences they only fantasized about before."

Timing is everything if everything that rises is to converge. The mystique, action, and sexual power of the Mineshaft could have happened only in the Titanic 70s, an innocent, but not naive, time which those who were there remember, and those who weren't there often trash out of envy and bitterness because they missed the decade-long party.

Whoever did not live in the years
 neighboring the revolution
 does not know what
 the pleasure of living means.
 —Charles Maurice de Talleyrand

The Mineshaft existed in that wonderful window between penicillin and HIV where sex galloped out of the closet completely unleashed in the heady first decade of sexual liberation. A real camaraderie existed. A few months after the Mineshaft opened, Wally Wallace became ill with the kind of heart problems that eventually killed him in 1999. In the first *Mineshaft Newsletter* for 1977, he wrote on page 5:

A note of thanks to all you guys who thought of me during my hospital stay with your prayers, letters, and love. I am doing better every day; but like all affairs of the heart, it will take a while to really recover. May I return your love many fold. —Wally

In gay iconography, Wally Wallace, guarding the rope and the door at the Mineshaft, early in his life became a beloved star to gay and straight New York City where James Wallace was known by a single name. There was only one "Wally."

Jack Fritscher: Describe a cross section of the Mineshaft crowd.
 Wally Wallace: We had every profession and business. Journalists. Critics. The cream of the crop. Bob Mapplethorpe, of

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

course. Clergymen. It was a change for men dispensing holy water to receive holy water in the bathtub. Theater people. Directors, writers. Not just performers. Performers of note stayed away, although some arrived in disguises. Nureyev showed up at the door in his huge fur coat, took it off and was in full leather, but the son of a bitch I had as doorman was a French-Canadian who thought he had to enforce the dress code to the nth degree. He wouldn't let him that night because he wouldn't leave his fur at our coat check. Rudy never came back. I fired the French-Canadian kid. I know that Rock Hudson came in. Pacino came in. I let him in one night just so he could research his role in *Cruising*. The music was low. So you could hear the person next to you.

Jack Fritscher: Who did your music tapes?

Wally Wallace: Jerry Rice...

Jack Fritscher: *Mon amour*, and house guest for years [since 1967].

Wally Wallace: ...and Michael Fesco who ran the Flamingo disco...

Jack Fritscher: Michael and I spent the Jonestown weekend together. [November 17-19, 1978] Luckily, we were in San Francisco, not Jonestown, drinking beer, not Kool-Aid.

Wally Wallace: ...and a guy named Ashland, and myself. I asked all kinds of people to make new tapes to fit our scene. We played anything in the world, from western to classics. A lot of classics actually. Electronic variations on classic themes. Ella Fitzgerald, jazz. Tomita, new wave.

Jack Fritscher: I remember hearing Kitaro, and Kraftwerk's *Trans-Europe Express*, and Tim Buckley. His "Sweet Surrender" was more seductive than poppers for fisting.

Wally Wallace: We tried to avoid basic disco, references to females, references to "let's dance," things like that. Our music became famous because we didn't follow the mainstream. We were about kink. Mineshaft members knew what kink was. They weren't out to blind date, nor to emulate the straight world in terms of sexuality, lovers, dogs, and family. Single guys.

Jack Fritscher: Every detail. Your main bar had sawdust on the floor. Inside the Mineshaft you created an alternative universe.

Wally Wallace: Most people don't know. Art, business, politics were conducted. Sex at the Mineshaft was like going to the

gym to work out. An exercise. But also spiritual, like going to church. The Mineshaft was a form of recreation for people in high-pressure jobs whose stress came out as sexual intensity. It was not just a business; it was a labor of love. Other businesses tried to copy the Mineshaft but didn't succeed because they did it for money.

Jack Fritscher: The Mineshaft helped shape the way we were in the 1970s and 1980s.

Wally Wallace: I think we allowed everything. We gave guys a sense of freedom, to sort of sow their oats.

Jack Fritscher: Sow their oats and spill their seed.

Wally Wallace: Right. Sex is many things, never a cut and dried subject.

Jack Fritscher: Including sex, the Mineshaft provided much support to the community.

Wally Wallace: Stonewall didn't happen over night. The Stonewall Rebellion was one night. It didn't just grow spontaneously. It took a long time and a lot of people to develop what some people think exploded all at once in 1969.

Jack Fritscher: You ran a gentlemen's club for some wild gents who were building that first decade of gay liberation.

Wally Wallace: The staff and I gave a lot back to the community. We were there when people needed things, especially when they needed a space for a fund raiser. All these special-interest organizations came out: gay bankers, and the gay chorus needing tuxedos for their concert at Carnegie Hall. We raised a lot of money for charities and politics, and gay churches, and then AIDS. Just read the Mineshaft newsletters. The Mineshaft was so good at raising money that we caused people for the first time to realize the importance and the power of gay money.

Harold Cox was partners with Wally Wallace in the bar, The Lure, in the 1990s. Cox is the legendary editor of the magazine, *Checkmate Incorporating DungeonMaster*. He told me:

When it came to money, Wally was no crook. He was personally very honest, but he had worked for some shady types. So when we started The Lure, kind of to give him a job after the Mineshaft closed, we had to tell him he did not need to drive to New Jersey to buy liquor, and he did not have to pay people under the table. We were not a Mafia bar.

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

I wouldn't say the Mafia was slow on the pick up, but in 1984 profits dropped so sharply at the Mineshaft that the good fellas called in Wally Wallace and his staff, one by one, and accused them of skimming the cash register. It took nearly six months for the godfather to believe what Wally Wallace said: AIDS was killing their paying customers.

A notorious Hollywood “fictionalization” of the Mineshaft, featuring real Mineshaft “regulars” as atmosphere extras, was the William Friedkin film *Cruising*, finally released censored and cut in 1980. The *Cruising* script was loosely based on a fact-based novel of the same name by *New York Times* reporter Gerald Walker. During the film's 1979 location shooting in the streets of the Village, crowds of gays picketed the filming because they feared that Friedkin's dark image of gay leather men as murderers would cause a backlash against gay liberation.

Talk about the double standard in queerdome! These same anti-leather gays nonetheless defended drag queens and guys in butterfly costumes on roller skates as normative in the broad daylight of Pride Parades. Perhaps their attitude was bitchy payback against Friedkin whom they hated for his outing—ten years earlier—of the self-hating archetypal bitch-queens in his acerbic film of Mart Crowley's lacerating play *The Boys in the Band* (1970).

The fearless Friedkin also trolled the nihilistic dark side of drugs, satanism, and gangsters in classics like *The French Connection* (1971), *The Exorcist* (1973), and *To Live and Die in LA* (1985), Friedkin's sharp nihilistic formalism on screen was, I think, very like the formal, perfect-moment dark side of Robert Mapplethorpe, a Mineshaft charter member, who was honored by leatherfolk and disdained by the majority of the eponymous “gay community.”

Some scholar needs to investigate how this disconnect within queer culture is similar to the culture war waged by straight fundamentalists against homosexuals. I addressed this dramatically in the “gay-politics civil war” story arc in *Some Dance to Remember: A Memoir-Novel of San Francisco 1970-1982* (1990).

Wally Wallace gave his eyewitness testimony about *Cruising*, Friedkin, and the allegedly corrupt *French Connection* cops in the video *Jack Fritscher Interviews Mineshaft Manager, Wally Wallace, March 28, 1990*:

Wally Wallace: *Cruising* was not filmed at the Mineshaft but it gave us notoriety. We had a lot of sex tourists from all over Europe. One time I had [in a kind of shocking statistic worthy of both Kinsey and the Center for Disease Control] our doorman keep tabs for one week—we called it “Seven Days

in May,” but it was really ten — on where everybody was from who came through our doors, and I think it was something like thirty-three states and over forty countries....About the only countries not represented were from behind the Iron Curtain.

Jack Fritscher: The CDC might like to profile that statistic.

Wally Wallace: The film representative came into the Mineshaft maybe six months before filming. He wanted to do still photographs, but he said the ceilings were not high enough for a movie. I refused because we had a rule at the beginning about no photographs. We only let friends like Mapplethorpe take some...And then a couple of my staff got involved with the movie. Others on the staff didn't want anything to do with it because it portrayed gays as murderers....

Jack Fritscher: So, to end the rumor: it was not filmed at the Mineshaft.

Wally Wallace: *Cruising* was not filmed at the Mineshaft—although to this day people think it was. The bar scenes were done at a place now known as the Cell Block, but at that time it was—before it was Hellfire—another after-hours place in the basement of the Triangle Building at 14th Street and Ninth Avenue. It is a unique space that is under the street and not under the building.

Jack Fritscher: It was always a more hetero mix there. My friend Frank Vickers, the Colt model who was also a model for Mapplethorpe, liked to play there. [Having photographed Frank Vickers on video in 1981, I asked him to appear on the cover of the first edition of my erotic fiction anthology, *Stand by Your Man* (1987).]

Wally Wallace: They continued to want to shoot stills in the Mineshaft, but I refused. [In a much longer and complicated dialog, Wally Wallace alleged to me, the film company purposely “set up” the first police bust of the Mineshaft by bribing the cops who had helped Friedkin direct *The French Connection* in Manhattan a few years earlier. During the raid, while Wally Wallace and his staff were arrested and]...taken downtown in a paddy wagon....a crew from the movie company came into the Mineshaft and photographed everything [ostensibly to build a similar set on a sound stage]...Friedkin had this obsession to re-create the Mineshaft interior and exterior.

Jack Fritscher: It certainly looks real on film.

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

Wally Wallace: In order to create the exterior, he hired the meat company which is right next door to the Mineshaft, where he filmed all his entrances and exits to the bar in the bar scenes. In the movie, people go downstairs after entering, whereas in the Mineshaft, you had to go upstairs. Otherwise, it looks the same.

Jack Fritscher: Is it ironic that when you began to have a movie night, the first 16mm film you projected on the screen in the Mineshaft main bar was *Cruising*?

Film critic, Gary Morris, wrote in *Bright Lights Film Journal* #16 (April 1996):

Friedkin's sweaty tableaux of leather-clad, popper-snorting, fist-fucking, sadomasochistic hedonists was bound to trigger a reaction from gays who feared society would assume all homosexuals were busily engaged in these activities...This sounds dangerously similar to the middle-class queens who complain about the presence of leather, drag, or nudity in gay marches...What they failed to note is how *Cruising* points the finger for a violent decadent society far past the gyrating leather queens, who come off more as fun-loving party-boys than sinister psychopaths...it's the leather boys [from the Mineshaft] who are the targeted innocents...while the cops (read: society) are shaking down, brutalizing, raping, and probably murdering gays....

Here's my two-cents' worth of contribution to original scholarship: *Cruising* is the unspoken dark "back story" of the kind of Mafia-and-cop-subculture that tyrannized the Stonewall Inn and all the other gay bars in New York in the 1960s. It explains why that gay rebellion was so self-defensively energized and important. That homophobic, authoritarian, and Fascist subculture of cops did not evaporate in the vapor trail of the Stonewall Rebellion, June 27-28, 1969. It was pervasive nationally. In Chicago, when Chuck Renslow opened the world's first leather bar, the Gold Coast, in 1957, he had to pay off both the cops and the mob well into the 1970s. On April 11, 1976, the LAPD raided the Mark IV Bath and arrested forty-two people at the fund-raiser, the *Drummer* "Slave Auction." Harassment continued in New York even as the Mineshaft opened its doors in 1976 under legal and civic threats exactly like the fire-code and health-code dodges used to close the Mineshaft doors in November 1985 ending the sacred shrine's fabled nine-year and nine-day sleaze party.

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

What further original analysis I can add from my own experience is that the 1970s vanilla culture of Manhattan gays was terribly upset, set up, and misguided by a seminal anti-S&M screed written by the infamous Richard Goldstein at the *Village Voice*.

There was a political as well as erotic reason behind the dress code at the Mineshaft. In the *Mineshaft Newsletter* (April 1977), Wally Wallace wrote:

The Queen, England's Elizabeth, is celebrating her first 25 years on the throne. Without her pomp or her circumstances, the MINESHAFT will celebrate its first six months on the weekend of April 15th. Fortunately we don't expect a queen in sight. Thrones [toilets], yes, but "queens" no!

Exercising "crowd control" against invasive cologne and Lacoste queens, Wally Wallace wrote in the *Mineshaft Membership Application*:

Approved items in the MINESHAFT DRESS CODE as originally adopted are leather cycle styles, western gear, Levi's, T-shirts, tanktops, official uniforms, plaid and plain shirts, some rugged work pants, cut offs, gymwear, jockstraps, and just plain sweat.

The items *not* approved are those which do not fit in a man's club where visions of leather, cowboys, uniforms, and jocks are a reality and not just sugar plums at Christmas. In other words: NO COLOGNE, PERFUME, or STRONG AFTERSHAVE, NO SUITS, TIES, JACKETS, DRESS PANTS, or FANCY SHIRTS, NO DISCO DRAG, NO MAKE-UP OR FEMININE HAIR STYLES, NO FANCY DESIGNER SWEATERS, NO RUGBY OR OTHER STRIPED SHIRTS, NO HEAVY OUTERWEAR OR PARKAS, and, last but not least, LACOSTE STYLE SHIRTS. This is a NO, NO even if manufactured by those who ignore the original alligator and replace it with foxes, sailboats, pigs, or monograms. The administration of the DRESS CODE is the responsibility of the MINESHAFT Doorman, and should he err, someone on the very capable staff will probably catch it. So buy it, don't defy it!

...When you go to the Baths, you are requested to wear a towel.

...Problems arise in the dress code when a guy dressed properly tries to bring in a friend who is not so attired. It is equally hard to turn away an out-of-towner, especially a foreign visitor,

who may be of the right head, but of the wrong dress. Exceptions have been made, but in the future they will not be without a loan of the shirt off our back to the right guy.

....We feel that suits, ties, sport jackets, sweaters, fur coats, sparkles, spangles, and dresses have a place in gay society, but it ain't here.

Richard Goldstein was a lickety-lickety crusader of the correct. He seemed to have a special hatred for the Mineshaft and for Rex. He got his buzz poking his stick into the gay beehive. He specialized in anti-leather, anti-S&M, anti-fisting articles, such as “Flirting with Terminal Sex” which continued his cautionary rant begun in “S&M: The Dark Side of Gay Liberation,” in the *Village Voice*, July 7, 1975.

Goldstein hit a diva's high note that shattered glass.

Timing is everything.

Seventeen days before the *Village Voice* published Goldstein's article, *Drummer* had published its first issue June 20, 1975.

Objective corollary: seven weeks before *Drummer* was first published—that is, while the first issue was being written and edited, the Vietnam war, which drove draft-age gay men to excess to stay alive, ended on April 30, 1975, as helicopters lifted the last Marines off the rooftop of the American embassy in Saigon.

Never underestimate the pervasive violence of the Vietnam war, and the resistance to it, on the psyche of gay men in the Titanic 70s. Queer scholarship needs to address this unspoken nexus between war and hedonism.

If, as an eyewitness participant, I made *Drummer* homo-aggro (aggressive), particularly in my editorials (eg.: *Drummer* 24, September 1978) and in my hard-hitting “resistance” themes of *masculinity* and *homomascularity*, it was part of my stance against anti-leather queens like Goldstein who in 1975 was the first voice I heard of the politically correct who later abducted gay culture when it was brought to its knees by HIV, and thus made so very vulnerable to hostile take over.

About Hollywood, Katharine Hepburn famously said, “Most people in this profession are pigs.” About the politically correct in publishing and academia, I'd say the same thing. I have withstood the PC pigs for thirty years and I will rejoice when their politically correct fad fully fades like the Marxism whose bastard it is.

I suspect that at this moment most leatherfolk are yet as unaware of Goldstein's pioneering anti-leather, anti-edge rants as they were unaware of the *Life* (June 26, 1964) article which I was the first to “out” to the attention of leather history in *Drummer* 134 (October 1989). That was

the issue on the stands during the huge Loma Prieta earthquake, 5:04 PM, October 17, 1989, that wiped out the *Drummer* office, demoralized its owners, and caused the magazine to be put up for sale, and turned over to the last owner's mostly greenhorn-tinhorn editors.

The politically correct quake was worse.

Why is the West Coast always ahead of East Coast leather? Like Rex, even NY-centric Mapplethorpe left Manhattan and came to San Francisco, to my *Drummer* desk, to begin his West-Coast-driven "leather period" which to this day his East Coast heirs probably wish would disappear so they can sell calla lily photographs printed on dinner plates and shower curtains.

Much that I have written in *Drummer* in defense of leather, edge play, fisting, and S&M, as well as much that I have written in defense of, in fact, Robert Mapplethorpe, was caused, as scoped out here, by crap such as Richard Goldstein's hysterical take on masculine-identified leather. Goldstein's anti-male prejudice was the East Coast twin of self-described sissy publisher, David Goodstein, whose fear and loathing of men permeated his magazine, *The Advocate*.

Are some gay men so "whipped" by feminist Marxism that they fight the fact that homomascularity is a legitimate measure on the Kinsey scale?

What makes these urban oracles, who have a right to be surrounded by coteries of sissies, forget this fact: the true gay-male demographic within all races is more than ninety percent masculine identified. For incontrovertible proof, I offer as internal evidence of self-fashioned gay identity the millions of personal sex classifieds of magazines and papers ranging from *Drummer* to *The Advocate* which pivot on the word *masculine*.

Contemporaneous with Anita Bryant and the religious right, Goldstein and Goodstein set up the judgmental and fearful attitude that grew to excite the United States federal government when Republican Senator Jesse Helms denounced S&M, leather, and Mapplethorpe on the floor of the United States Senate, and destroyed the National Endowment to the Arts as well as federal funding to uncensored voices and visions. No one can convince me that these anti-sex Cassandras weren't all vindicated by the advent of AIDS.

Drummer's voice and vision is totem of leather culture within gay culture within straight culture.

Drummer, from first issue to last (*Drummer* 214), stood like a light-house against the dark censorious shadow cast by attitudes such as Goldstein's, Goodstein's, and Helms' who represent legions of repression from the Marxist left and the religious right.

The positive energy pole of West Coast *Drummer*, appearing at the same time as the negative energy of East Coast Goldstein, charged up

the electrical field that shaped and censored *Drummer* throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s: in problems *Drummer* had with Puritan printers and fundamentalist distributors, with customs agents seizing *Drummer* between the US and Canada, as well as the specific video censorship of *Drummer* publisher Anthony DeBlase's and Zeus Studio's *Drummer* S&M series, *USSM* — which I've always thought was the most brilliant title ever for a video series.

Nevertheless, "*Drummer* served, and still serves," wrote PlanetSoma.com, "as the guidebook to the national leather/SM community." So I was happy when PlanetOut.com wrote that "Fritscher was the groundbreaking editor of *Drummer* magazine."

I was equally happy when an anti-Semite website listing the takeover of "Jews in Homosexual Vocations in America" named me specifically in terms of *Drummer*: "Fritscher became editor in chief of gay *Drummer* magazine in 1977." Others listed were: Tony Kushner, Larry Kramer, Leslie Feinberg, Dan Savage, Sarah Schulman, Martin Duberman, Rex Wockner, Gayle Rubin, and even black-leather's nemesis, Richard Goldstein, himself. Even though I am an Irish-Austrian American Catholic, I realize that *fag* and *Jew* are one and the same epithet to bigots, and in that I relish solidarity.

Always in the eye of a Category 5 storm, *Drummer* was the leather magazine of record which dared proclaim masculine-identified homosexuality as alternative to the queenstream. Such issues of sexual identity interested Friedkin. Had he submitted his screenplay for *Cruising* to *Drummer* I would have gladly serialized it — Vito Russo notwithstanding, because Friedkin's depiction of leathermen holds up as a psychological inquiry, as well as a *film-noir* murder mystery in which the "virilization issues" of male sexual identity are the main theme.

Also, for leathermen of a certain age, it is nostalgic fun to freeze-frame *Cruising* to see a veritable gallery of otherwise lost-to-history familiar faces — including the 1960s Latin porn star, Fernando — "acting" all around the sexy and brooding star Al Pacino who could have been that year's Mr. *Drummer*. I wrote in *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera*, pages 189-190:

Between 1979 and 1980, Robert Mapplethorpe was the "official" Mineshaft photographer. Wally Wallace asked Robert to shoot a party at the club....In October, 1979, he shot David O'Brien, that year's "Mr. Mineshaft," at the bootblack's stand....

As Bogart said in *Casablanca* (1942): "Sooner or later, everyone comes to Rick's."

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

The Mineshaft was instantly the hottest spot in New York during the Titanic 70s even after Studio 54 debuted five months later on April 26, 1977. Everyone who was anyone traveled from wherever they were in the world, from over the rainbow, from Max's Kansas City and the Saint and CBGB to the north end of the West Village, twelve to fourteen blocks away from Christopher Street, to try to be admitted into the after-hours Mineshaft.

"It is an odd thing," quipped Oscar Wilde, "but everyone who disappears is said to be seen in San Francisco. It must be a delightful city, and possess all the attractions of the next world."

Substitute the word *Mineshaft* for *San Francisco* to understand the Bali Hai call of the Mineshaft and the litany of the rich and famous, talented and beautiful and legendary who were, so urban legend gossiped, seen down on their knees at the Mineshaft—from Nureyev and Minnelli to Fassbinder and Foucault. Mick Jagger was turned away for showing up with a couple of women, who, like business suits and Lacoste shirts, were not on the list. Once in awhile, some women disguised as men did make it into the Mineshaft. As with the Woodstock wannabes ("I was at Woodstock!") and the Stonewall revisionists ("I was at Stonewall!"), Wally Wallace assured me, lots of people—men as well as women—who bragged they made it into the Mineshaft were lying.

During my 1990 interview, Wally Wallace—who was the founding (and only) manager of the Mineshaft, as well as its total creative force and code enforcer—offered me more than one hundred photographs shot inside the Mineshaft for inclusion in the video documentary as well as for historical publication in *Eyewitness Drummer*. Wally Wallace had a couple of original Mapplethorpe prints tossed unprotected into his suitcase with all the other photographs, his underwear, and socks. I lifted the Mapplethorpe photos up with two fingers by the corner, as if they were sacred objects, and told Wally what iconic images they were and how much they were worth.

He shrugged.

He was totally unassuming, but he was also in interview so very monumentally disgusted with gay culture at large that he damned the whole of it. What happened next at *Drummer* didn't sweeten his tongue. Wally Wallace knew I intended to excerpt his interview in *Drummer*.

I wrote a letter to him dated April 10, 1990:

Wally Wallace
183 Christopher Street 2nd Floor

Drummer 19: The Mineshaft

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New York NY 10014

Dear Wally,

Thanks for a very pleasant afternoon. You made the interview much more fun than interviews often are. Actually, it was nice just to be able to sit and talk with you. Next time you're out [to San Francisco], we must visit again, without both of us having to work at the same time.

Enclosed is a copy of *Palm Drive Video's Greatest Hits* which you might find amusing. Sort of short clips from a wide variety of our offbeat videos.

Especially enclosed is a copy of *Some Dance to Remember*, my new novel, which we spoke about. Hope you enjoy it. Reader response has been excellent as have the reviews that have come in so far [in the two months since the book's publication].

Your photos which you left with me are safe, and I'll be giving them to *Drummer* as soon as I finish [transcribing] the interview, which should be sometime in May.

Again, thanks for your time. I'll be sending you a draft of the interview before it's published in *Drummer* so you can check it to make sure I haven't misrepresented you in any way. It's very important to me to keep things clear among people, particularly in the gay business of publishing.

Best regards,
Jack Fritscher

cc. Anthony DeBlase, *Drummer* publisher
Joseph Bean, *Drummer* editor

On the same April 10, 1990, I wrote to *Drummer* editor, Joseph Bean:

Dear Joseph,

...The Mineshaft interview took 12 hours, 2 meals, but it was worth it. Interview should be to you mid-to-late May. Also took pix of Wally, so that bottom of 1st page might have 3 horizontal pix ala *Playboy*. However, you use them, they're the only current pix of WW around....

Yours,
Jack Fritscher

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

cc. A. DeBlase

When the October 17, 1989, earthquake destroyed the *Drummer* office, the magazine never recovered despite the efforts of editor Joseph Bean and the publisher Anthony DeBlase who felt compelled to sell *Drummer* to the Dutch businessman Martijn Bakker in September 1992.

In the turmoil, my interview with Wally Wallace lay in turnaround, unpublished.

Seeing the handwriting on the wall, and feeling abandoned and ignored, Wally Wallace knew he was being double-fucked. It hurt my feelings that *Drummer* hurt him. I thoroughly liked him. He was not even a year older than I, but he had a hundred years of wear and tear from his long nights at the Mineshaft. He was always a difficult personality, but he was no curmudgeon. And his heart condition was worsening. He knew the primacy of *Drummer* in leather history, and he felt his legacy slipping away through DeBlase's negligence.

Wally Wallace sent me a copy of a bitter letter he sent to Anthony DeBlase because, failing a response from DeBlase, he wanted me publish the letter; it was postmarked April 7, 1992. Two years had passed since I had given Wally's photographs to *Drummer*, and still DeBlase refused to cooperate with Wally Wallace with whom he had once been so close, famously even hosting S&M workshops at the Mineshaft. The irony was that it was DeBlase who roped both Wally Wallace and me into doing the interview in the first place.

Of course, there was a back story.

Because I was involved with former Chicagoan DeBlase in the startup and the writing of the *Drummer* feature on leather history titled "Rear-View Mirror," I was aware as early as 1988 that DeBlase's interest and loyalty was shifting from repairing *Drummer* in San Francisco to inventing the Leather Archives and Museum in Chicago in partnership with Chuck Renslow. DeBlase was founding director and president of the LA&M board of directors. I know, from my eyewitness participation, that he asked me—and others—to write about leather history and to interview personalities such as Wally Wallace so that, as *Drummer* publisher, he could funnel our raw data and essays into the new Leather Archives and Museum which was a brainchild born out of a partnership with Chuck Renslow who was casting about for a place to archive the artwork of his terminally ill partner Dom Orejudos aka Etienne. The Leather Archives and Museum was incorporated in August 1991 and Etienne died on September 24, 1991.

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

Even so, DeBlase, dejected over *Drummer*, was no longer motivated to publish the Wally Wallace interview in *Drummer*. Even before the 1989 earthquake, DeBlase devalued *Drummer* because on his watch plague and politics had turned the former erotic giant into a self-help and gender-esteem magazine, and he was trying to unload it on anyone (including me) who would buy it.

Primarily, he wanted my personal historical research about Chicago leather culture and Folsom Street life, as well as my Wallace-Mineshaft videotape to build up his LA&M history archives where he was worthily engaged in building a *Leather History Timeline*. (He once thanked me and admitted he mined my archeological information in my *Drummer* writing, particularly my “Rear-View Mirror” columns, in order to build parts of that vast timeline. I also helped him construct his later issues of *DungeonMaster*.)

No one has yet noted the important role that *Drummer* once performed in adding its DNA to the GLBT genome at the LA&M.

In the zero degrees of separation, the morbidly ailing DeBlase chose former *Drummer* editor Joseph Bean, who moved his expertise from San Francisco to Chicago, to become executive director of the LA&M in July 1997. Anthony DeBlase died in Oregon on July 21, 2000.

Wally Wallace’s letter is presented with his punctuation, spelling, and feeling intact:

April 6, 1992

Dear Mr DeBlase,

Two and a half years ago I was asked by you if I would be willing to be interviewed for a feature article in DRUMMER on my experiences as manager of The Mineshaft. I believe that it was part of a series of articles on Seventies Sleaze spots. It was shortly after the earthquake and I believe that the intent was to revitalize your membership [subscription lists]. Although I agreed to what appeared to be an urgent request it was another four or five months later before I was directly contacted by Jack Fritscher who was assigned to write the article. [I contacted Wally Wallace quickly after DeBlase had waited months to give me the assignment.]

Jack suggested we set a time for him to call me and we would do it over the telephone. I felt that if it was to be the important feature that a person-to-person phone conversation would be inappropriate as I have had a couple of bad experi-

ences in being misquoted and generally am uncomfortable in extended telephone conversations.

After making one personal schedule change, arranging for a Friend to stay with and an inexpensive flight, I went out to San Francisco to meet with Jack. I had cash flow problems, which I still do, but thought the story well worth making the trip. I NEITHER ASKED FOR NOR REALLY EXPECTED COMPENSATION FROM DRUMMER. [Nor did I who received none for this project.] That is, other than a fair shake, or should I say a rather timely publication of the article resulting from my face-to-face interview with someone whom I both knew and still respect. Naturally, as you are the one who initially approached I thought that you would also be involved with the end product.

In any event I thought I was doing someone whom I respected a favor. I also looked forward with sharing my experience in a leisurely manner in an unpressured atmosphere away from New York. With Jack this worked very well as we talked for hours on the balcony of a friend overlooking San Francisco. The early spring March day was perfect and as we talked he videotaped every word. I think that I was candid and we covered many, many subjects. I was excited because I finally opened up a lot of thoughts that I had had to contain within me to that day. And most important, I was certain that the resulting feature by Jack would be both a pleasure for your readers, who had either visited the Mineshaft or had heard tales about it.

So, where is it? Where is a copy of the video of that experience that I thought I would show my other half? [He presumed I would release a copy of that original video footage. I never promised that. What I promised was to send him a transcript of the interview. As a journalist, I would never release into the wild my private notations on paper or on tape. I also think he presumed that my video was some kind of production by my company, Palm Drive Video. In truth, I set up my camera on a tripod in a full-on medium close-up of Wally Wallace, in the same way that I interviewed Robb of Amsterdam and others. It was electronic note-taking. As I wrote his words on my yellow legal pad, I let my camera—with its wonderful microphone—run untouched as a way to record his words more precisely than a small audiotape recorder. He knew that the video was for archival use.] Where are my personal pictures that I left in your or Jack's care. [I had handed them to DeBlase so that he could begin photostating them for the page-layout design of the inter-

view. Ultimately, I went to DeBlase and asked for the photos which he held for another six months. Immediately, on October 20, 1992, I mailed them to Wally Wallace, and the letter that accompanied them follows this letter.]

Jack was kind enough to send me a short and wonderful note shortly after, but that is the last semi-official written notice that I have ever had regarding my efforts to give you the DRUMMER story that you wanted.

...I also want immediate return of all my photographs and other materials that I supplied for this thankless endeavor...In truth I am glad that I did participate in that experience for like many of life experiences it served as a lesson in the art of wasting time which seems to be just what most of my endeavors on the behalf of the DRUMMER image have been.

[Wally Wallace then shifts to *Drummer* and his discontent with DeBlase's lack of help in staging the Mister Northeast *Drummer* Contests.] ...Behind the scenes, cooperation on the part of DRUMMER this year was to say the least, minimal. Each year our expenses are raised through the program ad inserts with the ticket proceeds going to the cause [AIDS]... Shortly after we mailed our letter soliciting ads we received a call from someone in your organization wanting a quotation on the subscription prices in last year's ad as they couldn't locate the copy we had sent with our letter. It turned out that the prices were still in effect, but the post office box number was wrong. So, the caller said he would send another tearsheet or mechanical which he did. To it our layout man added the expression "Keep on Drummin'" in the space between the cover photos and the order form. Then in a blank space on another page we devoted a 3/4 page to a free promo for the San Francisco main event [the annual international Mr. *Drummer* contest].

Then later a few days...I called John Ferrari [at *Drummer*] about the payment for the ad. He said he'd look into it, but as you were having cash flow problems he doubted that you wanted an ad. After two days I called again only to find that he was in Atlanta and you were away. I left messages at two Atlanta locations for Ferrari, but he never called. But, we went to press with the belief that you would come through. I sure made a mistake.

The army taught me never to assume anything. I guess that I forgot that when I mistakenly thought that DRUMMER

magazine would repeat their support, in a DRUMMER Contest program, for an AIDS...fund raiser.

...The shock of your “cash flow” decision was not only difficult to explain to our beneficiary organization, but lost us two vital committee members on the eve of the contest who basically indicated upon exiting that...they have had it up to here with the piety of the Almighty DRUMMER....In truth you use, but certainly don't know how to appreciate the people in the various regions who work damn hard to keep the name and publication of DRUMMER alive.

This has not been an easy letter to write. In fact on a personal level it has been most difficult to write as I seem to remember a cocktail party in my former home congratulating you on your acquisition of DRUMMER Magazine. Enough said.

Enough indeed. Wally Wallace apologized for speaking truth. Wallace had feted DeBlase in New York after the wealthy doctor Andrew Charles purchased *Drummer* for his lover DeBlase on August 22, 1986. In San Francisco, our long-standing salon around *Drummer* also welcomed Charles and DeBlase to *Drummer*. There was an especially wonderful and intimate supper for ten held in their honor on the Thursday before the Folsom Leather Weekend, September 25, 1986. We writers, photographers, and artists—including Rex—hoped for a restoration at *Drummer* after the botched ownership by first publisher John Embry.

It wasn't long before new publisher DeBlase was believing his own press. The toy his lover had bought him brought him power, and power corrupts—at least, relatively. (The *Drummer* mystique—and here's the elephant in the room—was also a way for both Charles and DeBlase to get laid by leathersmen who otherwise would not touch them for love or money.) Embry had used *Drummer* to fund real estate. DeBlase, even though married to the Charles fortune, used the energy and cash of *Drummer* the way Evita, even though married to Peron, funded her foundation and her Rainbow Tour. His interest was not in *Drummer* itself; he was using *Drummer* as a means to an end.

Owning *Drummer* was like waving a gun: the sense of power made everyone look, and get out of the way.

Whatever insecurities or jealousy that DeBlase had felt in the 1970s trying to break into the Chicago leather empire created by

the legendary Chuck Renslow, he was out to prove something. He had issues. He had been the archetypal fat john standing in the Gold Coast leather bar knowing that every thirty pounds he was overweight took a half inch off his penis. By 1990, he was determined to return to Chicago as a player and a winner and a cult personality no one there could dismiss or exclude.

As eyewitness in his April 2, 1992, letter, Wally Wallace insinuates the storyline of how DeBlase came to San Francisco, climbed his way to power, forgot who he was, fell from grace, and had to flee the City. I had been friends with Andy Charles since 1969. I knew him “when”: before he met DeBlase. My first lover David Sparrow and I, and then Mark Henry and I, were their friends. It saddens me to remember that as an eyewitness on the inside track at *Drummer* and at their home, I watched as their personal modesty turned to the same kind of prehensile hubris that infected John Embry.

In closing I ran into Rex last night who was about to return to San Francisco. I told him of my intended letter on the article that never happened. He said, “what did I expect from the laxidical [*sic*] world of the porn publishing world.” Somehow, from you, Tony, or rather Master DeBlase, I did expect something more.

(Signed) Wally

Acting as apologist for *Drummer* and DeBlase, I wrote to Wally Wallace on October 20, 1992:

Dear Wally,

You’ve heard of all the changes at *Drummer*, I’m sure, since it’s been sold. Tony stays on [so I was told], which is good, because he’s a calming influence; Joseph Bean remains editor, which is also good. Now with a new publisher perhaps a solid new direction will pump some life into the magazine—life that was lacking mostly due to censorship. *Drummer* always gets picked on for things that aren’t *Drummer*’s fault. Once this presidential election is over—and decides things somewhat about what the gay media can expect [to print]—the pace of publishing will pick up.

As I mentioned to you [on the telephone], I have worked on your interview...and so it will happen, but not, of course,

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

without your reading it and updating or changing whatever you like. That's not just a courtesy to you for all the courtesy you showed me the day I drove from the country to the City to see you; it's a courtesy and more. I want the interview to be accurate and to reflect how you want to see yourself presented in print.

So again, thank you, for meeting with me and for being so open and fresh in the stories you told and how you told them. History will be all the more exact for your testimony to the Golden Age of the Mineshaft.

Enclosed are the photographs you left with me. I hate sending them through the mail [as he requested], but I'm packing them safely and sending them CERTIFIED etc to enhance the chance that the Post Office can actually deliver.

I hope you got that original Mapplethorpe framed—the one I pulled from your stack of photographs. It's quite valuable.

As things take shape with the latest new *Drummer*, I'll let you know the schedule and will send you the manuscript for your reading prior to publication.

All the best,
Jack Fritscher

When DeBlase bought *Drummer* from its first publisher John Embry in 1986, hostilities broke into a blood feud almost instantly. When DeBlase sold *Drummer* to its third publisher Martijn Bakker in 1992, a nasty business quarrel erupted within hours.

Egos and cash done 'em all in.

Martijn Bakker, the new owner of *Drummer*, lived in Holland and quickly parted ways with DeBlase who, besides being a morbidly obese gourmet cook and cigar smoker, suddenly “suffered some kind of emotional collapse.” Escaping Bakker and *Drummer* and San Francisco, DeBlase fled to Oregon where, growing more eccentric, he edited his magazine *DungeonMaster*, which he sold to my longtime friend Harold Cox, publisher of *Checkmate* magazine. Guiding the Chicago LA&M from Oregon, DeBlase died of complications involving liver failure on July 21, 2000.

Bakker's amateur American editors Robert Davolt and Wickie Stamps, twisting *Drummer* to their own agenda, shunned the very idea of an interview about a long-gone sex club by “Wally who?”

Even though I offered Davolt-Stamps some of the Mineshaft photos, I was told the interview was “too much text” for their taste! Their readers wanted pictures.

Rex said, “What do you expect?”

This snub by neo-gay culture pissed Wally Wallace off even more. He felt further justified in his bitterness toward the ignorant, young, history-free queers who took over in the 1990s after the generation who should have been running gay media had all suddenly died.

An historian wanting to know how *Drummer* fizzled to its demise in 1999 need look only at the magazine’s failure of originality and vision during the entire 1990s. For instance, *Drummer* staff, Davolt and Stamps, missed the perfect journalistic “hook” to publish my Wally Wallace interview when there was a hot news flash about a “new” Mineshaft resurrected by the French in Marseille in 1995. As it turned out, *Drummer* was scooped by rival magazine, *International Leatherman* (September 1996), whose editor (in the zero degrees) was former *Drummer* editor Joseph Bean. Even so, in the *IL* “Euro-Leather” column, Bean’s history-free reporter Thomas Schwartz wrote about the French Mineshaft without mentioning the original Mineshaft or Wally Wallace or Rex whose artwork was badly imitated in the advertising for the Mineshaft, F.S.M.C., rue Mazagan, F-13001, Marseille, France.

Wally Wallace was insulted by both the French imitation and the leather-heritage omission in both *Drummer* and *International Leatherman*.

Even as we remained friends, Wally Wallace often phoned to chat, bitching and wondering why *Drummer* wasn’t interested in his story of the Mineshaft. My hands were tied.

He said, “Gays are always embarrassed by the leather community the way straights are embarrassed by fags.”

We both believed that *Drummer* in the 1990s had been captured in a coup by vanilla queers. He and I both remained at a loss why *Drummer* did not want to hear his vivid oral history, because *Drummer* had eagerly published my histories of other leather luminaries such as Chuck Arnett, Robert Mapplethorpe, and Tony Tavarossi in my “Rear-View Mirror” leather-history columns.

Ten months before DeBlase died, Wally Wallace, betrayed by gay culture and embittered by the century, died September 7, 1999.

His heart clutched.

He died in a panic to remember.

Everything ends in panic.

Like Magnus Bishop, my narrator in *Some Dance to Remember*, I was left holding baskets full of notes, diaries, letters, recordings, photographs, and videotapes.

In “THE MINESHAFT FIFTH ANNIVERSARY NEWSLETTER,” Wally Wallace wrote about remembrance:

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

In one hundred years will anyone remember? In one hundred years will anybody care? Lyrics from a long ago Broadway show [Kander and Ebb's *Chicago* (1975)] echo through my head as I put together this *Newsletter* celebrating the MINESHAFT's fifth anniversary. Well, I can't comment on one hundred years to come, but as far as today goes it can be said that the club is in the thoughts of guys the world over who have either been in the MINESHAFT or fantasized about it from printed word or the word of mouths. So for you and them I hope that the mystery, the myth, the magic, the music, and the men remain hot for at least five years if not for one hundred. — Wally

My own experiences at the Mineshaft, which I attended religiously for years, are glossed, of course, in my 1977 feature article in which I was tub-thumping for the Mineshaft as a place of necessary pilgrimage for any grown-up masculine-identified gay man. As editor in chief, I presupposed my *Drummer* readers believed Auntie Mame's first commandment that life is a banquet and most poor suckers are starving to death.

Back in that day, I lived bi-coastally between New York and San Francisco all during the 1960s and 70s. When I was in Manhattan, I'd see the latest films during the afternoon, the latest plays in the evenings, and after a tour of the leather bars, I'd alternate the late nights between the not-so-vanilla Everard Baths, a filthy, glorious, matchbox maze which burned often (one of many times in 1977, and finally in 1985), and the Mineshaft (which was so wet it burned partially only once) with its more extreme action of nipples, slings, fisting, piss, bondage, whipping, and scatology.

At the Mineshaft, the group dynamic was such high energy that a man had to be in control of himself so as not to get swept away in action that was too extreme for himself. That meant grass and poppers—and staying away from acid, MDA, and angel dust.

Sometimes the very personal is the way to, if not universality, at least to historical feel.

Eyewitness Scenario 1: Interior Mineshaft. 2:30 AM. A very hand-some leatherman and I, both stripped to the waist, pec to pec, nipple to nipple, began bumping belt buckles, and playing with our leather belts, which turned into a mutual belting session, chest and back and shoulders, which "turned on" a third man who joined us, increasing the round of beltings, as the energy shifted and two ganged up on the third, and the trio of us migrated slowly away from the crowded room to a more private corner, and the belting increased to the intensity of, say, two guards in a

Georgia prison beating an inmate, escalating in consensual intensity until the ferocity rose to a level of awareness of what “being beaten by belts” was about, to the moment where the quintessential intellectual curiosity is satisfied, is transcended, and the scene having reached its apogee begins to descend into nothing but physical subjection to brutality, and I said, *stop*, and they continued, and I said, *No, stop*, and they continued, and I crawled out from under them and said, *Really, no, stop*, and they stopped in the wonderful bonding, knowing finally that I meant *stop*. I got the point—the experiential definition of what belting and beating is—and reached my limit in a spontaneous scene I had not expected to be part of, and we smiled, and I rose up, and as quickly as I rose to my feet from under their belts, a fourth man, who had been watching from the doorway, fell to his knees at the booted feet of the three of us, and the belting began all over again, on him.

The very architecture of the Mineshaft as well as the shifting crowd allowed scenes to flow from one intensity to the next, and the players to change within a scene, so that a man could enter any scene, upstairs, or leave any scene downstairs, exactly when and how he chose, free, always careful not to break the erotic trance of the participants in the scene.

In fact, *erotic trance* was goal and mantra at the Mineshaft.

“Fantasy imagined” was exchanged at the door in favor of “fantasy actualized into new reality.”

In the Mineshaft, a man knew there were men who would gladly do to him the things he never thought anyone would do to him.

Eyewitness Scenario 2: Interior Mineshaft, 3:30 AM. Another night. In a corner, on the first floor of the Mineshaft, an incredibly handsome man, well built, started out giving a certain vibe in the middle of the room. He was soon backed into a corner by a dozen men worshipping his wonderful body. For almost a half hour, the small gang stroked, petted, and licked at his god-flesh naked but for a dirty piss-soaked jockstrap and boots. On their knees and standing, they shuffled in towards him, and reshuffled themselves among themselves, sucking on each other's cocks, working nipples, writhing in orgy between his big, hairy thighs. On a close look at him, he was well worthy of desire.

So I reached my right hand over and through the scrum of men thrashing around his legs and torso and I touched his nipple. Surprisingly, he looked up, smiled, and reached out toward me, leaning into him, both arching above the worshipers, judging what this erotic negotiation might mean. He had that light in his eyes that made me feel he read us both. He was so hot I figured to do anything he wanted. He wasn't shy. He grabbed onto my nipples and pulled himself out of the worshipping suction toward me, and kept flowing by me, towing me by the pecc into the

next room where a sling hung vacant and waiting. We danced a primordial, ancient, prehistoric, genetic, and sacramental choreography. Neither asked the other our motivation. And what happened, happened very fast. He walked me up to the sling hung from huge 8x8 posts, unbuckled my belt, peeled my jeans down around my ankles, knocked me back into the sling, and I was thinking *Am I ready?* for this specific trip within all the general erotic possibilities of the Mineshaft, when my ankles went up into the stirrups, and loose change fell to the floor from my jean pockets, and he leaned into my biggest arch, and drove his hand skillfully, and most importantly, realistically, into me, with no foreplay but an intense smile, and no drug other than grass and desire, because we both had clicked into the “whatever” of the perfect moment, and I was glad I had hosed out a couple of hours before, receiving his big fist on his powerful arm driven by his tectonic torso and his intense face. He wanted me to cum. Maybe his game was harvesting cumshots from as many guys as possible. Sometimes a hardon is hard to come by during a butt trip, but his drive summoned up all my cooperation, and I came to please him, and myself with him, the two of us connected fist to ass.

Tennessee Williams’ Blanche says, “Sometimes there’s God so quickly.”

And as fast as I came, he leaned over and kissed me, turned and walked off into the crowd. Two other men, witnesses to the collision, unhooked my ankles, and I had to make the only crucial decision one had to make at the Mineshaft: whether to go upstairs to the bar to reload for a second round, or to head to the street hoping that, among the butchers in white shouldering bloody carcasses of meat, I could shout, “Taxi.”

It was always beautifully symbolic to me
that gorgeous sides of fresh red meat
were hanging from bright hooks
outside the warehouses around the Mineshaft.

And, oh, what a gift it was
in those years to be able to be meat
every once and awhile
in a lifetime surrounded by people
so moral and ignorant they think
it is a bad thing: this enfleshment,
this incarnation of self,
this becoming flesh that is,
well, the actual very heart of Christian theology.

I always hear of neo-religious people
talking about how physical sex

led them to spirituality.
I'm talking about how physical sex
leads to animality.
After all, I am equal parts
meat and spirit
and I have never minded celebrating either.
In the sanctuary of the Mineshaft,
the word was made flesh.
And for a writer, what could be better.

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

**Men's Bar Scene
Manhattan's Divine Decadence...**

The Mineshaft

Hot spots get too hot not to cool down. So hit them while you can. Like The Mineshaft in New York, New York. Two floors and a roof of whatever flips your switch. In San Francisco, a friendly stranger asks your sign. In LA he asks what part of town you live in. New Yorkers just do a two-handed fine-tuning on your tits and lift an armpit, either yours or theirs, for openers. That's the "Manhattan Hello."

UP A STEEP AND VERY NARROW STAIRWAY

Cab it to The Mineshaft. It's tucked in among the meat-packing houses at the Little West 12th Street. Head on up the stairs. At the entrance, a man checks your membership or issues you a card renewable every three months. For members the door charge is minimal and the stub is money at the bar.

Best of all you can check any or all of your clothes. You aren't going to need them anyway unless they are fetish items. For instance, a new group called The Jock Strap League tends the bar Monday nights. Those quiet dudes you see roaming around in their Bikes are actually in their club uniform. (You can join the JSL by calling (212) 580-9582, but don't wash your jock first.)

The jock fans are typical clientele. Tuesdays, for instance, during this first year of Mineshaft festivities, have been reserved for live bouts by the New York Wrestling Club. Wednesdays the FFA takes over both

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

slings and the pool table: left ball in the side pocket. A can of Crisco sits behind the bar. Ask for some with an outstretched hand and you get an ice cream scoopful to lube up to your elbow. Thursday the A.E.A. (Ass Eaters Association.) takes over the downstairs, although they're there every night everywhere. Other nights, uniforms are as varied as a surplus fantasy can get. Obviously, The Mineshaft has a Dress Code, basically macho and fetish, and strictly enforced.

OTHER VOICES, OTHER ROOMS

The Shaft is an amazing two-story maze of rooms, stairways, toilets, closets, hallways, bathtubs, gloryholes, and sex equipment. Light varies from shadows to darkness. Men sit, stand, kneel, hang, crawl, drink, and eat. After midnight: something for everyone. The music is truly weird, but played low enough not to cover the slurps, moans, whippings, and piss scenes.

Anything you can fantasize is available somewhere in The Mineshaft which is not for those with low Fantasy Quotients. The Shaft now offers a "School for Lower Education" to aid men in their descent. Currently, an M.D., a psychiatrist, and a psychologist are needed to conduct the timid through courses geared to release their inhibitions. Dial 924-4978.

The Mineshaft is the pits. In the best sense. The Shaft is no place to take your daytime identity. The Shaft is the place of the night-time ID. Abandon inhibition all ye who enter here. Any joint up front enough to advertise SUNDAYS ARE FOR SLUMMING, you can figure goes all the way down on Friday and Saturday nights. The Shaft is true raunch.

Besides the variety of body types, the New York attitude, the films, the genuinely far-out trips, and all the gimmicks any good bar exploits to jazz up a cooking atmosphere, the best thing at The Mineshaft is the men who make it go: Wally Wallace, Bruce, and Bob. They really care about your safety inside the oasis they have created. Clothes checking is totally safe; members have special valuables envelopes which are placed in a newly fire-proofed safe. The current newsletter, in fact, is full of sensible advice on how to keep Mr. Goodbar out of The Mineshaft and out of your life. So if you don't live in The Big Apple, but still want a hot trip, rest assured inside The Mineshaft everything is cool. (Outside, remember to take a taxi.)

THE SHAFT IS A FANTASY BY REX

The essence of The Mineshaft is found in page after page of Rex's drawings in *Icons* and *Mannespielen*. If you get off on Rex, you'll like The

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

Mineshaft and you'll understand why The Shaft chose him to design its 1978 poster and T-shirt. Rex epitomizes in his work the concept of The Mineshaft man.

THE CURRENT SHAFT HOURS

Monday, Tuesday, & Wednesday 10 pm-6 am

Thursday Happy-Hour Prices 5 pm-9 pm

Thursday Evening Hours 9 pm-6 am

Friday (Everything Goes) 10 pm-9 am

Saturday (Around the Clock) 10pm-?am

Sunday (Happy Hours) 4 pm -8 pm

Sunday Evening Hours 8 pm-6 am

The Mineshaft is located at 835 Washington Street, New York 10014.

III. Eyewitness Illustrations

EYEWITNESS PHOTOGRAPHS. In the following pages of Mineshaft publicity kit photographs, all were shot for promotional purposes in the Mineshaft and were given to Jack Fritscher by the manager of the Mineshaft, Wally Wallace, from his personal collection, with the express purpose of illustrating Fritscher's eyewitness history of the Mineshaft in conjunction with advertising materials, Mineshaft Newsletters, personal letters, and transcripts of the videotape *Jack Fritscher Interviews Mineshaft Manager, Wally Wallace, March 28, 1990*. Out of an age of joyous anonymity in the 1970s and through an age of AIDS in the 1980s, where identification was simply not uncloseted and then became impossible, names of subjects and photographers are strictly noted as known. All photographs ©Wally Wallace. One hundred Mineshaft photographs in the Jack Fritscher and Mark Henry collection may be seen by appointment.

©Jack Fritscher

“Mineshaft,” drawing by Rex, illustrated the first article written about the Mineshaft which was authored by Jack Fritscher in *Drummer* 19 (December 1977). Drawing ©Rex. Used with permission.

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

“Wally Wallace, Mineshaft Manager,” San Francisco, March 28, 1990. Photograph by Jack Fritscher. ©Jack Fritscher. Following the muralist tradition, Wallace commissioned the large panels installed on the walls of the bar in the Mineshaft.

“Mineshaft 1983 Calendar,” drawing by Rex. Drawing ©Rex. Used with permission.

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

Front: Protest Poster V. *Cruising*

This page and opposite. Top: "Protest Poster V. *Cruising*," William Friedkin, the director of the acid-tongued *The Boys in the Band*, shot the controversial film *Cruising* in streets and locations round the Mineshaft in 1979. "Correct" multi-grain vanilla gays, not particularly fond of meat-wearing leather gays, and not understanding the subculture of leather gays' secret society, protested that *Cruising* would be bad publicity for the emerging gay identity because straights would think that all gays acted like the characters in *Cruising*, as opposed to straights thinking that all gays acted like *The Boys in the Band* or Quentin Crisp in *The Naked Civil Servant*. Worth the price of admission in *Cruising* is Friedkin's brilliantly shocking scene in which a muscular booted black cop, naked but for a white jockstrap and a cowboy hat, barges suddenly into an NYPD interrogation room and slaps leather cop Al Pacino across the face. Every diverse behavior in the Mineshaft, and every promise of lustful aggression, and every subliminal desire crying out in the Mineshaft, was summed up in the erotic interracial code of that slap.

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

Back: Protest Poster V. *Cruising*

© Jack Fritscher

Mineshaft Newsletter

Bottom: *Mineshaft Monthly Newsletter*, October 1977, written, edited, and produced by Wally Wallace. Sample page: The School for Lower Education, Camille O'Grady concert, fire code compliance, Halloween fete, drug use, politics.

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

Crisco was the lube of choice at every gay bath in the world. Free cans of Crisco hung on chains next to the slings at the Mineshaft in New York, and Crisco was sold for 25 cents in three-ounce white paper cups at the Slot Hotel in San Francisco. At the Safeway on Market Street near Castro in San Francisco, late on a Saturday night there was always some optimistic leatherman pushing a grocery cart empty but for a can of Crisco and a six-pack. Having written that gays exist to inject irony into the lives of straight people, Jack Fritscher, as if by providence, found this camp treasure of a book, *The Story of Crisco* (1913), in 1974.

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



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 copy-right, model releases, permissions, and privacy, some graphics are not available for publication at this time, but can be shown by appointment.

**Eyewitness
Illustration**

Photograph. "Wally Wallace and Rex," standing at the bar in the Mineshaft, New Year's Eve 1982, exhibit the cover of the 1983 Mineshaft calendar drawn by Rex. In the way that Rex was the official artist of the Mineshaft, "Bob" Mapplethorpe, as Wally Wallace called him, was a favorite photographer who once set up his camera in the Mineshaft itself to shoot on location the winner of the Mr. Mineshaft contest. (Although Mapplethorpe gave Fritscher a copy of that photograph, no Mapplethorpe photographs are included in this book.) In 1981, after Rex's San Francisco home and studio and drawings were destroyed during the July 10, 1981, Barracks fire on Folsom Street, Wally Wallace hosted a "Casino Night" on October 20, 1981, to help Rex, who was not personally injured, get back on his feet. This gesture was typical of the kind of fund-raiser and community charities the Mineshaft community supported.

**Eyewitness
Illustration**

Four photographs. Clockwise beginning at top right: In the style of Studio 54 uptown, a "Caped Customer" poses downtown on the stairway leading from the Meatpacking District street to the Mineshaft entrance on the second floor. "Disco Ball Bondage" against the rough wooden frames purpose-built into the Mineshaft interior. Two contestants strut on the bar for one of the many Mr. Mineshaft contests. In the anti-war climate of the 1970s, many gay bars displayed the American flag.

**Eyewitness
Illustration**

Three photographs. Top: This group photograph is a peephole into the "look" and diversity of men in the homomasculine culture of the Mineshaft. Bottom left: Fritscher pal "Lyle Heeter" whom Mapplethorpe shot for the famous salon portrait "Lyle Heeter and Brian Ridley." Bottom right: The reel-to-reel music tapes played at the Mineshaft were created by Jerry Rice and Michael Fesco and Ashland and Wally Wallace, and were absolute key in a perfect mix of classical themes, jazz, energetic beat, and S&M themed lyrics, with a special fisting favorite, Tim Buckley's "Sweet Surrender." The Mineshaft dress code inspired Jacques Morali's creation of the four archetypes of the Village People.

**Eyewitness
Illustration**

Photograph. "Leather Rick [left] with the Skulls of Akron" who were the only group allowed to shoot sex videos inside the Mineshaft. Farther out than Cirque du Soleil, the Skulls shot aerial trapeze videos like *Fisting Ballet* and extravaganzas which remain *video verite* documentaries of a lost civilization. In the 1980s, the Skulls of Akron videos went beyond censorship when the master tapes were confiscated by government authorities.

**Eyewitness
Illustration**

Photograph. "Candle Fire." Nightly at the Mineshaft, men played erotically with elements of "earth" sex, "water" sports, "fire" edge play, and the "air" exchange of breath control, pot, poppers, and ether. When Hollywood director William Friedkin, mimicking Mineshaft culture, was filming *Cruising* with Al Pacino in 1979, he cast his "atmosphere" extras from Mineshaft regulars whose faces appear like ghosts if one freeze-frames the film.

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

**Eyewitness
Illustration**

Three photographs. Three unencumbered views of Mineshaft bartenders and the bar near the entry where Wally Wallace, the Autocrat of the Mineshaft, ruled who could enter his club. Having once mistakenly turned away Camille O'Grady, Wally made her the official singer of the Mineshaft. When the Beautiful People spilled very late out of Studio 54 and tried to crash the Mineshaft, they had to have a certain *je ne sais quoi* to get past Wally who said he turned away Mick Jagger, but admitted, he said, Nureyev, Minnelli, Fassbinder, and Foucault.

**Eyewitness
Illustration**

Three photographs. "Butt Parade on the Mineshaft Bar as a Runway." Top to bottom: Compared to the exclusive fisting palace of the invitation-only Catacombs in San Francisco, the Mineshaft in Manhattan was an open and inclusive parade of real "fundament"-alism. Butts that shimmered in contest pageants on the main bar enticed logical conclusion in the dark maze of Mineshaft rooms where men hung, waiting in slings, like the raw carcasses hung on hooks outside the door of the Mineshaft at 835 Washington Street where bloody young butchers, aproned in white, worked nights shouldering huge sides of beef lit by the blinding fluorescence of the loading dock.

**Eyewitness
Illustration**

Three photographs. At the Mineshaft, slings, hoists, and trapezes removed gravity from sex and added to the circus of sexual acrobats. Bottom: In a Skulls of Akron performance art piece, Wally Wallace received the "New Year's Baby" doll birthed from inside the butt of the man lying on the covered pool table. The man handing Wally the doll was one of the most able of masochistic leading men in the Skulls of Akron videos.

**Eyewitness
Illustration**

Photograph. Every night was Halloween, Santeria, or homo-religious leather ritual in some corner of the Mineshaft lit with black light that showed off Day-Glo body-painting that was popular in the 1960s and 1970s.

**Eyewitness
Illustration**

Photograph. Mummified and hung on a rough-hewn cross in the Mineshaft, a gent discovers the rare human satisfaction that he has finally found the place where men will do to him the kinds of things he always dreamed men would do. In the 1970s, New York sculptor Nancy Grossman fashioned life-size wooden heads sinisterly hooded with tight black leather and industrial zippers that sold in galleries for thousands of dollars. The Mineshaft admission for the real thing in a hood (including one's own head) was no more than the three-buck cost of a Mineshaft membership card.

**Eyewitness
Illustration**

Two photographs. "Blacksmith 1" and "Blacksmith 2" were lensed outside at night on the roof of the Mineshaft. What at first glance seems like a festive barbecue morphs into serious S&M because of the anvil in the lower left corner as two blacksmiths heat and shape branding irons for red-hot action.