



**HOMOSURREALISM MAGAZINE
WINS POETRY AWARD FROM
NATIONAL LEATHER ASSOCIATION-INTERNATIONAL
FOR THE POEM, “MAPPLETHORPE MOVIE,”
WRITTEN BY JACK FRITSCHER
FOR THE DECEMBER 2019 ISSUE**

**Race, Sex, and Gender:
Our Once and Future Leather
Lives during Black Lives Matter
and Covid-19**

**A Keynote Valedictory Address
Presented to the National
Leather Association International
in Gratitude upon Acceptance of
the
NLA Lifetime Achievement
and Literary Award
August 8, 2020**

by Jack Fritscher, PhD,
Founding San Francisco Editor-in-Chief of
Drummer

During this Reckoning of Black Lives Matter and Covid-19 Quarantine, thanks to the National Leather Association for this Lifetime Achievement Literary Award. It's a hopeful finale to a sixty-five-year career spanning from my "leatherboy" diary crying for James Dean when I was sixteen in 1955—to my witchcraft book interviewing High Priest Anton Lavey at the Church of Satan, and to my leather history books which are posted free for you all at my site: DrummerArchives.com.

I applaud the NLA on your thirty-fourth anniversary. You are the only group that honors leather literature as art. So cheers to the Committee for all the years of support: SirJohn Doan, Lady Jeanna, Vince Andrews, Brian, boy david, girl alayna Munster, Joseph Antico, Robert Helms, and CandiAnne Terra. Thanks also to my dear husband of forty-one years, Mark Henry, who makes life and achievement possible. And big thanks to all you Zoomers tuning in to this short "Hello-and Goodbye" valedictory which may be the last public thing I, retiring at age 81, will ever do.

Andy Warhol said all of us will be famous for 15 minutes, so may I share my quick 15 with you?

Erotic writing begins with one stroke of the pen—and ends with many strokes of the penis. Books are clones of the author. So Sir John asked me to share my eyewitness journey inside *Drummer* which is very cool because in 20,000

pages *Drummer* contains the autobiography of all of us—the Origin Story of you, me, and how we leatherfolk came to be.

Perhaps, like me, you love the smell of old magazines as much as we all love the smell of new leather.

Forty-three years ago, from 1977-1980, I was privileged to be the founding San Francisco editor-in-chief of *Drummer* which had fled Los Angeles after the brutal LAPD arrested forty-two *Drummer* staff and subscribers at our 1976 Charity Slave Auction.

In San Francisco, two years later, I'll never forget the day local cops barged into my *Drummer* office—just to brutalize us. They thought we were subversive. They were right. *Drummer* was helping create the very leather culture of sexual resistance we reported on.

The cops hassled us because, among other things, in *Drummer* 20, January 1978—ten months before ex-cop Dan White shot Harvey Milk in November—I had written a political editorial warning leatherfolk about the rise of sadistic government fascism in America.

Drummer was a first draft of leather history.

Drummer portrayed our desires to organize our thoughts to inform our practices.

In the very first issues, our founding Los Angeles editor Jeanne Barney honored Black men and gender-bending "Cycle Sluts" in words and photos.

Leather-historian Viola Johnson, founder of the Carter/Johnson Leather Library, and a champion of Black Lives Matter, wrote about *Drummer's* early impact during the late 70s when I happened to be the editor. She said: "I knew the date and the time when *Drummer* would hit the... newsstand....One night, after a Eulenspiegel meeting [TES/BDSM], a group of us women went out to eat, and one of the dominants at the table asked if someone would loan her their *Drummer*....Within a few minutes all the women at the table, dominant and submissive, were talking about *Drummer* and what they liked to read in the magazine...It didn't matter that *Drummer* was a gay men's magazine. We read it, learned from it, and enjoyed it."

Drummer was never separatist. *Drummer* was a cross-over gender hit whose mystique inspired the founding of several dynamic self-

determined groups like Women of Drummer, and *whipmeister* Peter Fiske's group The 15.

All in all, thirty-six of the 214 *Drummer* issues were edited by two women: the first editor, Jeanne Barney, and the last, Wickie Stamps. Transgender writer Patrick Califia was associate editor of five other issues, two of them racially significant.

Native-American Apache elder Judy Tallwing McCarthy, the International Ms. Leather winner, drew her monthly leather-cartoon series for *Drummer*, and wrote a wonderful editorial calling for leather unity in the landmark issue, *Drummer* 100.

When Califia put IML and Mr. Drummer winner Graylin Thornton on the black-and-blue cover, Graylin wrote a brilliant editorial from an African-American point of view titled "The Slavery of Words" about the use of *master*, *slave*, *boy*, and *buck naked*, saying: "It's not the words themselves; it's how we use them." The issue also included travel writing by Cain Berlinger, author of *Black Men in Leather*.

Three issues later, Califia put leatherman Ken Chang on the cover announcing a photo-spread titled "Men of the Mystical East: A Whole New Image of Asian Masculinity." That same issue featured Japanese artist Gengorah Tagame and his manga drawings of Chinese and Latino men playing together in S&M dungeons.

In hindsight, *Drummer* could have offered more diversity faster in our twenty-four years, when our press run of 42,000 monthly copies was read by millions around the world. As it was, we helped disrupt the leather *apartheid* around race and gender.

Drummer once was Tindr. Back then, guys met by US mail. We helped emerging races and cultures find each other in our Personals ads where we tried to teach the difference between, for instance, *race play* and *racism*.

Would you believe we turned down ads from the Gay Nazi Party who sued us!

We changed the 1950s pop-culture stereotype about weak gaymen to the 1970s archetype of empowered homomasculine leathermen.

We built Leather Liberation in the 1970s on the shoulders of the Black Civil Rights of the 1960s when many on our dedicated staff had marched for social justice.

Our first article in our first issue was an expose titled "Prison Slavery."

Our first star model was the Black, nearly nude, heavy-weight boxing champ Ken Norton starring in the anti-slavery exploitation movie *Mandingo*.

Our first Mr Drummer Val Martin was an immigrant from Argentina favored by associate editor Mario Simon, the Spanish immigrant husband of the publisher.

Our longtime photographer Efren Convento Ramirez was an immigrant from the Phillippines.

Our Mr. Drummer contestants were a Noah's Ark of nationality and race.

As *Drummer* made us leatherfolk visible, I was able to break male *apartheid*, and introduce women into *Drummer* 27 in 1979 when I produced and wrote a feature article profiling the pansexual Cynthia Slater, founder of the Society of Janus.

Imagine what a kick it was to have backstage access to the drama that was *Drummer*—hanging out with amazing friends like Tom of Finland, Thom Gunn, Larry Townsend, Wakefield Poole, Tony DeBlase, my dear lover Robert Mapplethorpe, and murdered Academy Award Streaker Robert Opel. My longtime friend, the leather author Sam Steward, an intimate of Gertrude Stein's salon, dubbed us all "the Drummer Salon."

In 1989, *Drummer* publisher Tony DeBlase created the Leather Pride Flag, and asked me to write the first leather history column for the Leather Archives & Museum. We titled it "Rear-View Mirror" for fear that the AIDS virus would wipe out our history.

Covid is not our first viral rodeo. Sexual distancing during AIDS was harder than social distancing now. Keep safe as you are at this dangerous moment—or become part of the Covid experiment.

Find Peace in this mantra: Fear lasts only so long, but hope never dies.

During the last sad virus, AIDS fated me as the last man standing from original *Drummer*—and tasked me as an eyewitness keeper of its leather history—whether I wanted to be or not. How is coronavirus now shaping you?

One of my happiest *Drummer* memories is of Halloween 1977 when a young unknown Robert Mapplethorpe, who became famous photographing both leathermen and Black men,

showed up at my desk—and fell into my bed. I assigned him his first magazine cover shoot, and we became lovers for three years in a story told in the pages of *Drummer* and in my book *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera*.

You know what? Our leather lives have no more memory than the remembrance we give them. So maybe get busy during this killer quarantine. Read books: maybe mine posted free. Read Mid-Atlantic leather champion Toni Solenne's new book *Women in Leather: Shaping Our Own Identity*. Read exciting texts like Tennessee Williams' "Desire and the Black Masseur," a fundamental tale of sadomasochism and race that is one of the best American short stories ever written.

Something's coming. Feel it? With Stonewall, gay character changed. With AIDS, leather character changed. With Black Lives Matter and Covid-19, leather character is changing again.

I wish you this. If you are thirty years old, may you be alive and kicking in 49 years when Stonewall turns 100 in 2069. You Covid survivors will be the caretakers of leather history. Don't laugh. Time is elastic. I was alive when Hitler invaded Poland and the polio virus was the *plague du jour*.

You want to be leather? Discipline yourself. Keep a journal of your words and photos. Even if you do it daily on Facebook. You will save your peers' generation of community history. Your personal memoirs will be a comfort to you in your own old age of lifetime achievement.

Virginia Woolf said, "Write three pages a day."

One request. Please don't label any generation previous to yours as "Old Guard." Does leather even have an "Old Guard" or a "New Guard"? Because Living in Leather is always "Avant Garde." Leather is cutting-edge inventing itself forward. Respect the past in the rear-view mirror while you drive forward to your own future looking through the windshield.

Feel, think, and analyze the Incredible Leatherness of Being Leather.

It's important to the independence of your critical thinking to resist anyone dictating commandments about our leather lifestyle—including me saying this.

There may be play-party lessons of courtesy to learn, but kneel to no politically correct preaching

about leather behavior. Think for yourself. Critical thinking is the most important tool and joy of a life well lived.

Remember this principle: There may be rules around leather, but no one knows what they are. So, march to your own authentic drummer. Dance your own dance to remember.

The NLA unites us into intentional community. We don't cancel each other. We curate each other. We adjust each other's crowns. We come together as we are today during this time of Black Lives Matter and *Corona-dämmerung*.

Drummer went out of business in 1999. For twenty years, I dreamed a dream of resurrection for our little leather rag that came true in 2019 when the bold new *Drummer* publisher, Jack MacCallum, asked me to help restart *Drummer* exactly as the first publisher, John Embry, asked me in 1977 to restart Los Angeles *Drummer* in San Francisco.

When Jack Mac asked me about editing, I bowed generationally to the global future, and introduced him to my international friend Mike Miksche who was born to progressive Lebanese-Muslim immigrants in Canada, and is now the first Arab editor.

In a very certain way, this achievement award is about you. The NLA intends its wonderful honor for the lucky person who receives it; but, in reality, the real purpose of this award is a text-message to inspire you to lead your own lifetime of leather achievement.

Thank you all so much.

The first line of my leather-themed novel *Some Dance to Remember* is "In the end, he could not deny his human heart."

This grateful human heart of mine wishes you all the best health, safety, and creativity now and forever. This Black Lives and Covid crisis is dark and deep, and we have miles to go before we sleep.

So "Hello and Goodbye" again.

Thank you for this dance to remember.

Come visit DrummerArchives.com

Watch the keynote on [YouTube](#):