CHAPTER 10

THE *DRUMMER* CURSE: WHY I NEVER BOUGHT *DRUMMER*

- **The *Drummer* Curse of Debt, Disease, and Death: What Happened to People Who Owned *Drummer***
- **Leather Heritage: Blacklist Lies Revise *Drummer* History**
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In 1978, the ninth of our ten years as lovers, David Sparrow loved me enough to give me this advice about *Drummer*: "Why buy what you already 'own'?" As the domestic spouse I had married, with leather priest Jim Kane officiating, on the rooftop of 2 Charlton Street in New York, he knew intimately my experiences as editor-in-chief. When I hired him as the freelance and official house-photographer for *Drummer*, he became his own eyewitness inside *Drummer*.

Considering my fifty-year career in gay writing, people have asked me a hundred times why I never bought *Drummer*. What was there to buy? Its one-word name was all *Drummer* had to sell. That, and an insatiable deadline that had to be fed every thirty days or the magazine would disappear. Everything else existed upstairs over a vacant lot. Despite Embry's dodgy masthead claims, I reckoned there were no legally registered trademarks for sale, no filing cabinets spilling over with a backlog of good stories and photos and drawings panting to be published, no legal paperwork identifying

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what publishing rights, and republishing rights, had been bought from contributors who were mostly pseudonymous and lost to history, no model identification documents or signed releases, and no mail-order business.

Drummer was a brand name, yes, and had momentum, yes, and an ardent fan following, yes; but *Drummer* was made by all three publishers into a suicidal succubus draining cash, time, and talent because it was always run not as a proper business but as a gay business. It was Mickey and Judy putting on an unsustainable show in the barn. The first publisher, Embry, hitched his chapbook *Drummer* to the *H.E.L.P Newsletter* to access its subscriber list in order to sell personal ads, sex toys, and poppers mail-order. My friend from the 1960s, the Chicago psychiatrist Andrew Charles, who had deep pockets and a loaded checkbook, became the second publisher when he established Desmodus, Inc., and bought *Drummer* as a trophy-toy for his lover Anthony DeBlase, who, moving to San Francisco, and throwing his jolly weight around at *Drummer*, became an instant leather celebrity and corporal instructor of eager young leather bottoms worshiping "everything *Drummer*." The eyewitness evidence of this dynamic is in DeBlase's four-feature *USSM* video series starring himself as the epicene "Fledermaus," the San Francisco whipmeister to hot and handsome young men—models from Mikal Bales' Zeus Studio in Los Angeles—who would have been out of his league were he not the publisher of *Drummer*.

Embry and DeBlase, with paradigms of Hugh Hefner dancing in both their heads, figured *Drummer* was a gay *Playboy* with the *Playboy* lifestyle. DeBlase and Charles stuffed their new mansion, south of San Francisco, with designer furniture, and staffed it with a revolving crew of leatherboy butlers and servants waiting on visiting LA leather-porn moguls such as Bales, and BDSM models such as Scott Answer who, like an Edwardian aristocrat changing into proper attire for morning, afternoon, and evening, slipped unironically every hour or so into new West Hollywood fashions made of leather, then rubber, then latex, pushing his didactic LA fetish exhibition at rival San Franciscans, happy with basic black leather. Embry struggled vaingloriously to open his "exclusive *Drummer* Key Club" on Folsom Street where it flopped. Embry also exploited the start-up of the Mr. Drummer contest to turn the contestants into free models for centerfolds like *Playboy* Bunnies. In the annals and anals of gay liberation, sexual objectification has an enthusiastic and valuable tradition, but only as long as the contestant models are complicit in their pop-culture roles, and thus empower themselves through performances which can enhance their self-esteem, perhaps damaged in their youth by nationalized American homophobia.

However, the Hefner business model was more than about content or

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contests. *Drummer* needed to follow Hefner's paradigm for *Playboy*, or Larry Flynt's for *Hustler*, or Andy Warhol's for *Interview.* Warhol had founded *Interview* in 1969, but the magazine did not turn its first profit until 1979, unlike *Drummer* which, although few believed it possible, never turned a 1979 profit. Or so Embry swore when our pay was not forthcoming.

Among all the parties in our *Drummer* Salon, there were two significant dinner parties that, like all things *Drummer*, turned inevitably to discussions about *Drummer* money, and talent not being paid. The first was the February 9, 1978, supper for nine men that Al Shapiro and I hosted at Jim Kane and Ike Barnes' 11 Pink Alley firetrap so that some of my star *Drummer* contributors, Tom of Finland and his lover Veli, and my lover Robert Mapplethorpe, and Sam Steward, and Robert Opel could all meet each other for the first time. These men were all gents and artists and had many pleasant interests in common including being in various degrees of stress about not being paid properly by Embry who was twice as slippery to the Europeans contributing from afar, with no redress but to beg the editor-in-chief to shake the publisher for payment. As editor, I apologized for Embry whom they knew I could not change. Around our pleasant table, the badinage of the hot-blooded artists, all at their peak, revealed that they all were happy that Al and I had decided not to invite the cold-blooded Embry.

The second essential *Drummer* Salon dinner party was the September 28, 1986, supper for eight guests whom art dealers Trent Dunphy and Bob Mainardi hosted at their Victorian home to welcome new *Drummer* owners DeBlase and Charles to their table around which sat eight survivors of Embry's *Drummer*. In attendance were hosts Dunphy and Mainardi, guests of honor Tony DeBlase and Andy Charles, Al Shapiro and his partner Dick Kriegmont, photographer Mark I. Chester, and my spouse Mark Hemry and I.

Between courses at that 1986 power pow-wow, DeBlase unrolled an emotional monolog. Only a couple months into owning *Drummer*, Tony said that he and Andy thought they had purchased *Drummer* free of any encumbrances, until they were immediately besieged by creditors and vendors hoping the new owners would pay them what Embry's *Drummer* still owed them. A bit touchy, DeBlase cracked a nervous joke hoping that none of us would ask him to pay what Embry owed us. They rather appreciated the good humor when I told them how one of the last of Embry's editors, Tim Barrus, took his revenge for not being paid properly. Barrus, who—with Joseph Bean—was one of my two favorite *Drummer* editors, had written to me about the chaos in the office that had caused him to quit as Embry's editor and move to Key West a short time before DeBlase rescued

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Drummer. Barrus recalled:

> John Embry always sucked. He once made an accounting error against himself and sent me several checks for the same article. Then he saw his error and screamed bloody murder he wanted that money back....He owed me so much I cashed every check. Fuck him.

Buying *Drummer*?

I never bought *Drummer* because it never had a real-world business plan for itself. It never fit the business plan for my life. That's why while editing, writing, and photographing for *Drummer*, I never quit my day job which, after my tenured career teaching journalism, literature, and film at university, was as a corporate marketing professional managing a staff of twenty writers while working at Kaiser Engineers thirty minutes away from the *Drummer* office. Instead of buying *Drummer*, even after David Sparrow and I divorced, Mark Hemry and I created an alternative to *Drummer* in 1979.

With our reader-interactive *Man2Man Quarterly*, we made the point that even intense underground erotic magazines can succeed with a low-budget business plan that does not include the publisher's hand in the till. When *Man2Man* ceased publication in1982 because desktop publishing did not yet exist to speed our hands-on labor, we moved forward with new media, evolving from page to screen by starting up our Palm Drive Video company featuring *Drummer*-like models and BDSM themes I had introduced to *Drummer* such as cigars, fetish play, and homomasculinity. However, unlike the mail-order bandit Embry who never refunded anyone anything, publisher Mark Hemry calculated how much of a subscription rebate was owed to our thousand *Man2Man* subscribers, and he sent each one a small check. Several men sent thank-you notes saying they had never heard of any gay publisher doing such a thing.

I saw what happened to people who bought *Drummer*. They seemed cursed with debt, dishonesty, disease, and death. *Drummer* itself did not curse them. *Drummer* was merely the medium through which their personal dysfunction and bad business behavior was amplified the way a friend of mine, who helped proofread this manuscript, won eight million dollars in the California lottery and each one of his addiction problems multiplied eight million times. Like Hollywood itself, *Drummer* was a golden opportunity for creative people, and a tempting trap for business people exploiting its resources for money, power, and sex.

Ten years after Embry sold *Drummer* to Anthony DeBlase, and a year

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after *Drummer* itself ceased publication, Embry continued to stew that DeBlase's *Drummer* had sometimes taken potshots at him both in and out of *Drummer*. The overweight Embry enjoyed DeBlase's nickname "DeBlob." When DeBlase, an obese cigar smoker died young of heart disease on July 21, 2000, Embry, rendering his own fat, cooked up a snotty, short 75-word obituary that DeBlase had been "removed" in his *Super MR* #6, Autumn 2000.

In that sarcastic obituary, the dick-swinging Embry called DeBlase "Mr." instead of "Dr." which would have infuriated the "Anthony F. DeBlase, PhD" on the *Drummer* masthead. Embry further succeeded in disrespecting DeBlase by sidestepping any direct mention of DeBlase as the second publisher of the world-famous *Drummer* who, faced with the social and viral changes of the 1980s, successfully struggled to open *Drummer* to all genders and to safe-sex guide lines.

Instead, he mentioned two of DeBlase's earlier small magazines, *SandMutopia Guardian* and *DungeonMaster*, and then mashed *Drummer* into a roll call with these B-List magazine titles. In Embry's appliqued timeline, he implied that *Drummer* was too much of a footrace for the sprinter DeBlase who bought and, all too quickly, sold the magazine to the Dutch within six years because he couldn't handle *Drummer* for the grand total of eleven years that Embry, the long-distance runner, had owned it. In the bully department, Embry finished up with a gender smackdown which was not cool in a masculine-identified magazine. He insinuated in the connotative spin of his subtext that DeBlase was a sissy "best known" for running up the leather flag on his, well, Betsy Ross sewing machine.

Editorial

> We were saddened to hear that Tony DeBlase passed away at 58 in Portland, Oregon. Mr. DeBlase wrote under the name "Fledermaus" and published *SandMutopia Guardian* and *DungeonMaster*. He and Andrew Charles, through their company Desmodus, purchased the *Drummer*, *FQ* [*Foreskin Quarterly*], and *Mach* titles from Alternate publishing in 1986. The Desmodus company was then sold to Rob of Amsterdam in 1992. Mr. DeBlase is perhaps best known as the designer of the leather flag. –John Embry, *Super MR* #6, Autumn 2000

Eight years later, in 2008, in the thirty-first year of my sine-wave relationship with John Embry, I thought someone should tell him at the Russian

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River that his frenemy Larry Townsend in Los Angeles was unconscious in an Intensive Care Unit. In response to my email, Embry, never one to forgive a grudge, wrote in ALL CAPS.

> From: Jack Fritscher
> To: John Embry
> July 23, 2008 3:33 PM
> Subject: Larry Townsend in ICU
>
> John, Our friend Larry Townsend is in ICU. Hopefully, he may rally, but the situation seems very distressed. If you want more info, please let me know. If you don't want to know, let me know.
> May our world of writers and readers keep Larry in our thoughts and give him good energy during the next few hours and days.
> Jack Fritscher

> From: John Embry
> To: Jack Fritscher
> July 23, 2008 6:02 PM
> Subject: Re: Larry Townsend in ICU
>
> [Embry writing in all UPPER CAPS] JACK, THANK YOU FOR NOTIFYING ME. ALTHOUGH LARRY'S AND MY RELATIONSHIP IS IN ABOUT THE SAME STATE AS HIS AND JEANNIE'S [*sic*]. BE THAT AS IT MAY, I WISH HIM WELL AND WAS VERY DISMAYED AT FRED'S PASSING [Townsend's partner of 38 years] WHICH I AM SURE WAS VERY HARD ON HIM.
>
> John Embry [lower caps]

Larry Townsend died six days later on July 29, 2008. In the gay archives of the dead, the Embry file boxes will forever be in a scholastic gay studies feud with the Townsend file boxes.

Regarding the universally contentious Embry, the writer and frequent *Drummer* author George Birimisa wrote to me on January 29, 2012:

> Jack, I guess you know I have a reputation as a very gay Off-Off Broadway playwright, but over the years, queer men would see my name and say, "You wrote that novel in *Drummer*. The magazine

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> was an incredible expression of free speech and that is why the LAPD practically tar-and-feathered John Embry to get him to flee LA for San Francisco. Love, George

The *Drummer* curse, from the 1970s through the 1990s, devastated those who owned it or claimed they owned it. Even though Embry had sold *Drummer* in 1986, he suffered seller's remorse. When the young Midwestern blond Robert Davolt showed up in San Francisco to work as proxy for the Dutchman Martijn Bakker who had bought *Drummer* from DeBlase, Embry astutely judged that he could manipulate Davolt in San Francisco against the absentee Bakker in Amsterdam to his own advantage. Portraying himself as *Drummer* Incarnate, Embry cosied up to the ambitious Davolt and turned him into a double-agent who could work for the faraway Dutch owner while feeding Embry private business information which included handing over to Embry whatever manuscripts, art, and photographs were stored in *Drummer*'s treasure-chest of neglected filing cabinets. Proof of collusion lay in the fact that the minute the well-rehearsed Davolt was fired by Bakker, Embry hired him to edit his *Super MR* magazine.

Embry was desperate to create a new "Franken-*Drummer*"magazine by reanimating *Drummer*. Damn the rights, he wanted whatever backlog of material that Davolt smuggled out from *Drummer* to help fill his *Super MR*. Because I was not one of the dead *Drummer* contributors whose grave he could rob, he came directly to me, which pained him dearly, to ask permission to publish in *Super MR* fiction and features that twenty-five years before I had written for *Drummer*. He was intent on returning to our mutual roots. So I consented to his republishing my original 1977 through 1979 writing because I think supporting gay publishing and history is more important than anyone's grudge against anyone. Embry knew I was faithful to the pure idea of *Drummer*, but more, he knew that after nearly thirty years I, with Jeanne Barney, was one of only a few survivors of early *Drummer*, and the only founding author who would have anything to do with him. I'm sure his rosacea face broke into red bloom when, a survivor himself, he had to acknowledge that I was the last living of his original *Drummer* writer-photographers as well as his editor-in-chief who had, during his cancer, steered the concept of *Drummer* to its first national fame. In his "Getting Off" editorial in *Drummer* 83 (March 1985), he had sniped like a dumped lover about our then eight-year-long relationship with spinning animosity:

> We had an editor some years back who still refers to the time he spent with us as "The Golden Age of *Drummer*." We remember

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> the good parts of those times, but if there is a Golden Age for this magazine, it would be the here and now, beginning with this issue [*Drummer* 83]....

Even so, while featuring my *Drummer* writing and photographs as headline leads in the first six pages of his first *Super MR* issue (2000), edited by Davolt, he refused to pay me cash for any *Super MR* reprints, offering instead an ongoing trade for advertising space for Palm Drive Video as he first did on that issue's page 57 with a half-page ad for bodybuilder Chris Duffy starring in my feature-length video, *Sunset Bull*.

It was satisfaction enough that he asked me to help him re-constitute what he finally admitted was the "1970s Golden Age of *Drummer*." In old age, he needed me as he had needed me years before when his dishonesty turned off contributors and cancer kept him absent from *Drummer*. In the long struggle between the corporate publisher and the artist writer, his republishing my work spoke volumes about his grudging admission and approval of our mutual history.

However, spinning around our detente, Robert Davolt, ambitious with a nostalgia for a *Drummer* past he had never personally experienced, became Embry's tool for falsifying the institutional history of *Drummer* which was wider than Embry's ownership. As a social climber, he was seduced that the veteran Embry offered to take him, the new recruit, under his Mephistophelian wings. With the American mole Davolt spying inside Dutch *Drummer*, Embry grew bolder, sponsoring Davolt to write a bespoke history of *Drummer* tailored to the inclusions and exclusions of Embry's famous little Blacklist.

On the San Francisco leather scene in bars and at regional *Drummer* contests, the attractively blond and bearded Davolt, who loved to travel nationwide on *Drummer* dollars, was "charming" in the same way that Embry's "charm" disarmed people who did not know him. The young Davolt, reveling in the reflected glory of *Drummer*, and keen on being the next publisher of *Drummer* under Bakker, but under the thumb of Embry, was characteristically way more "Son of Embry" than he ever was "Son of *Drummer*."

In many ways, Davolt's 1990s recruitment to the scene typifies the way some latter-day revisionists have tried to rewind the 1970s by brainwashing the young eager to learn their elders' history and fish stories. Accuracy depends on which elders and which agenda. The 1990s, in particular, was a freaked-out decade because the Great Dying of the 1980s raised everyone's anxiety about the evaporation of gay oral and written history from the 1970s.

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Into the void rode Marxist feminist academics of all genders, and vanilla gay institutions with mainstream misconceptions and stereotyped suspicions about outsider leather culture which they were all too happy to codify and label from their politically correct points of view, typically fingering men, in their fundamentalist chapter and verse, as patriarchal oppressors.

Gay history, more oral tradition than written, had always existed sub rosa. With the official invention of Queer Studies and Queer Theory around 1990, it became the "Gay History Business." In earlier days, people had come to San Francisco to feast on sex. After Foucault partied himself to death on fists at the Slot and Barracks baths of Folsom Street in the late 1970s and 1980s, academic carpetbaggers flocked into the City in the Queer 1990s like Hitchcock's *The Birds* to pick the bones of leather history which some of them, in their only S&M gesture, tied down to their preconceived Procrustean beds.

Gay and leather history were new hooks for footloose or forlorn professors needing to score academic tenure or grants, and for university libraries and archives to establish themselves, like churches promising everlasting life, by goading the dying at the height of the AIDS crisis, to donate their estates and their cash. Despite some intellectual abuse, gay history accommodated this expanding of legitimate political, academic, and gender agenda as well as new vocabulary by coopting words like *queer*.

Professional homosexuals and lesbians, especially privileged academics and politically correct protectionists and fundamentalists of every gender, race, religion, and grievance, began announcing "new rules" for telling the past the way they saw it or wanted to slice it. By the early 1990s, they started to rewrite history both by commission and omission. It seemed leatherfolk were to be reeducated in a brave new world where a Marxist type of patricidal feminism, minus irony, tried to retrofit and trump male homosexuality.

The towering babble of voices proved that history is indeed very *Rashomon* in all its points of view leading, hopefully as in a court trial, to the truth about the past from all the reasonable participants within that history.

Revisionism, meaning incorrect "ideological information" rather than the input of new but unknown truth, is wrong. For instance, on the Internet at dozens of hate sites is a Blacklist of fifty or so "American Jewish Leaders in the Degenerate Homosexual Movement." Round up the usual suspects of Larry Kramer, Tony Kushner, Allen Ginsberg, Harvey Fierstein, Martin Duberman, Gayle Rubin, Richard Goldstein, and Jack Fritscher named as "the influential Jewish editor who took over *Drummer* in 1977." This is grand ethnic company to keep, but it would be a newsflash to my Irish-Catholic mother and my Austrian-Catholic father. So much for the accuracy

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of anti-Semitic, homophobic, and politically correct revisionism. So much for Embry, the Cyclops, whose two-dimensional one eye could never see the three-dimensional perspective around *Drummer*.

Herein lies another literary panel for a GLBT writers conference. Analyzing the contributors and the contents of *Drummer*, one notices that except for Al Shapiro there was very little Jewish presence in *Drummer*, which is strange because S&M with its precepts, ritual, justice, and discipline is very Old Testament even with its add-on of the New Testament Crucifixion and Stations of the Cross whose details are iconic S&M in art and eros. I thought the "Interrogation" drawings of Leon Golub (1922-2004) with their parallels to gay S&M drawings by the Nazi-impacted Tom of Finland and Rex would have been an obvious fit in their own art layout or as illustrations for fiction. Embry did not. The Methodist Embry, ever jealous of publisher David Goodstein, borrowed everything and everybody he could from *The Advocate* except its then somewhat Jewish soul which was beyond his cultural understanding.

Although Embry published ads for the gay Nazi party in early *Drummer*, he quickly learned to correct his insensitivities about how far free speech can go. For all that he was, he was no bigot. *Drummer* in contributors and content might have been less Catholic and more Jewish if more writers from the incestuous New York clique of gatekeepers had not stood aloof in a virtual boycott of its pages, warned off, perhaps, by the demagoguery of Richard Goldstein who wrote "S&M: The Dark Side of Gay Liberation," published in the *Village Voice* (July 7, 1975) three weeks after the first issue of *Drummer*.

This is only a casual observation of S&M "Papists," from the Catholic aristocrat DeSade to the Catholic iconographer Mapplethorpe. Perhaps some daring GLBT panel might discuss: Is S&M, which at heart contains deep sentiments of religious ritual and psychology, a Catholic or a Jewish recreational sport?

The following exchange appeared in "Letters to the Editor," *Drummer* 3, page 12:

> Gentlemen, Please cancel my subscription. I do not wish to receive any publication that carries advertising for the "National Socialist League [Nazi]." —Fred, Wyoming
>
> Dear Fred, While we are certainly in sympathy with your feelings, and while we have no particular empathy with the "National Socialists," we feel that by denying any group the right to a voice, no

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> matter how we disagree with what they say, we are violating the very freedom we are trying to defend. *Drummer*'s only censorship is that no group attack any other. After all, everyone among us belongs to some minority. Thank you for taking time to let us know how you feel. —Robert Payne [aka John Embry]

BLACKLIST AGENDA: THROUGH A DAVOLT (DARKLY); JOHN ROWBERRY & THE REVOLVING KITCHEN TABLE

Embry's angry Hit List began in LA and grew enormously over time in San Francisco. His Blacklist was a red badge of courage. If you weren't on it, you weren't as *avant garde* as you thought. As Embry alienated more people in San Francisco, word spread about him and his lover Mario Simon, the two dramasexuals, sitting, as Jeanne Barney wrote, on their weekend deck at the Russian River piously clucking on about everyone who had done 'em wrong.

Immigrants to new cities need orientation. When Davolt moved to San Francisco to work for *Drummer* and found craziness in its office, he himself decided to court Embry who upon meeting him took control of the relationship. Perhaps Davolt wanted advice, but he did not stand a chance. Embry never met an immigrant he couldn't turn into a wage slave, or a sex slave, or a ventriloquist's sock puppet. Fresh from the Heartland of Missouri and Wisconsin, Davolt, who had belonged to the Young Republicans, was too naive to first investigate how San Francisco sexual politics might work against him if he hooked up with a scam artist like Embry whom leatherfolk had long since dismissed as a trickster. In short, his liaison with Embry hurt Davolt's reputation. Nearly every time he would mention that he was the "new editor and publisher" of Dutch *Drummer*, his next words would be about Embry, and all the help Embry was in "reconstituting" the past. Of course, Embry was trying his utmost to rewind *Drummer* history and, with most eyewitnesses dead, make it his own gospel, and he wanted Davolt to be one of his key evangelists. Sadly, Robert Davolt's young life was cut short when he died suddenly from skin cancer on May 16, 2005.

Frankly, I tried not to include Davolt, whom I liked, in the seamy parts of *Drummer* history, but he made himself part of it and what he did is a marker, but not a mark, on his character as an apparatchik keeper of leather history. Davolt may have been mouthing what he believed to be true, but some of the history he'd been told was disinformation. And he was, as he revealed about himself in his memoirs, a rather ambitious man keen on getting ahead in leather publishing.

Blogging on his leatherpage.com, Davolt wrote secondhand comments

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repeating a mythology that never happened, such as, "The Victorian apartment building on upper Market Street where early [*sic*] *Drummer* editor John Rowberry put together several issues in his kitchen." God is in the details, and as the tiniest "Exhibit A" of Davolt tampering with truths small and large, that phony "kitchen table" image is revisionist history lacking perspective because Rowberry was not an "early *Drummer* editor" insofar as he did not become even "associate editor" of *Drummer* until 1980, and only then after I exited which would have made me an early-early *Drummer* editor, and Jeanne Barney an early-early-early editor. His bump to full-fledged "editor" occurred only with *Drummer* 40 in January 1981, one full year after my departure, and six years after the first issue of *Drummer*.

And that kitchen table? That hands-on image is something either Embry or Davolt Googled and lifted, in their wishful confusion of attribution, from my website where since 1995 I was posting, among other history, local-color details about my own writing of early *Drummer* on my kitchen table in 1977 when *Drummer* was not yet two years old. One truth about John Rowberry is that he was always a pisser marking his territory. No office worker nervous about his competition was ever more jealous of holding down his own desk in the *Drummer* office than Rowberry, or, later, when I worked with him, at his very big office with the giant desk provided him South of Market by the Mavety Corporation. A kitchen table? Not his grand Los Angeles style because he liked to be seen sitting like a media mogul enthroned behind a desk that helped counter the fact that during the 1970s he was referred to at *Drummer* as the "office boy" who could not even make more than a twelve-issue "go" of Embry's pretentious passion project, *The Alternate*, which, pretending to be *The Advocate*, no matter what the two tried, was as disconcerting a flop as the disco career of Embry's lover, Mario Simon.

In the 1970s before computers and keyboards, we all wrote *Drummer* in long hand or on our own manual typewriters. My wordsmithing tool was my first typewriter, a gray 1956 Smith-Corona Portable with forest-green keys which, as a retired totem, has long sat atop a bureau in my bedroom because that non-electric typewriter was amazing: it was a keyboard that did not need a printer. So with strong fingers, we *Drummer* contributors gave our "medieval" copy to our unflappable typesetter, Marge Anderson, who, short, jolly and obese, with her Pall Mall cigarette always dangling from her lip, re-typed every word in *Drummer*. Marge herself could have written an extraordinary eyewitness testimony insofar as she had moved house from her 13940 Oxnard Street apartment in Van Nuys to follow her job with Embry and *Drummer* to San Francisco.

Davolt was also confused as to how many people had in fact been

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"editor-in-chief." There were only two editors-in-chief. After Jeanne Barney was the "founding Los Angeles editor-in-chief" and I was the "founding San Francisco editor-in-chief," Embry never gave the freedom of that high a title to any editor ever again. In Barney and me, Embry hired functional professionals who often resisted, and then led him, while we both insisted that the contributors be paid for writing, artwork, and photography. After us, he took a cue from his own sadomasochistic publication and sought out subservient staff and editors such as Rowberry.

As David Sparrow, and visitors to our home including Robert Opel, Robert Mapplethorpe, Al Shapiro, Thom Gunn, and even John Embry on truth serum could attest, *Drummer* in the 1970s was mostly written and edited on my kitchen table at my 25th Street Victorian, because, trying to avoid all the office politics and infighting, and keen to keep my own leather voice separate from Embry's camp leather voice, I never kept a formal editorial desk at the *Drummer* Divisadero office. Instead, each day I carried in all my "home work" which included my own original writing for *Drummer* as well as manuscripts and photo sets I edited on my kitchen table for other contributors who sat in my kitchen at that very table, including Robert Mapplethorpe, Oscar Streaker Robert Opel, *Advocate* editor Mark Thompson, and writers John Preston, John Trojanski, and Bob Zygarlicki. Each day, I assigned the next phase of production on the manuscripts and art work to various staff including Al Shapiro. Not wanting to lord it over anyone from a tyrannical editor's desk, I spent my in-office time sitting as equally as possible with staff at each of their work stations.

THE 3 ROBERTS: ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE AND ROBERT OPEL, PLUS/MINUS ROBERT DAVOLT

Always I headed back to my safe white-oak kitchen table, which I am using at the moment. It belongs in the Leather Archives & Museum because it became famous for the elbows that leaned on it over the years. That table is itself a minor character in *Some Dance to Remember.* It was at that table that my bicoastal lover Robert Mapplethorpe, who often stayed with me, ate breakfast and talked on the telephone to Patti Smith. It was at that table that Mapplethorpe watched Robert Opel jerk off while I read, at Opel's request, a story he had asked me to write for his new magazine, *Cocksucker*. When Opel shot his load as I finished the reading, Mapplethorpe, watching Opel write me a check of $125, said: "I thought I was the master-hustler of the hard sell." I handed Opel a paper towel and said, "Why can't you be like other publishers and just let me mail it in." I was ever so thankful that I did

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not have to read my erotic material personally to John Embry.

Before I wrote Shapiro's obituary in *Drummer* 108, Embry never gave any indication that he had ever read anything of mine that he had published in *Drummer*. He thought of me as inches, column inches, faithfully filling *Drummer* against its deadlines. With my training for the Catholic priesthood, I sometimes thought of *Drummer* as a droll parish bulletin sent out nationwide to instruct and thrill reader-subscribers who were only then learning how important it was to uncloset the homomasculine lifestyle in a gay culture whose media image was dominated by drag queens and effeminacy. As a humanist, I had to ask if a political masculinism existed, shouldn't it be equal to feminism?

Regarding Davolt, what college credential or professional training did he have for writing history? He majored in political science at the University of Missouri. He listened to Embry's version of Embry's eleven years at *Drummer* which as a magazine lasted twenty-four years, including the thirteen years when Embry as persona non grata to both the second and third owners was not privy to its internal workings. If Davolt simply double-checked the ongoing masthead of *Drummer* issues, he could have sorted the fact that by the time John Rowberry became editor with *Drummer* 40 (January 1981), the Titanic 1970s were dead as disco, and the "early" (Davolt's word) *Drummer* of wild sex had collapsed into the new normal of safe sex. In my archeology, "early" *Drummer* occurred in LA with Jeanne Barney helming the first eleven issues, and concluded in *Drummer*'s teens with my first fully San Francisco issue, *Drummer* 19 (December 1977).

ROW, ROW, ROWBERRY: OFFICE BOY ON THE MAKE; SON OF EMBRY, BANE OF BARNEY

If ever a character deserved a "character sketch" it was John W. Rowberry whom I grew to know extremely well and worked with off and on for sixteen years from 1977 to his death in 1993.

Scene 1, Take 1: Beginning after my departure, while following my editorial production of the last issues of the 1970s (31, 32, and 33), *Drummer* found new digs at 15 Harriet Street where, once he moved in, the territorial Rowberry never left his desk to go home to "a kitchen table," for fear his seat would be taken by Embry's next "slave-boy" hire. That "position" of servitude was a running joke in the office. Rowberry, for instance, seemed intimidated when Embry succumbed to the wiles of the self-identified hustler-writer John Preston whom Rowberry saw as competition for his office job. He needn't have feared because Preston who had been fired as the editor

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of *The Advocate* after only ten months in 1975. In addition, Preston was a writer who himself, according to his friend, the author Lars Eighner, always needed heavy editing which I had to do, in fact, to produce the final copy of his draft manuscript of *Mr. Benson* for serial publication in *Drummer*.

On October 31, 1985, I wrote Rowberry a letter congratulating him on his being hired to edit *Inches* magazine for which I had already written steadily for five years with its founding editor Bob Johnson. For all our attitudinal differences, we never quarreled. I did not rub it in that I had given him a good recommendation at Modernismo Publications which published *Inches* and other vanilla magazines. I also thanked him for his generous help in suggesting his friend, the agent, Bill Whitehead, who might represent the manuscript of my novel *Some Dance to Remember* that I had completed in 1984.

Before Rowberry matured and escaped *Drummer*, he was always Embry's minion. It was something like hero worship. Both were very strange men. Jeanne Barney told me she remembered Rowberry taking Embry's part when Embry trashed her "mercilessly and libelously" in LA after she left *Drummer*.

Rowberry fled *Drummer* before DeBlase bought it from Embry, because DeBlase loathed the trouble-making Rowberry, the co-dependent of Embry, and refused to buy *Drummer* unless Rowberry was fired. Eyewitness DeBlase railed in *Drummer* that Rowberry some years before had accepted three of Deblase's S&M stories; but when DeBlase wrote to Rowberry asking to be paid for the first story, Rowberry turned petulant queen, refused payment, and rejected the remaining two stories which DeBlase published months later in Modernismo's *Honcho*, the rival of *Drummer*.

It is a suitable storyline for a television sit-com that one of the prime problems in running a gay S&M magazine was dealing with the psychology of employees who were sexual slaves. Seeking abuse, these slave-boy hires were all too eager to work for pennies for a cruel master. Seeking identity, they got hard bragging they worked for an S&M business by day and played S&M games by night. In the unbridled 1970s, I thought Embry abused this dynamic to get cheap obedient labor the way the priest, Jim Kane, used it to rent his Pearl Street apartments to obedient bottoms like my gal-pal, Cynthia Slater, who in the *Drummer* salon nearly became, perish the thought, my sister-in-law while she was dating my straight military brother just before she took a lot of cash to marry the gay Australian immigrant, Frank Sammut, at City Hall in 1979, with Catacombs owner Steve MacEachern as best man. (Sammut's eyewitness email of January 8, 2012, endnotes this chapter.) Embry seemed absurd and unprofessional exploiting

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young leathermen's sex needs and neuroses to run his publishing sweat shop. When it came to social justice, no wonder he and I did not see eye to eye.

I was looking for creatives.

He was looking for submissives.

Embry knew how to top Davolt, because he had practiced on Rowberry and Preston and hundreds like them.

Barney, Barrus, Bean, Fritscher, and Shapiro no more bowed to Embry and his Blacklist than did Halsted, Hurles, Sparrow, and Mapplethorpe.

When the aggrieved Rowberry fled *Drummer* because of DeBlase, he decided to tell Embry a thing or two himself, and thus moved from accomplice to *persona non grata* on Embry's Blacklist. Rowberry followed the exact exit journey I had taken moving from my publisher Embry at Alternate Publishing to my publisher George Mavety at Modernismo. As strange bedfellows, Rowberry and I strategically bonded in a marriage of convenience when he came to work for Modernismo to replace my drug-addled and dysfunctional friend, the editor, Bob Johnson, with whom I had first joined forces creating the premiere issues of Modernismo magazines such as *Skin* (on January 4, 1979, with still a year to work as editor-in-chief at *Drummer*). The other magazines Johnson and I started together pre-Rowberry were *Skinflicks* (1980), *Inches* (1980), *Studflix* (1981), and *Just Men* (1982).

Johnson and I exchanged a vast correspondence chronicling the state of gay publishing from 1979-1984. His archived letters are filled with anguish apologizing for spending his money on drugs and not paying his writers, and begging for me to please send him one or two stories for the next issue, because he "really, really, really" would pay me. I stood faithful to him because unlike Embry, Johnson ultimately always paid me. Mark Hemry and I last visited Bob Johnson in his stylish house overlooking the Hollywood Strip during Thanksgiving 1985 to console him after Rowberry's takeover. At that time, glass-top tables were all the rage because their surface made chopping cocaine into lines with razor blades easy. Mark Hemry and I stood back, askance, watching Johnson bent over the table snorting again and again, while outside in the pouring rain the red taillights of traffic slowly headed west out Sunset Boulevard. It was a scene from a movie. One we didn't want to be in. Soon after, the ravaged Bob Johnson, whose real name was not his porn-business name, joined the disappeared.

Johnson had been Mavety's packager, scrambling to fill the hungry monthly magazines, and I had been his writer. Rowberry, who never met Johnson, was as mixed-happy-sad as Rowberry ever got that he and I had inherited each other. Because I had learned ways to handle his passive-aggressive personality, we were both content to work together at long

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distance. Within his own office, the snappish Rowberry added another disgruntled former *Drummer* employee, Steven Saylor/Aaron Travis, to help fill Johnson's list of magazines. Unlike, my friend, the sweet cocaine-addict Johnson, Rowberry stayed sober, and, unlike both Johnson and Embry, paid on time.

When describing sex writing, Rowberry sent me a handwritten note in summer 1986: "Jack, Remember I *love* [his italics] detailed descriptions of the characters' genitals. —JWR"

Historical Principle: Editor Rowberry in the 1980s focused *Drummer* on genitals. His godfather, Embry, focused on leather contestants. Rowberry and Embry both missed the mirroring essence of what made my 1977-1979 *Drummer* have *verite* appeal in a decade self-fashioning gay-male identity: faces, fetishes, fiction, and features reflecting grassroots readers.

A *Drummer* reader emailed about my writing: "You differentiate masculinity, sexuality, genitality, and the physical experience of leather and S&M as a constellation of foci that, as now, can, but need not be, joined."

My *Drummer* was not about penis, and not about beauty contests. It was about homomasculinity as a concept of emerging gender identity for men who like men masculine.

I replaced prescriptive LA attitude with descriptive San Francisco latitude.

When it came to sex impacting publishing, Rowberry was no pedophile. But as we worked together on *Studflix*, he so exclusively reviewed videos of blond chickens who were legally eighteen but not looking it, and he was so wrongly prejudiced against the emerging sunami of daddies and bears in magazines and video, that I told him, "If sperm could act, you'd give it a good review."

Nevertheless, Rowberry often published my photographs of grown men, and reviewed my homomasculine Palm Drive Video titles. Wrapping his review text around three of my bodybuilder photographs (pages 12-13), he wrote in *Studflix*, February 1987:

> Of special interest at Palm Drive Video are the following bodybuilding features: *Bodybuilder Hunks* which includes rare footage of the first "Gay Games" Physique Contest and a very young Frank

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> Vickers before he ever dropped his trunks for Colt Studios [or for Robert Mapplethorpe]. In *Buckskin Musclemen*, your jaw will drop when you recognize this former triple crown winner, Chuck Sipes (Mr. America, Mr. World, and Mr. Universe).... Fritscher's Palm Drive Video approaches what amounts to public voyeurism with such a casual hand that it comes off as *cinema verite*, documenting the spontaneous everyday thrills and knowing exactly where to look.

In *Inches*, February 1991, Rowberry wrote his own eyewitness insider's review of *Some Dance to Remember* because he figured that the *Leather Man* magazine portrayed in that memoir-novel was *Drummer*. "Rest assured," Rowberry wrote in his positive review, "*Some Dance to Remember* is about real people...." What he meant generally was that he thought I had created more than one fictitious character out of the *Drummer* Salon. What he meant specifically was that he thought my character Solly Blue was based on David Hurles, his new best friend, who was supplying him hundreds of Old Reliable photographs to quick-fill his empty pages.

Overall, Rowberry found *Some Dance* normalizing and therefore familiar in the way University of California professor David Van Leer, who might have been describing my mission in *Drummer* itself, wrote in "Beyond the Margins," *The New Republic*, October 12, 1992:

> Classic gay novels like Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar*, Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*, and more recently Andrew Holleran's *Dancer from the Dance*, Larry Duplechan's *Blackbird*, and Jack Fritscher's *Some Dance to Remember* all introduce readers to settings and psychologies that had not previously been depicted in literature. In so doing, they enlighten straight readers, but they also have a more particular mission for gay readers, which is to reassure them. They tell people who might otherwise have thought themselves abnormal that many share their sexual interests.

Van Leer, the author of *The Queening of America: Gay Culture in Straight Society*, limned a good observation that defined how both *Drummer* and *Some Dance to Remember* introduced stories and psychologies that helped expand the consciousness of gay liberation.

At one brief moment in time, I had edited half of all the *Drummer* magazines in existence. So I took the beating heart of that magazine and transplanted it into the body of my book to give readers a privileged peek into how

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Drummer helped create the very leather culture it reported on. With Embry still helming *Drummer*, I dramatized its reality as a comic parody in the memoir-novel's three fictional leather magazines titled *Maneuvers*, *Leather Man* and *A Different Drum*. *Some Dance to Remember* was written between 1972-1983, completed in 1984, shopped to publishers through 1988, and published in 1990 through the auspices of *Drummer* editor Tim Barrus at Knights Press.

Queer historians might do well to convene a workshop at some GLBT convention and gather papers for an anthology, or pitch gay television producers, such as Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman, or Randy Barbato and Fenton Bailey, to make a documentary about this "magazine DNA" inside gay popular culture in the first decade of gay liberation after Stonewall, which was fictively dramatized in *Some Dance to Remember*:

> Ryan liked wising off in print. He liked the largeness, the exaggeration, the metaphor that is the essence of all writing.
>
> His *Maneuvers* [magazine] remained erotic entertainment. Each cover promised: "What you're looking for is looking for you." [This was also the tag line of my 1980s zine, *Man2Man*] The magazine gave good head. Solid smut. Sleazy pix. All nasty leather S&M. A new network of personal ads written by readers and answered by phone or mail. Circulation grew. *Maneuver*'s only competition broke into a sweat.
>
> The rival mag, *Leather Man* [*Drummer*], ran middle-of-the-road S&M stories, not-too-dirty photos, and campy copy. Silly cartoon balloons of queenly dialog deflated *Leather Man*'s hardly hot pix of clonish young gay boys wearing leather chaps and chrome armbands available through the mag's 800-number shop. Slender pages of fiction and drawings were a fat-cat publisher's thin come-on to get readers to subscribe to a monthly magazine that was a glorified mail-order catalog to sell leather toys and poppers and his lover's latest disco records. In the first rise of gay magazines, it was fast-buck publishing. For guys not knowing the difference, *Leather Man* passed as the real thing.
>
> "Lips that touch Naugahyde," Ryan said, shaking his head at his competition's latest issue, "shall never touch mine."
>
> The [*Masculinist*] *Manifesto* made masculinism a theory. *Maneuvers* made it a fashion. *A Different Drum* reviewed the tempest with sympathetic amusement. *Leather Man* didn't get it at all. Ryan was prick-teasing everyone, even his own kind, and having a

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wonderful time doing it. —*Some Dance to Remember: A Memoir-Novel of San Francisco 1970-1982*, Reel 3, Scene 3, pages 176-177]

Historically, it is a zero-degrees-of-separation footnote that Terry LeGrand, the West Hollywood producer of the film *Born to Raise Hell*, read *Some Dance* in galley proofs while he and I and Roger Earl and Mark Hemry were shooting a series of six BDSM video features on location in Europe in 1989, the last summer that West Berlin existed. LeGrand, excited by the name of my fictitious magazine, *Leather Man*, decided to begin his own LA magazine titled *Leather Man*, which, in issue 2, on its masthead page, credited *Some Dance to Remember* as the inspiration for LeGrand's title. Soon after, in the way that *Drummer* had moved from LA to San Francisco, LeGrand sold his LA magazine title to Beardog Hoffman, owner of Brush Creek Media in San Francisco, where it was produced by former *Drummer* editor, Joseph W. Bean.

Tweaking the *Leather Man* title in the way that *Drummer* was re-christened *International Drummer* by its Dutch owner, Hoffman added *International Leatherman* to his other Brush Creek magazines such as *Bear*, *Powerplay*, and *Bunkhouse*. As it happened, Brush Creek had cash problems similar to *Drummer*. Like Embry not paying staff workers, contributors, and suppliers, Brush Creek also had default problems that I first noticed when its business office stopped paying some accounts, including my Palm Drive Video company even while I was actively supplying hundreds of cassettes of my bear videos to Brush Creek for its mail-order business. One Sunday at Mass at Saint Sebastian's Church in Sebastopol near the Russian River, I noticed Beardog Hoffman standing next to me in line to receive Communion, and I wanted to ask him what-the-fuck, but out of respect for the sacred venue I did not.

Because of years inside gay publishing, I was hardly surprised when Brush Creek was busted by the United States Internal Revenue Service. In 2002, the IRS padlocked the doors of Brush Creek Media, shut down its magazines, and seized its inventory for back taxes. For historical purposes, I shot a photo of the IRS sign posted on the sealed front door at 367 Ninth Street. Nevertheless, I found no Schadenfreude in the situation because I personally liked and appreciated both Beardog Hoffman and his partner Jack Boujaklian and their efforts to create a gay media empire that so often and so generously published my writing and photographs and sold the video features I directed and shot. In 2007, a court assigned the ownership of *Bear* Magazine and all the Brush Creek Media copyrights to a creditor of Brush Creek, Butch Media Ltd., and its parent company Bear Omnimedia LLC, Las Vegas.

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If only *Drummer* and the rights to it had also been legally negotiated with such clarity through all three publishers, analog *Drummer* might also have been revived like *Bear* in the digital twenty-first century. Instead, the *Drummer* title fell, it seems, by disuse into legal limbo, and all rights to its contents belong, as they always have, to the original creators of its writing, photography, and drawings, or to their estates and heirs; and their intellectual property may not be republished without their permission.

That's why I never bought *Drummer*.

Writing History One Eyewitness at a Time:
Sex, Immigration, the Catacombs, and
the Marriage of Cynthia Slater and Frank Sammut

From: Frank Sammut, Wednesday, December 14, 2011, 12:24 AM
To: Jack Fritscher
Subject: Catacombs

Dear Jack,

My name is Frank Sammut. I lived in San Francisco from 1977 to 1983. I went to the Catacombs for at least 3 of those years. I knew Steve MacEachern well. I used to also every Monday for a while clean the Catacombs. Cynthia Slater I married in 1979, this was re helping me to get my green card. I left SF in 1983 back to Australia. Have been living here since. I have had several trips back to SF. I read your write up on the Catacombs and of course it made me very emotional; am I the only one left living from that place and that period. If you can help me track some people down from that period I would so appreciate it. Attached are two photos. I do have others but am rushing to send this after I read your article on line. One of me from the 80's and one as I look now. Thank you and look forward to hear some word from you. —Frank Sammut

* * * *

From: Frank Sammut, Sunday, January 8, 2012, 7:05 PM
To: Jack Fritscher
Subject: Catacombs

Dear Jack,

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Happy Twenty 12 to you too mate. Sorry it took me a while to answer, was in Sydney with partner and family for Christmas, then came back home and a day later went out bush to celebrate the NY at a friend's property. I have scanned some photos. I have a whole wedding album. The dark skin one of course is me, the fair skin one, with the big mow was my best friend Paul. He used to be door man at the Balcony and Toad Hall, he lived on Market St next to I think a gas station before one turns into Castro.

We met Steve through our then dearest friend, whom I think has left the planet, the black man in the picture, his name was Bob Mahoney. He took us to the Catacombs first, then Steve would call us every week to join in. Bob got sick later. I was in SF round about 1986 maybe and he was not well. He was then living with his partner on Divisadero. Two others in the photos; Mikael Fry and then his partner Paul Sorenson. I think I had heard that they also left us.

I met Cynthia at the Catacombs. We became good friends. She wanted to take my hand and in return she'd do me. I was more of top. The first time I was fisted was at the Handball Express, so taking Cynthia's hand was a relief, small hands. She knew that I was there illegally and wanted to help. We got married. I wanted to buy her a ticket to bring her to Australia for the holidays, and to meet some of the other fellas who used to come to the Catacombs. Later on she opted for cash. Before I left the States, we divorced to have a clean slate. I worked with her in her dungeon on a couple of occasions. I used to also clean her house. The wedding was a civic ceremony with Steve and my then partner as witnesses. The wedding reception was held at dear friend of mine's house down by the water front. We had heaps of friends who were invited to the party. We had a wedding cake and all. In one of the photos you will see Doris Fish and Miss Leading or Tippy. They lived on top of us at 115 Haight Street, corner of Octavia, right behind the church with the round dome and then a revolving cross. Did you know she was married to me?

My doctor, and also a dear friend of mine, was doctor Tom Ainsworth. He was on 18th Street round the corner from Castro in front of that supermarket [Cala]. He later on gave up work and retired. I Googled his house and I have a feeling that he has also gone. His house was up for sale in 2002 under a revocable trust. I cannot find any signs of him. He was a great man. He was the one who in 1981 when I fell sick (sero-converting) said to me: something was really strange with my blood results. Of course they did not know what the hell was going on.

In two days I am doing a long drive 8 hours to Northern New South Wales, where we used to live. I will not have access to computer unless I get my phone to start sending emails out which I will

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work on the next two days.

I wish you all the best and hope to see you when my partner I come to San Francisco next year.

Frank

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