

CHAPTER 9

STEALING *DRUMMER* AN ORIGIN STORY OF GAY MAIL-ORDER

- **Copyright War: Protecting Writers, Photographers, Artists, and Heirs**
- **David Begelman: Hollywood Studio “Money Scandal” Impacts San Francisco *Drummer***
- **Richard Locke and Daddies: Turning a Man’s Age into Erotic Fetish**
- **Gay Culture: Entrapped by Law and Then by AIDS**
- **Mail-Order Pioneers Create 20th-Century Gay Popular Culture:**
 - Bob Mizer, AMG Studio**
 - Chuck Renslow and Etienne, Kris Studio**
 - Larry Townsend, LT Publications**
 - David Hurles, Old Reliable Studio**
- **Author Daniel Curzon: An Eyewitness to History Testifies about Publisher Embry**

“We were fools to buy *Drummer*.”

—Anthony F. DeBlase, Letter to Jack Fritscher, 1988

Since the advent of the internet, scan-and-post poachers have continually sniffed around the contents of *Drummer* because there is a popular misconception that everything gay is somehow “gay community property.”

From *Drummer* 1 to *Drummer* 214, as far as I know about other authors, photographers, and friends whom I published, and certainly I know about myself, *Drummer* bought only one-time First North American print publication rights. It did not buy second reprint rights, and, certainly, not electronic rights that would allow *Drummer* or anyone else, for instance, to scan a page of *Drummer* and post it on the web.

The principle of “fair use” is a minimalist law.

As the owner of Alternate Publishing, Embry wrote specifically in his *Manifest Reader* 11 (1995) about the intellectual property rights he typically

purchased while he owned *Drummer*. Interviewing himself twice-over, both as the “Alternate” asking the questions, and as “Embry” providing the answers, he wrote specifically about the magnificent cartoon panels of the British artist, Bill Ward, but he extrapolated to all the rest of the art and writing he rented for *Drummer*:

This work [Ward’s art] was furnished to his publishers on a one-time publication basis, known as First North American Rights, then the originals go back to the artist. In the case of Bill Ward, re-shipping was hazardous because of British censors [vaguely true, but more revelatory of *Drummer* rarely bothering to send originals back to anyone] and the art was retained on file [that is, kept by Embry] on his behalf...[In the call and response of this interview, he here changes voices to interview himself under his own name.] *Manifest*’s publisher John Embry says, “What we have of Bill Ward’s art is safely on file here [still with Embry, nine years after he sold *Drummer*]. It is available to him anytime he [at his advanced age and poor health and living in Britain] wishes. That was the arrangement made then, and it remains the same today, identical to virtually every other arrangement we have with any artist.”

From Anthony DeBlase, I possess legally signed paperwork of the limited rights I assigned *Drummer*. Bedeviled by debt and censorship, DeBlase wrote, over his partner Anthony (Andy) Charles’s signature, on September 4, 1988:

Enclosed you will find the statement you requested about your manuscript rights and photo rights. Andy and I both thank you for your kind comments about *Drummer*. The political climate [of censorship] continues to hurt us economically, as I’m sure it does you. Your comment about the need to possess a clear statement of rights in case of sale of the mags amuses me. At this point the sale of the mags/business is a “consummation devoutly to be wished” but no one would be fool enough, as we were, to buy it!

As an eyewitness of what I observed at *Drummer*, I can only speculate on some of the financial secrets behind the scenes. Except insofar as I had to deal daily and practically with *Drummer*’s cash-flow problems, I have no ledgers on what Embry or DeBlase or Bakker did personally with the money which was their business. My questions are keen only because dollar bills tortured *Drummer* to die the death of a thousand paper cuts.

There are many stories about *Drummer*, but there is one chapter in *Drummer* history that few know, and it connects *Drummer* to the infamous David Begelman embezzlement scandal at Columbia Pictures that was one of the biggest media stories of the late 1970s. What I write here I write allegedly.

In San Francisco in 1977, Embry imported from his posse of LA cronies a certain “Dick Caudillo” whom he hired as a business manager with the title “Assistant to the Publisher.” At the Divisadero office meeting in which Embry introduced “my friend Dick Caudillo who formerly worked at Columbia,” the seven of us staffers sniffed because the smell in the room went “off.” Caudillo was famously one of Begelman’s accountants; and there was nothing funny or flattering about any gay connection to the financial crimes.

In addition, hard on the heels of Embry’s LA attitude, Caudillo’s LA attitude, the moment he spoke, immediately bombed. I remember on that afternoon I purposely sat by the door, inside Embry’s office, on the arm of his red couch. Having been briefed beforehand by Embry whose choice shocked me, I did not want to go further into his office, and I did not want to sit down, and I gave off my own attitude as editor-in-chief. *Piso mojado!* A pissing contest had begun. All we staff of insouciant leathermen cast side-eye glances at each other, smirking at Caudillo, wondering like Mart Crowley in *The Boys in the Band*, “Who is she? Who was she? Who does she hope to be?” Al Shapiro afterwards said, “‘Dick Caudillo’ sounds like a porn name.”

When I told Embry to dump Caudillo fast, he invoked an odd loyalty. He claimed he had met Caudillo for the first time—in jail—the night they were both arrested at the *Drummer* Slave Auction one year before. Embry, reminiscing at the turn of the 21st-century, wrote about the group of them locked into the same cell.

Included in my group was Fred Halsted, Terry LeGrand and a couple of his filmmaker associates, along with a newcomer Richard Caudillo, who gave me his business card. It said that he was with Columbia Pictures and I thought it strange at the time that he was handing them out in jail. —*Super MR* #1, (2000), page 36

Caudillo means *leader* in Spanish, but in the office Caudillo’s “leadership” was little more than the kind of nagging that square accountants do who do not understand how to work with staff hired to be creative. For the next two months the personally (to all of us) loathsome Caudillo was the fly

in the ointment until the night *Drummer* was burgled and the typesetting machine that Marge Anderson had driven up from LA was stolen along with other items necessary to the production of *Drummer*. We were robbed. Our little sanctuary of art and sex had been invaded. Alarmed, I asked Embry, "Have you called the cops?" He said, "No." I asked, "Why not?" He shrugged mysteriously and walked away.

That broke one bond of trust. A publisher should be a protector giving artists and writers and staff safe space to create. In that den of thieves, I was not about to leave my manuscripts and my Fritscher-Sparrow photographs in a desk in a *tres* gay office to which so many temporary boyfriends and momentary slaves and disgruntled employees had keys.

From all that the media has written about Begelman and Caudillo, who was guilty and who was innocent? Was Begelman Mafia? The book *Indecent Exposure: The True Story of Hollywood and Wall Street* written by David McClintick characterizes Caudillo as a bureaucrat, "a stocky man in his early thirties with thinning hair...who rather enjoyed pricking wealthy show-business personalities with little government forms." (Pages 9 and 10) While Caudillo was pricking us *unpaid* mag-business workers with cost-cutting concerns meaningful only to bean counters, my concern was only how the creative side of *Drummer* could continue because so many of our monthly contributors, like Ed Franklin, were beginning to hold their future writing and pictures hostage for want of back pay. Caudillo's boss Begelman had led a long, secret life as a thief who had also tried to shake down stars like Judy Garland until Oscar winner Cliff Robertson called the cops. In the 1960s, Begelman had been Garland's agent at his company Freddie Fields Associates. He was also the suicidal Garland's lover who bandaged her wrists and pushed her out on stage to sing live.

No one can even allege that Caudillo was the thief who burgled *Drummer*; but, Caudillo seemed a nasty moment in time. I found out later that during 1976 he was president of the "ACLU Gay Rights Chapter of Southern California" which, if he were like Embry infiltrating the H.E.L.P. organization, seemed little more than a political maneuver to drum up business contacts. Did he bring out a deeper venality in Embry? From Caudillo's first arrival, the publicity hungry Embry bragged that Caudillo was "a star in a big Hollywood scandal." It was on the nightly news for months. The complicated legal case involving the IRS whipped up a variety of media speculation including the laundering of Mafia money and embezzlement. Who knows the truth of what Caudillo did or did not do before, during, or after *Drummer*, but several books and articles pro and con have investigated the complicated scandal.

When a certain “Informant,” supposedly from inside Columbia Pictures, alleged his own eyewitness memory of what he says Caudillo was like as an office manager at the Hollywood studio, he seemed to reveal specifically almost exactly what we witnessed generically at *Drummer* where the staff never knew what was going on with Embry’s latest schemes and his shell games around money, travel, and real estate. As reported in the May 10, 1978, *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, Bill Dakota, editor of the *Hollywood Star* tabloid, recorded a telephone conversation with an Informant claiming to be an inside eyewitness to Caudillo’s alleged financial behavior which—were it to be what happened at *Drummer*—could explain why, with the diversion of professionally laundered cash, *Drummer* never had the money to pay staff or contributors.

Bill Dakota’s Informant alleged:

... Further when the Begelman expose started, there were two gentlemen working, at that time, in the accounting department...one Lou Phillips, who is assistant underneath Johnson, that’s the head of accounting, and a worker out in the office, I guess controller of the office, Dick Caudillo. I don’t know how to spell his name. Dick was apparently the bookkeeper keeping track of all these things and hiding them along with the fact that he was hiding Lou Phillips’ house payments in excess of \$640, I’m told, a month and his own house payments that ran close to \$600, plus Diner[’s] Club cards for both men...airline fare. Dick did quite a lot of flying at that time and apparently charged the airline tickets also to the company. Subsequently, when the Begelman thing broke loose, they just quietly asked Dick Caudillo to resign and he went elsewhere for employment [to *Drummer*] and no one has seen him since...Lou Phillips is still there. —<http://the-gossip-columnist-31.blogspot.com/>
[Posted October 30, 2009]

In Dakota’s Informant’s testimony lies a joke-y insult that Caudillo resigned and went someplace “elsewhere” to work, and was seen by “no one” in LA since his resignation. What a sensational Hollywood punch line to that joke: Caudillo disappearing at a gay porn rag in San Francisco!

Two days after the burglary at *Drummer*, our typesetting machine miraculously reappeared in the office. Was it that Caudillo and Embry had quarreled, and that Caudillo had demanded, like the rest of us, to be paid his salary? Had he called Embry’s bluff and held the typesetting machine hostage? The caustic office gossip was about honor among thieves. Whatever

was the truth about who did what to whom, Caudillo was, as far as my eyewitness, never again seen at *Drummer* after the burglary. He may have been Embry's henchman, but he lasted only two issues. His name appeared as "Assistant to the Publisher" on the masthead of *Drummer* 20 (January 1978) and *Drummer* 21 (March 1978).

Caudillo's sudden disappearance caused not a whit of concern. We were San Franciscans. We specialized in fly-by-night people who appeared and disappeared. Ask Oscar Wilde. "It's an odd thing, but anyone 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."

Begelman was found shot to death in a Century Plaza Hotel room in LA in 1995.

Paralleling Dakota's Informant, Jeanne Barney, testifying her own eyewitness, told me in an email, November 14, 2006, that Caudillo

...sold John Embry a bill of goods about how much he could do for *Drummer*, yada, yada, yada. Some years after I left [*Drummer*], when I was still handling "The Leather Fraternity" and fulfilling magazine subscriptions [in 1978 before Embry trashed her handling of "The Leather Fraternity" in *Drummer* 30], he showed up here with John and told me that they would no longer be providing the magazines [directly to me], that I would have buy them from the distributor. Which I was forced to do in order to fulfill these people's subscriptions; he and John refused to do it. He should rot in hell. With John. Every year when John [Embry with whom she remained lifelong frenemies] and Jerry [Embry's partner] do The Annual Day-After-Christmas Ladies Who Lunch, John says, "The worst thing I ever did was get involved with Dick Caudillo." And I always respond, "No, the worst thing you ever did was letting me go." By the way: a friend and I used to call DC, "Dick Caudildo."

Were *Drummer's* financial direction and account books handled by "amateurs" like Mickey and Judy putting on a show? During twenty-four years, was there a business plan? Was there ever a professional financial director or a licensed accountant? Were profits reinvested into the magazine? Or into real estate? Was anyone watching the cash register? Was *Drummer* embezzled to death? Were its accounts run like personal checkbooks? Was *Drummer* a cash cow milked dry? Or was it simply a case of Hollywood accounting where no film turns a profit? No matter how big a film's gross, the studio accountants typically figure it nets zero. These financial

questions asked about *Drummer* actually fit all kinds of small gayborhood entrepreneurial businesses run by amateurs lacking financial discipline. I saw several gay businesses in 1970s San Francisco snorted *zip* up the noses of their owners who had a taste for drugs and hustlers. As far as I witnessed, Embry did neither drugs nor tobacco, but he was not averse, according to *Drummer* photographer Jim Wigler, to fluffing models like Scott O'Hara during shoots when Wigler allegedly snapped incidental documentary shots of Embry giving the talent a helping hand.

Wigler told me on June 7, 2011, that he began working freelance for Embry shooting stills and video at *Drummer* in 1981, as Embry was trying to start up his own *Drummer* video production company. In 1982, Wigler told Embry he had to exit the madness at *Drummer* or he would take up drinking again. Angry, Embry refused to agree to let Wigler collect unemployment. This was Embry's management countermove against so many of the hundreds of laborers he hired. Wigler insisted on going to an Employment Board hearing. Embry refused, then agreed. Wigler demurred to say exactly why Embry caved, but a detective might suspect the possible existence of fluffing photos that called Embry's bluff.

If Embry snorted *Drummer*, it was to suck it dry of cash for real estate, and to produce the recording career of his unemployed Spanish immigrant lover, Mario Simon, who, seven years after the founding of *Drummer*, was insinuated onto the masthead like a carefully crafted "Trophy Wife." In 2000, Embry admitted in *Super MR* #1, page 36, that Mario had "some-what of a language problem." As a ringer listed among actual working staff, the aspiring musical-theater actor Mario Simon, listed as "Mario Simone," played the part of "General Manager" from *Drummer* 59 (November 1982 to *Drummer* 66, July 1983), and then "Co-Publisher" from *Drummer* 67 (August 1983) to *Drummer* 98 (June 1986), Embry's last issue. If *Drummer* had been run like a business investing in itself, it might have survived on page, screen, and internet beyond 1999. It was a brand name that could have been a media franchise like the constellation around *The Advocate*.

In *Drummer* 13 (March 1977), Embry kited another facet of what seemed part of his "Robert Ripoff" hustle in "The Leather Fraternity." On the full inside back cover, he trumpeted his own travel deal. "The Leather Fraternity Announces Three Big European Leathermen Tours for Fall 1977." Managed by "Travel Coordinator" Bob Rose, the escorted tours were to be to Amsterdam/Germany for Oktoberfest (\$1295), Greece (\$1595), and Italy (\$1395). The deadline for the "space limited" tours was June 1, 1977, precisely the moment *Drummer* was in absolute turmoil during its escape

from LA, and three months after the March moment when the dying LA *Drummer* was dumped into my San Francisco lap.

As the new editor-in-chief, I said nothing about “Robert Ripoff” or the gay travel scheme except crack a joke about *Drummer* readers becoming stranded in Europe. Of course, no one sent in a *sou*. In the zero degrees of gay separation, tour escort Bob Rose was also the handsome Colt model “Dave Gold” whom I later shot for the Palm Drive Video feature *Dave Gold’s Gym Workout*. My photographs of Dave Gold appear in *Drummer* 117 and *Drummer* 204.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO MARGE ANDERSON?

John Embry: Marge Anderson was no stranger to gay journalism. Years ago she helped set up *Data Boy* in Southern California and did all its typesetting. She typeset *Drummer* as well when we were there, then moved up to San Francisco with us. Her only reaction to our purple prose was to tell me once that “typing this stuff makes me horny as hell and, dammit, there is nothing in the building except gay guys,” and she would laugh her hearty laugh. Her cooking was legend and we all tried to keep on her good side along about Christmas cookie time when they would deliver the ingredients by the truckload. But Marge really never had any other side than a good one.

Then she moved to Alaska to be near her son and daughter. The news arrived just before our press time that during an operation her great and generous heart finally gave out. The multitude of friends in the gay community will miss her along with her friends at *Drummer*. “—30—,” Marge. —*Drummer* 87 (1985), page 3

DEBLASE AND CHARLES ENTRAPPED BY AIDS: “WE WERE FOOLS TO BUY *DRUMMER*”

I witnessed DeBlase’s deep regret at having bought *Drummer* from salesman Embry who, with his keen sixth sense about censorship (tweaked by the LAPD), unloaded *Drummer* on the wealthy “innocents” from the Midwest, DeBlase and Charles: “...fool enough, as we were....”

DeBlase’s bitterness was sharpened by the claustrophobia of the times as gay men were entrapped by AIDS. In 1981, the decade exploded with HIV, causing *Drummer* editorial policy to shift to safe sex and community

education. When the October 17, 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake stopped the live telecast of the World Series in San Francisco, knocked down the Bay Bridge, and destroyed the *Drummer* office, DeBlase became so personally desperate that in December 1989—years before charity schemes like GoFundMe—I wrote a fund-raising letter requesting kink community support of *Drummer*, “the leather people’s magazine,” because *Drummer*, to me, was never about who owned it, so much as it was about the institution and force and voice that *Drummer* proved itself to be in the evolution of gay liberation and leather identity. That authentic *Drummer* voice needed rescue. The open letter was to have been signed by a dozen leather luminaries.

My full text contained this excerpt:

We, the writers, artists, photographers, and videographers who supply *Drummer* magazine, ask you to join up in the rescue of a magazine fighting for survival. After the October 1989 earthquake, *Mother Jones* magazine petitioned its readers to help it recover from its severe loss. The *MJ* readers responded nobly. As you may know, the *Drummer* office building was completely destroyed by the quake. This loss was injury on top of insult—the insult being the censorship rampant in the US [by right-wingnut Republican Senator Jesse Helms and the US Senate]. Both events... have forced *Drummer* to its present shape. The earthquake disaster is in recovery.... The censorship battles are still to be fought. If you compare a 1989 *Drummer* to a 1979 *Drummer*, you will see in the 1979 issues what you can no longer see in the 1989/1990 issues. Bookstore owners across the US tremble when religious fundamentalists come into their stores to censor everything from *Catcher in the Rye* to *Drummer*.... First they come for your magazines, then for your VCRs, then for you. If this sounds alarmist, it is. We are sounding the alarm, because we live in alarming times. We are fast sliding into 1950s McCarthyism which can slide into 1930s Fascism, ironically, while, in other countries, walls [the Berlin Wall had just fallen that November 1989] crumble as individual humans reach for freedom of the self.... —Best regards, Jack Fritscher

The draft of the letter sought the signatures of creatives such as Mikal Bales, Rex, the Hun, Domino, Mark I. Chester, Terry LeGrand, Roger Earl, Mister Marcus, Mark Thompson, Pat Califia, Elizabeth Gershman, Brian Dawson, Richard Bulger, Trent Dunphy, Alan Selby, and Judith Tallwing-McCarthy, among others.

This effort, for enervating reasons, gained little momentum. It was the Great Dying of 1984-1994. The devastated leather community had no inclination to aid an ailing commercial business like DeBlase's private corporation, Desmodus, Inc.

Death unhinged the culture, and despite all the help everyone gave everyone, confusion became hysteria. Chuck Arnett, for instance, was one of the greatest artists published in the *Drummer* Salon. He had been a dancer on Broadway and was the founder of the Tool Box bar. He was also the man who introduced the needle to Folsom Street. On the skids, he seemed very like the failing *Drummer* which his brand-name graffiti art so essentially characterized. No one seemed to be there to save him. I remember seeing him very late one night at the Barracks baths where I walked into the empty and steamless "Steam Room" and saw him sitting naked on the upper wooden bench like a skeletal gaunt ghost of Auschwitz tripping his tits off. Arnett died virtually alone and destitute on March 2, 1988. I profiled him in *Drummer* 134 (October 1989) and in Mark Thompson's book, *Leatherfolk: Radical Sex, People, Politics and Practice*. On March 27, 1990, three months after my plea to save *Drummer*, my friend, the *Drummer* Salonista, Bob Brackett wrote:

Dear Jack:

...I have some of Chuck Arnett's ashes in a crystal box along with some dirt sent to me by my ex [from] where we first made love, and some sand I brought back from Egypt from the base of the pyramids. Not something I've told many people.

I remember near the end when Chuck's roommates were letting him die in his own shit and one of his friends called to tell me. I went crazy. But I called in every favor I had to get Chuck out of there and bumped 50 people to get him into Garden-Sullivan [Hospital] the next day. I had doctors ask me how I did it. I don't know and I probably couldn't do it again. It's just that Chuck and I had a strange love affair, had season's tickets to the ballet (talk about "the odd couple") and a very special friendship.

I've never forgotten the couple of times I made it with you. Only to go on to dating David Sparrow [my former partner of ten years] a few times....What movie am I? [quoting a line repeated frequently in *Some Dance to Remember*]

—Bob Brackett

WORKERS' STRUGGLE: CONTRIBUTORS KEEP OWNERSHIP OF THEIR COPYRIGHT

Meanwhile, back at the 1970s copyright war, Embry, during his own ownership of *Drummer* (1975-1986), may have invalidated even the one-time rights he bought when he failed to pay contributors for their material.

My earliest and fiercest conversations with Embry concerned the Copyright Act of 1976 which became effective January 1, 1978, at the very instant I, having been hired in March 1977, was writing sometimes half of each issue of *Drummer*. In the special issue, *Son of Drummer* (September 1978), I wrote seven pieces bylined as "Jack Fritscher" and "Denny Sargent," and printed one page of "Sparrow-Fritscher" photos, plus eight of my own photographs, and nine of Mapplethorpe's whose attorneys protected copyright Embry dared not compromise.

This seemed the time when every stress from Embry's arrest, exile, and cancer rose and converged. He was ever the scofflaw autocrat flipping off the new copyright procedures which recommended that every author's copyright be posted at the end of each article or story. When I signed my writing in *Drummer* 19 to *Drummer* 33 with "© Jack Fritscher," Embry most often stripped it out because, he said, "I don't like the look." I'd have Al Shapiro paste it back in. Embry would strip it out. He thought I was using the law to piss on his territory. "It looks like you're writing the whole damn issue." In fact, there was a moment in time when I had edited half of the *Drummer* issues in existence.

When I asked Sam Steward if I could do an edit-update on his cop-sex story "In a Pig's Ass" for *Drummer* 21 (March 1978), he was aware of the copyright struggle when he wrote on January 9, 1978: Dear Jack, Here 'tis, please use the circled "c" at the end for the copyright." I added it for him as I did for the other contributors.

He then asked me to check to see that Embry wasn't reprinting his stories "Babysitter," *Drummer* 5 (March 1976), and "Many Happy Returns," *Drummer* 8 (September 1976).

"Whyncha [*sic*] check the contents in *The Best and Worst of Drummer* volume [an "extra issue" which Sam hadn't seen] and see if any of [my] Phil Andros [writing] was used?"

As an historian, a writer, a photographer, and especially as a video documentary maker, for years I have dealt with securing permissions from survivor-pioneers or their heirs regarding their intellectual property, in order to protect against any copyright crisis caused by latter-day poachers.

I'm no attorney, but I have tendered legal action against publishers and

websites who violate my copyright. I can opine that no past publisher of *Drummer* may legally reprint, or scan-and-post anything from *Drummer* unless that person has bought and paid for second reprint rights or has bought electronic rights—which Embry and DeBlase would not have done, not even bothering to figure that in the future new methods of publication, such as the internet, would be invented.

In truth, beyond a bit of “fair use,” *Drummer* may never be legally scanned and re-published. First page to last page, it is a jigsaw puzzle of intellectual property whose copyrights are owned by the creators or their heirs. For instance, to film my documentary *The Domino Video Gallery* showcasing *Drummer* artist Don Merrick/Domino, I had to secure written rights from both Domino’s sister and a surviving friend of Domino, my erstwhile pal, John Dagion (aka JD), the pioneering publisher of the long-running zine *TRASH* (founded 1975). I sought the same permissions from Al Shapiro’s partner, Dick Kriegmont, for my documentary, *The A. Jay Video Gallery*, as I did for the living *Drummer* artists, Rex and the Hun: *The Rex Video Gallery: Corrupt Beyond Innocence* and *The Hun Video Gallery I: Chain-Gang Gang Bang*, and *The Hun Video Gallery II, Rainy Night in Georgia*.

Because *Drummer* was rarely run as a “real business,” but as a “gay business,” its legal paperwork seemed either nonexistent, helter-skelter, or a lie in Embry’s early and unlikely masthead claims, for instance, that certain words like *Drummer* were trademarked—even though *Drummer* is not the only magazine named *Drummer*.

Trademarks take time, money, and lawyers to establish. It is illegal to print the trademark sign without proper registration with the United States Trademark Office. Perhaps legal documents do exist; that was not my province. My research for internal evidence found no 1970s trademark advisement printed in *Drummer* even up to my last issue, *Drummer* 33. When Embry later began claiming “trademarks” on the masthead page, the real-estate property owner he was began to understand the parallel ownership of intellectual property.

Drummer rarely had a legal eye for the future because it was so pressured to fill each next issue, and because, unlike my regard for the valid totality of *Drummer* culture, it did not value itself or its contributors as legal identities. Failing to secure any reprint rights, the publishers made a huge legal and historical mistake that I repeatedly cautioned the first two publishers about.

It will be seventy years after the last copyright holder dies before *Drummer* contents could possibly fall into public domain. As if the Mapplethorpe Foundation will ever let that happen to Robert’s photos in *Drummer*! This is why, in order to make this eyewitness peek into *Drummer*

happen at all, I limited my scope mostly to my work, not out of ego, but out of respect for others' copyrights which death has made mostly impossible to trace. To clarify copyright, the bibliography of all my own writing and photography, signed and unsigned, was published online and in the book *Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer*, pages 679 to 705. Any claim jumpers thinking *Drummer* is community property or that the copyright law is a joke might meditate on this punchline: "While publishers may not be able to find the copyright holder, the copyright holder will always find the publisher."

*DRUMMER SUCCESS SURPRISES EMBRY:
BEING AND BECOMING*

How clueless was Embry about the essence of *Drummer*? In *Drummer 1*, Embry, as "Robert Payne," offered for sale through his Alternate mail-order Leather Emporium a set of bed sheets made from Naugahyde (!) which as a faux fabric was anathema, taboo, and camp joke to genuine leather fetishists. Among bar buddies, one line tossed off to dismiss a leather wannabe who was too new or too plastic to "dig the scene" was: "Lips that touch Naugahyde will never touch mine." (See *Naugahyde* as insult: *Drummer 1*, page 9.)

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

Knowing Embry, I suspect that his ingenuous "Butterfly McQueen" quote is true. Revising history in *Drummer* 188 (September 1995, page 23), he boldly claimed he invented *Drummer* solo, himself, alone, as an almost "immaculate conception"—his exact words—inside his *Leather Fraternity Newsletter* which was—he did *not* say—cloned out of the early gay-lib *H.E.L.P./Drummer* newspaper and the 1960s magazine *Drum*. Robert Davolt wrote about Embry's wriggling revisionism:

After [my] extensive conversations with...[Embry, he]...either claims the [Mr Drummer] contest as one of his most brilliant ideas or blames it on staff members [Shapiro and Fritscher], depending on how the conversation is going...Val Martin was picked by the publisher or the staff (depending on who is telling the story...)
www.leatheweb.com/histdrum.html, March 11 2002.

Embry was a generation older than I in gay years, particularly in the youth culture of the 1960s-1970s. He was born October 14, 1926, thirteen years before I was born June 20, 1939. When he hired me, I was thirty-seven and he was fifty-one. As an adult who came out in the 1940s-1950s, he struck me as kind of an “LA, Johnny Ray, cocktail-lounge lizard.” He was distinctly different from me who as a teenager also came out in the 1950s, not in a bar, but in a nice boys school run by the Pope. There from 1953 to 1963, I survived the tsunami of Vatican II and experienced firsthand the temper tantrums of queeny priests and draggy bishops which prepared me to deal with the mercurial publisher of *Drummer*. My schoolmate for six years at the Pontifical College Josephinum was Bernie Law who grew up to become Bernard Cardinal Law of Boston made famous by his illegal coverups of priest molestations of minors as dramatized in the film *Spotlight* (2015), Oscar winner Best Picture. The Pope disciplined Bernie, that “Prince of the Church,” by recalling him to Rome and sentencing him, with no Vatican irony, to a life of powerful luxury in his own palace attached to Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore.

Embry, before *Drummer*, was a salesman from Winslow, Arizona, and an advertising copywriter wandering in his job searches as far as Hawaii. Insofar as Embry’s was the name that floated to the top out of the interne-cine squabbles among the several possible LA “founders” of *Drummer* who, except for Barney and Townsend, seem lost to history, I give him this salute.

Entrepreneur Embry was, I agree with Jeanne Barney, the “motivated force” who caused *Drummer* to “be” as a business.

In the same way, Barney and I were, along with Al Shapiro and a few early contributors like Robert Opel and Ed Franklin and Fred Halsted, part of the “dedicated force” that caused *Drummer* to “become” a reader-reflexive leather community voice.

BONE-MARROW TRANSPLANT INTO *DRUMMER*: “WHAT I DID FOR LOVE”

In 1977, I cleaned up Embry’s *verboten* content that had caused censorship trouble in LA, and introduced new content, themes, and styles that became ongoing or repeated staples in *Drummer* till the day it closed in 1999. Noting this, *Drummer* editor Joseph W. Bean, who began editing the magazine one hundred issues after the last issue I edited, wrote his own eyewitness in the Leather Archives & Museum newsletter, *Leather Times*, Issue One, 2007:

“What do you want done with the ‘Leather Lifestyles’ theme you announced for *Drummer* 132?” I asked my boss, *Drummer* publisher Tony DeBlase. “Go all the way with it,” he answered, apparently leaving me unsure of what he meant. “You know,” he added, “do a Fritscher!” Yes, I knew.... Subject after subject thereafter, the concept kept being “do a Fritscher” on it. Brown leather (*Drummer* 134) fell far short of that goal; leathersex and spirituality (*Drummer* 136) almost made it; bears (*Drummer* 140) got pretty close; spandex (*Drummer* 141) felt like a success. We really “did a Fritscher” on that “kinky softwear” as we called the form-accentuating garments. Edge play (*Drummer* 148) felt even more fully Fritscher-ed... The now infamous “Remembrance of Sleaze Past” issue (*Drummer* 139) has to be the best of that lot and, if I remember correctly that idea either came from Fritscher or DeBlase in conversation with Fritscher [who wrote the feature].

My original-recipe *Drummer* was, by internal example in each issue (19-30), an open invitation to all contributors in that first decade of gay publishing to stand and deliver in terms of evolving leather esthetics, emerging identity concepts, and erotic themes, including:

1) “Gonzo New Journalism” emphasizing true experiences of participatory sex written in a first-person voice: “Leather Christmas” (*Drummer* 19, December 1977); “Prison Blues” (*Drummer* 21, March 1978); “Bondage” (*Drummer* 24, September 1978) which was my personal interview with world-famous New York bondage top, Gary Bratman, eventual mentor to Richard Hunter, the owner of “Mister S Leather Company,” San Francisco; and, later, my *piece de resistance* of gonzo journalism reporting real BDSM with real cops, “The Academy” (*Drummer* 145, December 1990).

2) “Homomascularity” as theme, lifestyle, gender identity, and ancient urge resurrected in a New Age of masculine-identified gay males fetishizing male secondary sex characteristics of leathermen, daddies, and bears through erotic identifiers such as facial and body hair, muscles, baldness, bulk, and deepening voice.

3) “Theme issues” assertively outing closeted fetish materials for the first time into gay publishing: cigars (*Drummer* 22, May 1978); redneck blue-collar men and white trash ex-cons (*Drummer* 23, July 1978); tit play (*Drummer* 30, June 1979); gay sports (*Drummer* 20, January 1978, years before “gay sports” rose up with the first Gay Olympics aka the “Gay Games 1982,” whose physique contest Mark Henry and I videotaped on the stage of the Castro Theater); the first men in kilts photographs (*Drummer* 25,

December 1978); ex-con rough trade (*Drummer* 24, September 1978); brown leather (*Drummer* 134, October 1989, centerfold); and the first writing on bears in *Drummer* (*Drummer* 119, July 1988; and again in *Drummer* 140, June 1990, including shooting the bear cover of that “Special Bear Issue”).

4) “Leather *Verite*” turning *Drummer* conceptually into an ongoing “Song of Myself” for leathermen by inviting grass-roots readers to submit selfies to make *Drummer* reflect an image of authentic leather as lived, not by professional leather models, but by the honest multitudes of common men defined in *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman, a friend of Thoreau who gave *Drummer* its name; to ground *Drummer* as “reader reflexive,” I initiated my monthly column “Tough Customers” (*Drummer* 25, December 1978) which celebrated personal selfies exhibited in the first decade men dared show their faces.

5) “Daddies: Pivoting ‘Age’ from Ageism into Erotic Fetish,” by writing the first “Daddies” feature, originally titled “In Praise of Older Men” and announced in *Drummer* 24 (September 1978); withholding that article from *Drummer*, I re-titled the essay, “The Daddy Mystique,” for publication as the cover feature, *In Touch* #56, June 1981; emphasizing his seniority into the 1970s youth culture, I introduced model Richard Locke, age thirty-seven, specifically as an “older man” (*Drummer* 24, September 1978), and personally secured Locke a contract for his autobiography, *In the Heat of Passion: How to Have Hotter, Safer Sex* (Leyland Publications aka Gay Sunshine Press; Fritscher letter to Winston Leyland, April 29, 1987).

I wanted to uncloset a repulsion-attraction demiurge in gay culture: many gay men, both sissy and butch, remembered or fantasized they were somehow misunderstood or abused by their rugged blue-collar fathers. Sometimes shoved by a patricidal feminism, they fairly or unfairly demonized their straight dads who, despite the glib anti-patriarchal bias of gay culture, were in “gender truth” the very essence of the masculine erotic authority gay men advertised for in *Drummer* personal ads searching for daddies. I wanted to “out” and validate that erotic desire within Freud’s and Jung’s “Father Complex” so that gay men did not have to go against their personal gender identity as masculine men who unapologetically prefer men masculine. *Drummer* eventually published three special issues of *Drummer Daddies*.

Drummer had a cast of hundreds of talented contributors. Embry, thundering with the autocracy that publishers have over writers, artists, photographers, and subscribers, was like “the old woman who lived in a shoe. She had so many children she didn’t know what to do.”

Embry mistook original-recipe *Drummer* to be entertainment wrapped as bait on the hook of his money-spinning center-section, the “brochure

pages” selling his sex toys mail order, and—in one variation—his “Leather Fraternity” sex ads at twenty-five cents a word. Jeanne Barney, sometimes using “ALL CAPS,” alleged to me in an email dated July 1, 2006, what is here quoted exactly, that

in LA, Embry’s alter-ego, Robert Payne, was known as “Robert Ripoff” because of his reputation for NOT delivering on mail-order merchandise. (If you want to know about this practice, please ask.) I handled The “Leather Fraternity” long after I “fled” *Drummer*. There was NO CHARGE for Leather Fraternity ads. Here’s how it worked, and here’s what John did/did not do: A subscription to the magazine cost \$35, which included a FREE Fraternity listing. An interested guy could send in \$1 for an application/questionnaire, which he could return with \$35. Before I started handling The Fraternity, John would take out the \$1 and never send the application. After I started handling The Fraternity, that was not a problem—but a much more serious one arose: the \$35 would come in for the subscription—which John would then NOT FULFILL. To me, John would blame whoever in the office was responsible for subscriptions. To the people who’d been cheated out of their \$35, John would blame me.

Embry was aware of the awesome LA mail-order business model of Bob Mizer, a pioneer sex revolutionary, who had founded his Athletic Model Guild in 1945, and went on to shoot more than 10,000 models. Mizer had started his Hollywood photography business climbing inside the underpants of young ex-soldiers who at the end of World War II descended on the wild sex party that was LA. Mostly straight trade servicing rich and closeted johns and famous movie stars, they hustled nights in and out of Scotty Bowers’s Richfield gas station on Hollywood Boulevard at North Van Ness as lovingly detailed in Bowers’ autobiography, *Full Service: My Adventures in Hollywood and the Secret Sex Lives of the Stars*. They earned a few more bucks appearing afternoons in front of Mizer’s camera at his AMG Studio in his garage behind his home where he lived with his mother at 1834 West 11th Street, and a few more by “going on location” to trick with select AMG clients who appreciated that Mizer had test-driven them on set.

Mizer with the heart of a long-distance runner sold his AMG photographs and his 3,000 8mm films through his *Physique Pictorial* magazine which he published to great success for forty-five years. In 1972, Embry took a gander at the throngs of young leather-inflected talent descending on LA

bars. As a born salesman, he figured to cash in on the mail-order success of both Mizer and Larry Townsend. Embry's imitation of Townsend's leather publishing business ignited the on-again and off-again feud between the two that lasted their entire lives, and was made worse by the mail-order public often confusing one's name with the other. It was a purposeful confusion nurtured by Embry to his own advantage.

“TOP 10” HIT SONG 1955

“Black Denim Trousers and Motorcycle Boots”

The seminal “Black Denim Trousers and Motorcycle Boots” was the first biker song. I remember it and its thrilling teen-identity context clearly. I was sixteen. I bought the black-vinyl 45rpm for 25 cents. I sang along with the lyrics I learned by heart. A week after the release of this single composed by Jerry Lieber and Mike Stoller, and sung by “The Cheers,” James Dean, age 24, died in a car crash—the ultimate 1950s Teen Tragedy—fueling in straight and gay popular culture the archetypal romance of biker rebels without a cause that Marlon Brando had ignited in *The Wild One* (1953).

“He wore black denim trousers and motorcycle boots
And a black leather jacket with an eagle on the back
He had a hopped-up 'cycle that took off like a gun
... axle grease...underneath his fingernails
On the muscle of his arm...a red tattoo...”

© 1955 Lieber and Stoller

With producer-distributor Mizer's tough young studs in mind, seeing the LA bike gangs streaming on the freeways, and noticing the crowds at the LA leather bars, Embry calculated, for cash and not passion, to exploit the innate homoeroticism of straight bikers' appeal to a gay consumer audience. We had all experienced the pop-culture wave of mid-century media, from AMG to Chuck Renslow's Kris Studio Chicago to major Hollywood studios, making homomale stars and icons of blue-collar workers, bikers, and cowboys defined by the combustion-engine styles around motorcycles and hot-rod cars: Marlon Brando in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) and *The Wild One* (1953), James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) and *Giant* (1956), Kenneth Anger in *Scorpio Rising* (1964), Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda in the Swinging Sixties' culture-changing *Easy Rider* (1969),

and the ultimate leather biker William Smith in *C C and Company* (1970). This was raw material ready to be served up in a new kind of magazine in which the new ways of being a masculine gay man would destroy the straight stereotype that gay men are sissies. Embry hadn't thought his concept through personally or philosophically, but he knew the marketability of the newly emerging gay masculinity, even as he nervously tried to inject it with 1950s Old School camp humor that did not sit well with 1970s New School *Drummer* subscribers.

He insinuated himself into Townsend's affairs at the *H.E.L.P./Newsletter*, which Townsend edited, when he returned to LA from an advertising venture in Hawaii and volunteered to upgrade the mailer for H.E.L.P., beginning with the first issue of the prototype folio zine *Drummer* in 1971, four years before the landmark founding of glossy *Drummer* in 1975.

Embry's pulp-paper *Drummer* of 1971 was a queeny LA bar rag very like West Hollywood and very unlike its 1975 evolution into a leather magazine for men. Needing a mailing list, he waltzed into H.E.L.P. to get his paws on its member lists so he could jumpstart himself as a mail-order guru writing, publishing, and distributing his own work. Writing as "Robert Payne," Embry proved himself a busy leather "author," often retyping straight fiction he plagiarized from men's adventure magazines, such as *Saga* and *Argosy*, turning the text "gay" as he typed. He sold his magazine-sized "books" along with leathersex toys including "aroma" popper variations on the drug amyl nitrite.

Trial Balloons

Small Folio Chapbook and Tabloid

titled *H.E.L.P./Drummer*

(4.25x5.5 & 8x11)

1971-1973

Sets Stage

for Glossy Full-Size *Drummer*

(8x11)

June 1975

* * * *

H.E.L.P./Drummer, Volume 1 #1: November 19, 1971

H.E.L.P./Drummer, Volume 1 #2: December 10, 1971

* * * *

H.E.L.P./Drummer, Volume 2 #1: September 15, 1972

H.E.L.P./Drummer, Volume 2 #2: October 15, 1972

H.E.L.P./Drummer, Volume 2 #3: November 15, 1972

H.E.L.P./Drummer, Volume 2 #4: December 15, 1972

H.E.L.P./Drummer, Volume 2 #5: January 15, 1973

Embry, who built his fortune selling over-priced poppers for thirty years, denounced poppers in *Drummer* 98 (1986) solely to spite incoming new *Drummer* publisher DeBlase and to hurt DeBlase's mail-order competition. On October 21, 1991, he enlarged his hypocrisy by condemning poppers in his new *Manifest Reader* magazines at the same time he offered them for sale. Embry was a drug dealer whose concern was not respiratory health. He loved only his mail-order company Alternate Marketing. In an age of AIDS, he mass-mailed a coded snake-oil "drug letter" from 31855 Date Palm Drive, Cathedral City, CA 92234:

Dear Friend,

As you know, a federal law was passed that prevents the sale of aromas [poppers; variations on the inhalant amyl nitrite]. We cannot break the law and thus no longer carry or sell aromas. We do however have a wonderful new automotive carburetor cleaner [what a euphemism] that you should consider buying. It is priced at \$12 per bottle or 3 bottles for \$29, post paid. The product carries a full money-back guarantee that will perk up your engine's pistons as any buddy who is used to working on them can show you.....

We also ask that you allow up to 3 weeks for delivery as this new carburetor cleaner is in limited supply from time to time.

My Best Regards,

Alternate Marketing...

If you order now, we'll send you a free cock ring.

That last line should be on his tombstone.

Embry profiled his evil-twin "Robert Payne" and his reputation in a full-page ad he wrote for *Manifest Reader* 15 (1991), page 57. As a prose stylist, his advertising copy did no more for him than it did for Mario Simon's disco records in *Drummer* 81 (February 1984).

When Robert Payne Finally Writes a Book, It's Industrial Strength!
 Alternate Publishing proudly presents *The Exchange*.

Robert Payne [that is, John Embry; italic added] has been at the forefront of the world of leather even before *Drummer* burst on the scene. His stories first delighted the readers of *Drummer*, then *Mach* and *FQ* [*Foreskin Quarterly*], along with the myriad of special projects coming out of that magical publishing era [the 1970s]. When *The Exchange* stories were unleashed on the unsuspecting pages of *Manifest Reader*, the reaction was electric [sic]! So it was decided to put the rest of *The Exchange* into a book instead. Be sure to read these unforgettable adventures carefully to keep the pages from sticking together. Who else can grab you like that? Enclose this ad with you're [sic] *the Exchange* order and, with any luck, Mr. Payne might autograph your copy for you!

[British artist Bill Ward also drew a cartoon strip titled, *The Exchange*, which can be sampled in *Manifest Reader* 17 (1992), pages 63-65.]

WHAT EMBRY WANTED: GAY MAIL-ORDER, THE FIRST BUSINESS OF GAY LIB; THE ROOTS OF "LEATHER HERITAGE" IN LARRY TOWNSEND'S "THE QUESTIONNAIRE"

After Stonewall, "gay business" began coming out of the closet, and competition among gay startup companies was fierce. The Gay Grail in the Titanic 70s was mail-order, because most homosexuals needing magazines, sex toys, and amyl nitrite "Aroma Room Freshener" lived in Iowa. Historically, the mail-order "business models" that Embry cut his teeth on were classic. Bob Mizer, the Wizard of Mail-Order, who lived the most discreet of dangerous lives, began his Athletic Model Guild studio in 1945 and synergistically sold his photos and films nationwide in his gorgeous mail-order brochure disguised as a magazine, *Physique Pictorial*. Every issue of that handmade *Physique Pictorial* mailed to men living isolated in Iowa was an enlightening and consoling catechism teaching homomascularity by featuring the palm-driving inspirational thrills of men such as Arnie Payne, Gable Boudreaux, and John Tristram, who was a friend of my 1970s longtime partner, the blond bodybuilder champion, Jim Enger. My eyewitness interview of the private and guarded Bob Mizer, "AMG Duos," was partially published as a "Virtual *Drummer*" feature in *Skin*, Volume 1, Number 5, 1981.

In the 1950s, Chuck Renslow and Dom “Etienne” Orejudos founded Kris Studio in Chicago. They recruited models within the straight authenticity of their Triumph Gym, the very old-school iron pile they purchased on Van Buren Street in the Loop. They introduced a Midwestern crop of butch leather models, like the homomasculine icons, Ron Rector and Mike Bradburn, in their classic magazine, *Mars*, which was the first dedicated *leather* magazine to publish continuously (1963-1967). Renslow, daring to mix sex and politics, wrote an editorial titled “Victory for Censorship!” in *Mars* 21 (September 1966). He analyzed how unconstitutional censorship was impairing the media of gay culture. With *Mars* as a kind of mail-order catalog, Kris Studio sold its image of homomascularity in photographs and 8mm films, such as *Cabin in the Woods*, *Black Magic*, and *Slave of the Sheik*. Because even the gayest of 1960s gay magazines liked masculine-identified men, Kris Studio’s images, particularly of Rector and Bradburn, went wide in other periodicals such as *The Young Physique*, Volume 6 #3, February-March 1965. In 1976, Kris Studio gave its mailing list to my longtime friend Lou Thomas to use to build up his mail order at Target Studio. Thomas had also been, with Jim French, the co-founder of Colt Studio. His Target brand provided many covers and centerfolds to *Drummer*.

Was rivalry the reason Chuck Renslow did not give his mailing list to Embry when the needy *Drummer* was one year old and busted by the LAPD? Or why Renslow’s iconic homomasculine Kris photography was never published in *Drummer* even though Etienne’s drawings were? Or how Renslow felt when immediately after his first International Mr. Leather (IML) Contest in 1979, Embry “invented” the Mr. Drummer Contest?

As an eyewitness at the 1982 IML, *Drummer* employee Patrick Batt revealed insight into Embry’s one-sided feud with Renslow in the biography *Leatherman: The Legend of Chuck Renslow*, page 36.

I was living in San Francisco, and I was in [traveled to] Chicago that year for the IML Contest because I was working for *Drummer* at the time. Our contestant was Luke Daniel. I didn’t think he’d have a chance in hell of winning, because there was some tension at the time between John Embry and Chuck [Renslow]. I don’t know what it was about or even if it was legitimate. I think it was a bigger deal to John than to Chuck....Well, Luke ended up winning, and I was representing *Drummer*...and suddenly had to do all these things. I...got through on the phone to Embry, who was [at his summer home] in the Russian River area, to tell him our contestant had won.

At the very moment Embry was planning the June 1975 LA debut of *Drummer*, his nemesis, San Francisco investment banker David Goodstein, rode into Los Angeles and bought the *LA Advocate: The Newsletter of Personal Rights in Defense and Education (P.R.I.D.E.)* from founders, Dick Michaels and Bill Rand. Goodstein was no friend of leather or masculine gays even though he briefly moved *The Advocate* to the San Francisco industrial suburb of San Mateo before he ferried the LA publication back to LA where its upright politically-correct Southern California editorial policies belonged.

During his San Mateo experiment, Goodstein hired writer John Preston and columnist Pat Califia who instantly became persons of interest to Embry eager as ever to poach any talent he could from *The Advocate*. It took four years for Embry to reel Preston in by promising to serialize his raw manuscript *Mr. Benson* in *Drummer*. Califia, under timing and terms only he knows—during the lesbian sex wars around his own book *Sapphistry* (1979)—eventually became a 1980s contributor to, and associate editor of, *Drummer*.

When the LAPD busted the *Drummer* Slave Auction in 1976, Embry, imitating Goodstein, moved his Alternate Publishing, Inc. north to San Francisco, and, when Goodstein quickly returned his headquarters to LA, Embry was left standing stupid in the geographical snipe hunt that Goodstein's own business plan had unwittingly sucked him into. Goodstein was, for Embry, the gold standard of what Embry wanted to be. In November 1977, he even named his *Drummer* spinoff magazine *The Alternate* to crib frisson off *The Advocate*. By accident, *Drummer* found its true home in San Francisco. Without the unique geography, men, and erotic spirit of San Francisco, LA *Drummer* would have died long before its rebirth in issue nineteen, December 1977.

In the mid-1970s, when Embry and Goodstein moved their corporate businesses and their LA attitude north to the more artisanal San Francisco, they were the cold foreshadow of the gentrifying “Dot-com millionaires” that the 95-year-old eyewitness Lawrence Ferlinghetti said, “moved into San Francisco with bags full of cash and no manners.” —Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Interview by Jeffrey Brown, PBS, March 24, 2015

In the bars and bistros of 1970s San Francisco, *The Advocate* was little more than an LA rag widely scorned as “fish wrap” whose existence was justified only by its “Pink Section” with its sex classifieds that rivaled capitalist Embry's “Leather Fraternity” personals. In *Drummer* 1, pages 6-8, Embry

kited details (with strings attached) of how to join his primary business, “The Leather Fraternity,” and receive—almost as an after-thought—a “free subscription to *Drummer*.”

In the late 1960s, Larry Townsend was using the United States Postal Service to collect nationwide information profiling leathermen, sex rituals, and fetishes for the book he would publish in 1972, *The Leatherman’s Handbook*. Townsend, well qualified with a degree in industrial psychology from UCLA (1957), invented the first market research aimed at leathermen. His questions about S&M scenarios helped men uncloset themselves, and made his book a vivid expose of the core realities of BDSM in the Swinging Sixties decade before Stonewall. Simply called “The Questionnaire,” it penetrated gay popular culture very like a chain letter that leather guys redacted, re-typed on carbon paper in their new versions, and circulated by first class mail during the 1960s and early 1970s.

As a pioneer Leather Heritage “liberation” document, it was as important to me—I filled it out and mailed it to him—as it was to Larry Townsend who, if he did not originate “The Questionnaire,” perfected it, and circulated it through the underground of leathermen in his demographic inquiry into leather identity. I unraveled some of the DNA of “The Questionnaire” and analyzed it when Larry Townsend asked me to write my Introduction to his *Leatherman’s Handbook*, Silver Anniversary Edition (1997). When I was *Drummer* editor-in-chief, I often used the grass-roots demographics of Townsend’s “The Questionnaire” as my “tickle file” to develop, produce, and publish formerly subliminal and closeted themes and angles for features, fiction, and photography. “The Questionnaire” was a primordial index for my version of *Drummer*.

In 1969, I added my own list of occult questions to “The Questionnaire,” typed my own revised version on mimeograph stencils, and printed twenty-five purple-ink copies. I mailed them to leathermen around the country. Their responses gave insight into how leather rituals sometimes mixed with occult rituals which I reported in my book, *Popular Witchcraft*, page 115, 1972 edition; page 170, 2005 edition:

In S&M psychodrama I dig the following scenes with related gear and torture. Check your choice.

Soldiers () Firemen () Cyclists () Sailors () Marines () Airmen ()
 Coast Guard () Nazi SS () Policemen () Inquisition () Witch Trial
 () Executioners () Black Mass () Cowboys () Witches Sabbath
 () Leather Types () Doctors () Satanic Coven () Crucifixion ()
 Hot Wax ()...

On August 22, 1968, leather priest Jim Kane indicated the internal workings of how “The Questionnaire” was a leather folk document built by many, just like *Drummer* itself would be. He wrote to me:

Jack, boy— ...I just finished my contributions to the sixth and final (for the present) edition of that Questionnaire you may have seen at Ed’s [Ed Tarlton, leatherman, Chicago]. An ambivalent friend of mine [a slave], late of LA [where he got his draft from Townsend] and now in Houston, is doing most of the work. Let me know if you’re interested, and I’ll try to send along a copy in a few weeks.
—Cheers, Lord Jim

On September 23, 1968, Jim Kane wrote:

Midnight, Monday. Jack, boy— ...the other author [one of many claimants] of the Questionnaire was in for four days last week. Found a lone pine standing in the center of a small grove up the hidden valley. Nice scene.... —Lord Jim

On February 2, 1971, with my *Popular Witchcraft* book at the printers, Jim Kane complained about his edit of “The Questionnaire” being ripped off by a gay mail-order company in LA:

Dear Jack and Dave [*sic*; David Sparrow]— ...I’ve got a grudge against the Inter-House Introduction Service in LA [a forerunner of Embry’s “Leather Fraternity” hook-up scheme] because they swiped and degraded the Questionnaire form. —Jim

The chorus of authorial claimants was a group grope in the zero degrees of leather incest. If future *Drummer* columnist, Larry Townsend, did not compose the first edition of “The Questionnaire,” he certainly knew its quintessential value for his reader-reflexive book, as I did for *Drummer*.

Obsessed in 1970 with mass-market mail-order, Embry was keenly aware that Townsend was selling his own leather S&M books which he wrote and published as LT Publishing. Embry’s twin, “Robert Payne,” was also penning fiction to sell via mail-order. What he needed was to invent a magazine to wrap as alluring disguise around his mail-order brochure. Embry and Townsend, both physically huge opera queens, hated each other with the grand passion of frenemy divas who can kill with an air kiss. Larry Townsend told me on October 10, 2006:

John asked me to go into business with him on *Drummer*, but I didn't because I did not want to get involved in the pressures of writing and producing a dated publication that had to come out monthly or else, and I also did not want to be in business with John.

MAIL-ORDER: OLD RELIABLE, BOB MIZER, AND *PHYSIQUE PICTORIAL*

In my "Gay Sports" feature in *Drummer* 20 (January 1978), I first introduced the wrestling photography of my friend David Hurles, the gay mail-order pioneer whom I had met in May 1976 through *Drummer* photographer Jim Stewart who had been my longtime friend since we both lived in Michigan in the 1960s. Jim Stewart roomed with David Sparrow and me at our 25th Street home when he moved to San Francisco in 1975. In our intimacy, I produced his photographs for *Drummer* 14 (April 1977) in my run-up to becoming editor. In that same issue, page 65, was a half-page display ad for Stewart's Keyhole Studio. Two Hurles' boxing photographs appeared on page 70 in *Drummer* 20. Another Hurles' photograph, featuring our friend, the gay-sports trendsetter, John Handley, founder of the New York Wrestling Club, appeared on page 71.

Working with fetish themes, I began my campaign to launch Hurles' important American erotic art into our *Drummer* Salon and into the leather-stream of gay popular culture. I introduced him very aggressively in my lead feature, "Prison Blues," *Drummer* 21 (March 1978), as a gonzo character under his professional name, Old Reliable, who was fictitiously kidnaped and brutalized in Beirut. That porn-mogul character, already in progress in "Prison Blues," prefigured the fictitious character of the pornographer, Solly Blue, loosely based on David Hurles, in *Some Dance to Remember*.

In the same *Drummer* 21, I transcribed, re-wrote with a polished edit, and printed Hurles' oral history interview, "Scott Smith: Heavy Rap with an Ex-Con" with his "Mug Shots" gallery. That edgy monolog and the fourteen Old Reliable photos were two "firsts" in gay publishing history: the authentic first-person voices and the photographs of straight ex-cons forcefully presented as dangerous, irresistible, and available sex partners printed to frighten readers into a masturbation frenzy.

Before I determined to "discover" Old Reliable, who was as Weegee as he was Arbus, and before I set up his debut in *Drummer*, no gay magazine would touch his scary photos, and not even he had thought to turn his recorded Old Reliable audio tapes into writing. David Hurles had been laboring underground since the late 1960s with H. Lynn Womack at Guild

Press, Washington, DC. However, in March 1978 with *Drummer* 21, Old Reliable who had worked at his craft for years became an “overnight” star.

Embry did not want “stars.” Heaven help any editor such as Jeanne Barney or me, or any contributor, such as Halsted (who left in a boil) or Mapplethorpe (who left in a rage) or Opel (who left in a hearse), who outshone the publisher or the magazine. The very visible Embry thought he was playing the *invisible starring role*, the “one singular sensation,” around whom all of *A Chorus Line* circles. He quickly turned against Old Reliable who had run, since 1971, his own mail-order business selling his own erotic audio tapes and his own one-reel, four-minute Super-8 films to fans of dangerous, hyper-masculine, young American men who were hustlers and ex-cons from Polk Street, Union Square, the Transbay Bus Terminal, the Zee Hotel at 141 Eddy which was the hustler hotel of the Tenderloin, and the Old Crow hustler bar at 926 Market Street.

David approved the true line I wrote to characterize him and his extreme *verite* documentary photography: “Terror Is My Only Hardon.” When Rex assembled *Speeding: The Old Reliable Photography of David Hurles* (2005), our mutual friend Trent Dunphy asked me specifically who wrote the terror-hardon line, Hurles or Fritscher, perhaps because Rex figured that sentence as “true north” in the character of Old Reliable and wanted to credit the source properly. In point of fact, my line, quoted at my site from my feature “Call Him Old Reliable” in two publications *Skin* (2 #5, May 1981) and the *California Action Guide* (1 #3, September 1982), apparently rang so essentially true in fact and cadence to John Waters that in his book *Role Models* (2010) his third sentence about Old Reliable was “Danger is the turn-on for Mr. Hurles.” The Googling Waters tipped no hat to acknowledge the coincidental source of his paraphrase, perhaps figuring that his softening of *terror* to *danger* and *hardon* to *turn-on* made my original rhetoric somehow his.

Hurles may have begun his career with Dr. Womack, but his muse was Bob Mizer who in 1970 became Hurles’ artistic mentor, business model, and friend for whom Hurles wrote a perfect and loving eulogy for *Outcome* magazine, issue 12, in 1992. In 1980, Hurles introduced me to Mizer, and I interviewed him poolside in the backlot of his AMG studio. He gave me his personal tour of his sets and his film-archive building behind the studio which was also his home where he had grown up and where for years every Saturday night he hosted an open house, showing his newest photos and films and introducing his models to guests with checkbooks. Embry, meanwhile, was continuing his Blacklist. So my feature on Mizer, “AMG Duos,” a “Virtual *Drummer*” feature, was published in *Skin* 2 #5, May 1981, alongside my article on Hurles. In 2004, Hurles, asking for editorial

comments, sent me his final revision of the insightful and tender manuscript of the Introduction he had written for the Janssen book, *Bob Mizer, Athletic Model Guild: American Photography of the Male Nude 1940-1970*.

Hurles made a point in the draft of that Introduction to credit Mizer for directly aiding the careers of a dozen famous gay artists and photographers including Tom of Finland, Harry Bush, Etienne, and Larry Townsend who were all frequent contributors to the sustainment of *Drummer*. He could have added Robert Mapplethorpe, the art student at Pratt, who began his career making collages of Mizer's photographs in *Physique Pictorial* which he bought as a teenager in the dirty bookstores on 42nd Street.

In Washington, DC, Hurles had created a sensation when, during a 1968-1969 obscenity trial involving Guild Press, he testified twice: once as a Guild Press model, and once again as a Guild Press photographer, to demonstrate that posing erotically for a camera did not destroy the sanity or the humanity of the person being photographed. The judge complimented Hurles on the cogency of his testimony as well as for his ability to simultaneously photograph and fellate himself in a series of best-selling pictures.

Embry's personal enmities were destructive to *Drummer* considering how much *avant-garde* edge David Hurles mainlined into middle-brow *Drummer* with his low-class models. Readers loved Old Reliable who gave them dangerous hustlers they would never dare invite into their lovely homes. Small wonder that when I walked out, David, with whom I had bought a house on May 25, 1978, exited with me. We maintained as steadfast friends because we were never lovers. In 1984, when John Rowberry could take no more abuse at *Drummer* and extricated himself for a year from Embry, Rowberry was hired by George Mavety's Modernismo Publications to work on the magazines that Bob Johnson, with my stories and features in all his first issues, had begun publishing in 1979: *Inches, Just Men, Skin, and Uncut*. The always conflicted Rowberry set up himself up in a South of Market office not far from the *Drummer* office. To his chagrin, he knew what Hurles and I had done to boost *Drummer*. He enlisted us to help him keep his new job. In the world's weirdest three-way ever, we *Drummer* refugees—writer, photographer, and editor—were perhaps ill-suited to each other, but functional.

Years later, David Hurles gave me a hundred of his letters from jailbirds and clients including Rowberry's 1984 letter to him which was Rowberry's overture to begin his repetitive publishing of Hurles' Old Reliable photos. Rowberry solo, after years of riding Siamese tandem with Embry, revealed something of his own disproportionate judgment. While Embry abhorred

Old Reliable, Rowberry obsessed on Old Reliable. He stuffed his magazines with Hurles' photos and mail-order ads which, of course, made Old Reliable happy, but editorially made Rowberry seem unable to attract other photographers and, especially, other advertisers who resented that they had to pay for the kind of coverage that Hurles received free from Rowberry's obvious insider trading for mail-order ads.

In a completist bibliography covering the early 1980s, I wrote several interview-articles of Mizer and Hurles which I intended for *Drummer*, but which were published instead in various magazines such as *Skin*: "AMG Duos: Who's Who in American Chicken, Veal, and Beef," *Skin 2 #5*, 1981, page 20; "Old Reliable: The Company Dirty Talk Built," *Skin 2 # 5*, 1981, page 30; and "Beauty and Terror: The Art and Trash of Old Reliable," *Skin 4 #3*, 1983, page 10; and "Terror Is My Only Hardon: Old Reliable Speaks," *Man2Man Quarterly*, Issue 8, October 1981, pages 24-32. German publisher Marco Siedelmann reprinted these Old Reliable articles as background introducing my twenty-first century biographical essay, "David Hurles: Rough-Trade Director, Eyewitness Life inside Old Reliable Studio," in the book, *California Dreamin': West Coast Directors and the Golden Age of Forbidden Gay Movies* (2017).

While Hurles and Rowberry and I were otherwise employed filling magazines rivaling Embry, for the twenty-four months of 1984-1986, *Drummer* was dying.

Blackballed by Embry, I was an eyewitness watching from a distance, and listening to the confessions of disgruntled *Drummer* staff, as well as of dissatisfied artists, writers, and photographers, and even of angry subscribers.

Instead of *Schadenfreude*, I put my energies into transferring my *Drummer* vision to other magazines and to my boutique fetish studio, Palm Drive Video.

In terms of timeline, Rowberry, trying to save himself, had deserted the sinking ship of *Drummer* several times. Having left in early 1984, he rejoined Embry in late 1985 until DeBlase, the new buyer of *Drummer*, insisted that Rowberry had to be fired if the magazine were to be purchased. Embry cheerfully sold his "slave" Rowberry downstream in his desperation to unload the magazine that had become the content-impaired victim of Embry's own exclusionary Blacklist.

For his part, when Embry dumped *Drummer* on Tony DeBlase in 1986, he revealed where his heart lay. He sold the magazine, but he did not sell his main business interests in his "Leather Fraternity," in his Alternate Publishing, and in his mail-order company, Alternate/Wings Distributing.

Dropping Names: The Delicious Memoirs of Daniel Curzon
 “John Embry”
 by Daniel Curzon

“Angry, bitter, and dangerous, with chips on both shoulders, Daniel Curzon is also ferociously honest and very funny. *Dropping Names* is the most enjoyable, gossipy memoir since Gavin Dillard’s *In the Flesh*. As Curzon says, ‘It’s gossip when you’re alive; it’s literary history when you’re dead.’” —Ian Young, *Torso Magazine*

Daniel Curzon, the author of *Dropping Names* (2005) is the author of “the first gay protest novel,” *Something You Do in the Dark*, and of the “comédie grotesque novel,” *Saving ‘Wacko’ Jane Austen*, as well as of the non-fiction *The Joy of Atheism*. Before John Embry done him wrong, Curzon’s roman a clef, *Among the Carnivores*, received a rave review in the *Drummer* sibling magazine, *The Alternate*, issue 9, 1979. Curzon is a *gay flaneur* whose impassioned eyewitness testimony about his professional experiences with John Embry quite accurately expresses in detail the publisher’s high-handed villainy and attitude. From my own experience, I have no reason to doubt anything Curzon states about Embry, and his Blacklist.

Dropping Names
 “John Embry”

Daniel Curzon: I was introduced to [John Embry] the publisher of the *Drummer* magazine publishing empire by John Rowberry, his long-suffering editor.

From the beginning I was wary of the man because nobody, but nobody had a good word to say about him (Unflattering memoirs are still coming out!) Embry had somehow managed to capitalize on the S&M scene with coarse fantasies and liberal doses of tit-rings and big cocks and become rich. There was something sinister about this big hulking middle-aged man that made me not want to get to know him better. Unfortunately, I couldn’t avoid him. Even a bout of cancer couldn’t make most people shed a tear for this caricature of the ruthless entrepreneur.

Even when Embry’s empire was centered in L.A. I had bad experiences with him. Jeanne Barney, a straight woman, was the editor of *Drummer* at that time, and since we were sort of friends I sent her a short play, which she intended to use until Embry read it and said his readers would find it too hard to understand.

When Alternate Publishing (the empire) moved to San Francisco,

I began to be a regular contributor to *The Alternate*, which was John Rowberry's means of keeping his sanity in the midst of the daily deluges of S&M sex, which he [like Embry] didn't even engage in himself. Rowberry was able to publish some quality material this way. It likewise allowed him to put up with Embry's temper tantrums, forgetfulness, and financial mismanagement.

I would go to the office often, even did some proofreading to help my spindly budget. Embry had to approve every check, and so sometimes I'd find myself having to wait until a staff member could locate him and get his signature before I could get my money. I would nod hello if I had to, but I didn't want to talk to him any more than I absolutely had to.

His publications were doing well in the late 1970s, and then Embry got too ambitious. He decided to open the *Drummer* Key Club, modeled after the *Playboy* clubs, only for South-of-Market types. Rowberry told me his boss also spent some of the profits on a new house for himself and his lover, cars, the usual. The Key Club was a flop, and money became tighter. The empire moved to humbler quarters.

The staff, with few exceptions, came and went like migratory workers. Once or twice even Rowberry resigned. "What's wrong?" I asked. "That man's a liar, a cheat. I can't work for him any longer." But Rowberry would return. He was the only one who could make the empire function.

I'll have to give Embry credit for something. I did see him doing layout for *Drummer* at times, so he wasn't above dirtying his hands. As a matter of fact, he wasn't above dirtying his soul either.

Even when *Alternate Publishing* began to publish books, I did not suddenly cotton to John Embry. But I did submit one of mine to Rowberry, *The Y*. It was accepted and we signed a contract, but then the novel lay around the office for a year or more. When I asked Rowberry why it was taking so long to get the galleys, he said he had to wait to get each book published, in some kind of complicated trade with the printer that printed the magazines. Embry wanted the prestige/sales of real books, but he wanted to do the job on the cheap. So my book lay there, changing titles almost daily, as Rowberry and I discussed calling it something else. We finally settled on *Deathsman*.

About this time, poor David Lambie was hired by Embry to run his new newspaper. Lambie worked for a month gathering news stories and features, some from me, only to have Embry bail out at the last minute. He decided to buy the failing *California Voice* from Paul D. Hardman (on the cover of which my lover and I had once appeared, in some other strange publication deal). *California Voice*

too disappeared almost at once. Lamble had nothing good at all to say about Embry after working with him, and he usually held his tongue.

I thought I'd been clever in avoiding having to deal with the man directly over quite a number of years, but I was too optimistic. After Rowberry had finally left for good and Steven Saylor (later a writer of junky gladiator porn and formulaic Roman mysteries, in hardcover book form no less) had taken over as a departmental fiction editor, I got a call from Steven after I queried him about the status of my novel. He said he thought I should take back the book because the publishing empire was dawdling with its book line, and, if the book ever did come out, most likely it wouldn't receive any promotion. I sighed, but agreed to withdraw the book. Another publisher had expressed interest in it anyhow. (It never came out.)

Stephen, in a postscript as I was leaving his office with my novel manuscript, said maybe I should send a clarifying note to Embry, telling him I was taking back the book. This I did.

Well, I began to have second thoughts about mentioning the affair to the unreliable Emperor Embry, and I called Steven to tell him to intercept my letter. But it just so happened that Embry was going through the mail and found my letter a few moments before Steven could snatch it to safety.

I thus got a telephone call from the Evil Emperor himself, telling me that his evil empire wanted my novel. Blah, blah, blah! He even admitted he hadn't known that his firm had accepted a book of mine! "But you signed the contract," I informed him. "I did?" he said. "Nobody around here tells me anything!" He went on and on about how his staff kept things from him.

When I mentioned in passing that I had received a \$300 advance, he was very interested. Soon he was saying, "Well, if you don't want us to publish your book, you have to return the \$300." Now everybody in publishing knows that authors do not have to return an advance on a book the publisher agrees to publish and then keeps beyond the deadline specified in the contract. The Emperor had already exceeded his deadline by a whole year! But he was so intimidating and I didn't have the contract in front of me, so I'm not sure if I even mentioned this to him.

I couldn't believe how belligerent and obnoxious Embry was in that telephone call. I just wanted to get him off my back, so I said possibly I could return the advance. As soon as I hung up, I said to myself, "He'll rot in chains in an S&M Hell before he sees a penny from me, after what I've been through."

A letter from the Emperor followed, threatening me with legal action. I got out my copy of the contract. The asshole hadn't even

signed it! So legally he didn't know if I had received an advance or not. In the same letter this charming gentleman said words to this effect [regarding his Blacklist]: "If you don't give back the \$300, you'll never again be published in any of the empire's publications and there aren't that many places to publish."

Can you believe this? I couldn't. I decided not to answer the letter. Steven Saylor said I should just wait, since Embry would no doubt forget about it in a week, just as he forgot about most things.

Needless to say, the Evil Empire began to collapse. What else do you expect with a demented emperor running affairs of state? *Drummer* was sold into new hands, and as a consequence the world had to be a better place.

The only way he'll ever get that \$300 is to suck it out of my ass. Then again, maybe he'd like that. But I wouldn't give him the satisfaction. © 2005 Daniel Curzon

Even though most gay book publishers did not really start up their companies before the mid-1980s, as soon as *Drummer* became fully successful as a brand in 1979, Embry wanted to expand into book publishing. Through magazine editing and serializing, I helped develop John Preston's *Mr. Benson* as a book, but I resisted Embry's blandishments to publish my novel *Leather Blues*, which he had begun to serialize in *Drummer*, because I adamantly refused to sign away any rights to a publisher who would not pay me. Soon after I left *Drummer*, Winston Leyland of Gay Sunshine Press bought my novel and paid properly. Curzon was lucky that he escaped with his manuscript. He was generous to gay and leather history in writing his profile of Embry, and then permitting this reprint of his eyewitness experience.

AMERICA'S MAG FOR THE MACHO MALE

DRUMMER

350
OUTRAGEOUS!

Cover Photograph
by Jack Fritscher and David Sparrow

ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

More pages, more fiction, more original artwork than any other gay publication

ISSUE 30