

My Glittering Hotel

by Tim Barrus

I have never even once referred to *Drummer* magazine as a publication. *Drummer* was and is and will always be my glittering hotel.

It was a place. It was where I lived. It was where the most extraordinary men walked into my life. It was a fantasy. It was reality. It was where I lost my mind and nearly my life. It was about the drugs. It was about the sex. It was about the leather. It was rock and roll gone lost in the chaos of a dark music so dark you, too, became naked in the shadows. It was work. It was sweat. It was a place inundated, crowded, and haunted by ghosts.

Both the living and the dead. Ghosts.

I do not dare even dream the dreams of those nights anymore. I cannot go back. I don't think I could survive another stint at my glittering hotel.

Scott O'Hara walks into my office unannounced: "Let's walk naked down Market Street with NAMBLA at the parade."

"Okay."

Mark I. Chester walks into my office unannounced. Sits down. Puts head between his knees: "They're driving me insane."

"Okay."

TR Witomski walks into my office unannounced: "I hate it you got this job as editor."

"Okay."

Jim Wigler walks into my office unannounced: "You will never be organized. It's not possible."

"Okay."

Scott Taylor walks into my office unannounced: "I'll set myself on fire if you'll take the photographs."

"Okay."

Coulter Thomas walks into my office unannounced: "I have a new tattoo of a snake emerging from my rectum. Would you like to see it?"

"Okay."

Australian cowboy walks into my office unannounced: "I've come all the way from Australia to see you. I'm staying with you for the next three months."

"Okay. Here's the key."

Jack Fritscher walks into my office.

He hugs me. Hug is the wrong word. He holds me. Tight.

This does not happen quite like this at Other Magazines. This happened at *Drummer* daily.

What magazine.

I learned a lot while there. Mainly these were things I didn't want to know. Like my limitations. I didn't want to think back then that I had any. I do.

Drugs. You couldn't keep the drug dealers out of my office. I didn't exactly want to. They all had free samples and I sampled. Like a smorgasbord.

I knew I had a proclivity for the stuff. What I didn't know then but know now is that I am more than capable of going (jumping) overboard and it's a very fast ship that leaves you drowning in a very big sea.

I was treading water. At *Drummer*.

I very much needed someone to hold me. Tight. Jack Fritscher did. I wonder if he even remembers.

At that point in my life (I have grown quite accustomed to this and am today indifferent to it) I had never been hated as much as I was hated at *Drummer*. Today, hating me is so passé. *Drummer* was my entree into a life of crime.

You couldn't win. It was not unlike being imprisoned in a small room with twenty interior designers. No matter what you do with the furniture, someone somewhere was going to bitch.

Drummer was a letting go of every single moral injunction you ever had. *Drummer* was the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography. You figure.

There was no holding all the loose ends of these contradictions together. There were two jobs in San Francisco back then for gay writers, and Randy Shilts had one of them.

I had the other. Which had once been Jack's.

I was the front desk of my glittering hotel.

At the end, I had totally disintegrated.

I can't talk about what working at *Drummer* meant for other people. I can only speak for myself. I didn't even like *Drummer*. I loved *Mach*. Billy Bowers and I hung a naked blond boy upside down on a black cross and we hung the cross from a tree and took photographs of Brian Neal trying to breath between screams for us to take him down. The cross sort of swinging gently in the wind.

Mach published those photographs. I liked *Mach*. But *Drummer* came with the package.

I put my photograph in there as a "model" and sold myself as a whore. I made more money as a whore than I did as an editor.

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

In the final analysis, drugs are not free forever.

When I think about the number of times I almost overdosed back then, it leaves me breathless. Today, I am quite aware of my own mortality. Drugs are the past.

Hello, my name is Tim Barrus and I'm a junkiebitchwhore.

Recovery was a year on the shores of Lake Michigan. After *Drummer*. Staring into sunset after sunset.

"I wrote a novel," Jack said.

I wanted to run.

Not another novel. Every bitch with a credit card and leather chaps South of Market had written a novel. I had read thousands of them.

Jack knew that look. "No, really, it's good."

It was.

Some Dance To Remember was more than good. "Does he know what he's done," Elizabeth Gershman asked me. "It's a historical document. Really, a piece of American history."

"I think he knows what he's done," I said. "The question is what will you do with it."

She published it.

I blame myself. I put Jack into bed with Knights Press.

Remember that big sea with the drowning and the treading water. Publishing companies tread water and drown regularly. Publishing companies are why writers need drugs.

We see time. Ships in the night. Shadows passing.

I'm living at Mariano Lake on the Navajo Reservation. I'm writing (remember that life of crime). I'm fucking poor.

No. Really, really, really, really poor. The thing about living among the Navajo is that they're poor, too. It is the norm. It is not unusual. Publishing stories in *Advocate Men* as Nasdijj was not a living. Publishing as Nasdijj for Random House was a living. But let us not go there.

How poor was poor.

I was stealing food from dumpsters at elementary schools. Poor is pizza crust some first grader did not eat.

A check arrived in the mail.

There was a note attached. "Eat," it said.

How Jack Fritscher even knew where I was shall be one of the great mysteries of my life. That check lasted a very long time. I could even go to Safeway.

I don't know what Other People see when they see Jack. I knew of him long before I met him. Without Jack, there would be no *Drummer*. No my glittering hotel. Whenever I see Jack in my head, I go completely psychic.

That was the thing about my glittering hotel. If you were open to dancing with the thing, you learned something about the power of the visions it would lend your life. Once you have them, they do not fade away. They will hurt you good, baby, all the way to the fucking grave.

Coulter and the snake.

Scott and the boys.

Jack Fritscher like a ghost who had made us all.

That was when I started seeing Jack as a Holy Man. Yes, a Holy Man. A man who had studied for the priesthood.

But here's the thing.

A man who had studied for the priesthood and who then transcended it.

I don't see Jack in leather.

Beyond ritual, I see Jack in monk's robes. Jack is like a monk to me. Someone who represents the thing at ground level. Someone who doesn't consult scripture, he lives it.

You will meet only a couple of people like this in your or any lifetime. There is a word for what Jack is. That word is spelled a-u-t-h-e-n-t-i-c.

Jack had set my stage. *Drummer* was where I started to listen to the voices. In me.

Call it psychotic. Or whatever you want. I've been called everything else. It doesn't mean anything. What was meaningful to me beyond the glittering dramas that were played out with such staggering force at my glittering hotel, if you could transcend the details, you would see another world.

Jack had transcended it. His writing and his person had transcended *Drummer*. He had the ability to hear Other People's voices (which is why he is twenty times the writer I am) and here's the thing: he could respond to them.

Maybe it was just a hug to Jack. I would not know. I know this: it saved me.

Beyond *Drummer*, what Jack gave me was transcendence. It was no theory. It left his body with that hug and entered mine. It has pushed me along this journey in ways Jack could never know.

Some dance in my glittering hotel with grace. My memory is a razor blade of blood. They are mostly gone now. But they were here and we danced and we connected and we gave voice to a history of what does amount to change.

So many people, many of them now haunt me, many of them wondrous, walked into that office. For one thing or another. My glittering hotel is still crowded with the likes of dancing ghosts. Remembering them is so painful, it is almost more than I can do. I loved them.

But not one of them ever held me.

With one important exception. How many men do you know strong enough and self-aware enough to fathom you might need holding. Then and there. No waiting around for the appropriate time. No bullshit. You need to be held in that moment and someone walks into your life who sees not only right through you, but beyond you into what you need. Not as a writer. Not as a boy-editor. Not as an artist. Not as an opportunist. Not as a poet. Not as a gay anything. But as a human being. *Drummer* was the loss of everything. For me.

With one huge exception. The man is a sculptor. He has pounded out the likes of us in sometimes horrifying detail. He knows us. He hears us. He sees us. He sees through us. He can smell us a mile away. Sometimes what he knows is that we are not as invulnerable as we pretend we are.

In many ways, he is still holding me.

His name is Jack.

Tim Barrus, who was editor of *Drummer* issues 117-121 in 1988, is the controversial author of many novels including *Genocide* (1988), *To Indigo Dust* (1992), and — writing as his channeled identifier the Native-American Nasdijj — *The Blood Runs Like a River through My Dreams* (2001), *The Boy and His Dog Are Sleeping* (2003), and *Geronimo's Bones: A Memoir of My Brother and Me* (2005). He was the subject of a major article by Andrew Chaikivsky in *Esquire* (May 2006). His fiction also appeared in *Drummer* issues 67, 72, and 77. He was the founder of the 1980s “LeatherLit Movement” in San Francisco. As chief editor at Knights Press in 1988, he acquired and directed the first publication of Jack Fritscher’s *Some Dance to Remember: A Memoir-Novel of San Francisco 1970-1982*. Married to Tina Giovanni, Tim Barrus is a filmmaker who lives and works in Paris.

