

SOCIETY OF JANUS

BDSM Boys and Girls Together

Author's Note: While continuing for years with my longtime intimate, the Irish-Catholic priest James H. Kane, Ph.D. (1927-2004) and with Cynthia Slater (1945-1989) who co-founded the Society of Janus with Larry Olsen, I conceived this 1979 feature interview-essay, which as editor-in-chief of *Drummer*, I bylined as "Eric Van Meter" — as demanded by publisher John Embry who said, "It looks like you're writing the entire magazine."

Because of my personal relationship with Cynthia Slater, I wanted to introduce versatile women like her and Pat Califia into *Drummer*. So this article published in *Drummer* 27, February 1979, is the first leatherstream mention of women advancing into male venues of S&M, and is also the first mention in *Drummer* of the person then known as the woman Pat Califia — later the beloved transman author Patrick Califia who spoke against the anti-Janus mentality typified by "Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media," and against the "San Francisco Gay Freedom Committee" who denied Janus float privileges in the 1978 Pride Parade until, under pressure, it begrudgingly relented.

My erstwhile writing partner since 1969, Jim Kane had been born fifty-one years earlier in the Roaring 1920s, and asked me to code him as "Frank Cross." In this reprint, I restored his name to the text. Was it characteristic that the leather patriarch who quit the Diocese of Colorado Springs soon also quit his "parish of Janus" when he realized he was unable to enforce his priestly authority on straight men coming into the Society? He had become distressed with the power struggle among genders as straight males dismissed his diktats and continued pushing their sexist dominance over women and gays. Even so, he remained a friend to Cynthia and a colorful fixture in leather culture.

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Published in *Drummer* 27, February 1979

Frank Cross [Reverend Jim Kane], a 51-year-old former priest and proficient S&M Top, demonstrates his homemade trapeze, a wondrously wicked device for securing a Bottom to tit clamps. The clamps attach to ropes. The ropes go along a pulley, and on the other side of the pulley are knots in the rope for hanging lead fishing weights. “If he’s a heavy Bottom,” Kane says, “you can increase the weights to increase the pull on his tits.”

HIGH PRIEST

Kane, who wears leathers and sunglasses like they were papal vestments, pulls out a large leather hide. An admitted fetishist, Kane adores black leather. He speaks of its “bouquet” and handles it with the awe and respect one associates with fine wine.

Kane moves to the subject of flagellation, speaking in rhythmic, ritualistic tones. “You’re possessing the Bottom’s mind, his body, his sensitivity,” he says. “You’re whipping out every sense of reality except pain. Pain...your brain...pain. Pain. You get his full attention.”

“I love this man!” a woman shouts out.

Kane smiles, just slightly. He respects adoration from the Bottoms.

SHOW AND TELL: CYNTHIA SLATER

It’s Show-and-Tell at a Society of Janus meeting, and the motley San Francisco crowd, sardined into a small room above a Market Street bar, gobbles up Kane’s bits of S&M lore like manna from heaven. Kane was, after all, once a priest; and once a priest, always a priest. Now, the Society of Janus is his parish.

Society of Janus founded August 1974
 Catacombs opens May 1975
Drummer first issue June 1975

Cynthia Slater, an earth-woman in her hot thirties, wearing stiletto-heeled boots and spurs, takes the floor moments later, demonstrating

particulars on her human bridle. Slater shoves the bit into her Bottom's mouth, straddles her, and picks up the braided reins that extend back from the headpiece. Slater yanks on it expertly. "Some people," she cautions, "have sensitive gag reflexes."

The litany moves along to thumbcuffs, more whips and cats, ideas on shaving a partner's genitals prior to splashing hot candle wax. (Never use beeswax. It burns for real, not ritual!) When handcuffs get locked, and the key is lost, we're told, don't panic. Call the San Francisco Fire Department. "In this town," Slater says, "they don't even bat an eye."

In all, 16 "toys" that Mattel never heard of are discussed. What one person doesn't know about the most sensual refinement of a device, another provides.

"Grease up the end of the flange for whipping," Slater says. "It makes a greater sting without any mark."

Kane smiles his benediction at her wisdom. If he is the priest, she is the priestess.

Janus members know the best saddle-and-tack shops in the Bay Area, the friendliest leather gear outlet, the finest surgical supply store. You might say what the Juilliard School is to music education, Janus is to S&M.

EDUCATION BREEDS SAFE PLAY

All information, by Janus policy, aims at safety tips and precautions. Toys aren't capriciously brought in and creamed over, but instead discussed reasonably and practically. The erotic element is primary. "We try to tell people to never play over their heads or beyond their skills," Kane explains. "You can achieve an S&M high without crucifying people."

The meeting charges on with good-humored, and even playful camaraderie. These folks are all friends.

"Sensuality," Kane says, with no note of preachment in his voice, "is the name of the game."

"And mutuality," Slater adds. The lady knows pleasure in private, and guest-lectures on human sexuality at college symposiums.

A surge of applause endorses the sentiments.

Nobody's here to score. Not officially, anyway. The assortment of men and women, gay and straight and bi, Tops and Bottoms and Negotiables, comes not to orgy or to swap, but to share information. Janus was formed, according to the group's literature, "to exchange insights and to learn more about S&M in an accepting social atmosphere."

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GROUP PURPOSE

Janus, almost unique in the United States, is rivaled only by the older Til Eulenspiegel group in New York. Til Eulenspiegel also features rap [rapport] and consciousness-raising sessions. Aside from the Show-and-Tell described above, Janus schedules programs like “Bondage Workshop,” “Ask the Doctor,” “The Gentle Art of Flagellation,” and “Playroom Tours.” Interested in an S&M speaker’s bureau? Call Janus for a good time. A monthly bulletin with consumer reports, occasional S&M book and film reviews, as well as social events like a Halloween party are included in the membership package.

Janus has roughly (no pun intended) 50 members, and has recently branched into a women’s C/M group named *Cardia*, and a Lesbian offshoot, *Samois*. Janus maintains a plurality of gay men. (Home-base is, after all, SFO.) A membership survey determined that 20% in the group are clearly-defined Tops, 55 to 60% are exclusively Bottoms, and the rest are Negotiables.

TAKE MY WIFE. PLEASE.

I ask Slater what motivates a person to join Janus. “First a chance to share information and learn more,” she answers. “Second, a chance to meet partners. And third, a chance to be in a supportive, validating environment. Like when you first find out you’re gay, you’re afraid you’re the only one in the whole world.”

Slater, who founded Janus [with Larry Olsen], frequently lectures on the group’s behalf. She identifies herself as a bisexual-Negotiable basically into sensual bondage. She sprinkles her talk with pop-psych vocab. “Validating” comes up a lot. The “OK-ness” of being a Top or a Bottom. Slater stops well this side of est. What she says is intelligent, eye-opening, and well-reasoned.

Slater moved to San Francisco in the 1970s, and began actualizing her S&M fantasies. She and her male lover had problems making “trips” and Tops “click” in the scenes because of their lack of information. You can’t go to the library and check out a book on *How to Safely Tie Up Your Partner*,” she says.

The groups they discovered by reading *Berkeley Barb* ads were mostly swing-swap-n-clap clubs. Commercial. Heterosexist. Very much “I’ll kiss-off my wife for yours.” The women were traded around like fuckable commodities on the New York Stock Exchange.

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At the same time, Slater grew tired of her non-S&M friends whose “heavy vicarious curiosity” became a judgmental mindfuck. “They never really shared themselves other than saying, ‘I’m not into that.’ At the same time they’d be squirming on the edge of their seat and clenching their wet thighs. I felt ripped off. Even psycho-sexually molested.”

Slater never minces, despite the psycho-babble sentiments.

Finally, she and her lover decided that in order to meet other S&M people, without the bullshit of the existing clubs, they’d have to start their own organization. It was August 1975. Their first move was a newsletter, advertised in the *Barb*, listing the monthly meetings at Cynthia’s house. In those early days — before gay men started joining — a lot of heterosexual men persisted in “dogging the women,” Slater says. “That was the only reason they came.”

NO PRESSURE-PUNKING

Today, there’s a firm Janus rule regarding pressure. If someone asks for a date, gets turned down twice, he or she must drop it.

“Anyone looking for a hot conquest,” Kane said, “or for a bunch of men stalking and menacing each other, won’t find it here.”

CROSS [KANE] PURPOSES?

The focus of Janus has been changed in the past three years. Whereas information and support were the steady diet before, now there’s a kind of communication between Tops and Bottoms as well. “We try to get both sides be more tolerant of each other,” Kane says. “So many times a Bottom lets the Top take over completely, thinking he’s done everything the Bottom needs to do just by presenting himself. Big deal! He expects the Top to be his animated dildo.” Kane strokes his heavy leather. “On the other hand,” he says, “Bottoms complain that Tops lack patience. They keep saying the Tops need to go to school.”

“The real coup,” Kane says, is getting away from inflicting your fantasy on someone else. Both need to recognize the need for mutual turn-on, mutual susceptibility. Sharing. I found I have a built-in circuit-breaker. Unless my Bottom is enjoying, I don’t want to play.”

JANUARY: TWO FACES

The name *Janus* comes from the two-faced Roman god of doorways, symbolizing beginnings and endings. To quote Janus literature: “Some of us believe that the intertwined drives toward domination and submission are

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common to all humankind...[and when] expressed creatively S&M can develop an exquisite and beautiful trust.”

Trust is the operative word.

Slater corroborates: “The more I have gotten in touch with my S&M fantasies,” she says, “the stronger a human being I’ve become. Even a bit of a humanist.”

Fantasies. Myths. Guilt. What S&M person ever had a smooth coming-out? Cynthia is articulate and moving on this subject. Perhaps she’s used the speech in her lectures. No matter. With Slater, practice makes perfect.

“Anyone who’s a member of a sexual minority in this country,” she says, “no matter how much work they’ve done on their head or how much external support they get, always carries a remnant of the crap that society has laid on them. You never get 100% clear of it. I have my moments when someone looks at me funny, and it pushes those buttons for me. But I deal with it now because I have something that balances it out. I can walk into a Janus meeting and be surrounded by great people who validate me.”

SOME CRAP NEVER DIES: GAY PARADE SAYS “NO”

The crap she recalls lives right now, alive and sick, within the uptight, vanilla-gay, kissy-face gay community. Feminist circles, like queenly circles, go down in a nosedive of fear, resentment of, and a downright attitude toward S&M.

A tremendous amount of flak rained down on the Society of Janus when they applied to the SFO Gay Freedom Committee for float privileges. Janus was finally begrudged a space. When they paraded that day on Market Street (with a placard saying “A Woman’s Right to Choice Is Absolute!”), the howl could’ve been heard in San Jose. Middle-class gay pressure groups ultimately caused the parade committee to say: “We’re sorry we let you in.”

S&M COMING OUT: PAT CALIFIA

Women probably have the toughest time coming out as an S&M person. Even in “soft” or “vanilla” sex, society’s heavy thou-shall-not hand tells them to be less exploratory and adventuresome than men.

“If you want to come out with gay men,” Slater says, “you’ll find a lot of men equate being a Bottom with the traditional woman’s role in the home. They show the same insensitivity that exists in daily life, so that playing with them can’t be mutually satisfying. It’s awfully scary to be a

maitresse to any American male considering the lack of permission women are given to be assertive and initiatory.”

“Coming out to gay women,” Slater continues, “you can expect to be trashed. I’ve been verbally attacked and abused by my so-called sisters in ways that utterly appalled me.”

Pat [now Patrick] Califia, 24, one of the coordinators of Janus, says the anti-S&M mentality is typified by Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media. The WAVPM is a righteous group that made news by getting the giant billboard for the Rolling Stones’ album *Black and Blue* (depicting a bruised and bound woman) removed from the Sunset Strip.

“Spanking, bondage, torture, and murder are lumped together in their minds,” Califia says. “They want to ban pictorial sex altogether.” She sees the group as reactionary and playing directly into the hands of neo-right anti-gay and anti-porn groups. Instead of attacking S&M people and the erotic art industry, she feels WAVPM should focus its tight little vaginal wrath on ineffective rape laws and capricious police enforcement.

Califia, who took her name from the Amazon figure that appears on the California State Seal, is also incensed by WAVPM because of its bigotry toward gay men. “If there’s any group in our society that’s supportive of sensual sexuality, it’s gay men. It also infuriates me to see one minority dump on another; it’s like watching lobsters fight in a bucket.”

Califia seems to have her head “right on.”

“The majority of lesbians think sex is nasty unless it’s someone you want to spend your life with,” Califia says. “I like to play in public. I’m exhibitionistic. But there’s no way I could march into a dyke bar and drag out a hot woman in handcuffs. Those lesbians would be up in arms.”

Califia has two lovers (one Top and one Bottom), a budding career as a writer of women’s erotica, and an insatiable desire to transfer some of the “privilege and power of male S&M” into her own life. She has the distinction of being the first woman to violate the once all-male sanctum of the Black and Blue, a once popular San Francisco leather bar. The bouncer refused her admittance, but she brazenly marched past, dragging two women with her.

THE VILLAGE VOICE

Pain. Torture. Should one believe the famous Richard Goldstein piece on “Flirting with Terminal Sex” in the *Village Voice* some years ago? Goldstein suggested that the S&M aficionado ultimately loses control, finding his passion spiraling into realms of the senses he never dreamed of entering

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— like death. It’s that old “slippery slope” fallacy so beloved by conservative moralists: marijuana leads to heroin, etc.

The Goldstein piece used words like *Satanic*. It equated S&M with Nazism.

Kane, who hated that piece, insists S&M is not a progressive thing. “You don’t go from dressing up in uniforms, to bondage, to pain, to torture, to blood. No. As I’ve observed it, people have their own functioning level, and as long as they’re comfortable they usually remain at that level.”

“Most of the men at the Black and Blue were amused and titillated,” Califia says. “When I handcuffed both the women, threw them up against the wall and did a number on them, the only one who got blown away was some guy in a jockstrap and dog collar who kept saying, ‘Is nothing sacred?’”

Jim Kane sometimes offers tours of his totally maxed playroom and water sports den near the corner of Pink and Pearl just off Market Street. Kane is also concerned with dispelling myths. He says, “Phil Andros [aka Sam Steward, legendary erotic writer for *Drummer* and other publications] is always quoting to me a major psychiatric researcher who says that a person’s main interest in S&M lasts seven years and then burns out.” Kane is confident and reassuring. “I’ve been into S&M for fifteen years, and I’m probably better, more accomplished and patient than ever. One of the nice things about S&M is that it’s not ageist, like so much of the homosexual culture. Leather and S&M can add a whole additional decade to a man’s active sex life if he understands it and uses it properly.”

Goldstein also isolated fistfucking as the pinnacle excess of S&M, an “apocryphal gesture.” Kane argues that, though FF and S&M occasionally intersect, most fisting doesn’t carry an S&M element. “It’s purely sensual; it doesn’t have that exchange of domination and submission. It’s more of a direct trust exchange.”

SENSUALITY AND MUTUALITY

Overcoming the kind of incorrect and malicious information in the Goldstein piece is one of the objectives of the Society of Janus. The introductory Janus pamphlet defines S&M as “an exchange of power between two or more mutually consenting persons.” Nothing more.

S&M does not necessarily involve leather or rubber, the literature says, or pain, or even sex. It is “by definition consensual...(and) therefore antithetical to rape, violence, and murder.” Take that, you WAVPM ladies!

THE IDEA! OF A UNIVERSITY?

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Is Janus working?

Cynthia Slater replies: “I see us making progress. We’ve gotten some very good press from non-S&M magazines. I see changes in the professional world. When I started knocking on doors at institutions like San Francisco Sex Information and the University of California, I said, ‘You’re the frontrunner in the human sexuality field. You’re taking the most humanistic view of sexuality ever. What are you doing about S&M?’ They all said, ‘Nothing. We don’t know anything or anyone who’s qualified. Will you help us?’ So now S&M is part of their program.”

Slater smiles through opalescent skin and lights up an Eve cigarette.

“Across the country, there are some people in the counseling and helping professions who don’t follow the old approach of ‘curing perversion’ when they encounter an S&M-identified person. Perhaps more important are the changes in S&M people. It’s just my instinct that Janus has something to do with it,”

Cynthia Slater finishes with a grin: “But I think people feel better about themselves because Janus is here.”

“Yeah,” says Kane. “You can see it from the way they walk when they’re out in leather.”

For more information on the Society of Janus, write to: Box 6794, San Francisco CA 94101. [Address not valid after 1984]



Ike Barnes, Ohio State football half-back (1959 Rose Bowl), and the Reverend Jim Kane, Catholic priest, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, June 20, 1972. Photo by Jack Fritscher.

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