

Coaching *Drummer*:

How Jack Fritscher Survived
Every Owner, Publisher, and Editor
by Harold E. Cox, Ph.D.

The history of *Drummer* is closely tied to the liberation history of masculine-identified gay male sex in the United States and there is no one alive today better qualified to write this history than Jack Fritscher. Associated with the legendary magazine as editor, writer, and photographer for some twenty-plus years, Fritscher is the keeper of the institutional memory of *Drummer*. In the confusion that followed the Stonewall Riot in New York, it was clear to Fritscher that the macho male community was a different breed from the drag queens of the Village, the two groups having stylistically little in common beyond basic same-sex drives. While the fight for freedom may have been the same for both (or perhaps not—you decide), the route to be traveled to gender identity was far different. This difference was explained to me some years ago by an observer who had watched the police and the drag queens fight for a while, decided that the screaming was boring, and went down to the Trucks for some *real* action.

Jack Fritscher, born in the 1930s, recognized through boyhood epiphanies that masculine erotic culture was rooted in the heroic military men of World War II. As a teenager seeing magazines and movies, he responded to the alienated veterans' banding into the motorcycle gangs which evolved with their male-male rituals in the 1950s and 1960s. This was something new because prior to WWII, traditional S&M relations were—and still are—hide bound in the set formulas of Victorian English “games.” Our modern macho male colors are black leather, blue denim, and prison orange. The modern “Victorian” gays following Oscar Wilde tend more to lavender and pinks. Think Shiites and Sunnis.

The roots of gay male S&M in America are to be found in the weekend sex games played by rugged young military men in the sand dunes at Virginia Beach during the 1940s, a time when the immediate vicinity contained the largest aggregation in the world of soldiers, sailors, air corps, and Marines who mustered out and disseminated throughout the US. In his war stories and military photography in *Drummer*, editor in chief Fritscher knew that *Drummer's* 1970s demographic was readers who

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

grew up during WWII in erotic awe of soldiers who were their fathers, uncles, brothers, and the older “boy next door.”

Having been recruited as a deputy sheriff for the City and County of San Francisco, Jack Fritscher had the lust to focus on military themes and cops and prisons and brigs and cowboys and sports to bring out of the closet idealized man-to-man relationships so that those theretofore straight identities could cross-over into gay man-to-man sex games. Because of the Vietnam War which lasted until the first issue of *Drummer* in 1975, he was careful to glorify not war but the same kind of soldierly camaraderie found celebrated in Walt Whitman. In the virulently anti-war culture of the 1970s, he dared make it okay to wear uniforms for sexual role play. As *Drummer* publisher Tony DeBlase pointed out, Fritscher recognized that the *Drummer* base was interested in bikes and leather as only the first of many metaphors and fetishes of the kind of masculinity Fritscher was creating in his monthly training manual.

Personally, Jack Fritscher was a major influence on my emergence into the world of gay male S&M. Born in the hills of Virginia in the early 1930s, I was not aware of my homosexual tendencies until I was in my early twenties. I knew something wasn't quite in sync with the world around me and I definitely knew I liked to tie men up, but that was as far as it went. Living in Appalachia, I sought others with similar drives in urban publications ranging from *Justice Weekly* to *The Advocate*, but it was not until 1975 when I encountered *Drummer* that I felt I was on the right emotional track. The first *Drummer* I read was interesting, but not interesting enough to hold my attention. Then Fritscher appeared on the scene and refocused the magazine. The impact on me is a personal and professional history which I have yet to put on paper.

Some day perhaps I'll add my eyewitness to his.

Fritscher, whom I never met personally until the 1990s, influenced me from afar in other ways. One of his missions was to clarify the mysteries of gay S&M to those seekers who wished to play but didn't know how to start. He published articles (e.g.: bondage) on technique, safety practices, and other practical information for the benefit of the uninitiated. When he left the editorship of *Drummer* which in the 1980s deflated into a leather contest magazine, the mission of covering technical matters passed on, for the most part, to *Dungeonmaster*, of which I became editor in the late 1980s. Fritscher's influence encouraged me when I wrote my own cross-over article on adapting military interrogations to S&M play for the first issue of *Dungeonmaster*.

When *Dungeonmaster* went into decline, I and my partner, Bob Reite, established *Checkmate* that Fritscher volunteered to support with his *Drummer*-style writing and photography which we published. Like

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

Drummer, Checkmate was killed by the Internet after our ten-year run. Without Fritscher blazing the trail to opening up S&M writing about masculine games and leather psychology, it is likely that none of these monthly chronicles about leather S&M would have happened, and neither DeBlase's *Dungeonmaster* or our *Checkmate* would have ever existed.

Fritscher's *Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer* history is written in typical full-frontal Fritscher format: pull no punches, evade no problems, and take no prisoners. No one should think that some of what he has written about *Drummer's* history simply represents the squabblings of a dysfunctional family of perverts trying against all odds to put out the world's first leather magazine.

It is my professional observation, as a university history professor, that *Gay San Francisco* is the history of a period of masculine sexual liberation in which there was a seminal change in the manner in which males dealt with questions of their own new identities and their sexual relationships with other men for which new rules had to be defined and new games played.

Nearly a hundred years previously, when slaves were emancipated after the Civil War and given the vote, Blacks, led by Stephen Douglass, opposed the granting of civil rights to women, presumably because they feared that more rights for women would mean fewer rights for them. When Victoria Woodhull Claflin became the first woman to run for president in 1872 and battled against the anti-obscenity laws of the day, she was strongly opposed by more conservative women who considered her advocacy of free love to be immoral.

Every leader in a moment of drastic change will encounter those who can't lead, won't follow, and don't get out of the way. Fritscher was never deterred.

He is one of the last original activist writers of the culture war that began in the 1970s. His intimate *Drummer* history—a kind of autobiography of all of us in leather—should be read by anyone who seeks a deeper understanding of the masculine-identified sexual revolution.

There were, of course, hundreds of great people who contributed to *Drummer*, but Fritscher drove *Drummer*. He wrote *Drummer*. He coached *Drummer*. He chronicled *Drummer*. He outlasted every other editor and owner and publisher. As editor, writer, and photographer, he was *Drummer's* main contributor through nearly seventy issues of the magazine's twenty-four year run.

What would our leather community be like today if he had continued, not just as a contributor, but as editor in chief of *Drummer* after New Year's Eve 1979 became the 1980s.

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

Harold Cox is professor of history at Wilkes University and the eminence gris of S&M who is the founding editor and owner of *Checkmate* magazine into which he incorporated *DungeonMaster*, a magazine begun by the second publisher of *Drummer*, Anthony F. DeBlase. A leather player since the 1950s, Harold Cox, with Bob Reite, has created, besides *Checkmate*, two legendary institutions within leather culture. He is the founder and owner of the international S&M rendezvous, the Delta Run, held annually in the woods of Pennsylvania. He is also the *primus inter pares* founder of the 1990s New York leather bar, the Lure. His writing ranges from reportage about “reality-based power-exchange S&M” to the history of electric street railroading: *The Fairmount Park Trolley: A Unique Philadelphia Experiment* (1970).

Lure poster by Rex.
Used with permission.

“Harold Cox and Bob Reite, Alcatraz,” San Francisco, 1995. Photograph by Jack Fritscher. ©Jack Fritscher

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

Fritscher enlarged and cultivated the *Drummer* salon and its homomascu-line esthetic beyond even *Drummer* itself. Publisher Anthony DeBlase, having sold *Drummer*, featured Fritscher's photography on covers of his "Virtual *Drummer*" magazine, *DungeonMaster*. See *DungeonMaster* 47 (January 1994). *Checkmate* magazine publisher Harold Cox, having purchased *DungeonMaster* continued Fritscher's writing and photography exemplified by the cover of *Checkmate* 18 *Incorporating DungeonMaster* (February 1997). Two photographs by Jack Fritscher. @Jack Fritscher. Covers used with permission.

