



A bimonthly magazine of history, culture, and politics.

NAVIGATE

HOME ARTICLES

Larry Townsend Leaves a Legacy in Leather and Pulp

By ALISTAIR WILLIAMSON

THE PASSING of Larry Townsend on July 29th at the age of 77 has robbed the gay, lesbian, and leather communities of one of their pioneering writers, editors, and publishers. Larry Townsend—which was a pseudonym, as it turns out—is perhaps best known as the author of the erotic novel [Run Little Leather Boy](#) and of [The Leatherman's Handbook](#). Sources vary as to the original publication dates of these books, but shortly after Larry's death, his own publishing website (www.ltpublications.com) changed its home page to showcase what is referred to there as a “new thumbnail biography, having been approved and updated by the leather world's number one eyewitness, Larry Townsend.” In this biographical sketch, a reprint from Jack Fritscher's recent book, *Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer Volume 1*, we learn that *Run Little Leather Boy* was first published in 1970, and *The Leatherman's Handbook* in 1972. Both are still in print.

Larry Townsend was born on October 27, 1930, and spent his teenage years in the Los Angeles area, where his neighbors included such figures as Noël Coward and Irene Dunne. Fans of *Gone*

With the Wind (the movie, not the book) will undoubtedly perk up upon discovering that the young Larry “ate cookies with his neighbor Laura Hope Crews, who was Aunt Pittypat [in the movie].” Of greater interest to students of leather history is the fact that Townsend served with the U.S. Air Force in Germany during the early 1950’s, and that he earned a degree in industrial psychology from UCLA in 1957. It was at about that time that he first became active in the Los Angeles leather scene, where his Hollywood connections once again reared their heads, as it were. From Fritscher’s sketch we learn that “he and Montgomery Clift shared a lover.”

Larry Townsend’s lasting legacy will perhaps turn out to be his role in the creation and nurturance of Drummer magazine, which was first published in 1975 as a successor to the H.E.L.P. Newsletter, a publication that was itself an arm of the Homophile Effort For Legal Protection, a legal defense organization for which Larry served as president. The last piece of Townsend’s writing that was published before his death was “Who Lit up the ‘Lit’ of the Golden Age of Drummer?”, a chapter in Jack Fritscher’s Gay San Francisco. In this piece, Townsend has this to say about his contributions to Drummer: “I was never ‘a Drummer writer.’ I am a novelist whose novels were often excerpted in Drummer and a columnist published for a dozen years in Drummer [between 1980 and 1992]before I sold my ‘Leather Notebook’ column to Honcho [where it appeared until shortly before his death].” Entries from this long-running advice column were compiled in a 1995 book titled Ask Larry.

In addition to the two classic books mentioned above, Townsend wrote over forty works of fiction, the most recent of which, Time Masters, was published in April 2008. One of his final important contributions to gay liberation and publishing was his founding of a small press called L.T. Publications. Under this imprint, in addition to his own work, he published books by writers such as Victor Terry and Fledermaus. His domestic partner of 43 years, Fred Yerkes, died in 2006.

Townsend probably did more than anyone else to create and shape the gay leather subculture in North America. While dealing with sexual practices that not everyone feels comfortable with, Townsend always advocated an ethical approach that emphasized mutual consent between adult partners and the importance of tending to the other person’s needs. His authoritative but principled voice for sexual liberation will be missed by his many readers and fans.

Alistair Williamson is a writer based in Ottawa, Ontario.