

29

A MONTAGE RECAP
A KING TUT SARCOPHAGUS IN THE TV ROOM
AN EARTHQUAKE
“A SHOCKING REVELATION
FROM TOM OF FINLAND”

In a final summary montage of the Great Man, Larry Townsend’s last novel *TimeMasters* was published in April 2008, a hundred days before his death. His last published writing was his “Introduction” to *Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer—A Memoir of the Sex, Art, and Salon of Drummer Magazine 1975-1999*. His lover of forty-three years, Fred Yerkes, died two years before him on July 7, 2006, succumbing alone late at night while watching television. Larry, waking in the night and missing him in bed, found him just before dawn lying peacefully on the big leather couch that sat next to their six-foot-tall King Tut sarcophagus. The colorful coffin stood upright in the corner of the screening room they had furnished with dozens of Tut knickknacks from the Franklin Mint. Both Larry and Fred, like many gay men, had been deeply touched by the traveling “Treasures of Tut-ankhamun” exhibit that set records for museum attendance in 1978. When gay marriage became legal in California on June 16, 2008, six weeks before Larry died, he wrote to Mark and me the constant refrain he had voiced earlier that month while we were cruising around LA in that gas-guzzling Cadillac Escalade whose luxury he loved:

I’d like to have someone to marry. Fred and I would have been married. Thank God, though, for the domestic-partner law because it saved me so much trouble when Fred died.

Four weeks after celebrating the publication of *TimeMasters*, he lay unconscious in Cedars-Sinai ICU. Two weeks later, without regaining consciousness and surrounded by his family, he died, about fifteen minutes after he was taken off life support.

At his own request, he was cremated by the Neptune Society with no funeral or memorial service. Nevertheless, Durk Dehner, true to the end, hosted a wake for him at the Tom of Finland Foundation at 2 PM, Sunday, September 7. It was attended by intimates Jeanne Barney, Terry Legrand, Roger Earl, and a few other friends.

Did Durk's written invitation to a last hurrah reveal Larry's shocking and bitter prank against the literary establishment that may have been, rather than a prank, a desperate plea for attention by an old man who was grieving the loss of his spouse, his career, and his life?

Durk wrote a punch line worthy of a stealth-narrator in *Play It as It Lays*. It shocked me even as it confirmed the Townsend temperament I knew so well. Does he who laughs last, really laugh best?

Durk wrote:

Larry never intended to pursue the suit with the bookstores; he just wanted them to vent their anger on Moseley—the one who was truly responsible. [Italics added for emphasis]

Larry Townsend was a giant of our leather archetribes and our gay culture. I miss the man still and forever. I loved him. He was wonderful. Let the academic studies begin. Let his books be kept in print. Let his novels be adapted into audiobooks and movies and long-form television series and stage plays. A suitable keening might be an hour spent reading from one of his novels like his epic of history, intrigue, and sadomasochism, *Czar! A Novel of Ivan the Terrible*.

On July 29 as he lay dying on that day we did not know he would die, Jeanne Barney wrote me at noon:

At 11:43 a.m. we had a 5.8 magnitude earthquake. My desk, desk chair, computer, etc. bounced. Seussie barked, ran around in circles and was very frightened.

I responded minutes later at 12:02 PM:

Dear Jeanne, The earthquake is, one fantasizes, perhaps biblical, like the New Testament, when Christ died and there were earthquakes and the sky was darkened. The earth shakes on the day when Larry is very likely taken off his ventilator. As ever, Jack and Mark

Larry died at 2:40 PM.

Three days later on August 1, I commiserated:

Dear Jeanne, If the last 72 hours have been as hard on you as on us, may we hold hands? One can hardly think of LA without Larry Townsend there to keep things in order. What a character. No matter that he was often difficult, he was also human, and, ya know, forgive us our trespasses as we.... There's no denying the good comfort you gave him after Fred died. You were a good friend to him. If you two were too hot not to cool down, well, that's life. It's all "Musical Chairs." None of us knows if we will have a seat the next time the music stops. Keeping extremely busy with tons of work has been the best rite of grieving. As always, we are here for you, as we know you are for us. Love, Jack and Mark

Shortly thereafter, Jeanne, acting out her June 27 email predicting her imminent social withdrawal because of pain and depression, disappeared into her own re-framed new life in LA and died in 2019. What she left behind in her Arts and Crafts home at 1525 N. Gardner was, in the way gay history disappears, not archived, and was auctioned on eBay. Her home, one block off Sunset Boulevard, sold remodeled for \$1,710,000 in 2020.