

CHAPTER 11

RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARCHIVES: THE SECRET PROTOCOLS OF JOHN EMBRY AND ROBERT DAVOLT

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- **Starting Tony DeBlase’s “Passion Project”: “A Leather Timeline” for the Leather Archives & Museum**
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“The history business is not the candy business. It’s not always sweet.”
—Jack Fritscher

Robert Davolt
Measure of the Man

Robert Davolt so drove himself to distraction with his disdain for Dutch publisher Martijn Bakker that he accidentally drove *Drummer* out of business. “Best men are molded out of faults,” Shakespeare wrote in *Measure for Measure*, “and, for the most part, become much more the better for being a little bad.” Robert Davolt, as controversial professionally as he was beloved personally by so many was that little bit of bad’s more kind of better.

ROBERT DAVOLT: BLOND AMBITION AT CAFÉ FLORE

In San Francisco on Market Street, over lunch at Café Flore on January 6, 2001, the blond and bearded Robert Davolt queried the blond and bearded Mark Henry and me about the possibility of our helping him sketch out his history of *Drummer*.

Something made Davolt seem dubbed like Steve Reeves in *Hercules*. His hips moved, but Embry's voice came out.

I blanched at his request to narrate to him the personal details of my early *Drummer* history, not only because I had already been writing and publishing parts of this very book in print and at my research website for years, but because I figured his not-so-secret agenda was to report back to Embry what progress I was making on my *Drummer* history. Davolt seemed blind-sided by Embry whose ancient *gravitas* he seemed to think gave him the *gravitas* of the long, lost son come home to papa.

Davolt voiced an identification he said was “ironic” that Embry was the first publisher, and he himself was the last. He confused *irony* with *coincidence*. I never really believed he was truly the “publisher” of *Drummer*. It sounded good, but if he were “publisher” under the third owner, publisher Martijn Bakker, the definition had changed from what Embry and DeBlase were.

However, as a university journalism professor and as *Drummer* editor-in-chief, I never discouraged young writers. I promised Davolt enthusiastic support if he wanted to be a fellow surveyor of the narrative arc of *Drummer*. I figured he was as expert an eyewitness of his experience at the end of *Drummer* as I was analytical about mine twenty-some years earlier. History needs all its *Rashomon* points of view.

I knew that Embry was using Davolt to erase my 1970s contributions the same way that Henry Luce made his co-founder of *Time* magazine, Briton Hadden, disappear. I may not have been an LA co-founder of *Drummer*, but I was the founding San Francisco editor-in-chief of *Drummer* who was hired to nurture the *arriviste* Embry. He owned the business of *Drummer*, but he seemed incapable of giving the magazine any resonant human heart, soul, or sensibility. Without mouth-to-mouth intervention in San Francisco, *Drummer* would have smothered to death in its Los Angeles crib and Embry would have struggled on publishing his true passion project: *The Alternate*.

At the Café Flore lunch, Davolt confided his plans and gave me his outline and completed sections of his book titled *GotterDrummerung* [*sic*] or *The Rise and Fall of Drummer Magazine* which abbreviated “the rise” of the 1970s to focus largely on “the fall” that Davolt himself had experienced

during his 1996-1999 involvement with the Dutch owner. He asked specifically for my comments. Similar to my take on early *Drummer*, his take on final *Drummer* was:

I had landed in the land of lunatics....the tension in the office was so thick that it was impossible to get anything done. The company had serious problems that could not be...tackled by this backbiting, screaming, hysterical rabble.

Overall, Davolt's writing about *Drummer* is more about the economic collapse of greedy queers doing "bad gay business"—like John Embry and Martijn Bakker—than it is about the esthetics or the erotica of *Drummer*, which, of course, was the essence of *Drummer*.

However long Davolt was conscious he was ill, he sought to share his eyewitness experience with me because he figured that, among others, I would outlive him and could promote his book. He alleged in his ©2001 "Outline" to his *Rise and Fall*:

The real undoing of Desmodus [DeBlase's iteration of *Drummer*] was a December 1997 agreement signed by then General Manager, Greg Byfield. It transferred all the [*Drummer*] trademarks [as purported to exist] to an AKKV, BV, a Dutch holding company.

His expose continued at length with details I don't feel free to disclose. I will note that Davolt, trying to keep *Drummer* afloat, felt more than a little betrayed that he did not know of this two-year-old agreement—allegedly to gut *Drummer* and drain its money—until 1999. Davolt had been kept out of the loop. He felt he had been used as a Dutch puppet with hollow job titles like "publisher" and "promoter" to keep *Drummer* and the *Drummer* contest looking alive and legitimate. While that Dutch insult contributed to his suffering in the last days of his life, did he ever realize that Embry was also a famous puppeteer? All puppets have strings, unless there's a hand up their ass.

Davolt never pretended to be an artist, a critic of art, or an erotic writer. He was a talker. A producer. Blogging made him a "journalist." He was a business manager. He appreciated our old-school *Drummer* mystique and was desperate to be identified as part of that mystique. Like John Rowberry, Davolt was exploited by Embry as a virtual and complicit sex-slave hire. Our 1970s origin story and development of *Drummer*, predating him, was beyond his ken and capacity. He knew it. He died with that disappointment.

Davolt had promise, but he arrived with too little too late and fell in with some wrong people. *Drummer* to his mind had existed as a condensed erotic abstraction before he arrived in San Francisco at the scene of the business accident where *Drummer*, having been bled to death, was already a corpse.

Like so many guys who grew up, or came out, after the Golden Age of the 1970s, he was nostalgic for the idyllic sex-past that was legendary. He wanted to make it his. But because it was not his by experience, he figured he'd make it his by inheritance. Trying to graft himself to our origin saga, he made himself believe anything old dogs told him. He wanted to fit into the romantic lust of *Drummer* so he could belong, like a time-traveling sex tourist, to that idyllic erotic history which he missed. Born too late in Washington state, he was a twenty-year-old sailor in the US Navy when *Drummer* was at its peak in 1978-1979. He did not move to San Francisco until 1996 when the dying *Drummer* had been in business for twenty-one years.

In an interesting sociological phenomenon, I have been eyewitness to hundreds of such young men grieving, bittersweet, that they missed the party of the first golden decade after Stonewall. My valentine to them is, of course, my novel of Castro and Folsom, *Some Dance to Remember*, which may be why my shoulder has become one for some to cry on in letters and emails and on telephones. After all, as a gonzo journalist, I press people to tell me their stories. As a father confessor, I was trained professionally by the Vatican to hear confessions. People know the *Drummer* name, but they don't know the *Drummer* story. They think they know what *Drummer* published in 214 issues, but they have no clue what the people who created it went through.

In the Dark Age of the 1990s, Davolt complimented my salad days as editor-in-chief when he confessed in his "Outline" to his *Rise and Fall* that he needed to perform a resurrection: "I would have to take *Drummer* back to what it was in the 1970s for it to survive." That was music to my ears, because he meant my version of *Drummer*. He made me think of the William Wordsworth poem that gay playwright, William Inge, had re-popularized with his novel and film, *Splendor in the Grass*, in 1961: "Though nothing can bring back the hour of splendor in the grass, of glory in the flower, we will grieve not, rather find strength in what remains behind."

Davolt also committed the fatal flaw of naive young bohemians: he expected to earn his living off art, particularly gay art. He wrote in his "Outline" that he asked *Drummer* for a company van after complaining about his paying for taxis to travel to contests and fund raisers, and that he was embittered that after paying some *Drummer* bills he had "less than \$20

a week for food...[while admitting he] was technically homeless” because he lived on a cot inside the *Drummer* office.

I could only shake my head and be thankful that for the nearly three years that I edited *Drummer* by night and on weekends, I also had a “day job,” a real career managing the publications and marketing departments at Kaiser Engineers, Inc., in Oakland. Never dependent on *Drummer* for my livelihood, I felt free to experiment and push the gonzo journalism of our editorial content just to see what grassroots power lay latent in the very concept of *Drummer* as a formative voice in the leather community it was helping create.

Surrounded by the Great Dying during the 1990s, Davolt seemed to me, loving, sympathetic, and understandably a bit panicked by his illnesses during his tour of duty at *Drummer*.

However, had he slowed down from the distractions of his S&M travels, leather contests, and blogs, and had he thoroughly studied back issues of *Drummer*, he could have examined the primary evidence of *Drummer* culture. He could then have put a gyroscope under Embry’s spinning oral history, and under his own redesign of the magazine thwarted by the sabotage of Dutch shoes thrown into the machine.

At the Leather Archives & Museum, on whose Board Davolt once sat, the keepers of the “Leather Timeline,” who have the patience of monks illuminating manuscripts, also know the benefit from an accurate hands-on turning of the *Drummer* pages in search of the telltale heart of the timeline beating within *Drummer*.

GAYLE RUBIN STUDIES *DRUMMER*, A FIRST DRAFT OF LEATHER HISTORY

The Michigan anthropologist, Gayle S. Rubin, PhD, who emerged in her teen years in the 1960s as a feminist in the Midwest, was a woman in the 1980s daring to write San Francisco men’s history, the reverse spin of which no man would dare do. Earning her doctorate, she set good academic example in San Francisco. She studied *Drummer*, San Francisco’s longest-running LGBT magazine, as a primary source of men’s leather history, and she wrote for *Drummer*. Her essay, “The Catacombs: A Temple of the Butthole,” appeared in *Drummer* 139 (May 1990), twelve years after I wrote the first feature on the Catacombs with my documentary photographs in *Drummer* 23 (July 1978).

As a fellow academic who also once taught university in Michigan, I was professionally interested in how my leather colleague, as a feminist

anthropologist, parsed *Drummer* and our masculine-identified tribe around *Drummer*. Her arrival in San Francisco reminded me of famed anthropologist Margaret Mead arriving in Papua New Guinea, after which she wrote the 1935 tract, popular with feminists, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*. However, when I sought to read her 1994 dissertation, *The Valley of the Kings: Leathermen in San Francisco, 1960–1990*, the University of Michigan said it was not available. Two friends who were librarians, including Jim Stewart, department head of the Social Sciences and History Department at the Chicago Public Library and author of *Folsom Street Blues*, also pursued this intellectual inquiry. Because of the notion that dissertations, including my own *Love and Death in Tennessee Williams* (1967), are written to discover and publish new knowledge, I finally asked directly. She responded on February 1, 2014: “My dissertation isn’t available.”

Ever professional, she did, however, kindly attach three pdfs of her essays, totaling fifty-six printed pages, all of which I’d read previously in anthology books such as Mark Thompson’s *Leatherfolk: Radical Sex, People, Politics, and Practice* (1991). In that volume, her essay on “The Catacombs” followed my essay on Folsom Street artist, “Chuck Arnett,” in which I memorialized the iconic founder of the Tool Box bar profiled in *Life* magazine (June 26, 1964). In the endnotes of *Leatherfolk*, she graciously credited *Drummer* and my writing of leather history:

For further reading on the Catacombs, see Jack Fritscher’s knowledgeable and affectionate memoir of the Twenty-First Street Catacombs in *Drummer* 23, 1978. The article is accompanied by [his] priceless photographs of the interior. (Page 140)

Sweet words. No wonder I wanted to read her complete dissertation.

It was for just such a new generation of leatherfolk like Davolt and younger academics like Rubin that, as editor and writer, I consciously shaped *Drummer* editorial policy in the 1970s with an eye to our community future. Having been one of the founding members of the American Popular Culture Association in 1968, I knew that gay popular culture was valuable even as I was “inside the moment” of the Titanic 1970s helping *Drummer* create the very leather culture it reported on.

When I added the tag line, “*Drummer*: The American Review of Gay Popular Culture,” it was because I was always, from my childhood diaries and journals during and after World War II, a devoted documentarian conscious of future history. Anticipating the next gay generation, I wrote very explicitly, for instance, in *Drummer* 24 about the Castro Street Fair, “Castro

Blues: Years from Now When You Read This, and You Will Read This, Remember the Way We Were, 1978 Style.” In *Son of Drummer* (September 1978), I began my “Target Studio Retrospective” by repeating with a variation: “Years from now when you think of the Seventies, and you will think of the Seventies...”

PEDIGREE OF *DRUMMER* EDITORS: LEATHER HISTORY, INVASION OF THE REVISIONIST AGENDA

Had he paged through *Drummer*, Davolt, upon proper timeline investigation, would have found that, always discounting the “aka” aches and pains of “Robert Payne,” the “early” *Drummer* editorial pedigree is simple.

In the immortal opening words of *A Chorus Line*, “Five, six, seven, eight, again!” There were only two “editors-in-chief” of *Drummer*, and that was from June 1975 to December 31, 1979: Jeanne Barney (1-11 + hybrid issues, 11 and 12), and Jack Fritscher (19-30 + hybrid issues, 16, 17, 18, 31, 32, and 33).

Lists, timelines, and bylines need not be complicated affairs. My “Eyewitness *Drummer* Bibliography” of my own writing and photography is a simple list verified in the pages of *Drummer*. However, deciphering pen names and making correct attribution of authorship can pose literary and legal copyright problems. That ambiguity can also lead to speculation and revision of leather history. For instance, *Drummer* 85 (June 1985), the Tenth Anniversary Issue, pages 102-108, published Steven Saylor’s “*Drummer* Fiction/Fetish Index” which listed writing by “Denny Sargent,” but for some reason did not identify that I was “Denny Sargent.”

As a best-selling writer of detective novels set in ancient Rome, Saylor might have found a clue in my special issue, *Son of Drummer* (September 1978), where I published an excerpt from my novel *Leather Blues* under its original title, “I Am Curious (Leather): The Adventures of Denny Sargent.” Strangely enough, Saylor himself had reviewed *Leather Blues*, whose main character is named “Denny Sargent,” in *Drummer* 81, four issues before his “Index” was published. The opening line is: “Denny Sargent, eighteen, kicked his sheets to the floor.” Understandably, Saylor also missed my frequent use of the pen name “David Hurles,” a real name used with permission from my longtime friend David Hurles who understood that Embry was fuming that my byline appeared on too many articles and stories. As “David Hurles,” I wrote “End Product: The First Taboo,” *Drummer* 22 (May 1978), and “High Performance, Or, Sex without a Net,” *Drummer* 26 (January 1979), as well as my one-act play “with David Hurles,” *Corporal in Charge*

of *Taking Care of Captain O'Malley*, serialized in two issues, *Drummer* 22 (May 1979) and *Drummer* 23 (June 1979). The valiant Saylor, working hard as a literary gladiator years before computer searches existed, did what heavy lifting he could to create the very bibliography *Drummer* needed and its contributors deserved. A complete bibliography for the nearly 25,000 pages of *Drummer* has yet to be written.

Saylor once published his own recall about the grief he got working inside *Drummer*. Was the employee even aware of the employer's stealthy Blacklist agenda? Was his "Index" expurgated by Embry's late-night deleting of his "enemies"? Ever eager to reprint material so he could sell everything even more than twice, Embry illustrated Saylor's *Drummer* 85 "Index" with the very picture from *Drummer* 44 that had introduced "'Blue Light,' A Short Story by Aaron Travis," Saylor's pseudonym.

With *Drummer* 31 in 1980, Embry refused to name John W. Rowberry as "editor-in-chief." Rowberry was a manager without portfolio, until Embry begrudged him the limited title of "assignments editor," which by *Drummer* 40, in 1981, metastasized into "editor." Sorting Rowberry's titles can correct certain leather timelines cloned out of the Leather Archives & Museum's early "Leather Timeline"—before the LA&M began its twenty-first-century fact-checking oversight, and fine-tuning, of that timeline first drafted in chunks by Tony DeBlase and me as announced in *Drummer* 126 (March 1989).

Vetting of Rowberry's pedigree lies in the masthead credits of nine 1980 issues (31 to 39). Only after entering his second year as "assignments editor," did Rowberry, according to DeBlase (in *Drummer* 100), finally achieve the single-word title of "editor" in *Drummer* 40 during the sixth, nearly seventh year, of middle *Drummer*. I was editor-in-chief of 1970s "Divisadero Street" *Drummer*. Rowberry was editor of 1980s "Harriet Street" *Drummer* which became AIDS *Drummer*. Rowberry mainly plugged leather contest photos and video reviews. He was a lone wolf from LA and never part of the San Francisco *Drummer* Salon of serious writing and erotic art during the orgy of the Titanic 1970s.

Critical thinkers should be careful of any free-range revisionist's fore-shortened perspectives written years after the facts. Revisionists should also be wary that for far into the future there will always exist one more "last" eyewitness of *Drummer* history, just as there is always one more "last" eyewitness of the Holocaust to keep facts sorted properly.

DeBlase thought these distinctions important enough to ask me in 1988 to startup what would be my continuing leather-history column, "Rear-View Mirror." It was his intent to incubate and grow leather history in *Drummer*. In

that pre-Google decade, using the reach, resources, and friends of *Drummer* was the in-house way he and I started to gather up, rough out, and construct the foundation of his late-1980s concept of that “Leather Timeline” for his passion project, the Leather Archives & Museum, which he would later co-found with Chuck Renslow in 1991 in DeBlase’s native Chicago.

The founding of the LA&M, like the founding of *Drummer*, took several people and several years to create itself, finally completing its six-year origin story with the appointment of *Drummer* editor Joseph W. Bean as executive director in 1997. Bean, in his words, said he arrived to “legitimize” and “professionalize” the infant LA&M. I had the same two goals when Embry hired me to edit the infant *Drummer* when it was eighteen months old. From the first, I positioned *Drummer* to be a first draft of leather history. On the masthead of *Drummer* 23 (July 1978), I lead with my tag line of intent, subtitling *Drummer* as the “American Review of Gay Popular Culture.”

Writing journalism before the Internet, I put my leather-research boots on the ground to support DeBlase by gathering first-hand eyewitness historical information. In 1988, accompanied by the leather poet Ron Johnson, I shot hours of videotaped interviews of iconic San Francisco leather pioneers such as

- California Motor Club (CMC) founder (1960), Linn Kiefer;
- Ambush bar founder (1970), Kerry Bowman;
- African-American Folsom Street leatherman, Al Smith; and
- Jaguar Bookstore founder (1971), Ron Ernst, who originated the first Hanky Code (1972) with Alan Selby (Mr. S.) for their 18th and Castro store, Leather and Things.

Given the technology of the 1980s, the “Leather Timeline” lifted off to a good start, but has, since the introduction of fact-checking on the Internet in 1995, proved that, even with the best contributors, every timeline will always be a work in progress, open to corrections and additions as more leatherfolk and researchers participate and bring in new eyewitness line items.

WRITER DEBLASE, WANTING TO BE PUBLISHED,
BOUGHT *DRUMMER*

Looking at the internal evidence of leather history inside *Drummer* 17 (July 1977), I know that DeBlase as his pseudonym “Fledermaus” had sent a “Letter to the Editor” (Embry) asking to be published as a fiction writer (page 7). This was nine years before DeBlase bought *Drummer* from Embry.

Even as DeBlase, listing his leather-tribe credentials, was trying to enter the *Drummer* Salon, global leather culture had not yet heard of “Fledermaus.” Nevertheless, what imp of the perverse in Embry caused him to misspell DeBlase’s pseudonym?

FLENDERMAUS [*sic*] WRITES.

Dear Sir: I have been writing Gay S&M fiction under the pseudonym of Flendermaus [*sic*] for several years now. Most of my work has been published by Larry Townsend in his Treasury series. RFM has also published some of my work under the pen name, Pipistrelle. I am a charter subscriber to *Drummer* [Note his connecting himself to *Drummer*’s roots in his goal to become part of the *Drummer* fraternity, the *Drummer* Salon] and have enjoyed seeing the magazine grow. I would like to be included among the authors who have their work featured. —Tony, Illinois

Three years later, DeBlase wrote me a letter from Chicago dated April 20, 1980, answering my *Drummer* display ad for “Writer’s Aid” (*Drummer* 25, page 94, and *Drummer* 26, page 86) through which I counseled emerging erotic authors, and auditioned new writing for *Drummer*.

GAY WRITERS! *Sold any lately?* Pro-writer/editor/agent thoroughly critiques your poetry, fiction, articles, scripts! Erotic or straight. Novice writers also welcome. Send self-addressed stamped envelope for *very* reasonable rates and totally professional advice: WRITER’S AID, 4436 25th Street, San Francisco CA 94114 [my home address at the time].

Some of my “students,” like DeBlase and John Preston, became famous personalities; others writers, still living, I will protect till they’re dead.

By *Drummer* 98, DeBlase, a ball of fire, had bought his way into *Drummer* from Embry, a burnt-out case.

GRAVE ROBBERS STEAL THE “TREASURE HOUSE” OF
DRUMMER

Years after that, the health-impaired Davolt strove to spark off the flinty Embry his own heritage heat as a leatherman. In Embry, Davolt found his Darth Vader: “Luke, I am your father.” The two men might have achieved a certain higher nobility if they had spent their last years returning all the

photographs and original art that belonged to the creators and copyright holders. None of that intellectual property was given to *Drummer* to keep. It disappeared into what garbage can, what leather closet, what university archive, or what eBay auction?

As a back-story of evidence, in January, 2006, Bijou Video in Chicago advertised at its site that it was selling back issues of *Drummer* in a way that would have seemed to violate copyright. When I alerted Larry Townsend he alerted Jeanne Barney who alerted John Embry who wrote a well-distributed email dated January 9, 2006.

Embry stated that he had bought the *Drummer* archives from Robert Davolt. He stated this, significantly, only *after* Davolt's death: "While in charge, Davolt sold the files, the inventory, and the office lease to us."

Had Davolt ginned up the claim that he had somehow gained ownership of the *Drummer* files and was permitted to sell them? He tried to fix his lie into history. Talking through his hat and up his sleeve, he told historian, Dusk Peterson, some untrue tales that did not belong at Peterson's *truetales.org*. The skeptical Peterson, leading off with the telling words, "considered himself," wrote of Davolt:

Davolt considered himself to be the guardian of *Drummer's* legacy. He was the man who claimed rights over the publication (though another claimant existed) [A major point; who was the other claimant? Publisher/owners Embry or DeBlase or Bakker?], and who kept what he called the "mortal remains" of *Drummer*: the magazine's existing records.

Perhaps Davolt held the *Drummer* papers and artwork hostage because he could not wrest his wages or ownership control of the magazine itself from the Dutch. Whatever transpired around *Drummer* in *fin de siecle* San Francisco was a continent and an ocean away from Amsterdam. As Davolt admitted in interviews, he was desperate for money for his personal expenses, for publishing *Drummer*, and for producing the Mr. *Drummer* contest. About his ownership, he might have lied to Embry who, for once, could have been repeating the lie as a "truth" he'd be told. When Davolt asked me for donations of my books and videos, I sent some to support him, and asked him to return all my photographs still stuck in *Drummer* filing cabinets.

Did Davolt ever have the right or the authorization to sell art work and photographs he did not own? With so many *Drummer* contributors dead from AIDS, who knew what former lover or what straight niece inherited

the copyright to the intellectual property? Was Embry like some rich art collector buying artefacts smuggled out of a lost civilization by a dying grave-robbler who had tucked the loot into his carry-on luggage? Is this situation akin to twenty-first-century dealers selling art confiscated during the Holocaust?

Everything proven and alleged on this subject can be corrected if these phantom intellectual property deals claimed by Embry and Davolt are ever made transparent by a paper trail. Even so, it cannot be emphasized enough in a digital world of piracy and plagiarism, that the photographs, drawings, and manuscripts are the intellectual property of their creators and their heirs.

In *Super MR #7* (2001), Embry made an astonishing claim on page 37: “When *Super MR* acquired the original *Drummer* archives, we really didn’t realize what a *treasure house* [italics added] we had.”

I am really curious (leather)!

Embry’s little braggadocio needs a paper trail.

In *Drummer* 137 (February 1990), page 5, managing editor Joseph W. Bean addressed *Drummer*’s “enormous archive of erotic” treasures. He began the 1990s setting an ethical standard Davolt might have followed in the late-1990s, of pro-actively seeking to identify and return original material.

Missing in Action: Over the years, *Drummer* has collected an enormous archive of erotic artwork and photography. Unfortunately, some of the best items...have no identification.....So from time to time, we will be running some of these unidentifiable masterpieces in this feature, “Missing in Action.” If the artwork is yours, we want to hear from you. Or, if you know who the artist is [in this age of plague]....

In a June 1997 interview, Joseph Bean told me some information that contradicted Embry and Davolt’s claim that former *Drummer* owners and staff had discarded artwork and photographs. For the most part, neither had destroyed originals, even though they were often too busy to systematically store or return them. While I was editor-in-chief, I chastised Embry for disrespecting and tossing original art work, photos, and manuscripts into a jammed closet next to art director Al Shapiro’s drafting table. Bean also confirmed Embry’s mercenary statement that after *Drummer* closed in 1999, he bought its “treasure house” of art and photographs.

JOSEPH BEAN AND DAVID SPARROW,

DRUMMER PHOTOGRAPHER

The institutional memory of *Drummer* was short and often amnesiac because, during twenty-four years and three owners, a thousand people, often using subversive outlaw identities, and paid under the table, worked for or contributed to its creation. Bean revealed this in-house shortfall when he reported that DeBlase did not know who the famous “Sparrow” was, even though I had twice introduced DeBlase to my former lover, David Sparrow, who was for years listed by his full name on the masthead page under “Photographers.” Insisting on burying my bylines, Embry credited our “Sparrow-Fritscher Photography” reductively as “Sparrow Photography.” Did DeBlase who died in 2000 suffer memory loss? How did DeBlase fail to remember that before Andy Charles became his lover, Andy was great, good, and intimate friends with David Sparrow and me back in Chicago in 1969.

Perhaps DeBlase’s eye was not on that “Sparrow,” my Sparrow. Perhaps DeBlase confused my “Sparrow” with the “Sparrow” who was the iconic leather author Sam Steward also known as the tattoo artist, “Phil Sparrow.” Perhaps DeBlase threw his hands up in frustration in an office full of pseudonyms that were further muddled by the de-selections of Embry’s Blacklist. Bean made me even more aware of this identity confusion, and of the loss of hundreds of my photographs in June 1997.

Bean:.... I have to go backwards for just a split second. The photographer, “Sparrow,” David Sparrow.

Fritscher: Yes?

Bean: [who had suddenly connected my mention of David Sparrow to another Sparrow] Sparrow! His identity is an important [intellectual property] issue because there are in the *Drummer* archives dozens or maybe hundreds of photos just marked “Sparrow.” When I was editor there, I didn’t know who that “Sparrow” was and Tony DeBlase didn’t either. We didn’t know if the “Sparrow” photos had been used or not. [A dozen issues of *Drummer* numbered in and above issues 19 to 33 contain hundreds of our “Sparrow” interior photographs and cover shots, nearly all identified explicitly with our byline.]

Fritscher: Those are my photos as well. So that’s where they are? OK. I get it.

Bean: When I left, there were a lot of photos there.

Fritscher: Those aren’t just Sparrow photographs. Those photographs were hi-jacked and those photographs are mine as well, just for a

fact. That's very interesting.

Bean: Perhaps you just take a stab at getting them back then. When I left *Drummer*, Tony DeBlase had sorted all of the photography that existed in the whole Desmondus building by the first letter of the last name or pseudonym of the photographer. *There was enough "Sparrow" photography there that it had its own drawer.* [Italics added] So it was like "S" and then "Satyr" and then "Sparrow" and then "T." I don't know if they still have that system, but if they do, there's a whole drawer full of Sparrow photographs there.

Fritscher: Where is the drawer?

Bean: At *Drummer* [At that moment, in the hands of Davolt].

Fritscher: OK, I'll check there. Mark [Hemry] and I were just discussing this recently, the mysterious disappearance of all this stuff belonging to David and me, because so much has disappeared with people dying and...the same thing happened with Robert Mapplethorpe. Stuff disappears. Nobody has ever seen his scatology photographs. Where did those go?

Bean: I have heard of them before.

Fritscher: Or Mapplethorpe's "Nazi" photographs. I've seen them, even have copies of some, but not here. David Sparrow... How can I put this? As I told you, for ten years, the exact same time I was editor-in-chief of *Drummer*, David was my lover. We moved together to San Francisco from the Midwest where I had put him through college—somewhat against his will. He was a particular somebody [whom I loved and whom] I supported—into whose unemployed hands I put a camera that I purchased, loaded with film stock that I purchased, and took on shoots I set up and cast with models where I'd say, "OK, now I'll shoot this angle, you shoot that..." [My freckled and redheaded David Sparrow was born hard-scrabble in Evansville, Indiana, in 1946; he had the great beauty of the Celtic gene bank as well as its addiction disorders, and a poor boy's lust for bright and shiny things in pawnshop windows that stopped him in his tracks on our sex-trips from Manhattan to LA to San Francisco. More than liking photography itself, he liked cameras as expensive objects; but he was never really all that interested in actually taking pictures because film, and the development of film, cost even more money. In the upwardly mobile way that I forced him to go to university, and I paid for it, I cajoled him into fronting, and being, my *Drummer*

photographer, and I paid for it, because he was frequently jobless, and acting in my stead even the few times I made him shoot alone; and, for that service, I expected Embry to pay me back by paying Sparrow who put it in our marital household account.] The “Sparrow” credit line was another invention of that time when I was writing nearly everything in *Drummer* to front some of it with Sparrow’s name to satisfy Embry who thought my name was in too many bylines in each issue. [In our longtime marriage, David and I drew up our own binding agreements about our money and our mutual businesses, including his permission for me to write about him from inside our intimacy and privacy. After our divorce, he stopped shooting and was never published again.]

Bean: I don’t know what’s there at *Drummer* now, of course—what Sparrow photographs. I’ve been gone six years.

Fritscher: Has it been that long? I’ve always thought of you as the soldier-editor. In the leather world, you moved from front to front, fighting battle after battle, war after war, and have never yet yourself become a casualty.

Bean:[Laughs] Last night, Gayle Rubin asked me, what’s next, and I told her that I thought my next move would be to Chicago to work on the Leather Archives & Museum, because it really needs to get legitimized, to get professionalized....

PARVENU DAVOLT TWICE DECEIVED

I don’t want to blame the parvenu Davolt, a holy innocent who should have known better, but his caving into Embry and the Dutch “pirates” was no noble way to end *Drummer*. There was no respect in it for the thousands of working writers, photographers, and artists who created *Drummer*. In his “Outline,” Davolt revealed the debris in the *Drummer* office when he arrived:

The physical condition of the office was another story: piles of paper...mice in the filing cabinets. A splendid little patio in the back was overgrown with weeds that were encroaching on the office windows. The greatest photo and art collection in SM/leather history, or at least everything that had survived 25 years of looting by former owners and employees, was sitting in boxes—unsorted, unusable, and decaying rapidly.

Davolt was rather elitist underestimating *Drummer* readers. He asked Mark Henry and me at the Café Flore about what he had written in his “Outline”:

Do you think references to Wagner and Shakespeare are too high-falutin’? Where should I be aiming this manuscript? Ex-*Drummer* readers? Gay history junkies? Should I write a complete, definitive history of *Drummer* from beginning to end, or as primarily a story about the end with the earlier stuff as background.

Besides advising him to drop the unreadable bi-lingual tongue-twisting pun in his title, *GotterDrummerung*, I told him what I told my university writing students for years: “Write about what you know.”

After I wrote to Davolt telling him I would meet him for lunch to discuss his book, he emailed his set purpose on Wednesday, January 3, 2001,

Re: Happy New Year Yes Lunch:

I have never quite known how to “do” lunch. Eat lunch, yes. Drink lunch, occasionally. But “doing lunch” always seems to be slightly obscene. Foreplay to a food fight?

How about Saturday? Name the place and may I suggest some time post-lunch-rush, say 1300?

I could hardly think of such a project without you. I will take what I can get and impose on you until you wish me into the cornfield. Let’s start with the outline and something of a mission plan/priority list. With your permission I will send it ahead for your perusal.[Instead, he handed his feasibility “Outline” over during the lunch.] I would be fascinated to hear how you would approach this if you were me.

Thanks so much!

Robert

After our lunch, he emailed on January 20, 2001:

Jack,

Thank you for the two books! [*Some Dance to Remember* and *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera*]. I am honored that you also inscribed them for me. It took UPS a week to actually deliver them, but the result was well worth bullying their customer rep!

It was good to sit and talk—in addition to the enlightenment, it was a warm and enjoyable conversation. I hope you felt the same and we can continue some of the topics some time in the future. I hope that you and Mark might be able to stop by the house if time permits next trip into the City.

It is my goal to have a manuscript ready by May at the latest. To accomplish that, I am trying to keep to a schedule of producing at least two chapters a week, which would seem to be doable wrapped around the job search and other projects. Focusing on a more personal memoir [as was suggested to him at the table] will reduce the range of the required research, but it will make editing a little more of a problem.

Once again, thank you for the meeting and the books.

Best Regards,

Robert

In his book, *Painfully Obvious, An Irreverent and Unauthorized Manual for Leather SIM* (2003), Robert Davolt graciously included me in his list of writers he thanked for help and encouragement. Mark Henry and I had indeed given him both, but to what avail? Instead of a courtier's curtsy, Davolt might better have returned my photographs and manuscripts from the early *Drummer* as well as those I sent to the editors during the last seven years of double Dutch *Drummer*. It was also painfully obvious that Davolt's book needed proof-reading just to keep up with Google's search accuracy available since 1999. He missed the "S" in *Fritscher* which, in leather culture, no bottom "M" should ever do. From the earliest *Drummer* issues, the "Letters to the Editor" continually complained about *Drummer* not fact-checking, as well as about blunders in proofing, spelling, and punctuation. As early as *Drummer 6* regarding *Drummer 4*, a reader wrote: "Your editors don't care." More like the publishers did not care. Especially after the Titanic earthquake, October 17, 1989.

Three *Drummer* Crises:
Slave Auction Arrest (1976), HIV (1982),
Loma Prieta Earthquake (1989)

The Loma Prieta earthquake did to 1980s *Drummer* in the 1990s what AIDS had done to 1970s *Drummer* in the 1980s.

The shaking *Drummer* building at 285 Shipley Street, its second South of Market office, became instantly unsafe. Publisher DeBlase heard the news while touring Europe, panicked, and flew home from Heathrow. Editor Joseph Bean soldiered on. What last vestiges of the unbridled lust and personal sex joys of 1970s *Drummer* had not been destroyed by AIDS were finished by the earthquake. Once again, as in its desperate 1977 move from LA to San Francisco, *Drummer* needed to be reinvented to fit the times. So, in search of safer sex that we could promote as the hot new normal in S&M, I convinced Deblase to send me to Missouri on an undercover assignment at Chip Weichelt's Training Center Academy to report back about sex-free, man-to-man physical discipline adventures with five straight cops and Marines in the *Drummer* cover story, "The Academy: Incarceration for Pleasure," *Drummer* 145 (December 1990).

Chip Weichelt posted his Academy advertisement offering authentic reality in dozens of *Drummer* issues that mostly offered only fantasy. It was the dawn of a new kind of S&M at *Drummer* when a man offered a toll-free number that could change fantasy into reality. Weichelt turned the magical thinking of masturbators into an authentic experience that was sex-free, but—in every other S&M fetish way—erotic. This new authenticity did not survive Deblase's sale to the Dutch who preferred to publish pictures from slick sex videos ground out at corporate video companies that had not the personal soul of early *Drummer* film favorites directed by actual leathermen: Fred Halsted's *Sextool*, Roger Earl's *Born to Raise Hell*, and the Gage Brothers *Kansas City Trucking Co.*

THE ACADEMY

The Academy, a full-time staffed prison facility, continues to offer men with a serious interest a unique alternative service. The Academy can design and implement each detail of your experience in various environments and scenarios for weekend or week-long sessions. Special situations such as public arrest, hostage, and other complex programs are executed in realistic correctional or military atmosphere. Cell confinement, immobilization, isolation, interrogation, sensory control and endurance situations are all offered in safe, sane, discreet, and monitored environment. All Academy programs are administered by professionally trained military, corrections and law personnel. A brochure or videotape is now available. Reservation and deposit require (deposit and/or video may be charged by credit card). References provided after commitment.

Contact: The Academy, PO Box [deleted], Washington MO 63090. 1-800-deleted. NOTE: The Academy cannot offer sexual situations as part of its programs.

WHEN QUEERS COLLIDE: MR. MARCUS AND MR. DAVOLT

At www.leatherweb.com/histdrum, Davolt, who had been denounced by Mr. Marcus, the beloved leather columnist for the *Bay Area Reporter*, admitted, in the name of business and raising funds for charity, that he had lied, or prevaricated, or at least covered up the truth about what was really going on financially with *Drummer* and the Mr. Drummer contest:

...to keep up appearances...and the confidence...of contestants, sponsors, customers and suppliers long enough to fix what was wrong...We put on our game faces. The immediate past is not something anyone currently involved with the *Drummer* names is eager to talk about.

Davolt's "immediate past" was where the last of the archive treasures disappeared. His admitting to his bit of a hustle put me on guard from my previous support of the Mr. Drummer contest for which, over time, I had been a judge. In 1979, Embry and Al Shapiro and I, sitting trio behind closed doors in our office, handpicked the first Mr. Drummer ourselves. Later, as part of leather panels, I helped judge Mr. *Drummer* 1988, September, 24, 1988, and Mr. Northern California *Drummer* 1990, April 28, 1990. As the owner and film director of the leather and fetish studio, Palm Drive Video, I was listed in the program for the "Mr. Drummer 1989 Contest List of Prizes" as the first video artist to create a cash prize of a \$500 video contract to the runners-up, and to the winners of regional Mr. Drummer contests. Some of the winners I filmed were Wes Decker in *Leather Discipline Duo: Punch and Boots*, Larry Perry in *Naked Came the Stranger*, and Southwest Mr. *Drummer*, Rick Conder, in *Leather Saddle Cowboy Bondage*.

On June 18, 2001, Davolt wrote:

I am writing for a favor (natürlich) [*sic*]. I enjoyed your books (*Some Dance to Remember* and *Mapplethorpe: Assault*). I was wondering if you would do me the honor of sending a signed volume to be used as a raffle prize at my birthday party (a fund raiser for the AEF Breast Cancer Emergency Fund) on Wednesday, 27 June at Daddy's Bar.

The late Mister Marcus Hernandez, who was for thirty-eight years the principal eyewitness and news reporter of good, bad, and ugly leather behavior on Folsom Street, loathed Davolt's dishonesties privately and in print. Marcus dubbed him "Robert Revolting." Eyewitness Queen Cougar, the beloved emcee of nationwide leather contests, was Marcus' longtime friend and caretaker. She nurtured him in his last illnesses and became the keeper of his archive. She wrote to me on January 18, 2012 clarifying:

Marcus's beef with Robert Davolt was that he felt Davolt was weak and not a worthy leader. They [in their long feud] really only made up in print because of pressure from the BAR [*Bay Area Reporter*] management—putting pressure on Marcus to not keep the flame going with Davolt, as Davolt had come to them asking for Marcus's head on a platter....Yes, he did try to have Marcus fired....[He wanted to take over Marcus' job as the BAR leather columnist. After Marcus' death, the BAR leather column went to Race Bannon.] Bob Ross had no intention of firing Marcus, but they did want to maintain a reasonable truce between Marcus & Davolt not wanting a lawsuit to be mounted....Marcus knew Davolt was playing games with the [*Drummer*] money... he was very savvy about who in the community did that kind of thing ... and it disgusted him. He knew the community was being damaged by all the rip-off artists.... He was very concerned about preserving our history, and, despite the dishy aspect of his work, he truly wanted the best at all times for the community as a whole. He was not afraid to dish out punishment in print to those who it was clear had committed serious infractions against their club or organization. He often chose to let "sleeping dogs lie" regarding one scandal or another, because he was getting older and felt it was sometimes like swimming upstream to get [leather] people to realize the truth about their so-called [leather] "icons."...He hated how people didn't have any balls when it came to exposing and dealing with the rip-offs and bad-asses of our community. [Marcus had]...an interesting story of the night at the San Francisco Eagle when they [Martijn Bakker who had sold rights to the Mr. Drummer contest to Mike Zuhl] unceremoniously snatched *Drummer* out of Davolt's hands.

As a survivor of the AIDS crisis, I want to know what survivors of the Holocaust want to know about their families' art treasures. Where are my missing photographs? The missing Mapplethorpe photographs? The missing

Etienne drawings? The missing Bill Ward cartoon panels? The missing Tom of Finland sketches? The missing work of countless others?

That physical loss is similar to the missing credit lines in Davolt's 1990s *Drummer* which regularly failed to credit by copyright or by name photographers such as Lou Thomas of Target Studio whose work graced so many homomasculine covers and centerfolds of early *Drummer*. In its last falling down days at the height of the AIDS epidemic, the last generation of *Drummer* editors and staff had the misguided *chutzpah*, without permission, to publish and republish living, dying, and dead artists' photographs and drawings with the one lazy and dismissive credit line: "From the *Drummer* Archives."

Drummer was indeed a first draft of leather history.

So *Drummer* had a duty.

But the leather Rorschach that was *Drummer* lost its roar.

Drummer was dying.

How sublime and elegiac its twenty last issues could have been if editorial staff had only bothered to research the twenty-four years of purloined art to identify it with clear provenance, historic captions, or obituaries honoring the artists and photographers, living and dead, one last time before epic *Drummer* died with the century's end.

