

CHAPTER 4

FOUNDING *DRUMMER*

West Hollywood Bitch Fight When Embry Met Townsend and the Slaves of the LAPD

- How the *H.E.L.P. Newsletter* for Legal Protection Morphed into *H.E.L.P./Drummer*, and Evolved into *Drummer* Itself
- When Frenemies Collide: The Feud between the Heroic Larry Townsend and the Hubristic John Embry
- The LA Postal Inspector; Jeanne Barney, the Woman Who Was Not A Drag; and the Missing TV Footage of the Slave Auction Raid
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Los Angeles Times, April 14, 1955
UCLA Student Gets Medal for Rhine Heroism

Irvin T. Bernhard, 24, UCLA sophomore [name changed to "Michael Lawrence 'Larry' Townsend," July 19, 1972], was presented with a medal and scroll yesterday by Dr. Richard Hertz, German Consul General in Los Angeles, for saving a 9-year-old German boy from drowning in the Rhine River at Bonn last August.

Gov. Karl Arnold of the German state of Nordrhein-Westfalen sent the scroll and medal to Dr. Hertz for presentation to Bernhard, who was a member of the U.S. Air Force when he performed the heroic feat.

The youngster had been riding along a Rhine River road on his scooter when he had an accident and fell into the deep river. As a swift current spun the boy around in the water, Bernhard, who was

eating at a nearby sidewalk café, got up, raced to the river, and dived in fully dressed.

"I swallowed an awful lot of the Rhine, but the two of us made it back to shore all right," Bernhard, who lives at 624 Veteran Ave, West Los Angeles, recounted yesterday in the German Consulate at 3450 Wilshire Blvd. Accompanying the young man to the Consulate was his sister, Mrs. Ralph J. Tingle of 621 S. Barrington Ave., who proudly looked on as Dr. Hertz gave the awards.

THE 1972 BLACK PIPE RAID AND ARRESTS: LARRY TOWNSEND'S *H.E.L.P. NEWSLETTER* BECOMES *DRUMMER*

How John Embry's spit hit the fan! Let me count the ways. Was it Embry's act-up content and politicking what done him in? In the *mise en scene* of gay LA, Embry was sketchily involved with the August 1972 fund-raiser for H.E.L.P. headed up by leather author Larry Townsend. The title of the "Homophile Effort for Legal Protection," founded in 1968 (three years before Embry's arrival) was designed so its acronym would announce its mission: *Help*. Its campy tap root in 1960s popular culture was the Beatles film, *HELP!* (1965). Its main purpose was to bail out gays entrapped in tea rooms and arrested in bar raids by the LAPD. Townsend was particularly motivated. In his FBI file, I found he had been arrested three times: Sex Perversion and Fellatio (1963); Failure to Register as Sex Offender (1964), followed by a 1968 ruling that his registration was no longer required; and for Lewd Conduct at the H.E.L.P. fund-raiser that was dismissed for insufficient evidence the same year he first published his *Leatherman's Handbook* (1972). Held at LA's then-leading leather bar called the Black Pipe, the H.E.L.P. charity event suggested a two-dollar donation at the door. One of the booths on the open-air patio "auctioned off leathermen for a date" to raise money to open a gay Community Center. This mini-event was a Slave Auction that preceded the more famous *Drummer* Slave Auction four years later in 1976.

Proving no good deed goes unpunished, the cops targeted their so-called "Black Pipe 21" arrests on the President of H.E.L.P. who was Larry Townsend, and on H.E.L.P.'s board of advisors, including, almost Fascistically, the astonished guy at the card table registering voters. In 1975, Larry Townsend became the founding president of the Hollywood Hills Democratic Club which was the first openly gay political club in LA. But, in 1972, political activist Townsend's name, with ad man John Embry's, appeared for the first time together on the masthead of the first issue of

the newsprint magazine combining Townsend's *H.E.L.P. Newsletter* with Embry's small zine-version of *Drummer* which Embry had first published in November 1971. The new merged title was *H.E.L.P./Drummer*. The Black Pipe itself was bothering no one out on La Cienega near Venice in West LA, a deserted light industrial area similar to San Francisco's South of Market.

The Advocate headlined "Massive Bar Raid," September 12, 1972.

Gay activists, Morris Kight and the leathery Reverend Troy Perry, helped raise bail; and H.E.L.P. carried the costs. The charges against Larry Townsend were dropped and the last defendant cleared on June 21, 1974, one year before *H.E.L.P./Drummer*, with its personal ads, evolved through a civil war with Townsend into Embry's iteration of the slick, large-format *Drummer* magazine on June 20, 1975. In those early years, Embry had shown up at H.E.L.P. riding his Trojan High Horse and announced to Townsend that he could design the group a much better-looking newsletter. He took over like a Greek bearing gifts, but without the charm.

It was a tectonic shift.

During the four-year period 1971-1975, Embry wrested *Drummer* into and out of *H.E.L.P./Drummer* while the H.E.L.P. organization disintegrated with internal political strife stoked by him because he used the LAPD mess with the Black Pipe to further the destruction of H.E.L.P. Even so, his internecine actions with Townsend continued. In 2008, a week after Townsend died, I was helping his sister Tracy Tingle archive his papers, and found a revealing file of clippings and letters documenting what Townsend hated to admit was the "bitch fight" that Embry had plotted to check-mate him.

In the late autumn of 1973, the deposed president of H.E.L.P., Townsend, resigned as an ex-officio member of the H.E.L.P. board of directors with a cynical letter he sent to Embry, the new president of H.E.L.P. He was making his competitive moves against Embry, and landing on his feet politically. In its October 10, 1973 issue, *The Advocate* reported that Townsend was chosen by David B. Goodstein, president of the San Francisco Whitman-Radclyffe Foundation, as its Southern California representative. Even then, Goodstein's name set Embry's teeth on edge, a full year before the bourgeois Goodstein bought *The Advocate* so envied by the scofflaw Embry who could not afford to buy it.

Carefully crafting his air-kiss-off, Townsend coded his "press release" with ironic praise that partially revealed the politics of how quickly Embry had moved in on him and made him redundant. He described the H.E.L.P. coup that took Embry only eight months, referring to "the very fine leadership of yourself [Embry] and your fellow board members for over eight months," adding, in the smirk of simmering lifelong indignation he was

known for, that he was convinced that “this organization, which means so much to me, is in exceptionally capable and dedicated hands....my continued work and assistance are no longer necessary to the furtherance of the goals of H.E.L.P.”

Embry, in turn, air-kissed back. To hitch his own little-known wagon to that of the star author Townsend, Embry turned the resignation letter into a self-serving press release that he sent to *The Advocate* which headlined “Townsend Resigns from H.E.L.P. Board.” The six-paragraph “spin” reported: “Embry said H.E.L.P. ‘is heavily in debt to Larry Townsend for his years of service to us, and we wish him well in his new endeavors.’” Pulling his frenemy close to capture his voice and to link to his fame, Embry trumpeted that he “...understood that Townsend would continue to write a column for *H.E.L.P./Drummer*, the organization’s official newspaper.”

Embry’s press release was like a birth announcement: this was the first ever mention of *Drummer* in *The Advocate*, December 19, 1973. This recognition gave him the “win” he longed for: validation by Dick Michaels and Bill Rand’s popular Los Angeles magazine. Yet within two years of becoming president of H.E.L.P., Embry’s machinations finally helped kill that organization because he was little interested in H.E.L.P. except as a hijacked platform to launch *Drummer* as his political power tool. Ever the High Priest of Calumny, Embry scared off even the last sympathizers of H.E.L.P. when he reported, warned, and bragged in *Drummer* 3 (October 1975), page 43: “The word was out: to have anything to do with H.E.L.P. was to invite disaster.”

FEUDING, FUSSING, AND FIGHTING

History is like Akira Kurosawa’s 1951 classic Japanese film, *Rashomon*, which in eighty-eight minutes tells the same story four times, each time from a different participant’s point of view. When Embry and Townsend squared off at H.E.L.P., eyewitnesses of their power struggle sometimes felt like collateral damage in their ego issues. Steve Schoch, the vice-president of H.E.L.P., became so frustrated that in 1973 he turned whistle-blower and bought four pages of advertising space in the Los Angeles magazine, *Action*, to publish his essay, “A Time for Truth.” His insider and specific accusations seem prescient because the management of H.E.L.P. by Embry and Townsend foreshadowed Embry’s management style at *Drummer*. Schoch testified:

Due to the tremendous controversy which has emerged concerning the battle which has been raging for some time now over the

activities of H.E.L.P. Inc., I have decided that it is time for me to speak frankly about some of the practices and people involved. My name is Steve Schoch. I was personally involved with H.E.L.P. Inc. by serving two years as Vice Chairman of the T.G.A. (Tavern & Guild Association of H.E.L.P. Inc.), and eight months as Vice President of the Board of Directors of H.E.L.P. Inc.

Schoch stated that because the rank and file at H.E.L.P. were apathetic about the operations of the organization, the control of it fell "...into the hands of a select few who can control and manipulate." He admitted his own complicity:

I know; I participated in some of these decisions....All it really takes is for a few individuals to contact their friends and solicit or even mark their ballots for them. I know, because this was how Larry Townsend and I defeated Cliff Lettieri in last year's elections.

I ran in the most recent election...and because I refused to be a lackey of Larry Townsend's and refused to participate in ballot stuffing and refused to write a mud-slinging campaign letter to the members, I was defeated. So be it.

Even if disgruntled from eating sour grapes, Schoch accepted his personal loss by rising to the larger issue of conceptualizing, organizing, and preserving pioneer organizations: "But H.E.L.P. Inc. as a concept and *H.E.L.P./Drummer* as a concept and the T.G.A. must somehow be preserved from what is happening to them because either the members do not care or will not participate." Digging into specifics of pride, prejudice, class, gender, and embezzlement, Schoch passionately alleged:

Now we have H.E.L.P. in its present form, purporting to represent many thousands of very conservative and upper-middle-class Gays!!! Bunk...H.E.L.P. is a mixture of everybody including 'the long-haired Hippy freaks' that Larry Townsend is so afraid of. Afraid to the point that he and Jerry Howard did everything they could to discourage the Gay Community Services Center's "Funky Dance" held for awhile at the H.E.L.P. Center. The income derived from the rental of the Center's facilities was \$75.00 per week. Gone now, it went quite a way in defraying the \$750.00 per month rent on the Center.

While working for both the California Committee for Sexual Freedom law reform and The Whitman-Radclyffe Foundation, I

came to know, like, and respect the Women's Movement. The static I received from H.E.L.P., mainly from Larry, regarding the Lesbian Feminists and others was not to be believed. He told me he wanted no more Communist or Socialist Workers Party people (both male and female) in the Center. I do not belong to either party, but I'll defend their right to exist, even though the vast majority of our Sisters and Brothers are not affiliated with those political parties either.

Schoch's intuition about Townsend's taste for intrigue and select conservatism had some basis in his family history. His father had been an anti-Nazi spy before the outbreak of World War II. When, freshly demobbed from the Air Force, Townsend was seeking work in the early 1960s with the System Development Corporation, he had to explain why, in the 1950s, his Secret Security Clearance had been suspended. Still identifying himself as "Irvin Townsend Bernhard, Jr.," a name he did not change until 1972, he explained, as witnessed by Frances Lias, in his Personnel Security Questionnaire:

While on duty with USAF Intelligence Service (7050th AISW, Rhein Main ABF), my SECRET clearance was revoked for a period of approximately two weeks, due to the fact that my father (Irvin T. Bernhard, Sr.) had been active in collecting information for the FBI on German Bundest activities in New England during 1940. His name had been recorded on some subversive list at that time. A letter from J. Edgar Hoover, instructing him as to field offices and indicating that his help was appreciated is on file with security office, SDC. Also, refer to Mr. J. Frank Mothershead, 5241 42nd Street NW, Washington. D. C. This gentleman is former head of Patent Law Division, Dept. of Justice, and is aware of details to greater extent than I, since I was only ten years of age at the time.

Even as the H.E.L.P. battle received coverage in *The Advocate*, Schoch confessed how he supported Embry and Townsend in that fundamentalist Puritan custom of ostracizing anyone who disagreed with them at H.E.L.P., especially of Jeff Buckley, the publisher of *California Scene* which Embry saw as a competitor to his new *H.E.L.P./Drummer*. Shoch's paragraph is the first published evidence of Embry's famous Blacklist.

The worst thing I feel I participated in was the shutting up [silencing] at Board meetings of Jeff Buckley, publisher of *California Scene*. Jeff

can and does get carried away and can be very coarse and demanding, but Jeff has, and still does have, many questions to ask about the conduct of H.E.L.P. business....None have been answered to his or anybody else's satisfaction, nor have Phil Cooper's. Contrary to a statement published in *The Advocate*, Phil wrote his own letter without any prompting from me as Larry Townsend intimates.

When Embry wrested the presidency of H.E.L.P. from Townsend, Schoch wrote: "The current regime under John Embry is nothing more than an extension of Larry's policies of private control and manipulation." As would be the future with Embry at *Drummer*, Schoch pinpointed the problems of bills unpaid because of dodgy ledgers and cash gone missing:

For the members' edification, there is much they should be concerned about:

1. H.E.L.P. keeps no general ledger.
2. Expenses have often been posted in the same entry as both "net" and "gross" with no breakdown as to profit or loss.
3. The so-called "Black Pipe 21 War Chest" is a sham. With over \$2000.00 collected, there is no money left...because all H.E.L.P. funds are in one account and H.E.L.P. is practically broke.
4. *H.E.L.P./Drummer* is owed over \$3000.00 for ads, many of which were never authorized or were incorrectly run. (I owe *Drummer* for ads, myself!)
5. As of early April [1973], H.E.L.P. had less than \$700.00 in the bank and over \$1500.00 owed to creditors—plus \$750.00 due for April 15 for rent and five or six hundred dollars to print the April issue [of *H.E.L.P./Drummer*], plus whatever the issue cost to typeset.

Finally, Schoch addressed the general duplicity through which Townsend and Embry engaged in public politics in order to advance their own private mail-order businesses. He was particularly accurate in 1973 in exposing Embry's grift as a con-artist running his business and finances as a kind of shell game that he would use to confuse matters with the LAPD around the exact public or private nature of the 1976 Slave Auction.

...Is this fiscal responsibility? I cannot be blamed nor can other former Board members...because when I asked questions about our finances, both Larry and Jerry Howard told me it was none of my concern...OK...now let them answer to the members.

Let them also explain why a large number of members received their ballots too late to vote and some not at all. Let them explain why they have used the confidential H.E.L.P. membership list [as Embry would later use the “Leather Fraternity” list] for their own personal use in promoting mail-order sales!!! (John Embry aka Robert Payne) And why does Larry hide behind that name when his real name is Irvin Bernhard. This is liberation?

...I feel the future of H.E.L.P. and what it has done and can still do for the Gay Community is far too important to keep quiet.... Let's clean up this mess. I feel that together we can overcome this incompetency and gross neglect of your interest. How? Under the By-Laws, we can force a new election and make a clean sweep of the despots who hold power.

The editor of *Action* magazine made a point in ALL CAPS: “THE ENTIRE CONTENTS OF THIS LETTER ARE THE EXPRESSED OPINION OF STEVE SCHOCH AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE OPINIONS OF ANY OTHER INDIVIDUAL OR ORGANIZATION.”

In the 1970s “Los Angeles Party Game of Gay Cannibalism,” Embry, in the next issue of *H.E.L.P./Drummer*, published a letter rebutting Schoch. In the anonymous fashion that would become typical of John Embry aka Robert Payne in “Letters to the Editor” in *Drummer*, the style and content of the letter, signed only as “J. R. Santa Monica (H.E.L.P. Member),” would fairly much have fingered the name-changing Embry as the author.

However, in this instance, because the nine-paragraph letter was indignantly specific in defending Townsend without ever mentioning Embry, its author may well have been Townsend himself.

The caustic letter drips with the writer's intimate access to biographical details and inner thoughts of a “noble” Townsend who refuses to lower himself to rebut Schoch. It even directly quotes Townsend with a warm and fuzzy sentence that Larry, lit up or sober, would not likely have said, except for the dig that Schoch was mentally ill. “[Schoch]...has done some good things in the past. I think he's just going through a little emotional problem. It'll all work out.” This early-days version of a “proto” *Drummer*, published monthly by Embry via *H.E.L.P./Drummer*, listed a “Ron Harris” as the editor who titled the response: “Bullshit Is Not the Truth.” J. R. wrote:

I am sending this to *H.E.L.P./Drummer* because I am not saying things which the *Action* [magazine] people want to hear, and thus

know they wouldn't be willing to swap checks with me, or whatever they're doing to pretend that people like Steve Schoch are actually paying for their articles [paid advertisements]....The reason I am writing at all is because Larry refuses to involve himself in what he calls a "bitch fight."

J. R. defended Townsend's name change, and launched a litany of offenses "committed" by Schoch, alleging his ripping off the gay clients of his own heating and air-conditioning business, being too drunk and too sick to acquit his own H.E.L.P. duties as vice president, and hampering Townsend's effectiveness as president.

Despite the fact that he was unwilling (or unable) to do the work, Steve wanted the titles that went with these [political] jobs. For months, Larry was after him to carry his share of the load, and eventually got pretty pushy about it....There is a hell of a lot of difference between a man doing the work and taking some pride in his accomplishments, and the one who simply seeks the title while avoiding the work. If Larry had gone through the year in his presidency with a dependable, supporting vice president, he would have accomplished more than he did.

EMBRY ECLIPSED BY THE SHADOW OF TOWNSEND

During that first decade of gay liberation after Stonewall, the competition was fierce in LA among emerging publishers eager to catch the gay market, the pink dollar, and the leather crowd. If I were writing a byzantine LA screenplay fictionalizing this transition in leather history, I could dramatize moves on this chessboard that would shock Iago. And Iago, with his motiveless malignancy, would be too easy to cast.

The rift opened up further between leather impresarios Embry and Townsend who poured himself a double when the LAPD drove Embry out of LA in 1977. For six years, Townsend was conspicuously absent from *Drummer* until the 1980s. In 1978 when I was editor-in-chief, I took Townsend to supper at the cozy Haystack Restaurant on San Francisco's 24th Street and tried to persuade him to write for *Drummer*. He said he did not want to endure thirty-day deadlines, and, in any case, he wanted nothing to do with Embry.

Strictly speaking, Townsend never really wrote "for" *Drummer*. Townsend was never what was known as "a *Drummer* writer." He was

larger than *Drummer*. He refused to be defined by *Drummer*. He was simply, and perfectly, the marquee identity of “Larry Townsend, author of *The Leatherman’s Handbook*.” Although he was part of the wider *Drummer* Salon, Townsend always worked from outside *Drummer* as a guest “contributing editor” whose fiction and advice columns—which he also wrote freelance for a variety of publications—were printed in *Drummer*.

His “Leather Notebook” column ran from *Drummer* 38 (1980) through *Drummer* 156 (1992) when Dutch publisher Martijn Bakker bought *Drummer*. Typically, magazine editors, eager for his famous byline, welcomed Townsend who shuffled the deck of his writing and dealt it out strategically to publicize his new books. In the landmark *Drummer* 100 which published Townsend’s story “Board of Inquiry,” his “Leather Notebook” Q&A column appeared “in trade” for his full-page mail-order ad, page 93.

Famous for mining leather and S&M themes, Townsend liked *Drummer* hosting occasional excerpts from his fiction as well as from his “Ask Larry” column which was also published in other magazines. As an author in a kind of early gay syndication, he finally acquiesced to write monthly columns as synergistic promotions for his yearly books. His self-referential column in *Drummer* was in effect “advertising in trade” for his mail-order business through which he sold his independent L. T. Publication titles from 1972 to 2008. With the startup of his publishing company in 1970, Townsend was one of the first founders of a gay small business, and Embry scrambled to emulate him with his Alternate Publishing. Through *Drummer*, Townsend found value writing for several magazines with a masculine-identified demographic. With *Drummer* dead for the nine years since 1999, I remember in 2008 when he went apoplectic on the telephone because his long-running column in *Honcho* was suddenly cancelled; he died six weeks later, July 29, 2008.

In short, although Townsend and Embry despised each other like karmic star-crossed lovers to the day they died, Townsend liked the mail-order publicity in *Drummer*, and Embry needed the endorsement of Townsend’s marquee name. It was a Hollywood marriage made in hell, and eyewitness Jeanne Barney was its eyewitness bridesmaid.

Jeanne Barney wrote to me on September 8, 2006:

I rather imagine that John envied Larry’s reputation as The Last Word in Leather. I know for sure that Larry was (and still is) really bothered by Embry’s dishonesty, the reason that he declined when approached to kick in with *Drummer* in the beginning. [Some men on the mailing list confused “Embry” and “Payne” and “Townsend”

into one person the way others later confused “Robert Mapplethorpe” and “Robert Opel” into “Robert Opelthorpe.”] Because John and Larry both used the same mail drop at 525 Laurel, Larry continually received complaints that “he” [Townsend] had not sent merchandise ordered from “Robert Payne.” Larry printed something explaining the difference. John also was very late in paying Larry for his books that he sold mail order.

Compare both *The Advocate* and Embry each spinning a *Rashomon* eyewitness perspective of this history, “Triumph of the Black Pipe: Cops and Leathermen Clash in the Biggest Raid of All Time,” *Drummer* 3 (October 1975), page 36.

Six months after his Black Pipe H.E.L.P. feature article, Embry set about hosting two of his own “Slave Auctions.”

1) Larry Townsend told me, “Embry tossed his own first little Slave Auction at the Detour on New Year’s Eve 1975 and hardly anyone showed up but the LAPD who warned him, ‘Don’t ever try this in LA again.’” Those were fighting words. The LAPD acted. Embry reacted, and double-dared them. In the best laid plans of mice and men, a raid would be good for business because it could create a newsworthy Stonewall-like event to earn the then six-month-old *Drummer* free publicity, and gain Embry a crusading publisher’s reputation in gay history.

2) Despite the LAPD warning, Embry, Jeanne Barney remembered, proceeded to advertise a second, even bigger, Slave Auction for Valentine’s Day, February 14, 1976, which was bumped to April 10, and into history as the “Great Drummer Slave Auction.”

Embry mailed “invites” to his private membership list, the “Leather Fraternity” list, and then he broadened the mailing to his general direct-mail list. That maneuver shifted the shifty private event into a shiftier public event, and alerted a Postal Inspector who alerted the LAPD. See *Drummer* 6 (June 1976), page 14, for details about one Kenneth Elessor aka Kenneth Schmidt of Post Office Box 71002, Los Angeles.

Jeanne Barney added on September 5, 2006:

As for an eyewitness that would be me [Barney]. He went public with the invitations because the Leather Fraternity members, being mostly out-of-towners, were not responding in the \$ amount Embry had hoped for. In a “what-the-heck” attitude, he told me that he was going to send to the direct mail list. The Postal Inspector was not on the Fraternity list, but on the direct-mail list. [*Drummer*

6, page 14] As for going to the bars to solicit attendees, I was with him and Mario [Simon] and, I believe, Val on at least one occasion when he hit the Stud, among other bars.

Eyewitness Val Martin said:

Everything was private, only for the Leather Fraternity, and people who were into leather. Everybody who came was on a private mailing list, by invitation.... The whistle was blown by an undercover cop on the mailing list of [both] *Drummer*, [which was a commercial mailing list] and the Leather Fraternity [which was private]. —Olaf Odegaard, “Serving Two Masters, Or: The Great Slave Auction Bust: An Interview with Val Martin,” *Connection*, October 10-24, 1984

Embry was ambiguous in his sleight of hand. Did he or did he not decide in some hardon of hubris to allow this private fund-raiser to admit the public, and to charge admission—or was it a donation?—at the door?

His was an ambiguity whose subtlety was lost on the flat-earth LAPD. Police Chief Davis did not like disobedient pansies, especially the insidious ones geared up like masculine men, thumbing their nose at the law. And, the political being personal, he did not like Embry, the perceived agitator with a printing press, in particular.

Little did Embry know that his Slave Auction would turn into a high-profile photo op for his arch rival, the Christian crusader Davis, to feast upon. Davis knew Hollywood. Raiding a fabulous leather party on a Friday night had so much more dramatic appeal than a sad afternoon bust of a shabby little fag-mag office with a woman editor, an obese chain-smoking typesetter lady, and a nearsighted male paste-up artist.

In LA, on a slow news night, the Hollywood headline of “Sex Slaves” seemed so much better with photos of the Beautiful People in handcuffs. Under arrest, the immortal Jeanne Barney in a black-and-white gown snapped at a cop questioning her gender: “Honey, if I were a drag queen, I’d have bigger tits.”

In *Drummer* 4 (January 1976), Embry had foolishly cued sixty-five Keystone Cops when he wrote dangerous hints of under-age human sex-traffic in his “coming attractions” for the Slave Auction scheduled for *Drummer* 5: “See Val Martin parade tender young...,” Embry wrote, “...stuff for sale...,” Embry continued, “...to the highest bidder.” He was practically lip-synching Cole Porter’s “Love for Sale” with its lyric of “appetizing

young love for sale.” In the cocktail lounges and taverns in which men of Embry’s vintage came out during the 1940s and 1950s, “Love for Sale” was a staple on every juke box. When it came to male prostitution, Davis ran a fierce ongoing policy of targeting male hustlers and gay johns cruising Santa Monica Boulevard. To Davis, the Slave Auction was commercial sex trafficking. What an opportunity! Davis must have fallen to his fundamentalist knees. It was as if Embry had rounded up all the fag barflies and hustlers and johns from a dozen blocks of Santa Monica Boulevard, and penned them up at the Mark IV Baths for the convenience of Ed Davis and the LAPD.

In addition, the straight logic of the LAPD—who half-suspected that leathermen were also Hell’s Angels outlaws—gave Davis reason to believe that the elusive S&M serial killer responsible for the “Orange County Torso Murders” of gay men was to be a guest at the Slave Auction party.

My own eyewitness experience in LA at the time was that every gay man knew some gay man who knew the killer. (See *Drummer* 9, 10, 11: “The ‘S&M’ Murder Mystery.”)

In her eyewitness files, Jeanne Barney quoted *Los Angeles Magazine* (June 1976) which reported under the headline, “Love Ya to Pieces”:

A string of unsolved murders was the real reason for Ed Davis’ raid of that gay Slave Auction, according to LAPD insiders. Police believe a local S-M ring may be responsible for savagely dismembering at least 17 persons, some of whom haven’t been identified because investigators haven’t been able to find enough pieces. At the auction, Davis’ raiders were said to have observed spectators twisting rings affixed to the slaves’ breasts and dragging them by chains attached to their genitals. Police claim they were hampered from giving their version of the raid by gag restrictions.

Three years after the Black Pipe H.E.L.P. raid, Embry, beating a drum no one marched to, tried in vain to rally the troops by invoking the Lavender Standard of “Stonewall” as an emblem of freedom in *Drummer* 3, page 43. The difference was that it took a Greenwich Village of authors to raise their neighborhood news of the Stonewall raid into legend, whereas *Drummer*, lost in the vast grid of Los Angeles had only three staff members, a couple of freelance writers, and only Embry himself to care about reviving the ancient history of the Black Pipe arrests. From inside his West Hollywood bubble, Embry wrote: “One would think that, more than the Stonewall incident which happened 3,000 miles away and still spawned Christopher

Street West, the Black Pipe raid would be the rallying point of the Southern California gay community.”

In that sentence, he signaled his model, his scheme, and his lust for a second, bigger, historical raid. This time on *Drummer* itself.

Val Martin commented to Olaf Odegaard:

Stonewall was different, but they have similarities. Stonewall was the greatest thing that happened to the community. In a way, thank God, this [Drummer Slave Auction] happened, too. We learned how to cope with it, fight back, stand up for our rights....There was more unity after people began to find out what was really going on; what the image of the leather person was. —Olaf Odegaard, in “Serving Two Masters, Or: The Great Slave Auction Bust: An Interview with Val Martin,,” *Connection* (October 10-24, 1984

Jeanne Barney noted that the LAPD had confiscated all the gay cameras and film that night at the Mark IV Baths, leaving her with no photographs of the Slave Auction to publish. One of Embry’s purposes for the Slave Auction was to shoot cost-free photos of leathermen for future issues of *Drummer*. The droll Barney editorialized in *Drummer* 6 (May/June 1976), page 4:

We had considered running their [the LAPD’s] version of what happened at the slave auction in place of our usual fiction section, for the finest writer in town could not begin to approach the fabrications of the LAPD. We had thought to reprint the Arrest Report in its entirety, faithfully retaining every misspelling, every grammatical and factual error. We decided against this, however. Not because we fear retribution or continued harassment at the hands of Los Angeles’ Blue Meanies, but because we benevolently hesitate to make the ridiculous even more so. Instead, we have reported on the events of the evening and the days following. Sadly, we are unable to use photographs of the “slave auction.” The police [destroying gay culture] not only robbed us of our dignity but confiscated our film as well. We hope that they enjoy the pictures.

Thirty years later she told me about film footage that should be pursued by an attorney for some Leather Heritage GLBT Society:

At the same time our own photographs were taken by the LAPD, never to be seen again, there was a French television crew in LA

doing a Bicentennial special titled, *American Mores and Forays*. A producer named Jean-Jacques—I think he had abbreviated himself to that—contacted me about photographs and film footage. So I steered him to the people hired by the police [to shoot the raid]. They were more than willing to sell 370 feet of film at 13 cents a foot.

In the ONE Archive at the University of Southern California, filed under the “Mark 40 Defense Fund” there is a nine-folder collection of ephemera and police reports from several participating undercover officers. The materials about the excessive and oppressive “police action” around the Slave Auction include the LA City Council’s findings from its investigation headed by councilman Zev Yaroslavsky, a longtime Democratic member of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, and a straight opponent of Chief Ed Davis and of all the anti-gay excesses in the LAPD from 1975 to 2014.



