

## CHAPTER 1

### A MASTER'S THESIS *DRUMMER'S BIG BANG*

**Its Creation. Its Evolution.  
Its Civil War. Its Culture War.  
Its Origin Story.**

#### A Popular Culture Magazine of Gay Gender Identity

#### Who Did What to Whom When Where and Sometimes Why How the Leather Boys in the Band Played on

- **Who Founded and Created *Drummer*? An Eyewitness Narrative Timeline Featuring the Cast of Characters at *Drummer***
- **The *Drummer* Slave Auction, Saturday, April 10, 1976, Publisher John Embry Arrested for the Crime of Slavery; Val Martin, the First Mr. *Drummer*, Tells All**
- **How Los Angeles *Drummer* Became San Francisco *Drummer***
- **Blood, Fingerprints, and DNA: History Is the Internal Evidence Printed in the *Drummer* Text**
- **Buyer's Remorse and Seller's Remorse; the Cloning of *Drummer***
- **Blood Feud: How the Second and Third Publishers of *Drummer*, Anthony DeBlase and Martijn Bakker, Reviled First Publisher John Embry Who Reviled Them Both; The Contempt between John Embry and Larry Townsend**

With its cast of writers, artists, and photographers, the *mise en scene* of *Drummer* was important to gay identity because in its 214 issues over twenty-four years, *Drummer* created the very post-Stonewall leather culture it reported on. *Drummer* helped readers examine their boundaries, step into the closeted heartland of their erotic identities, find the true north of their homomascuine gender identities, and make their own new narratives.

In March 1977, John Embry hired me as editor-in-chief to assist his move from Los Angeles to San Francisco, and to write the *Drummer* story inside the magazine.

*Drummer* was a first draft of leather history.

This memoir of *Drummer* is a second.

This is a story of some talented artists and some unsympathetic persons, with some discomfiting eyewitness testimony about the pressures of art and commerce on the moral actions of writers and publishers during the first decade of gay liberation after the Stonewall Rebellion in 1969. *Drummer* was to me what Chawton village was to Jane Austen who also wrote about “a world in small” with characters reflecting the human condition.

“I never foresaw the impact that *Drummer* would have.

It was a big surprise to me....I’m amazed.”

—John Embry to Robert Davolt, 2003

John Embry was not a pure bully only because nobody’s perfect.

This is a backstage story born of a whisper, anchored in evidence, and told by many insiders interested in the truths rather than the legends about *Drummer*.

It is a cautionary tale about esthetic, psychological and financial abuse, as well as betrayal in the gay community.

It is a representative history, universal in its specifics, of the 1% of publishers exploiting the 99% of writers, artists, and photographers. An internet search for “bad publishers” yields 74,800,000 results in 0.23 seconds.

In our transparent age of social communication, nothing is secret anymore.

This book was ninety percent written when its present-tense immediacy changed the morning John Embry died in his sleep on September 16, 2010.

John Embry (1926-2010), born a Methodist in Winslow, Arizona, moved to Los Angeles to study art, was drafted into the U.S. Army (1949), and sold advertising in Hawaii and LA before his involvement with H.E.L.P., the Homophile Effort for Legal Protection that rescued gay men entrapped by the Los Angeles Police Department. The slick life in LA suited his business style perfectly. In 1971, his fledgling mail-order business, the “Leather Fraternity,” selling poppers and leather wristbands, needed a small-format brochure whose sales pitch he cleverly insinuated within his editorial and advertising coverage of bars and restaurants such as the Glass Onion, the Sewers of Paris, the Bitter End West, and the Bla Bla Café in Studio City. In December, he debuted his first mini-mag “trial balloon” and titled it

*Drummer*, listing himself (and not his alter-ego “Robert Payne”) as managing editor, and Dagmar King (*Drummer*’s first female employee) as art director, with fiction by Larry Townsend.

Always controversial and frequently exposed in the press because of his trickster business practices, Embry, the publisher who had two faces, quickly became a Los Angeles character whose twenty-five-cent bi-weekly magazine, in the end, ran away from him to San Francisco where it achieved an international cultural reach beyond his LA vision.

*Drummer* was a noble undertaking, but with the rebellious hubris of a bottom taunting a top, founding *Drummer* publisher Embry provoked the Los Angeles Police Department so relentlessly in the first pages of the first issue of his bi-weekly zine *Drummer* (December 1, 1971, page 31) and in the first issue of monthly *Drummer* (June 20, 1975) that he nearly destroyed the magazine when he caused the LAPD to arrest him and forty-one other leatherfolk at the infamous *Drummer* Slave Auction in 1976.

For years, the relentless Police Chief Ed Davis was Embry’s Inspector Javert, but Embry, who taunted Davis personally in print, was no innocent Jean Valjean. He stuffed *Drummer* with shady topics that drove Davis crazy. Former *Drummer* editor Joseph W. Bean observed in *Drummer* 188, page 17: “The first four issues of monthly *Drummer* featured slavery, SM, incest, phone sex, piss play, fist fucking, art, movies, plays, porn, and, to see what buttons really could be pushed, a piece on necrophilia as a fetish.” He could have added the bestiality themes and underage sex ads and Nazi display ads that Embry fancied made him and his petulant *Drummer* politically relevant in that first decade of gay liberation after Stonewall.

In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association declared that homosexuality was not a mental illness. In 1975, the future mayor of San Francisco, Willie Brown, personally moved civilization forward with the passage of the “California Consenting Adults Law.” During the founding of *Drummer*, gay sex was changing into something psychologically defensible and legal. Thus thwarted, LAPD Police Chief Ed Davis had to scramble to invent new constitutional grounds for arresting queers. Davis decided the best way to destroy *Drummer* was to use its contents against itself—in the same way I use *Drummer* contents to find its identity and prove its history. His approach was biblical: “Out of their own mouths they shall be condemned.” Davis, convinced that *Drummer* was subversive, studied the writing in *Drummer* so he could destroy *Drummer* and the “sick” leather culture that threatened Davis more than did effete drag culture.

It was easy for a fundamentalist like Davis to deconstruct the text of *Drummer* which had those references to underage sex, as well as an emerging

gay vocabulary where the words *boy* and *slave* were evolving to new meanings beyond the linguistic ability of the LAPD. To destroy the upstart *Drummer*, Davis decided to arrest publisher Embry for committing the crime of, not sodomy, but slavery. At the “Great Slave Auction” on Saturday night, April 10, 1976, at the Mark IV Health Club, Davis and his stormtroopers rounded up 125 leatherfolk and arrested forty-one men, and one woman, *Drummer* editor-in-chief, Jeanne Barney.

The infant *Drummer* was only five issues and ten months old.

Ten years later, John Embry, still shaken but not stirred to greatness by adversity, sold *Drummer* in 1986 to Anthony F. DeBlase who sold it in September 1992 to the Dutch publisher, Martijn Bakker, who Amsterdammed the American classic.

In fact, *Drummer* had been in such deep trouble with the law when Embry asked me to become the editor-in-chief in March 1977, I must have been out of my mind to ink our deal. The entire time I was editor of *Drummer*, Embry was on probation, continuously in court, and sentenced to community service.

*Drummer* had a dangerous history.

If I play “pinball” with *Drummer*, shooting the silver ball past the kick-up holes through the chase lights, using the flippers, risking TILT, all to make the score add up on the back glass, well, it lights up with something like the following facts and opinions.

If there is a point here, it is first to establish the history of *Drummer* itself, as well as the vast archive of leather history incidentally hidden in its pages.

Second, it is to answer the call to “Save Leather Culture” sounded at the height of the AIDS epidemic by Anthony DeBlase who with Chuck Renslow founded the Leather Archives & Museum of Chicago. Embry himself wrote in *Alternate Reader* (1995): “These days it is up to the survivors to pick up the mantle and fill in some of our terrible voids.”

Third, it is also up to the critical thinking of discerning readers as well as of literary historians, culture critics, and queer theorists to examine the role of *Drummer*, its owners, and its contributors, as well as its evolving content that helped create and shape leather culture itself. Readers who had never considered smoking a cigar as a fetish changed their minds in May 1978 upon discovering the feature-article instructions of “Cigar Blues” in *Drummer* 22 which ignited the cigar fetish in bars beginning that summer.

During the magazine’s twenty-four years and through all three owner-publishers, I was the fated eyewitness participant who was in sum the most frequent contributor of editing, writing, photography, and display advertising

to *Drummer*. My observations are those of a pioneer, a participant, and a university trained detective of literary history. I have a resume tied to media innovation in academia as well as in magazines, books, and video. As a critical thinker, I hope I am both objective and intimate enough eyewitness to be a professional keeper of the institutional memory of *Drummer*.

As a journalist, I have taken care to interview multiple eyewitnesses and to fact-check everything possible because *Drummer* is a vastly underestimated treasure trove of leather history and gay popular culture. I have studied every issue of *Drummer* to find in its pages the internal evidence needed to support a revealing narrative of *Drummer* history, using the magazine text itself.

Nevertheless, because I am a fallible human writing about other fallible humans, I wish to give the benefit of the doubt to all the living and dead involved, and, so, what I write in this book I write allegedly.

## THAR HE BLOWS! EMBRYONIC YOUNG *DRUMMER*

If Embry was cruisin' for a bruisin', he got it. He published heated accusations against the LAPD in both *Drummer* 6 (May 1976), and in the nuclear challenge of "Getting Off" in *Drummer* 9 (October 1976). All gays love the bravado of I-Am-Who-I-Am Broadway anthems. But, if not his gay fear, where was his gay caution?

After the arrests, most of the small *Drummer* staff fled. Because of telephone taps at their homes, search warrants for their houses, police cars tailing them, and ka-*ching* lawyers for the prosecution and defense, *Drummer* went into—what I call—its "First Coma" and for a year was on life support.

Founding Los Angeles editor-in-chief of *Drummer*, Jeanne Barney wrote to me on July 1, 2006:

I did not "flee" because of the phone taps. My telephone had been tapped since the early 1970s when I first began writing for the original *Advocate*. I "fled" *Drummer* because I was tired of having to deal with John Embry's middle-of-the-night revisions, and because he owed me \$13,000 in unpaid salary and for out-of-pocket payments to talent who would otherwise not have worked for us—and because I finally realized what a crook John Embry was, and I no longer wanted my name linked with his.

She added on November 12, 2006: "I left because of ethical and moral differences" with Embry.

During issues 6 to 11, legal, creative, and personal tensions ran high. The first Mr. Drummer was the Hispanic Vallot Martinelli, a native Argentinian, chosen, not in a contest, but in a business decision made in the *Drummer* office by John Embry, Al Shapiro, and me. “Val Martin” recalled his own Embry-caused stress in his interview with *Drummer* artist, Olaf Odegaard, in “Serving Two Masters, Or: The Great Slave Auction Bust,” *Connection* (October 10-24, 1984): “From 1976 until 1979, we [Embry *et al.*] used to go to court almost every other week, every three weeks, every month [while Fritscher was editor]. On Christmas we had to go to court.”

In *Drummer* 6, Embry wrote his own eyewitness version of the LAPD raid in a three-page essay with photographs, “*Drummer* Goes to a Slave Auction.” Embry’s first paragraph is an exercise in self-defense claiming—and this was always the controversial point—that his Slave Auction was a “private fund-raiser for charity.” Always scheming, Embry was trying to out-trick the LAPD charge that he had planned the Slave Auction for “commercial reasons” to fund his own private “Leather Fraternity” club in *Drummer*, and that it was not “private,” but open to the paying public. Noting that the aggressive LAPD bust that night was traumatic, Embry more importantly revealed the terrorizing ten months of LAPD harassment that the staff of *Drummer* suffered during the first year of publication. In *Drummer* 7 and *Drummer* 8, Embry continued his angry narrative in his publisher’s column “In Passing.” In *Drummer* 8, editor Jeanne Barney devoted her “Getting Off” column to the back story of the raid that so obsessed Embry she called it “a burning issue” in *Drummer* 6.

In San Francisco, I inherited this “burning” climate which was not sexy “hot” and asked Embry either to turn his emotions into an S&M porn story or give it a rest. His major complaint in a minor key was a turnoff. He rather much caused his legal troubles himself. National readers seeking erotica hardly cared about an old Los Angeles bathhouse raid that was not the Stonewall Rebellion Embry wanted to galvanize it into. From March 1977 through December 31, 1979, the entire time I was editor-in-chief, Embry was more than less absent because he had to drive his van round-trip from San Francisco to LA for his many court appearances with the legendary defense attorney Al Gordon, and he usually returned ranting, angry, and exhausted. Nerve-wracking legal problems, I think, contributed psychosomatically to his colon cancer in 1978. During the four months of his treatment, he was again absent from the *Drummer* office, leaving the production and creation of *Drummer* to art director Al Shapiro and me who created a new *Drummer* by coloring outside Embry’s lines.

Embry was peeved that Al Gordon, and not Embry himself, became a

quiet gay folk hero because of the Drummer Slave Auction. Embry always feared being upstaged by anyone helping him. In San Francisco, Embry refused to talk about Gordon who saved his skin. Embry never liked to admit he needed help. When the famous Gordon, 94, died in 2009, a year before the infamous Embry died at 83, the *Los Angeles Times* observed on September 6:

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Albert L. Gordon, an attorney who helped advance gay rights in the 1970s and 1980s by challenging discriminatory practices and laws, including a successful effort to decriminalize consensual homosexual acts, died August 10 in Los Angeles. He was 94. Gordon, a heterosexual whose twin sons were gay, became a lawyer in his late 40s and devoted most of his practice to defending the rights of homosexuals and battling the bigotry of law enforcement....“Before there was a straight-gay alliance in America, there was Al Gordon,” the Rev. Troy Perry, a longtime activist and founder of the gay-friendly Metropolitan Community Churches, said in an interview last week. “When other people wouldn’t touch us, he did. He was a hero.”

...One of Gordon’s most memorable cases stemmed from a notorious raid on a gay bathhouse [the Mark IV] on Melrose Avenue in 1975 [actually, 1976], when scores of Los Angeles police officers broke up a mock slave auction staged as part of the entertainment for a gay community fund-raiser [*sic*]. Apparently not amused by the gimmick, the police treated the [*Drummer* magazine] event as actual human slave trafficking, a felony, and arrested 40 participants. Gordon helped win their release. He supported a second mock auction, organized by Perry to raise defense funds, by going on the auction block himself. He went for \$369 to his wife, Lorraine.

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Only gay historians may care, but this timeline of facts is wrong in the book *Gay L. A.* (2006) written by Stuart Timmons and Lillian Faderman in the way that is typical of vanilla authors confused by the texture of the leather subculture of which they are not a part, especially when they live in LA culture and do not understand at all the *mise en scene* of gay San Francisco history.

The first editor-in-chief, Jeanne Barney, exited *Drummer* with issue 11 although some of her completed work ran on through Los Angeles/San Francisco hybrid issues, *Drummer* 12 and 13. For a year after the arrest, April 1976 to April 1977, issues 11 to 18 were published with “Robert Payne”



(aka John Embry) listed as “editor.” It was a ritual that the fictitious “Robert Payne” always rode to the rescue when *Drummer* had no actual editor.

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#### FRITSCHER TIMELINE INSIDE CLASSIC DRUMMER

1. Beginning in March 1977, I was editor-in-chief working out of my home at 4436 25<sup>th</sup> Street because Embry was still working out of his 311 California Street home. While he found and readied a San Francisco office, I studied *Drummer* and initiated my editorial make-over on theoretical and practical fronts. Proving no good deed goes unpunished, Embry, absentee because of court and cancer (1978-1979) seemed to feel that my make-over was a take-over.

2. My first association with *Drummer* was in *Drummer* 5 and *Drummer* 6, producing Phil Andros’ aka Sam Steward’s first stories for *Drummer*: “Baby Sitter” and “Many Happy Returns.” Steward who was sixty-six, alcoholic, and depressed was grateful for my help in resurrecting in *Drummer* his earlier mid-century European publishing career inside *Der Kreis* magazine.

3. My first writing in *Drummer* appeared in *Drummer* 14 (May 1977) when I produced and wrote: “Men South of Market,” page 46;

4. My second writing in *Drummer* 16 (June 1977) included producing and co-writing: “Tom Hinde Portfolio,” pages 39-46;

5. My first *Drummer* byline was in *Drummer* 18, (August 1977) when I directed the photography and wrote the feature “The Leatherneck Bar,” pages 82-85.

6. As needed, I worked as a producer on the intermediate Los Angeles/San Francisco hybrid issues, *Drummer* 14 to *Drummer* 18, assuming with each issue more responsibilities, and ghost-editing the entirety of *Drummer* 18. After I put *Drummer* on an August-December hiatus in order to collect its hysterical wits, I produced my first full issue, credited on the masthead as editor-in-chief, with *Drummer* 19 (December 1977).

7. The last of my work as editor-in-chief, but not of my writing and photography, appeared in *Drummer* 33 (December 1979). Embry was miffed that in August 1979 I had given early notice, not to strand him, but to phase out, and exit officially on December 31, 1979. Angry that I demanded my wages for my editing work, he fixed his face into a slow burn that exploded in flames. He was still a dubious newcomer from Los Angeles to San Francisco, and had depended on me, who had first arrived in San Francisco in 1961, as his best reference and introduction to local writers, artists, photographers, and models. By *Drummer* 33, he had completed the cleansing of my name which he had begun exorcizing in *Drummer* 31 (September



1979). All that autumn we played office tug-of-war negotiating contents, credit lines, and cash until we came to loggerheads.

8. Although in *Drummer* 31 Embry published two of my bylined articles, “Mr. International Leather” and “Do-ers Profile: Tony Plewik,” he deleted my name twice in that issue: as editor-in-chief, and, most important to me, as photographer of the twenty-some centerfold photos of Val Martin and Bob Hyslop which I shot alone on Sunday, May 20, 1979. He also deleted my credit line for my final edit and serialization of the draft of John Preston’s novel *Mr. Benson*.

9. By *Drummer* 32 and 33, I was disappearing until I was “disappeared.” However in some instances, Embry published my unsigned work as he had Jeanne Barney’s after she exited. Knowing Embry’s tactics, I signed a couple of my pieces internally, one in *Drummer* 32 (October 1979) by using my birth day and month in the opening paragraph: “A Confidential *Drummer* Dossier: 20 June 1979,” page 19. His “cleansing” plus his effort to “backfill” 31, 32, and 33 delayed *Drummer* 33, the Christmas issue, until late January 1980.

10. After six years on Embry’s Blacklist, I was invited to return as a private paid consultant by new publisher Anthony F. DeBlase in *Drummer* 100 (October 1986). I continued contributing for a total run of 65 issues, and was listed on the masthead, till the end of *Drummer*, as both “contributing writer” and “photographer” along with my Palm Drive Video company named as “contributor,” also to the end of *Drummer*.

11. As noted, during twenty-four years under all three owner-publishers, I was the most frequent contributor of editing, writing, and photography to *Drummer*, and thus intimate enough eyewitness to be keeper of the institutional memory of *Drummer*.

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The last issue was *Drummer* 214 (April 1999). The business closed officially on Folsom Fair weekend, September 30, 1999. Happily, in the mid-1990s, while I continued contributing to *Drummer*, Embry and I reconciled in a Mexican stand-off when he asked to publish my writing in his new *MR* brand magazines, *Manifest Reader*, *Manhood Rituals*, and *Super MR*.

On the one hand, I had to admire Embry’s brazenness in subject matter and bravado against censorship in 1975. But realistically, his brass balls meant the infant *Drummer* could barely survive, and certainly not in LA.

As founding San Francisco editor-in-chief, I was given my head to remodel Los Angeles *Drummer*, to re-box, and re-brand the product with—and here was the challenge—heat, guts, and aggressive masculinity, but in a new erotic way that was legal in most places. My desire was to reflect the

niche tastes of its masculine-identified readers living, not only in regional LA , but also out in the diversity of our national American popular culture.

That was a hard dance on the killing ground. Without prejudice to other genders, it had to be done for love of men, love of writing, and not love of money, because the money at *Drummer* always evaporated mysteriously.

## DIALING FOR DOLLARS

Warhol Superstar Joe Dallesandro recalled that at Andy's Factory in 1969, "A \$100.00 was two-weeks salary for a forty-hour week and a movie or two." By 1979, worker income was the only thing that had not changed in the underground world of alternative art. To illustrate the salary scale and the Jurassic degree of clerical difficulty in the pre-computer age of 1977-1979, consider this. As full-time *Drummer* editor-in-chief, writing on yellow legal pads and a manual typewriter, I began at \$200 a month. The minimum wage was \$2.10 an hour. As the press run climbed to 42,000 copies per issue (Embry's statistic told to me when I asked him directly), I negotiated my salary to \$400 a month.

Jeanne Barney told me about herself: "I was supposed to be paid \$200 a week [\$800 a month]." Atypically, the female editor-in-chief earned twice as much in 1976 as the male editor-in-chief did in 1977-1979. Barney continued: "Not only did I rarely receive that amount or anything close to it, as I've told you before, I frequently paid talent out of my own pocket."

The pay was exclusively for editing, and did not include my writing and photography for which in those sixty-five issues over twenty-four years I was never paid money, never once, not a cent, not by any *Drummer* publisher. (DeBlase paid me not for writing or photos, but as his personal creative consultant.) After I began my Palm Drive Video company in earnest in 1984, I opened to accepting ad space in dozens of magazines in trade for my writing and photography. My first Palm Drive Video display ad in *Drummer* appeared in issue 116 (May 1988), page 39, and the ads, with photos changing to keep them editorially fresh, continued virtually to the end of *Drummer*.

As a "zero-degrees of separation" autobiographical subtext to *Drummer*, my 1960s roots were deep in Chicago with my longtime friend Andy Charles, whom I knew years before he partnered with Anthony DeBlase. When the wealthy psychiatrist Andy Charles bought *Drummer* from Embry to amuse his lover DeBlase in 1986, Andy Charles wanted me involved to help float DeBlase's novice experience in publishing, particularly in publishing *Drummer*.

Andy Charles remained grateful to the day he died because of a chilling tale of a true-life capture-and-revenge story of a rapist-sadist who in 1969 held Charles, long before he met DeBlase, captive in bondage in Charles' high-end designer apartment on the North Shore. Working one hand free, Andy Charles reached his bedside telephone and called for rescue from his friends Dan Baus, my lover David Sparrow, and me who, because Chicago police were the enemy, had to break into the apartment and like gay vigilantes subdue the rapist and hold him until Andy Charles' then-lover returned from a business trip to take care of the situation.

But that's another outlaw story in the *Drummer* salon.

## GAY PSEUDONYMS: NAMES ON THE CLOSET

Embry was two people in one. So with whom was I, a Gemini, dealing? Embry had legitimate right to his gay pseudonym "Robert Payne," but Embry could not have picked a more dangerous legal moment to market, in a mail-order sex business, what the LAPD had reason and prejudice to suspect was his "criminal alias."

Over time, as Embry alienated people with his Blacklist, as did David Goodstein with his Blacklist at *The Advocate*, I've noticed that through arrest, scandal, legal battles, bad reviews, collapsed creative relationships, cash problems, catastrophic illness, personal brickbats, erotic abandonment, and death, John Embry always relied on his alter-ego: Robert Payne.

Pseudonyms are a part of the split-case identities in gay life caused by homophobia. Because of onward-marching Christian soldiers, many gay folk have traditionally altered their names for privacy and safety against Inquisitions. In my first meeting as editor-in-chief with first-time *Drummer* author, John Preston, I advised him against using "Jack Prescott" for erotica such as his one-off novel *Mr. Benson*. I wonder if New Englander Preston, because of his sexual interest in domination, actively or subliminally chose the name because he was mesmerized by its closeness to his own as well as to the vertiginous power of New England politician Prescott Bush, father of President George Bush and grandfather of President George W. Bush? Other pseudonyms that seem real are: Larry Townsend, Aaron Travis, and Phil Andros; "Pat Califia" is a pseudonym that became the second pseudonym "Patrick Califia"; "Anne Rice" is also pseudonymous for "Howard Allen Frances Rice née O'Brien" as is "A. N. Roquelaure" who, despite urban legend, never wrote for *Drummer*, although her work was excerpted.

I make note that for all the bravado of the first two issues of *Drummer*, the closeted staff was so circumspect that, while they were bylined, they

dared list no responsible names on the masthead: no publisher, no editor, no art director. It was *Drummer* 3 that first listed John Embry as publisher and Jeanne Barney as editor-in-chief.

Jeanne Barney told me:

I, at least, was not “closeted.” Indeed, I was the only writer to use her real name at the old *Advocate* so my name could not appear on another masthead. I was hands-on and off-site until we put together *Drummer* 3. John Embry put *Drummer* 1 and 2 together on his kitchen table. We didn’t even have an office until it was time for *Drummer* 3. My name, however, did appear as a byline in each of those first two issues.

Before my friend, Al Shapiro, became art director whose work first appeared in *Drummer* 17 (July 1977), he had introduced me to Embry in March 1977. During that spring, *Drummer*, I observed subjectively, was hysterical, and still arriving in bits and pieces from LA, fleeing for sanctuary in San Francisco where Embry set up his home and office at 311 California Street. Traveling between two cities, while trying to escape one and set up business in the other, Embry produced his first hybrid LA-San Francisco issue with *Drummer* 12, February 1977. He had completely cleansed its pages of Jeanne Barney.

In truth, Embry hired me because I had twenty years’ experience in editing magazines and books, because I had drawers-full of my original writing and photography to feed *Drummer*, and because I was socially and sexually connected into the grass-roots liberation leather culture of San Francisco. As a stranger in town, he figured the way to move forward was to climb on the back of anyone who mattered.

I knew people. He knew I knew people. One time I joked with him about bringing meat from farm to table: “I live it up to write it down. I have sex with all the men I write about. I fuck them in July, photograph them in August, and they’re published in September.” When I dedicated my gay popular-culture novel *Some Dance to Remember* to “the 13,000 veterans of the liberation wars,” I was referencing John Rechy’s concept in *Numbers*. Those 13,000 men were my sex partners with whom I balled and talked the truths of pillow talk during the positive and educational sex orgy of the Titanic 1970s. I might not have had an orgasm with each of them; but, with those 13,000 men in two-ways and three-ways and parties and orgies and sleep overs, the identity-revealing sex I remember so fondly was intimate enough—I swear to show how real and risky all this was—to have been able

to catch, at worst, a temporary disease and, at best, the grass-roots temper of gay male psychology as grist for magazine articles, fiction, and photographs.

As a professionally educated journalist erotically identified with leather, patrolling the bars and baths and bistros of San Francisco and sexing my way into fuck-and-talk contact, I worked to employ my 1950s and 1960s magazine skills, ripening my reporter's factual insight and my documentarian's intuitive discernment into what gay men liked and what they wanted in the 1970s. Perhaps, my version of *Drummer* worked because it helped define the pop-culture of leathermen inventing a new lifestyle. As published inside *Drummer*, readers responded that my editing and writing reflected their grass-roots leather culture as it blossomed, making 1970s *Drummer*, the peoples' *Drummer*. The beauty of *Drummer* was that *Drummer* helped create the very leather culture it reported on, thus spreading leather identity farther. What *Drummer* started locally spread internationally.

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Editor's Note

### 1971-1977: A *DRUMMER* TIMELINE

How *Drummer* was invented in Los Angeles and San Francisco and found its slowly emerging international character during the tumultuous first decade after Stonewall, helping create the very leather culture it reported on during the 1970s Golden Age of Leather.

#### I

#### Gestation and Birth

**I. 1. 1971:** In December, *Drummer* appears as a small "zine" on yellow newsprint reporting on bars, restaurants, and hairpieces in West Hollywood.

**I. 2. 1973:** *Drummer* appears as the samizdat political *H.E.L.P./Drummer Newsletter* slamming the LAPD for harassment, bar raids, and arrests.

**I. 3. June 20, 1975:** *Drummer* official first issue of 214 issues in large format with slick cover.

**1.4. 1977:** "The Year *Drummer* Nearly Died," fighting for survival, and virtually out of business while being retooled during two stoppages of four months (February-May) and five months (August-December).

## II

**On Hiatus: Four Near-Death Stoppages**

**II. 1. 1976 HIATUS #1** (April-December) is caused by the April 10 Slave Auction arrest by the LAPD whose continuing harassment, including court hearings against John Embry and *Drummer* staff, virtually stop the presses for eight months when the infant *Drummer* was less than a year old.

**II. 2. 1977 HIATUS #2** (February to May) is caused by *Drummer* moving incrementally in John Embry's van from Los Angeles to San Francisco; founding LA editor-in-chief Jeanne Barney quits with *Drummer* 11; replacing her with no one, the distressed Embry lists himself as editor of *Drummer* 12-18; founding San Francisco editor-in-chief Jack Fritscher, having produced features and fiction by Sam Steward for teenage *Drummer*, is hired full-time March 1977 after ghost-editing parts of Embry's "half-LA and half-San Francisco hybrid" issues *Drummer* 15 through *Drummer* 18; Fritscher is first credited as the founding San Francisco editor-in-chief in *Drummer* 19.

Eyewitness Rewind: As a sex refugee in the culture wars, Embry assessed his own state of mind at the time and wrote about his tension-filled "Tale of Two Cities": "The change from 'LAPD Land' to San Francisco was like abandoning East Berlin for Oz." (January 29, 2008 email to Jeanne Barney). He repeated his psychology in his *Super MR* 5, page 39, and in his *Manifest Reader* 26, page 53: "The day we took the final load [of months' of loads] from LA and drove across the Bay Bridge for keeps, I felt like we had finally made it out of East Berlin." Upon its arrival, *Drummer* needed to get its bearings.

**II. 3. 1977 HIATUS #3** (August-December) begins after publication of *Drummer* 18 (August) when new editor Fritscher quiets down production for four months with no new issues of *Drummer* until the first fully San Francisco issue of *Drummer* 19 (December), taking time to reorganize production operations, hire local staff, compose a style guide, and create new and emerging content and format while deleting references to minors, bestiality, and pro-Nazi ads; soon after, in early Autumn 1978, Embry, gut-sick with anxiety about his arrest, is diagnosed with colon cancer, goes absent from the office, has surgery on March 16, 1979, and again goes absent for recovery for four months leaving Fritscher and art director Al Shapiro the space and time of many months to reshape, reinvent, and revive LA *Drummer* into the San Francisco *Drummer* that resultantly went international, turning *Drummer* from a fledgling LA magazine into a thriving San Francisco magazine reflecting and amplifying the first

Golden Age of Leather: 1977-1979; with *Drummer* 21 as the Platonic Ideal of *Drummer*, those classic issues are *Drummer* issues 19-30.

**III. 4. HIATUS #4** (October 1989-January 1990) happens without warning on October 17 when the Loma Prieta earthquake destroys the *Drummer* office, as well as the fiscal foundation of the Anthony DeBlase-Andrew Charles ownership of *Drummer*; monthly issues struggle out saved by editor Joseph W. Bean; the earthquake is also a metaphor of AIDS tectonically shifting the tone and contents of the magazine, and of DeBlase's faltering and unsustainable business model causing him to advertise inside *Drummer* 140 (June 1990) that the magazine is for sale to anyone; soon after Martijn Bakker of Amsterdam becomes the third and final, and foreign, publisher, closing the quintessentially American *Drummer* forever in September 1999.

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#### DRUMMER AS PRIMARY HISTORICAL DOCUMENT

My father grew up as a child laborer on a Minnesota farm and escaped on an athletic scholarship to a small Illinois town where my mother was a cheerleader. Later they both worked in sales and marketing, surveying demographics. There is a show business axiom in Hollywood: "Will it play in Peoria?" Growing up there with that test-market consciousness, I was taught a heartland insight into American popular culture: Give the audience what it wants. So, synergistically, *Drummer* to me was a piece of cake. I was gay. I was leather. I was a writer. I was a founding member of the American Popular Culture Association in 1968. I aimed to gather, write, and publish what my leather pals wanted. *Drummer* was a way to put real stuff about real guys monthly between two covers.

Having taught magazine journalism as a tenured university professor for fifteen years, and then working as a corporate marketing professional from 1977 onwards with a full-time career at Kaiser Engineers the entire thirty-two months I edited *Drummer*, I felt I owed respect enough to Embry and to *Drummer* to be completely familiar with every form-and-content aspect of the magazine. So, as editor-in-chief, I paid to modernize my mid-century graphic skills at a UC Berkeley seminar conducted by Anthony Dubovsky and Marc Treib: "New Graphic Presentation Techniques for the Design Professional," June 1978. At Stanford University on March 24, 1979, this *Drummer* editor also won two Bay Area Golden Gate awards for technical writing and advertising design of corporate marketing brochures for Kaiser Engineers in Oakland.



I think there ought to be qualifications for being a gay publisher or gay author or gay critic or queer theorist other than just taking it up the ass. The pope's Pontifical College Josephinum taught me how to study the texts of Aquinas, Descartes, Marx, Jung, and even the Bible as a collection of folk tales told by an ancient tribe around campfires. The progressive Jesuit professors at Loyola University graduate school taught me how to limn literary analysis on Chaucer, Malory, Faulkner, and Woolf, with the vast dramas, short stories, and poetry of Tennessee Williams as the proving ground of my doctoral dissertation.

Internal evidence is always the best place to start.

Readers needn't get an "A" in "Literary Interpretation" or "History 101" to examine *Drummer* for forensic evidence, finger prints, blood stains, semen, DNA, skid marks in the underwear, and Sartre-like no-exit wounds.

In the spring of 1977, I studied *Drummer's* first dozen issues and found that Embry's embryonic baby *Drummer* had repeatedly attempted suicide by its fourth issue.

The subject matter of *Drummer* 4 would have put any erotic magazine out of business, even if Embry's noble goal was to advance gay liberation through First Amendment freedom of the press. Having always fought for that same principle, I would have directed Los Angeles *Drummer's* raw aggression differently from the first issue onwards in the way that I redirected San Francisco *Drummer's* raw passion by serving up sex and sado-masochism with a masturbatory heartbeat, minus politics, beginning with *Drummer* 19.

With my gay gaze, I grew up as a wide-eyed witness of the connection of World War II veterans' biker culture to the gay leather culture of the 1950s and 1960s. At 1970s *Drummer*, my goal was to transport that straight outlaw street esthetic into a gay art setting: from the roads and racetracks to the pages of a new lifestyle magazine. I had the bona fides. I grew up on the roar of engines, the smell of exhaust, and the vision of bikers. In Peoria, during the juvenile delinquent craze of the 1950s, I hung out as a teenager every summer ogling the rugged bikers who scooted into town to hit the dirt track at the annual three-day AMA Flat Track championship races started by the Peoria Motorcycle Club in 1947, the same year Hollister, California, hosted its first Gypsy Tour run made famous in 1953 by *The Wild One*. By 1964, I was twenty-five, and was enough of a homomale man to pass hassle-free among heteromale men. Hiding in plain sight, I shot my first 35mm transparencies of straight outlaw bikers while I was a participant in the rise of us outlaw gays as leather bikers. My first novel, *Leather Blues* (1969), was about a boy coming out into leather, and was based on those

days of dirt-bike scrambles in my small town. Leather is a language, and I was intent on speaking and writing it fluently, as much as I was enjoying coining new leather vocabulary to write about gay masculine concepts that before Stonewall had been afraid to speak their names.

## THE LAPD GAY-BASHES *DRUMMER*

Between Embry's flame-throwing *Drummer* 4 (January 1976) and *Drummer* 6 (May 1976), the LAPD's high-profile and political raid on the Drummer Slave Auction (April 10, 1976) struck *Drummer* with a vengeance.

What were Embry and Barney thinking?

Barney wanted *Drummer* to be a leather *Evergreen Review*.

Embry wanted *Drummer* to be a leather *Advocate*.

I wanted *Drummer* to be the gay-identity version of 1940s and 1950s men's adventure magazines like *Argosy* and *Saga* mixed with the substance of *Esquire*, *Time*, and *The Journal of Popular Culture*.

So why did *Drummer* aggravate and bedevil the LAPD?

Were the pioneering Embry and Barney living up to some last hurrah from the Revolutionary 1960s? Were they drumming up some ersatz Stonewall incident in LA? Embry first mentions Stonewall in *Drummer* 2 (August 1976), the same issue in which Barney made the first mention of "adult-child sex."

Were they trying to be shocking like Sally Bowles?

Didn't they know that in 1967 the S&M favorite, Jim Morrison, the black-leather singer of the Doors, had been maced and arrested on stage in Florida, not for exposing his penis as charged, but for bad-mouthing the police in his act and in his interviews?

Had Embry misinterpreted Thoreau and his drum?

Every gay person should own *Walden* (1854): "If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away."

Embry was well aware that Thoreau's quote had appeared on *Drummer*'s 1965 predecessor, *Drum* magazine, published by Clark Polak in Philadelphia. In Los Angeles in 1971, Embry published a small-format *Drummer*, costing twenty-five-cents. It was, historically the first issue of "little" *Drummer*, December 1, 1971, and Thoreau was not mentioned. "Little" *Drummer*, issue two, December 10-24, featured articles on restaurants and where to buy hairpieces. Thoreau was not mentioned. On September 15, 1972, Embry created "Little *Drummer*, Volume 2, Number 1, in a *Time* magazine

size on cheap newsprint. It was published by H.E.L.P. Incorporated whose president was Larry Townsend. Thoreau was not mentioned.

In May 1973, *Action* magazine published author Phil Cooper's two-page feature condemning John Embry's handling of H.E.L.P. At the same time, in *California Scene*, Steve Shoch/Shock, an intimate at H.E.L.P., wrote a scathing indictment of both Embry and Townsend with particular emphasis on Embry's mishandling funds, and his claiming that H.E.L.P. owed *Drummer* money. In a hostile takeover not forgotten years later by an unforgiving Townsend, Embry replaced Townsend as president of H.E.L.P. Exiting the organization he had founded, Townsend channeled Sun Tzu, and in his cynical resignation letter "praised" his enemy Embry in *The Advocate*, December 19, 1973.

In the first issue of the slick-format *Drummer* (June 1975), Embry, well into blacklisting his partners and contributors, took his characteristic revenge trashing Townsend's latest work in the first and only book review in that first issue. Embry and Townsend famously hated each other. In 1997, I wrote a narrative of this feud which Larry Townsend published as the "Introduction" to the twenty-fifth anniversary edition of his classic, *The Leatherman's Handbook*.

Finally, reaching for socio-political relevance, Embry printed Thoreau's marching orders for the first time on the masthead of *Drummer* 1, 2, and 3. Thoreau's quote then mysteriously disappeared from the next nine Los Angeles issues 4-12, reappearing inside San Francisco *Drummer* 13 and thenceforth in every issue.

## RACE AND RACIALISM: HOW THE LAPD BUSTED *DRUMMER*

Note that it only took six—count 'em, *six*—lines in the *first* article in the *first* issue of *Drummer* to use the word *nigger* erotically in the same way Mapplethorpe did in the 1970s.

That may be "racial," but is it "racist"? It is a curious "compliment" within gay culture that the very ethnicity of a person, even a howdy white redneck, can be objectified by himself or others into a sexual fetish without prejudice. Page through all the *Drummer* stories, and read the revealing Personal sex ads, lusting with equal opportunity after Blacks, Latinos, Asians, Southern white trash, and the disabled during that taboo-busting heyday when Robert Mapplethorpe, Rex, and Tom of Finland were fetishizing blond Nazis. *Drummer* thrived on erotic racialism that confused and angered the white racist LAPD.

John Embry's longtime partner was the immigrant from Spain, Mario

Simon. The first Mr. Drummer was the Colombian/Argentinian immigrant Vallot Martinelli aka *Drummer* signature model Val Martin, the star of *Born to Raise Hell*, who was featured on the cover of five issues: 2, 3, 8, 30, 60, and centerfold, 31.

*Drummer* 1 and 6 featured the Blacks of *Mandingo*. *Drummer* 17: Japanese artist Goh Mishima. *Drummer* 21, 23: ex-con rednecks. *Drummer* 41, 65, 164: Swedish leather. Special 1978 issue, *Son of Drummer*: “Chico Is the Man.” *Drummer* 93: erotic disability, “Maimed Beauty,” with photos by George Dureau and Mark I. Chester. *Drummer* 103: Indians. *Drummer* 105: Scotsman in Leather. *Drummer* 118: An Indian Trucker’s Revenge. *Drummer* 127: Vietnamese story, “Shadow Soldiers.” *Drummer* 131: Black uncut soldier. *Drummer* 137: Un Señor Tambor, “Mr. Northeast Drummer,” Anthony Citro. *Drummer* 155: Mexican “Attitude of Jose Del Norte.” *Drummer* 174: cover and lead feature, African-American Graylin Thornton, “International Mr. Drummer 1993.” The cover of *Drummer* 177 produced by associate editor Patrick Califia featured Asian leather hunk Ken Chang for the Jim Wigler photo feature, “Men of the Mystical East: A Whole New Image of Asian Masculinity.”

*Drummer* was in good gay literary company. The always racially progressive Tennessee Williams made a sex fetish of an African-American in “Desire and the Black Masseur”; and, in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, he created an enduring archetypal blue-collar sex fetish in what his script called the “Polack,” Stanley Kowalski, archetypally acted by Marlon Brando (1951) who continued to play the Kowalski character in the first Hollywood biker movie so formative to the style of leather popular culture, *The Wild One* (1953).

For eyewitness notes on racial diversity and on *Drummer* whose text and photographs were keenly and positively aware of the erotic appeal of race, turn to the “Timeline Bibliography” in this book.

*Drummer*’s patron saint, Henry David Thoreau, famously spent a night in jail.

John Henry Embry never mentioned Thoreau’s stretch as any consolation for his own six-hour night in the poky after the Slave Auction.

After Thoreau left jail, he wrote *Civil Disobedience*.

After Embry left jail, he wrote a rant in *Drummer* 6 (June 1976, page 12) titled “*Drummer* Goes to a ‘Slave Auction’...And So Do 65 LA Police Officers.” Even this flaming did not cool his distemper. He was already toying with fleeing fascism in LA to freedom in San Francisco. He wrote on page 14: “People in San Francisco say you have to be a masochist to live in Los Angeles.”

For a Rorschach of the magazine's post-raid state of mind, study the rattled cover design of *Drummer* 6, the second worst *Drummer* cover. It was a scrawl of busy and bad design too metaphorical and unsexy for readers wanting the newly uncloseted images of frank leather action. You can judge a magazine by its cover. In *Drummer* 7 (July 1976, page 68), Embry keened, "The LAPD understands no minority's lifestyle."

In *Drummer* 9, (October 1976), Jeanne Barney editorialized on page 4 that the LAPD Vice Squad had been very interested in *Drummer* changing its address; subpoenas, she wrote, were served by officers

...involved in the Slave Auction caper.... these visits always seem to occur after we've taken Ad Vice's [*sic*] Lloyd Martin or "Crazy Ed" Davis to task in print for malperformance. The last raid on our offices took place a matter of hours after the issue which reported on police outrages at the Slave Auction. (Issue No. 6). The most recent drop-in came about within seven days of *Drummer* No. 8 hitting the stands...the issue in which we blew the whistle on the deal made by the Deputy District Attorney....

With issues of *Drummer* always hungry for fill, why did Embry never create a special "Drummer Slave Auction Issue" in the regular run of *Drummer* or in any of the fifty-something extra issues of *Drummer*? If not immediately after the bust, then some time during the eleven years he personally owned *Drummer*? In endless complaints he referenced his famous arrest, but was he unable to deal creatively with his abuse by cops? Embry was no artist. He was incapable of lifting his reality to the level of erotic creative expression. He was so angry with the LAPD that he could not handle the idea of creating a thematic issue dedicated in words and illustrations to exorcizing the raid by eroticizing the leathermen, the slaves, the sex, the bondage, the whips, the cops, the uniforms, the arrest, the jail, and the fetishes in play that April night. At one time, I wanted to dramatize that LAPD "Mark IV Bath" bust the same way I did the NYPD "Stonewall Inn" bust in my story "Stonewall: June 27, 1969, 11 PM."

Herein lies an essential evaluation of Embry as a publisher and historian. Any publisher who is a real journalist would have interviewed *Rashomon* eyewitnesses Jeanne Barney, Val Martin, Terry LeGrand, and the Libertarian, Fred Halsted, a co-auctioneer, who wrote his own eyewitness in *Package* 1 (July 1976), pages 28-29, and in *Package* 2 (September 1976), page 3. A crusading journalist would also have subpoenaed the LAPD for return of *Drummer*'s confiscated photographs, and would have purchased

news-media photographs and TV footage for its single frames. A good publisher could have done all this while skating figure 8's on an ice cube in hell. The issue would have spontaneously created its sensational self—with breathless commentary by activist Robert Opel, and with sexy re-staged “erotic arrest photos” upon which Embry's dreaded “camp cartoon-dialogue balloons” might have for once been suitable.

Embry, during the age of Woodward and Bernstein, owned a gay magazine and missed a triumphant opportunity for GLBT investigative journalism, political commentary, and exciting satire, particularly of *The Advocate* which, while owned and published by the rich-born heir to a family fortune, the bourgeois David Goodstein, did nothing significant to support the annoying leather freaks against the LAPD. Even as some LA political activists, including the Reverend Troy Perry, galvanized around the Slave Auction at fund-raisers, West Coast journalists failed in their responsibility to jump all over this 1976 liberation story unlike East Coast writers who elevated a similar 1969 raid on the Stonewall Bar into a benchmark myth. The two raids were very different. At Stonewall, the NYPD purpose was to bust the Mafia—with gays being no more than collateral damage. At the Slave Auction, the LAPD goal was to bust queers.

Will a GLBT queer studies conference ever host a panel investigating why there is an inherent queerstream double-standard against S&M leatherfolks who tend to embarrass the mainstream *Advocate* culture? Twelve years after the Slave Auction, my colleague Eric Rofes, writing in *Drummer* 115 (April 1988), raised a *cri de couer* wondering why leathermen, and the “feckless press,” rarely fight back against anti-leather raids. He cited LAPD harassment specifically against leather bars such as the One Way, Griff's, and the Gauntlet which the cops, not liking shoulder-to-shoulder men, limited to only fifty-seven patrons. Rofes claimed nothing had changed since the 1976 Slave Auction. “This isn't 1978 [*sic*],” he wrote in his “Rough Stuff” column. “It's 1988 and the issues that these bar raids raise for our specific [leather] community are great.” On the cusp of becoming executive director of the Shanti Project in San Francisco, he meant that especially because the AIDS epidemic was raging at its height, leather culture seeking collective safety needed to be “especially protective of our community spaces.”

Rofes was the author of *Dry Bones Breathe: Gay Men Creating Post-AIDS Identities and Cultures*. He was an informed voice of the times. In a sense in post-Embry *Drummer*, Rofes faulted former publisher Embry for agonizing way too personally over the Slave Auction arrests, and for failing to use the power of his press to turn that horrible event into a game-changing West Coast Stonewall. Embry was too cash crazy to become a leather Patrick

Henry. In his last days, Embry was kicking himself for not having the intellectual and literary gifts to raise the personal to the political, the specific to the universal. That failure, if anything, is a measure of Embry's greatest flaw, as well as of his hubris.

Luckily, Val Martin told us friends what happened that traumatic, comic, and ironic night when he was the main auctioneer for the Slave Auction. Perhaps Embry didn't get that Val Martin was a smart man and not just a pretty sex object on the cover of *Drummer*.

When *Drummer* artist, Olaf Odegaard, interviewed Val Martin in 1984, one year before Val Martin's death, one can only speculate why that "eyewitness *Drummer*" interview between one of Embry's superstar models and one of his superstar artists about a subject burning a hole in his guts was published in the now-disappeared news weekly, *Connection*, and not in *Drummer* where Embry and his staffer John Rowberry sat contemplating their navels? Had one of the usual Blacklist enmities, jealousies, or estrangements arisen between *Drummer's* top model and its publisher?

Were Val and Olaf, like Fred Halsted and Robert Opel, just two more of the many former intimates of Embry who turned against him? Did they have to use other magazines to do an end-run around him to give voice to their testimony? Val told Olaf:

So, that night [Saturday, April 10, 1976] we started the show and I started selling slaves.... We kept the slaves in a special room [off stage] where they were all in cages. In shackles and everything. We brought them one by one from the room to the stage....We tied some people up and spot-lighted them, took their clothes off... I had seventy slaves in the cages.... I was up to about my seventh slave, and I was selling him; a very groovy guy comes up to me with a leather jacket and a leather cap, torn jeans, very good-looking. And he...asks...the price of these slaves....He asked me if (the slave) was a good cocksucker; I said "sure" and he said, "Well, I have a big dick, do you think he can suck my big dick?" So, I said, "Sure, as a matter of fact they call him 'Jaws.'" I was just kidding...finally the guy bid the highest and I said, "sold." And...as soon as I said "sold" and received the money from him, the whole thing comes down.

He gives a signal to the rest of the police and a couple of helicopters, two or three busses, three or four TV cameras, and 120 policemen surrounded the premises.... The police came in [to the cages]...and said, "We've come to free you. We know you've been sold, abused, beaten up and we've come here to free you." One of



the slaves said, “I don’t want to be freed. I am here because I want to be.”...We repeated many times what the [charitable and playful] purpose of the slave auction was.... They made us lay on the ground, hands on our necks;....they actually booked 380 people, and they took 40 to jail. They just went you..you...you.... They treated us like animals.... The funniest thing was this friend of mine was wearing a dildo. And when they made us strip, a cop was standing in front of him, and when he took his pants off, his dildo fell out. The cop just freaked out....for the cops it was like a carnival. They must have called everybody in the building to come in and take a look at us. They were taking pictures, calling us names....

Of the 40 [charged], they dropped 36. They left only four... John Embry, myself, my helper [Douglas Holiday] and a lady who bought one of the slaves, Jeannie [*sic*] Barney....I think the sentence [for “slavery” which was changed to “prostitution”] could have been 5-10 years. They gave me ten days in jail and three years probation. John Embry and Jeannie [*sic*] Barney, the same. My helper didn’t go to jail. He had to pay a \$500 fine and got three-years probation. My lawyer fought back and we [all] got off with 100 hours of volunteer work instead of ten days in jail, and three-years probation. It cost the community [LA taxpayers] something like \$160,000... Most of the people [had] paid bail... For the 40 it was half a million dollars.... The bail was reduced from half a million to \$100 a piece, to \$50. But those who went earliest paid \$1,000, even \$2,000.... [The LAPD] spent over \$150,000 that night....[Coincidentally] a lady was killed ten blocks away, at the same time they were doing the raid. She was mugged and killed. —Selections from and © 1984 Olaf Odegaard, “Serving Two Masters, Or: The Great Slave Auction Bust (1975): An Interview with Val Martin,” *Connection*, October 10-24, 1984

So infamous was the bust worldwide that the Slave Auction was reported on immediately, with some sexual detail, as far away as in the mimeographed newsletter, *South Africa Gay Scene*, No.21-21, May-June, 1976, who found their information in the straight newspaper, the *Rand Daily Mail*.

Hollywood. About 39 men were charged with “Suspicion of Slavery” recently under a state law going back to 1901....The 30 officers who raided the Mark IV Health Club one Saturday night around midnight confiscated leashes, chains, ropes...harnesses,

studded arm bands...labeled in a police report as “sado-masochistic” paraphernalia.

...about 175 people were attending the “auction.” ...the slave then became the property of the buyer for 24 hours. Captain Wilson said....“you can rent paddles there so you keep your slave in line. You can put them in leather harnesses fashioned in a bizarre manner for restraint. It’s a very humiliating experience.” Another police spokesman said about 65 officers took part in the raid and witnessed acts of copulation and sodomy before the auction... Bail was set at about R 4 250 [South African currency]. Conviction could bring a prison sentence of one to 10 years. “Gay community” spokesman, Mr. Morris Night [*sic*; Morris Kight, Los Angeles gay pioneer, one of the founders of the Gay Liberation Front]...denounced the raid as politically motivated and termed it “appalling and excessive.” He said the event was “harmless fun” to raise money for “gay” activities...similar to high school and college slave auctions....

As a footnote, gay historians might find a legal insight into the Drummer Slave Auction in the *ACLU Gay Rights Newsletter*, September 1977, which featured the Slave Auction in its cover article, “The \$200,000 Tragic Farce,” with a photograph of Jeanne Barney and Thomas Hunter Russell, calling “The Notorious ‘Mark IV Forty Slave Auction’ episode...one of the more blatant landmarks in the history of [LAPD] police paranoia with regards to the gay community.”

Nearly twenty years later, Ben Attias published his analysis “Police Free ‘Gay Slaves’: Some Juridico-Legal Consequences of the Discursive Distinctions Between the Sexualities,” California State University, June 10, 1995.

John Embry, after penning many short versions, finally wrote his own eyewitness narrative of the Slave Auction which he excerpted from his unpublished memoir, *Epilogue*, in *Super MR* #5 (2000), pages 34-39.

#### EYEWITNESS: *DRUMMER* TIMELINE & SCORE CARD

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*Drummer* ran 214 issues from *Drummer* 1 (June 1975) to *Drummer* 214 (April 1999); *Drummer* officially quit business on Folsom Fair weekend, September 30, 1999.

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A QUARTET FOUNDED *DRUMMER*; HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE CREATED *DRUMMER*; MILLIONS OF PEOPLE READ *DRUMMER*

A stack of 214 issues of *Drummer* is a coffee-table sculpture 3.5 feet tall weighing 120 pounds. Laid flat, top-to-bottom, *Drummer* stretches sixty-four yards which is two-thirds of the length of a football field. At approximately ninety pages per issue, *Drummer* comprises a total 20,000 pages filled by hundreds of writers, artists, designers, and photographers, including even more thousands of revealing personal ads voiced and written by readers, with commercial advertisers displaying precise pop-culture signs of the times.

*Drummer* surged beyond calculation.

A *Drummer* group photo would look like the album cover of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

With a 42,000 copy press run for each issue in the 1970s, and with a pass-along rate of two readers in addition to the subscriber, approximately 100,000 people handled each issue of *Drummer* for an approximate total of 21 million people.

The mobbed Folsom Street Fair in San Francisco hosts 100,000 leather guests every September.

Even if Embry exaggerated the press run by fifty percent, each issue of *Drummer* would have been in the hands of 50,000 people. In gay book publishing, 5,000 copies sold is considered a best seller, and books fall far short of the pass-along rate of magazines.

*Drummer* was huge.

For the last quarter of the 21st century, among the millions of leather-folk, there was hardly a person alive who had not heard of or read *Drummer*. Years after *Drummer* closed, readers continued to write to me that as young teenagers they had managed somehow to find *Drummer*, even in Sweet Home, Alabama, and it had answered their incipient needs and shaped their masculine identities.

More people have read one issue of *Drummer* than have read any one book by any deeply established GLBT author in the "Top 100" list of literary best-sellers in the gay canon.

That's why I added the line to the masthead of *Drummer* 23 (July 1978): "The American Review of Gay Popular Culture."

During that same year, Richard Labonté and Norman Laurila founded the revolutionary bookstore, A Different Light, in the Silver Lake district of LA. In his eyewitness recall, the trend-spotting Labonté noted that during ADL's first months in 1979 while I was editor-in-chief, he had to increase his

monthly order for San Francisco *Drummer*. Labonté's amusing eyewitness email sent December 21, 2006, paints a sweet picture of the ADL startup which coincided with a moment in time, that I remember fondly, when I had edited more than half of the existing issues of *Drummer*.

I think our magazine supplier (a Venice Beach independent, not one of the Larry Flynt or Mafia companies [who published so many gay magazines]) started us with 5 copies of *Drummer* the first couple of weeks. At the same time, we were dropping [our cash-drawer] quarters into *The Advocate* vending machines in front of the YMCA in Glendale and the old Bodybuilders Gym in Silver Lake and liberating five or six copies from each box, because *The Advocate* was one mag our supplier couldn't supply. Within a few weeks, our draw for *Drummer* went from 5 to 10 to 25 and finally to 50 for each new issue, with fill-ins ordered in as required until the next issue. I soon learned to keep as many back issues in stock as our supplier could provide (often returns from other outlets), so that customers from out of town could buy three or four months' worth of *Drummer* at a time.

In the zero degrees of separation, Richard Labonté and A Different Light helped *Drummer* succeed in its significant 1979 growth spurt. Labonté's statement reveals how periodical literature grew in the 1970s before small gay book publishers arose in the 1980s. *Drummer* had fled LA and had become a San Francisco magazine whose reintroduction to LA was greatly goosed because Labonté in Silver Lake exhibited hard copies at A Different Light where browsers could sample the redesigned *Drummer* before becoming subscribers. The British actor and leather personality, Peter Bromilow, who emceed leather events at LA bars and starred in many big-budget films including *Camelot*, recalled that Los Angeles leather queens, as he called them, were amazed at the change made in *Drummer* by the move to San Francisco.

#### DRUMMER RESTORATION SUPPER: WHAT CAME AFTER

Having purchased *Drummer* from John Embry on August 22, 1986, new *Drummer* publisher Anthony F. DeBlase and his lover, the psychiatrist Andrew Charles, president of their Desmodus, Inc. corporation, ending the Blacklist, personally invited me to return to the landmark issue 100 of the Embry-free *Drummer*. In fact, DeBlase, cued and funded by Charles, quietly hired me as a private personal advisor for the next three years because they

wanted to return *Drummer* to its roots and its core themes while at the same time changing its attitudes to accommodate the safe-sex exigencies of HIV.

Here is “inside” eyewitness history.

Their invitation to rejoin *Drummer* occurred in tandem with the significant “*Drummer* Restoration Dinner Party” hosted Folsom Fair weekend, September 28, 1986, 2:30 PM, by the erotic artist Rex and by Trent Dunphy and Robert Mainardi, owners of the archival San Francisco store, “The Magazine.” If ever a *Drummer* Salon dinner party for ten gay men was ripe for a screenplay, this sit-down summit had characters, wit, and intrigue enough for a Merchant-Ivory production scripted by Parker Wilde, the love child of Dorothy and Oscar.

Celebrating the exit of the old regime of Embry and the new purchase of *Drummer* by DeBlase and Charles, the eight guests at the supper table in the photography-filled Dunphy-Mainardi Victorian included the intentionally forward-planning boys in the band: Anthony DeBlase, Andrew Charles, Rex, Al Shapiro and his partner Dick Kriegmont, Mark I. Chester, Mark Hemry, and me.

Two months later, in a letter to Al Shapiro, dated November 20, 1986, I wrote:

Dear Al, All this *nuevo Drummer* stuff, starting with our pasta supper at Trent and Bob’s, has reminded me, as issue 100 sits next to me, and your name and mine are so entwined, that I might not have become editor of *Drummer* if you as art director hadn’t been so insistent [to me and to Embry]....Those were some days when you were the once-and-future famous A. Jay and I got to watch you work, designing issue after issue! Embry was a curse and a disaster, but he never was able to divide and conquer and come between us....I just wanted you to be the first to know that Gay Sunshine Press has today signed me to a contract for an anthology of my writing titled *Stand by Your Man* due out in late 1987, and, on page 1, I’m dedicating the book to you, because when I moved to San Francisco, you were one of three guys who tried to help me find suitable work, and you succeeded....So what the hay! We can lift our heads and blow raspberries at all the small-minded, cheating, conniving Embrys, because, truly, we have been artists and friends together.

Six months later, Allen J. Shapiro died May 30, 1987, ten years after we first marched together into *Drummer*. I wrote his eulogy in *Drummer* 107 (August 1987). In that eulogy built on my interviews with him, he

explained how he, like *Drummer*, had evolved out of the pioneering gay publishing of the 1960s. So important was his art to Embry that when A. Jay quit *Drummer*, Embry tried to claim for himself the copyright ownership of *Harry Chess*. When A. Jay threatened legal action, Embry was forced to cease and desist.

**A. Jay:** *Drummer* was the first magazine for masculine gay men, not for embarrassed leather queens....I once heard John Embry called the “Marie Antoinette of Gay Publishing.” He didn’t really have much respect for the intelligence of the readers. Let them eat cake. The same pictures and models, especially the beloved Val Martin, the same tired beefcake recycled monthly for the public to eat. I don’t really agree with all that, but I am used to working with publishers with balls. At the beginning, John Embry was an innovator. *Drummer* started back after poppers hit big [actually poppers in mesh capsules hit around 1966, nine years before *Drummer*] and the leather market was ripe for its own publication, and not just for another mimeographed underground bike club monthly newsletter printed on typing paper.

Embry and I did lock horns numerous times, but I do give him credit for giving me, as “A. Jay,” great exposure, and an opportunity to do my art-director thing for almost three years. I did uncover budding genius artists like Matt and Domino. [New Yorker Don Merrick/Domino’s first West Coast show opened March 24, 1979.] Embry, as the cartoon fanatic he is, had the good taste of recognizing the pulling power of my *Harry Chess* and taking it on. Also Embry picked up Bill Ward’s wonderful cartoon panels, *Drum*, before he took on *Harry Chess*. So as a fan of gay cartoons, he did some real good.

**Jack:** How did you launch *Harry Chess*? That strip led you to *Drummer*, yes?

**A. Jay:** *Harry Chess* got started because one of the world’s most daring publishers, Clark Polak, put an ad in the *New York Times* twenty-five years ago, saying he needed an art director for his gay magazine. He actually used the word *gay* in the ad! He nearly caused a couple hundred heart attacks at the *Times* when they found out what it meant. Anyway, I was considering drawing a gay comic strip then, so I proposed *Harry Chess* to him.

**Jack:** The rest is gay pop history.

**A. Jay:** Back in those closeted days, Clark dared to put in a special slip-sheet mailed only to his subscribers. Frontal nudes. No sucking and fucking. Men who bought his mag called—guess what, guys, *Drum*—on the news stand missed out on that hot stuff. How times have changed! I did *Harry* in *Drum* for five or six years. Long before *Drummer*. One episode a month. Clark reprinted the whole thing once as a pocket book.

**Jack:** That would have been *The Original Adventures of Harry Chess*. It's now out of print. A collector's item, right?

**A. Jay:** I wish I had a couple dozen copies....Uh, let me see, where was I in the Decline and Fall of Practically Everybody Who Was Anybody? Oh yeah. Like Sebastian Venable, you see, I traveled a lot. I left *Drum* for a year to live in Mexico City for the 1968 Olympics. Sniffing around the wrestlers, picking up used international jockstraps, and pumping my tits up at the local gym. Always hoping the yummy bodybuilder and movie star, Jorge Rivera, the Mexican Steve Reeves, would come in and sit on my face.

While I was feasting on dark meat, *Drum* magazine died. Clark chose to move on to something better that made him, I think, rich. So *Harry Chess* became “Little Orphan Harry.” Then Hanns Ebensten [the pioneer of gay group travel] told me about *Queen's Quarterly*. Can you imagine a mag being called *that* in 1987? Back then you could. Anyway, publisher George DeSantis hired me freelance and *Harry* had a new home.

I talked George into changing his two-word camp title to the sleeker, more designer-like “QQ” to try to butch it up. I could tell sissies were on the way out and sleaze-macho was on its way in.

DeSantis then started two more mags: *Body* and *Ciao*. DeSantis was a great publisher. A kind man. I learned a great deal from him about magazine production, which prepared me, really, to take over the art direction of *Drummer*.

At a meeting with a struggling DeBlase at *Drummer* on Friday, February 12, 1988, I made a proposal offering to further help lift his load producing his monthly periodical. Besides my discreet hand-holding, I suggested reviving my 1970s concept of creating “theme” issues for *Drummer* featuring



underwear, rubber, bears, mud, and tit torture. To me, the announcement of upcoming themes was a pro-active way to encourage writers and artists with enough lead time to submit materials on the themes. To make the point, I showed DeBlase a portion of my Palm Drive Video photographic portfolio and its themes. On March 1, 1988, DeBlase wrote me a letter confirming our plan:

Dear Jack,

Life as usual is amazingly hectic.... With your proposals in mind [i.e.: my theme thumbnails and thematic photos which I left in his hands to cue his issues], upcoming fetish features are:

Issue 116, Underwear: Your shot of Curtis James in his long-johns is great. Do you have more of these that we could use along with a review of this tape? [The video was *Redneck Cowboy in Black Leather*, and he published three of my underwear fetish photos on pages 48 and 98.]

Issue 117, Daddies: I plan to use your *Dave Gold's Gym Workout* [still photographs taken during the video shoot] here; do you have others that you'd like included? [DeBlase published two of Dave Gold, page 45.]

Issue 118, Rubber: A natural for your new Keith Ardent video [*Pec Stud in Black Rubber*, during which I shot two hundred photos, including a special *Drummer* cover and a photo spread of eleven centerfold pictures (pages 2, 3, 11-18, 32), as well as authoring the cover feature article "Rubberotica"].

Issue 119, Bears and Mountain Men: Curtis James again, as well as many of your models. You pick the ...[models] you'd like emphasized here. [DeBlase printed twenty-one of my photographs of straight mountain men and gay bears and published my lead cover feature article, "Bears! How to Hunt Buckskin Mountain Men."]

Issue 120, Mud, Oil, Grease, and Grunge: Naturally, your *Mud Pillow Fight* video and photographs will be featured. Anything else you have that is appropriate? [I provided three interior photographs of "mud" for "Sodbuster," *Drummer* 148, page 61.]

Issue 121, Tits: Again a natural for your *Tit Torture Blues* tape. [DeBlase printed one of my photographs of Jason Steele.]

Any more recommendations for upcoming fetish features?

At DeBlase's request, I suggested "solo sex and video" as the theme for *Drummer* 123 and wrote the lead feature, "Solo Sex: Who's Who in J/O

Video,” to accompany my twenty-two photographs (pages 34-36, 38-41). I offered “bodybuilding” for *Drummer* 124 and wrote the lead feature with DeBlase selecting an excerpt from *Some Dance to Remember: A Memoir-Novel of San Francisco 1970-1982*, plus five of my photos (pages 16-17, 35). Following up in 1989, because my former lover Robert Mapplethorpe, whom I had featured in *Drummer* 24 and *Son of Drummer*, had recently died, I nominated Mapplethorpe as the hook for *Drummer* 133 and wrote the lead feature article, “Pentimento for Robert Mapplethorpe: Fetishes, Faces, and Flowers of Evil.” Additionally, because “safe sex” was the new buzz word, I tendered “nostalgia for the way we were in the Titanic 1970s” as the theme for *Drummer* 139 with my lead feature article, “Remembrance of Sleaze Past.”

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Editor’s note:

See DeBlase’s editorial credit for themes created by Fritscher in *Drummer* 139, p. 35: “So, inspired by Jack Fritscher’s theme, we decided to do a photo shoot with a hot leatherman nibbling on...cake...” which referenced both Proust’s cookie and the title of the “Remembrance” feature article. See also Tim Barrus’ posting of this re-instituted “theme approach” as a way to solicit and build issues out of the grass roots readership in *Drummer* 120, page 19.)

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DeBlase continued:

Do you mind having your name mentioned in conjunction with your Palm Drive Video company? I was going to name you in the review I did of your *Gut Punchers* [*Drummer* 115], but since you didn’t include your name in your own literature [because I was keeping my literary identity separate from my photographic identity], I didn’t do it. What is your feeling on the subject? I think *Drummer* readers will take your name as a badge of quality and be more likely to purchase from a company they haven’t dealt with before—if they knew of your association. [A couple weeks later, on Saint Patrick’s Day, March 17, over lunch at Original Joe’s, DeBlase said, “Let me give you this business advice. Your name is a brand name. People are still learning the name of Palm Drive Video. You should start calling it ‘Jack Fritscher’s Palm Drive Video.’” [And so, on DeBlase’s marketing recommendation, the name was changed, and

thousands of Palm Drive videos were sold by DeBlase at *Drummer*, by Beardog Hoffman at *Bear* magazine's Brush Creek Media, and by John Embry's Wings and Alternate distributing through *Super MR* mail-order.]

Sincerely,  
Tony DeBlase

In September, 1992, when Martijn Bakker, residing in Amsterdam, purchased *Drummer*, he globalized the name of the uniquely American *Drummer* into *International Drummer*. Not understanding American gay pop culture and *Drummer's* place within the psychology of leatherfolk, Bakker destroyed its homomasculine American mythology, and foolishly replaced its "personal contents" with "corporate contents" interchangeable with other newer glossy mags in cahoots with video companies pushing their corporate photographs as soulless centerfolds. Even as Bakker intended to produce an online version of *Drummer*, the site never functionally happened. He closed *Drummer* forever. He added high-profile insult to injury when he worsened the indignity by shuttering *Drummer* during the highest American Leather Festival of the year, Folsom Fair weekend, September 30, 1999.

San Francisco leather-heritage historian, Mister Marcus wrote in his online column, "Leather Bazaar," May 26, 2005, at [www.mamasfamily.org/MisterMarcus](http://www.mamasfamily.org/MisterMarcus): "Martijn Bakker, the Dutchman...was the sole killer of *Drummer* and all it stood for." However, Bakker was hardly the sole "killer"; he had competition from villainous accomplices, including John Embry and Robert Davolt, the last editor of *Drummer*, who both reviled Bakker publicly. Did Bakker hate Embry and Davolt? Whereas Embry and DeBlase fought privately, this threesome fought publicly in a passionate blood feud that broke out into print. Bakker relished that he had scored internationally when he purchased *Drummer* which was the Holy Grail Embry had sold to DeBlase in the biggest mistake of both their publishing lives. Bakker, in a neck-snapping duel, fought back, for instance, in a Press Release announcing that the new Dutch *International Drummer* was in fine shape for the year 2000, and that

a well-known American publisher [Embry] moons wistfully over the *Drummer* era as if it were past and shows up only in old copies of former issues. Gentlemen, it is not so. Anyone who actually believes *Drummer* is dead, is simply not paying attention."

In return, Embry's talking head Robert Davolt ranted back against Bakker in the rival *Super MR 7* (2001):

...*Drummer*, as we knew it, is plainly gone. It is particularly embarrassing [*sic*] to [Embry's] Alternate Publishing who originated the title [*Drummer*] 25 years ago...

Why would Embry's Alternate Publishing be "embarrassed"? It was ironic. Why would Embry, notorious for years for ripping off subscribers to *Drummer* and its "Leather Fraternity" want to fulfill the subscriptions of *Drummer* subscribers when there was a new publisher of *Drummer* in Amsterdam? Embry wasn't even the previous publisher. He had bowed out of *Drummer* in 1986; he hated everything that DeBlase did; and then he hated everything that Bakker did in the way he had hated everything Jeanne Barney and I had done.

Just as DeBlase, surprised that he had to pay the debts Embry owed, had buyer's remorse, Embry had a major case of seller's remorse. Perversely, Embry abused *Drummer* when he owned it, and when he got rid of it, he loved it. Embry fancied he was *Drummer* incarnate, but he wasn't, Blanche, he wasn't, and that fact fried his *cojones* for the rest of his life.

Embry was first motivated to start the infant *Drummer* (gestation was from the twice-monthly little "zine" of 1971 to the slick monthly magazine of 1975) mainly as a medium for his mail-order business: "The Embry Company, PO Box 3843, Hollywood." In the last issue Embry published, *Drummer* 98 (June 1986), he bitterly tried to destroy the future mail-order business that DeBlase would be running in his own version of the *Drummer* business. In his "so-long-suckers" issue, Embry penned a two-page diatribe against poppers in the "*Drummer* Forum" section titled "Death Rush" which he illustrated with a drawing Rex had created to sell the popper brand "Bolt: New from the makers of Rush." Ironically, Embry had for eleven years courted popper manufacturers like W. Jay Freezer who made "room odorizers" with names like "Rush" and "Aroma." Poppers kept *Drummer* flying high. Popper dealers paid a huge chunk of advertising dollars buying full-page display ads including expensive inside covers and back covers, often illustrated by identified *Drummer* artists like Rex. Embry's sudden "abstinence from poppers" was no epiphany of social consciousness about the health effects of poppers. He wanted to injure DeBlase enough by alienating advertisers to drive *Drummer* out of business so that Embry would be able to crow that *Drummer* could not exist without him. He ended his diatribe with this sentence naming all the commercial brands of poppers:

“I...went around the house [meaning *Drummer*], seeking out anything with a RUSH, RAM, THUNDERBOLT, LOCKER ROOM HARDWARE, DOUBLE EAGLE, CLIMAX, QUICKSILVER, HEAD, or CRYPT TONIGHT [his caps] label and tossed them into the garbage. Room odorizers indeed!”

With the popper companies boycotting the issue, *Drummer* 98 had no ads either inside the front cover or on the back cover which instead promoted Embry’s mail-order video company. The inside back cover was an antidote-to-poppers ad for VitaMen and Immunitab vitamins.

At the height of the AIDS epidemic, “Death Rush” was the last piece Embry wrote for *Drummer*. Thirty days later, in his first issue of *Drummer* (*Drummer* 99, August 1986), DeBlase was so fiercely angry at this attack and, by extension, at all of Embry’s skullduggery that he reprinted in his own first “*Drummer* Forum: The Popper Wars Continue” an article by Dr. Bruce Voeller to rebut Embry with Voeller’s feature noting that while poppers may have health risks, the studies were not scientific, and anti-popper crusaders were often too politically motivated to discuss the issue. Professor Voeller was the founder of the National Gay Task Force and the Mariposa Foundation and was the man who coined the phrase “acquired immune deficiency syndrome.” DeBlase’s laissez faire attitude of choice around drugs was not too different from what I learned at San Francisco General when my longtime friend Tony Tavarossi, one of the founding pioneers of Folsom Street culture, was dying of some mysterious ailment in ICU in 1981. I asked his doctor, “What’s the matter with him?” “We don’t know,” she said in that summer when no one had heard of AIDS. She added, “We’ve never seen a patient so distressed.” Tony was on a ventilator. I asked, “Could poppers have caused this?” She looked up and said, “Poppers are an insult to the lungs, but, no, poppers did not cause this.”

The several times when I could have bought the *Drummer* business, I did not, because I knew as an insider, there was nothing for sale but the *Drummer* name, and a lot of ongoing debt.

Embry’s fake embarrassment at Bakker’s *Drummer* was nothing more than a sniffy attack of the “vapors,” trying to remind everyone of his one-time connection to *Drummer*.

So confused is the timeline of leather history, and so bad were the inter-cine vendettas that a blogger wrote in his inflated obituary for Embry, “The *young* [italics added] John Embry founded *Drummer*.” In truth, on the day that the first issue of *Drummer* was published, John Embry was forty-five years old, and not at all part of the youth revolution of the 1960s and

1970s that trusted no one over thirty. When I crossed swords with Embry and resigned from editing *Drummer* on New Year's Eve, December 31, 1979, Embry was turning fifty years old, was distracted by lawsuits and cancer, was obsessed with draining *Drummer* to fund his real estate holdings, and was no participant in the nighttime culture of leather in San Francisco.

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The best objective correlative of how Embry's on-going colon cancer subtracted him for almost a year of functional creativity at *Drummer* is an editorial he wrote after he fell and broke his hip in 2001.

I spent...the past weeks recuperating from a broken hip... Now, months later, I'm still not completely functional, but at least I'm mobile...I am now propped up in my own bed...still embroiled in an experience [health crisis] that threatens to go on for some time more. *The healing process takes a lot of energy, leaving little for the creative process.* [Italics added] (*Super MR #7*, page 5)

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Against the culture-changing tide of HIV, Bakker was riding high. He had recently purchased the legendary company, Rob of Amsterdam, founded by the person, Rob of Amsterdam, whom Mark Hemry and I—in the zero degrees of separation—videotaped in an hour-long interview in his leather shop in Amsterdam on June 22, 1989. Ravaged by HIV, Rob told us his eyewitness story in his last interview before his assisted suicide.

Whether it was against Bakker or DeBlase or anyone who ever told him “no,” John Embry carried grudges. Jeanne Barney said that Embry often-times sat on his porch at one of his Russian River houses repeating, over and over, the long lists of those who had done him wrong.

Embry was nothing but trendy. At the very same time, like a bitter queen escaped from *The Boys in the Band*, Truman Capote, another obsessive-compulsive, was sitting in Manhattan repeating over and over his infamous Hate List of all the rich and famous folk who had dropped him after he betrayed their personal secrets in his scandalous 1970s *Esquire* articles which became chapters in his troubled book, *Answered Prayers*. Like Embry's Blacklist, Capote's Hate List of hundreds of socialites and artists who had made the young Truman their darling included Jackie Kennedy Onassis' sister, Princess Lee Bouvier Radziwill; his arch-enemy Gore Vidal; designer Gianni Versace; society hustler Denham Fouts; and

Anderson Cooper's mother, heiress Gloria Vanderbilt. Capote's magazine-generated trouble started with his tattletale article, "La Côte Basque 1965," in *Esquire* (November 1975), the same month that the infant *Drummer* published issue number three, which was the first issue to dare to list the names of staff on the masthead.

In his own exit from *Drummer* in 1992, former editor DeBlase, enjoying a big-fat-cigar moment in *Drummer* 159, adopted the title for himself that I had suggested for my own situation when he asked me how I defined my professional relationship to *Drummer*. When as a retired university associate professor emeritus, I suggested "Editor Emeritus," DeBlase followed suit. After he sold *Drummer*, he went on to list himself as *Drummer* "Publisher Emeritus" and "Editor Emeritus." Doesn't almost every former *Drummer* editor deserve the title?

Jeanne Barney laughed when I suggested she was "*Drummer* Editrix Emerita."

Embry, who was no Edith Piaf, might have best solved his regrets and his identity crisis over *Drummer* by simply naming himself *Drummer* founding publisher emeritus, and then moving on to publish his *Drummer* clones: *Manifest Reader*, *MR*, and *Super MR*. Although DeBlase had made Embry sign a non-compete clause in the 1986 sales contract, Embry would not stop competing. Even so, after selling *Drummer*, Embry never stopped fantasizing about the original *Drummer* which had made him a success, and not vice versa. From start to finish, it took not just Embry, but hundreds of us to create *Drummer*.

The history of the rise of *Drummer* was a birthing, nursing, and teething process of three years of angst (1975-1978) accomplished by a parental quartet consisting of one publisher (John Embry), and two editors-in-chief (Jeanne Barney and Jack Fritscher), and one art director (Al Shapiro) who founded and evolved *Drummer* from a pulp-paper LA tabloid to a glossy San Francisco magazine read internationally as a gay-identity journal.

After that, came all the other publishers and editors who creatively repeated the themes and memes of original-recipe *Drummer*, particularly the crucial leather identity and gender identity issues of *Drummer* 19 to *Drummer* 33. Nearly everything contained in *Drummer* from 1980 to 1999 was a reprise of the themes that the late-1970s *Drummer* had introduced—which is not to say that the later versions are not original, entertaining, valuable, and historic issues in their own right. *Drummer* is like wine. When someone says they love *Drummer*, ask what was the year and who was the editor of their favorite issue.



## APPENDIX

**The *Drummer* Origin Story  
Morally Speaking**

In the *Drummer* Origin Story, the founding Big Bang of *Drummer* resembled the tumultuous founding of *The Advocate*, Andy Warhol's *Interview*, and Facebook. Derived out of the Clark Polak's 1960s magazine, *Drum*, founded in 1963 and published by the Janus Society of Philadelphia whose motto was the "different drummer" of Henry David Thoreau, *Drummer*—which did not become iconic overnight—evolved during the four rocky years of its trial-balloon emergence from a Hollywood bi-monthly chapbook "zine" (December 1, 1971) to its first glossy monthly issue of *Drummer* 1 (June 1975). *Drummer* finally found its leather character and homomasculine voice in both form and content in perhaps its most platonically perfect issue, the breakthrough and brand-making *Drummer* 21 (January 1978).

During its four-year gestation in Los Angeles (1971-1975), *Drummer* struggled to be born in the hands of advertising man John Embry, assisted by his archenemy leather author Larry Townsend who, when he withdrew his support from Embry in 1973, nearly put the fledgling *Drummer* out of business. Driven out of Los Angeles by the LAPD, *Drummer* was finally fully birthed in San Francisco in 1977.

In the tale of two cities, and in the tumultuous years of its delivery from 1975-1978, it took a village to create the legendary *Drummer*.

John Embry started *Drummer*, yes, in Los Angeles, yes, but he could not achieve liftoff. LA was the runway for *Drummer*, yes, but San Francisco, yes, was where *Drummer* achieved liftoff, yes, and cruising altitude, yes, that took it national and global.

Historically, Embry went to his grave protesting, perhaps too much, claiming *Drummer* was his immaculate conception, and his solitary conception, writing in his must-read editorial in *Manifest Reader* 26: "Unlike popular conceptions [which he was actively refuting], *Drummer* magazine was not something we all got together on, like in an Andy Hardy movie, with lots of enthusiasm and offers of Judy Garland's father's barn for a theater. Or even like Shel Silverstein's wonderful concept of *Playboy's* beginning with all the fellas standing around the steps of a Chicago brownstone deciding who was going to be the editor, the art director, and who would recruit the broads [*sic*]." In addition to writing this "broad" sexism that he thought was "cool," Embry also confessed to his "unnatural aversion...

[to] drag and female impersonation.” Pulling his wizard’s curtain back, he confirmed his naivete that at the beginning in LA he had “little, if any, idea what it [*Drummer*] should look like.”

So, like a designer baby whose four parents decide “what it should look like,” the *Drummer* that readers nationwide first responded to in June 1975, and came to love internationally by 1979, was gestated by a Jedi Council of four mitochondrial people: founding Los Angeles publisher John Embry, founding Los Angeles editor-in-chief Jeanne Barney, founding San Francisco editor-in-chief Jack Fritscher, and founding San Francisco art director Al Shapiro aka the artist A. Jay who had been hired in 1977 by Embry who was seeking publishing roots and design magic in A. Jay himself because Shapiro had been the art director of the original *Drum* magazine and *Queen’s Quarterly* in the 1960s.

Embry acknowledged this evolution, from nothing to something, when he wrote ingenuously in *Manifest Reader* 26 (1995): “*Drummer*’s first issue had 48 pages, a cover price of \$2.50, and was made up of whatever.”

Made up of *whatever*?

“Later [after moving to San Francisco] we were [he was] amazed at how much there was available to us.”

Embry, in actuality, paired Barney and Fritscher with equal billing, crediting each as editor-in-chief, the only two *Drummer* editors distinguished with that title, although he did bend history in *Manifest Reader* 26 when he lied, despite absolutely no evidence at all on any masthead in *Drummer*, that “John Rowberry, after Jack Fritscher’s exit, went on to become editor-in-chief.” He depended on both Barney and me for the magazine’s survival during the founding process made convulsive by three formative events: the arrest of Embry and Barney by the LAPD at the *Drummer* Slave Auction (April 1976); and the character-changing relocation of *Drummer* from LA to San Francisco (March 1977) when Embry, still on two years’ parole, left only after the court gave permission; and, finally, Embry’s nearly year-long absence from the *Drummer* office because of his long bout with cancer. (1978-1979).

He wrote in his *Super Manifest Reader* (2000), that his Los Angeles “*Drummer* was so limited in its subject matter....Moving from Los Angeles to San Francisco was like,” in a comparison he made repeatedly like an angry man obsessed, “leaving East Berlin.” He had earlier confirmed the fact of the magazine’s evolution between two cities in his column in *Drummer* 26 (January 1978) published while I was his editor having accomplished the previous eight issues: “*Drummer* has had a number of renovations [geographically and editorially] in these three years, most of them, we assume, being in the right direction.”

Strictly speaking, it is also noteworthy that in the dreamtime of *Drummer* pre-history (1971-1975), Embry had early on, two years before Barney exited *The Advocate*, also hired a “Ron Harris,” who left little or no DNA, as the first Los Angeles editor of *H.E.L.P./Drummer* in April 1973 while Embry was publishing that first chapbook “zine” and 32-page tabloid version of *Drummer*. Even earlier in 1971, wanting to expand his Leather Fraternity *NewsLeather* into entertainment coverage, he sketched out a magazine called *Drumsticks* which in 1975 became the fully fledged *Drummer* in which “Drumsticks” became a column featuring campy news items.

In the village it took to raise a magazine, the one thing John Embry personally invented about *Drummer* was its title.

Even his ambitious masthead tag line grasping for the gravitas of marching to Henry David Thoreau’s “different drummer” was shoplifted from *Drum* magazine.

Coincidentally, at the very same time in New York, Andy Warhol’s *Interview* magazine was having its identity invented by its own Jedi Council of six parents led by its editor Bob Colacello who wrote about the group genesis of *Interview* in his insider biography *Holy Terror: Andy Warhol Close Up*.

In Los Angeles, *The Advocate*, first named *The Los Angeles Advocate*, published by the Pride Foundation as its newsletter until 1968 when bought from Pride by Richard Mitch and Bill Rau, was also founded through its emerging period of more than seven years (1967-1974) by a cast of at least six characters: the founding publishers Richard Mitch (“Dick Michaels”), Bill Rau (“Bill Rand”), with artist Sam Allen, and Aristede Laurent, plus their all-important editor Rob Cole who professionalized the magazine’s character, and their columnist Jeanne Barney—as well as by Wall Street banker David Goodstein who bought Mitch and Rau out in 1974. Goodstein, firing his inherited staff as “too radical,” changed, with his new staff, the form and content of *The Advocate*, and turned its editorial politics bourgeois and conservative.

It took the competitive Embry only seven months after Goodstein bought *The Advocate* in November, 1974, to rush his startup of glossy *Drummer* in June 1975. Envious of Goodstein’s growing media power at *The Advocate*, Embry purposely in San Francisco in November 1977—and at the expense of his cash-cow *Drummer*—dubbed his newest magazine with the mirror title *The Alternate: What’s Happening in Your World*. When the talented Rob Cole started his new magazine *NewsWest* (1975-1977) which became *Dateline*, he and Embry could come to no accord because of Embry’s fear of Cole’s strength as an editor who might outperform him. So Embry worked to destroy the competition and frequently bragged in early

*Drummer* issues about how he had trounced the “inept” Cole at *NewsWest* and *Dateline*. He even coopted the title *Dateline* into the *Drummer* column “Dateline.” Continuously jealous of Goodstein, Embry slammed him and his controversial “*Advocate* Experience” by publishing a scathing feature, written to order by frequent contributor to *The Advocate*, Dan Gengle, titled “The Thing That Ate *The Advocate*,” in *Alternate* 9 (May 1979). Embry had by then poached as many “left-leaning” *Advocate* staff as possible, including, early on, Jeanne Barney and Aristede Laurent, and, later, *Advocate* editor John Preston and transman columnist Patrick/Pat Califia.

Embry, who denied he depended on the kindness of strangers, reached to the virgin-birth that Mark Zuckerberg later wanted at *Facebook*. Playing rock-paper-scissors, Embry was the only person ever to suggest himself as the sole creator of *Drummer*. Sometimes in the convenient shorthand of leather history timelines, people not familiar with the *Drummer* Origin Story name him as the founder of *Drummer*. In truth, he was the principal of the founders in the village that created *Drummer*. He was also the man most responsible for nearly all of the unnecessary drama and bad luck that always threatened the destruction of *Drummer* even after he sold the magazine to the second publisher of *Drummer*, Anthony DeBlase whose own point of view invented, after 1986, yet another version of *Drummer*, beyond our original *Drummer*, in order to cope with AIDS and political correctness.

In the way that George Washington, the “Founding Father of Our Country,” depended on the six other Founding Fathers, Embry, the founder of *Drummer*, depended morally on the two other Founding Fathers and one Founding Mother.

“The past is never dead; in fact, it’s not even past.”  
—*Requiem for a Nun*, William Faulkner