

## CHAPTER 18

### VENOM NEVER DIES The *Drummer* Blacklist

#### Summary Evidence Suitable for a Cross Examination

- **Unknown to GLBT Readers, Wicked Grudges Poison the Well of Gay Culture with Publishers of Books, Magazines, Newspapers, Archives, and Websites**
- **Feuding, Fussing, and Fighting: Robert Mapplethorpe, Larry Townsend, John Rowberry, John Preston, *Mr. Benson*, Frank Hatfield, Rick Leathers, Jim French, Colt Studio**
- **Embry vs. the LAPD, David Goodstein, *The Advocate*, LA Publishing Peers, Other Gay Magazines, His Own Talent Pool of Writers and Artists, as Well as *Drummer* Publisher #2, Anthony F. DeBlase, and *Drummer* Publisher #3, Martijn Bakker**
- **Embry's Final Grudge: Against *Drummer* Itself**

“Don't throw your past away. You might need it some rainy day.”  
—Peter Allen, *The Boy from Oz*

In the twentieth century, few people took time to take notes on the gay past while it was the speeding present they paid scant attention to from the 1960s to 1999. Recalling that *Rashomon* past which I chronicled beginning in my mid-century journals, I am no innocent naif amazed at the politics, skullduggery, and dirty laundry in gay publishing, literature, or any other gay or straight pecking group. I am an academically trained arts and popular culture analyst who, having climbed up from my father's traveling-salesman household, has had several careers inside groups way more dynamic, powerful, and byzantine than gay publishing.

Starting out at seventeen as an editorial assistant in the snake pit of the Catholic press, I survived religion (eleven years in the Catholic Seminary),

academia (graduate school plus ten years of tenured university-level teaching of literature, writing, and film), corporate business (eight years writing and managing writers for Kaiser Engineers, Inc.), and government (two years of working as a writer with the San Francisco Municipal Railway).

Subjective insider experience must always be verified objectively through internal evidence, such as found in the pages of *Drummer*. As a survivor of the twentieth century, I am an artist who is a writer who lived inside *Drummer*. If, by default, AIDS deaths made me a motivated keeper of the institutional memory of *Drummer*, then great is my responsibility to the dead for presenting true internal evidence in writing this New Journalism remembrance of things past.

### HOW THE EMBRY BLACKLIST WORKED

For the last quarter of the twentieth century, and until he died in 2010, John Embry nursed grudges. Jeanne Barney in 2006 painted a cosy, but lonely, picture recalling that partners John Embry and Mario Simon frequently whiled away the hours sitting on the front porch of one of their homes at the Russian River, going over and over the Blacklist of people they imagined had “done ’em wrong.”

#### 1. AGAINST POLICE CHIEF ED DAVIS & THE LAPD

From his early 1970s start in publishing, John Embry wanted to be a player in gay liberation politics. His personality, however, subtracted what gravitas he might have exerted as a publisher. He was strategically unwise using *Drummer*, a dedicated sex magazine, as if it were an anti-establishment political tract. Well into the 1970s, conventional gay wisdom counseled keeping politics out of newly emerging sex publications to protect the magazines from the revenge of powerful politicians who used the sex as the excuse for government censorship when it was really the politics they sought to silence. Embry was born a hard man with that kind of entitled male hubris that usually destroys guys who think they are tough.

Wanting a high-profile adversary, he tried to bait and provoke the most powerful lawman in LA, Police Chief Ed Davis, whom he variously satirized through the years as “Crazy Ed” (*Drummer* 9, page 4), and, again, through the century, showing venom never dies, twenty-four years later in his *Super MR #5*, 2000); as a “liar” (*Drummer* 7, page 68: “Chief Davis lied...”); pictured in an unflattering photo (*Drummer* 6, page 14); and fiercely parodied as a bit of a “pedophile S&M crusader” (*Drummer* 14, page 82). In *Drummer*

6, page 14, Embry blasted: “The reason the Democratic Convention is not being held in Los Angeles is the instability of its chief of police.”

Editor-in-chief Jeanne Barney poked jokes at the arresting officers, who nicked her at the Slave Auction, because their names were “Peters,” “Bare,” and “Gaily” (*Drummer* 9, page 4). Robert Opel satirized one “E. Davis” endorsing Opel’s porno mag, *Finger* (*Drummer* 9, page 43); Opel frightened the LAPD Vice Squad’s morality enforcement by stirring up the urban legend that there was, based on the reputations of Fred Halsted (*Sextool*) as well as Roger Earl and Terry Legrand (*Born to Raise Hell*), a hidden “underground gay movie network” in LA shooting porn-sex movies in gay theaters after closing time (*Drummer* 3, page 11); wanting to get a rise out of Davis, Embry showcased both those leather S&M films on the first covers of *Drummer*.

## 2. AGAINST LAWYER/PUBLISHER DAVID GOODSTEIN & *THE ADVOCATE*

Beginning with a hardon for *The Advocate*, and its publisher, David Goodstein who had bought it for \$300,000, the insolvent Embry retaliated in his first feature after his arrest by Ed Davis in “*Drummer* Goes to a Slave Auction,” *Drummer* 6, pages 12-14: “the...*Advocate* was even more inaccurate [about the Slave Auction arrest], loading its columns with attacks on Southern California Gay leaders and the Leather Community.”

Embry continued in *Drummer* 9, page 43, insulting Goodstein in a taunting display ad. Blacklisted by *The Advocate*, Embry created his own Blacklist as a response:

- Primarily because *The Advocate* 189 (May 5, 1976) had trashed leather culture in Judy Willmore’s “The Great Slave Market Bust,” an article that gave Embry no empathy in its cherry-picking of lurid quotes from the prejudicial police report; nor did Goodstein’s “Trader Dick” editorial column, “D. A. Claims Four Slaves Were Pandering,” and its companion piece, “To ‘Free the Slaves’ L. A. Plays Itself. Again,” both in *The Advocate* 190, (May 19, 1976).

- Secondly because *The Advocate*, taking vengeful fun fucking with Embry, reported on the Slave Auction without once mentioning the commercial word *Drummer*; that omission of identity deprived Embry of the free publicity and empathy he craved from other gaystream media, such as the offbeat *Advocate* competitor, *Gay Times* #43, in its sympathetic cover story written and photographed by Robert Leighton, who had been present at the event: “Free the Slaves: Full Coverage of the L. A. ‘Slave Auction’ Raid and Its Aftermath.”

- Thirdly because the word in LA was that the bad PR around the nasty counter-culture of leather and its Slave Auction arrests—fanned by the conservative *Advocate*—hurt *The Advocate*'s mission of social engineering its scrubbed image of gay politics and the gay male demographic who were interested in fashion, hot clubs, celebrities, and sex; but that sex, because it was unscrubbed and a money-maker, Goodstein tucked away inside *The Advocate* as the special “Pink Section” of personal ads titled “Trader Dick.” *The Advocate* was bourgeois and *Drummer* was bohemian. Knowing that *The Advocate* was based on politics, I made certain as editor that San Francisco *Drummer* was, like San Francisco itself, based on pleasure. Both *The Advocate* and *Drummer* helped create the very cultures they reported on. In fact, in San Francisco, the joke was that local Castronauts and Folsomaniacs threw away *The Advocate* and kept “Trader Dick” as a guide to the men and escorts offering free sex or hustler sex.

Confirming this Embry-Goodstein feud, *Drummer* editor Joseph W. Bean, a longtime insider eyewitness of leather culture, penned a wonderfully sardonic history about the Slave Auction, “L. A. Police Free Gay Slaves in 1976” in *Leather Times: News from the Leather Archives & Museum*, Spring, 2005. Bean wrote:

I have personally met at least 75 of the forty (40) men arrested, just as we have all heard from hundreds of the several dozen people involved in the Stonewall Riots. Oh, well, this is a case that is pretty well documented, even if many of the facts published by *Drummer* [i.e.: Embry] are (let's call it somewhat) inaccurate, and those published by nationally known news dailies are a shallow gloss, and even *The Advocate*'s coverage fails as good journalism. The truth can be sorted out, and should be, and might make someone rich as a movie script or Broadway play.

“Goodstein maintained,” Jeanne Barney told me, “that the typical *Advocate* reader drove a foreign car, owned a house in the Hollywood Hills, and ordered his booze by brand in bars. Which prompted me [Barney] to ask, in print, ‘That’s swell; but what about the rest of us?’”

In Gus Van Sant’s film *Milk*, screenwriter Dustin Lance Black who won an Academy Award for balancing historical drama and accuracy portrayed the elitist Goodstein as a righteous snob who so misunderstood real gay people that he opposed Harvey Milk’s populist politics. In truth, the only thing Goodstein liked about Harvey Milk was his assassination because the living Milk’s mere existence and election were Goodstein’s waking

nightmare of radicals in the streets. Goodstein, who was an easily enraged short pudge, and a self-shaming and self-described “troll” twisted with scoliosis and cursed with a high voice, was a member of the pretentious 1% of gays intent on re-educating the 99% of gays—on political correctness and proper behavior—in his tabloid paper and in his gay version of “est,” his cultish human-potential re-education program all *Advocate* employees had to endure. Needing no help from Embry or *Drummer* to be made a mockery, Goodstein’s hyper-gay version of the controversial Werner Erhard’s New Age gimmick made Goodstein and “*The Advocate* Experience” the laughing stock of San Francisco in the late 1970s even as San Francisco writers Randy Shilts and Armistead Maupin attended the opening session at the Jack Tar Hotel.

Whatever his dogmatic etiquette to control his *Advocate* staff, Goodstein, to his credit, was a bit more effective than the politically inept Embry. In 1975, while the Women’s Caucus challenged Goodstein for dedicating the majority of *The Advocate* to gay men’s news and sex ads instead of women’s issues, he was one of the gay-image makers who helped pass the California Consensual Sex Act legislation (1974) which Morris Kight and Jeanne Cordova of the National Gay Task Force dismissed as a waste; he also helped found the Gay Rights National Lobby (1976) and the Human Rights Commission (HRC, 1980). Goodstein’s money, and the cachet of the Rembrandt he exhibited in his dining room, made him socially and politically influential, but he was nevertheless revengefully banished from the White House in 1977 when the National Gay Task Force meeting with Midge Constanza, public liaison assistant to President Carter, blacklisted him. That put the Task Force on Goodstein’s own Blacklist. Embry spent his cash not on politics, but on real estate and his three years of endless legal fees stemming from the Slave Auction. As each magazine self-fashioned itself, *The Advocate* was for assimilation of middle-class queens into polite society and *Drummer* was about independent, rougher, outlaw homomascularity. Shadow-dancing Goodstein by “plagiarizing” *The Advocate* name for his own wannabe political magazine, *The Alternate*, Embry felt impelled to march into the escalating gay civil war over gender.

In the first issue of *Drummer*, on page 1, on the matter of sexual identity of masculine-identified gays *versus* queens, Embry, even though he was often campy, shot off what might be called “The First *Drummer* Masculinist Manifesto” by introducing newcomer *Drummer* to LA as a champion of masculinity *versus* the giddiness of magazines like *The Advocate*. Because Tony Deblase mentioned in *Drummer* 100 that I put emerging gay masculinity ahead of leather identity, and because writer Patrick Califia once

defined me in one of his articles as “an apostle of homomascularity,” I should acknowledge that at that time I took my populist cue for tub-thumping masculinity in my issues of *Drummer* because the evolution of men identifying as masculine was part of the roots of *Drummer* itself. Historically, *Drummer* writers Toby Bailey and Bernie Prock, proclaimed the triumphant debut of the new masculinity of leather culture in their *Drummer* column, “The Leather Journal,” in which they collected the best concepts of their previous columns in *Drummer* 6 (May 1976): “Masculinity and Masochism,” “The Masculine Fetishist,” “Men Who Go to Leather Bars,” “Clothes and the Leatherman,” and “Ageism.” As Joseph W. Bean noted in his history, *International Mr. Leather: 25 Years of Champions* (2004), I summed up this new breed of gay masculinity by coining the word *homomascularity* in *Drummer* 31 (September 1979), pages 22-24.

Embry’s on-going feud with Goodstein encouraged *Drummer* columnists to take gratuitous Blacklist swipes at anyone in anyway associated with *The Advocate*. One of his reviewers, Ed Menerth aka Ed Franklin aka Scott Masters, gratuitously trashed photographer Crawford Barton’s exquisite coffee-table book, *Beautiful Men* (*Drummer* 12, page 15; and *Drummer* 13, page 30), because my pal Barton’s publisher was Liberation Publications, the umbrella over Goodstein’s *Advocate* empire which also bought Sasha Alyson’s Alyson Publications. The hurt to 1970s *Drummer* was that the stellar San Francisco photographer, Barton, whom I thought a lovely man, subtracted himself from helping Embry’s *Drummer* in San Francisco, even as Barton, whom I interviewed on tape, helped me create my book, *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera*.

Ed Menerth was the LA reviewer who, disgusted at being an unpaid Embry apparatchik, finally untied the bondage of his puppet strings and exited the pages of *Drummer*. I was an eyewitness because Ed Menerth, who was a vocal coach, called me at least once a month crying me a river to get Embry to pay up or he would withhold his review columns as well as his serialized stories written as “Scott Masters.”

Jeanne Barney told me that Menerth, “the prolific writer was always paid during my tenure as editor-in-chief, more often than not out of my own pocket.”

Frustrated with no pay and no return of his manuscripts, he soon quit *Drummer* cold. In an end run around Embry, Ed Menerth, as his own eyewitness, wrote to me, not at *Drummer*, but at my home address on January 21, 1979. That date is important because it gave me a model for my own exit for the same reasons at the end of 1979. Menerth said:

Dear Jack: Now that my long-time association with *Drummer* is “officially” terminated would you kindly return any material of mine that has not been used.... If Embry has published [these latest pieces], I am certainly unaware of it. Just wanted to add that I think you are doing a spectacular job with the magazine, giving it tone and thrust it so badly needed. Keep up the good work. —Ed Menerth

Embry hurt *Drummer*. Defections like Menerth’s and columnist Halsted’s caused me to begin to write even more features to fill those holes left by disgruntled columnists in a golden age of sex when most would-be writers, artists, and photographers preferred getting laid, or, in Halsted’s case, chose to start his own magazine, *Package*, to rival *Drummer* by picking up specific coverage of the LA leather scene after Embry fled West Hollywood for San Francisco. Some of Menerth’s on-file writing may have appeared in *Drummer* in 1979, but Menerth, who had been part of early LA *Drummer*, had exited, as noted, a year before I ankleed out of *Drummer* December 31, 1979.

When, with *Drummer* 12, Embry in 1976-77 had to flee LA, he simply mimicked publisher David Goodstein’s destination. Goodstein, who had settled in San Francisco in 1971, had moved *The Advocate* north out of LA after he bought it in 1974 from *Advocate* founders, Dick Michaels and Bill Rand who in 1967 had started up publishing 500 copies of letter-sized pages in the samizdat style. When the tabloid, *The Advocate*, set up shop at 1730 Amphlett, Suite 225, San Mateo, minutes south of San Francisco, future *Drummer* hire Pat (Patrick) Califia was its San Francisco editor; Mark Thompson was its associate editor; and John Preston, for eleven months, its general editor—before he was fired and became a contributor to *Drummer*. While Embry had been driven out of LA by the LAPD, Goodstein was driven out by gay activists who could all too easily demonstrate outside the doors of *The Advocate* in LA, but would never ever go to San Mateo to protest anything.

Over time, Thompson matured into the most leather-savvy of non-leather journalists at the leather-lorn *Advocate*. We met in 1978 when he, investigating the mystic side of leather, came to my 25<sup>th</sup> Street home to interview me both as the author of *Popular Witchcraft* (1972) and as the editor-in-chief of *Drummer*. We sat at my kitchen table for what, I think, turned out to be for him, as a young investigative reporter, a slightly shocking conversation about the wild carnality that was frankly happening in the fast-evolving San Francisco leather scene. The gentle Thompson, familiar with sexuality gentler

than leather and coprophagy, was a writer-photographer of gay spiritualities in his books *Gay Spirit: Myth and Meaning* and *The Fire in Moonlight: Stories from the Radical Faeries*. Unafraid of opening himself up with the exciting 1970s, he eventually authored a couple of stories in *Drummer*, shot glorious photos of Robert Mapplethorpe, wrote perceptive articles about Folsom Street (*The Advocate* 346, July 8, 1982), and astutely collected and edited the anthology, *Leatherfolk: Radical Sex, People, Politics, and Practice*, which he somehow managed to get published by Alyson Press in 1990.

Suddenly, in the beat-down of the Embry-Goodstein Punch-and-Judy show, Goodstein moved *The Advocate* back to LA because he could; and Embry couldn't. He was trapped in San Francisco, in exile from his home base in LA, because the LAPD was salivating to harass him.

Was it karma that caused Embry to be the victim of his own “unrequited envy”? By his acts he seemed always in competition with Goodstein, but Goodstein and *The Advocate* sadistically ignored Embry and *Drummer*—which, every queen knows, is the best way to cut someone dead.

For his part, Embry never saw a former *Advocate* employee or associate whom he didn't hire or feature: Jeanne Barney, Pat Califia, John Preston, John Rowberry, Aristede Laurent, and others, including LA's Durk Dehner, who was mentored by Goodstein into starting up the Tom of Finland Foundation. Embry published Dehner as “Durk Parker” in the centerfold of *Drummer* 15 (May 1977) in remarkably sultry photos shot by Lou Thomas of Target Studio. Most of these talents had been let go one way or another by Goodstein who did not like “neurotic” (his word) and left-leaning (disobedient) editors and staff.

To his credit, gay peacemaker Mark Thompson, made individual repair of this publishing-war damage in his grass-roots anthology, *Leatherfolk*. Thompson reprinted writing from *Drummer* such as my essay on Chuck Arnett (*Drummer* 133, September 1989). He also considered reprinting my “*Pentimento* for Robert Mapplethorpe” (also *Drummer* 133), but I chose to reserve it as the anchor chapter for my own book about Robert.

In my *Rashomon*, I watched Embry's unrequited hate of *The Advocate* impact *Drummer* as he diverted cash, content, and energy from *Drummer* into *The Alternate*.

Unlike Larry Townsend who commanded his confused clients to keep his mail-order identity separate from Embry's, attorney Goodstein didn't even bother to sue over the possible confusion of brand names. Embry was a claim-jumper and his bait-and-switch tactic was straight out of the play book of the notorious Countrywide Publications which, in New York in the 1960s, devised look-alike publications to confuse readers into buying



its magazines. For instance, in title and layout and “feel,” Countrywide’s *National Mirror* imitated the *National Enquirer*. As Robert Stone recalled in *The New Yorker*, October 16, 2006, page 130: “The lord of this empire of the ersatz was a man we called Fast Myron...who had many such replicant....[and] ringer schlock magazines whose names were bogus household words....‘If Myron wanted to make a magazine like *Harper’s*, he would call it *Shmarpers*.”

At the same moment Embry established the first of his own “MR” brand magazines, a new gay rival came into existence, *Mr.: A Magazine of Men*, published in San Diego. On its masthead was printed: “*Mr.* is a registered trademark of Dawn Media.” Embry’s *Manifest Reader* published its first quarterly issue in December 1986. *Mr.* was first published in January 1987. Soon after, Embry began printing a great big graphic “MR” on each cover of *Manifest Reader*, imitating his competition again, as he had done with *The Advocate* and *Man2Man*. In all this publishing incest calculated to lure subscribers, Donald Hauck, the publisher of *Mr.*, affected a 1970s *Drummer* “look” in his design for his *Mr.* which, besides the *Drummer*-esque cover, type face, and page layout, featured the photographs of *Drummer* discovery David Hurles in *Mr.* 24 (1989).

When Embry asked me in 1978 to also edit *The Alternate*, I suggested he hire my friend, photographer Hurles, owner of Old Reliable Studio, as editor. The charming Hurles, who was no screamer, lasted four days before he went yowling into the streets to escape the snake pit of Embry’s office. Because nature abhors a vacuum, Embry scanned the room where the office boy/cleaner was literally running the vacuum over the wood floor. Rowberry was Embry’s understudy for anything and everything. That’s how he became editor of the little orphan *Alternate*. That *Advocate*-clone was floated on the unpaid salaries and fees owed to staff, writers, photographers, and artists, and was funded, Embry years later admitted in print, by the profits of *Drummer*.

I went deep into creating the essential *Drummer*-ness of being *Drummer*. I was a leatherman. Embry went wide into generic publishing. He was a business man. I wanted *Drummer* to have its own pop philosophy the way Hugh Hefner nurtured his *Playboy* philosophy. Embry liked my work. He never threatened to fire me. In 1978, he even asked me to start up a third magazine he wanted to title *Macho*. In the way the word *Alternate* sounded like *Advocate*, he wanted his *Macho* to beat up *Honcho* which had premiered its first edition in New York.

*Macho* was “designed,” he wrote in *Manifest Reader* 26, page 54, “to take some of the wind out of Modernismo’s new *Honcho* sails.”

If taking on Goodstein in LA was a gay cat fight, messing with straight Italian guys in Jersey might have meant a horse head in the bed.

His foolishness aside, I told him, bold-faced told him, that he could not dub his mag, *Macho*, because there was already a straight magazine named *Macho* located in South San Francisco. I had worked with *Macho* before Embry fled LA. I knew the “straight macho” *Macho* publisher would sue to protect his intellectual property.

This, history might note, is how Embry and I settled on the shortened title, *Mach*.

I also warned him that grinding out the third-banana, *Mach*, would mystify and confuse the *Drummer* faithful who were upset enough to write hundreds of letters that *Drummer* was always late.

*Mach* was Embry’s own “Virtual *Drummer*” the way *Man2Man* was mine.

*Mach Quarterly* appeared in January 1980. *Man2Man Quarterly* arrived in October 1980. The internal evidence of Embry’s editorial incest is within the first issue of *Mach*. Embry “revisited” (his word) the photos from *Born to Raise Hell* that he had published five years before in *Drummer* 3. *Mach* contributors and design layout were interchangeable with *Drummer*.

In a shell game to distance the two San Francisco magazines, he listed a single blind address for *Mach* that made it seem produced in LA: *Mach*, 7985 Santa Monica Blvd, Box 219, West Hollywood CA 90046 (page 62).

In *Drummer* 85, Embry proved the point when he confessed on page 4 of the *Drummer* Tenth Anniversary Issue that “we are even considering including the contents of *Mach* within the pages of *Drummer*.”

After Embry sold *Mach* to DeBlase, I photographed two covers: *Mach* 20 (April 1990) and *Mach* 29 (July 1993).

### 3. AGAINST HIS FOUNDING PEERS AT *DATELINE NEWS MAGAZINE*

In LA in November 1976, *Dateline News Magazine*, published by Dennis Lind, edited by *Drummer* editor Jeanne Barney, and backed by Embry, folded after one issue. Was it money? Was it politics? Was it Embry’s sabotage of the partnership of several personalities, such as his frenemy Barney, trying to establish their own ideas of gay publishing in LA? Was it a mirror of Embry’s feud with Goodstein? The minute after *Dateline* tanked, Embry danced on its grave. He revealed what had always been his secret plan: to kill any and all *Drummer* competition. Were his erstwhile business partners at *Dateline* surprised when he announced that, in less than sixty days,

dumping them, he would publish the first issue of his own news magazine, *The Alternate*, January 1977, and “magnanimously” take on the remaining subscriptions to *Dateline*? In *Drummer* 9, page 72, Embry wrote two paragraphs titled “*Dateline*’s Death”:

We will try to make some arrangements to fulfill *Dateline*’s subscription obligation in our launching of what we should have done in the first place, our own national NewsMagazine [*sic*]...It will be called *The Alternate*, and it will be all ours [Embry’s].

He added in *Drummer* 10, page 76: “*Dateline*...was to have been *our* [italics added] publication...”

In *Drummer* 6, page 4, before the death of *Dateline*, the editor’s column in *Drummer* had been titled “Date Line” which Jeanne Barney renamed “Getting Off.”

Answering my questions about the news magazine, *Dateline*, Jeanne Barney wrote me on September 23, 2006:

The main reason *Dateline: The NewsMagazine of Gay America* collapsed are these: 1) I had sole editorial responsibility for it, in addition to *Drummer*; 2) Given that the first issue had been put together during and immediately after The Great Slave Auction of ’76, I was stretched even thinner; and 3) *By the time we were supposed to be putting together the second issue, I’d already had it up to here with Embry and, indeed, was in the process of leaving.* [italics added] John was gleeful over the demise of *Dateline*, I rather imagine it was because he could blame it on my “desertion” and what he viewed as disloyalty.

Embry was expert at absorbing small magazines. In 1971 in Los Angeles, Embry, who had been an advertising salesman hustling column inches in Hawaii, had a brainstorm. He figured if he published his own magazine, he could keep the ad revenue to himself. All he had to create was just enough editorial content to wrap as an attractant around the heart of his mail-order brochure which was where the real money was. To have a credible periodical with ad space to sell, he devised a free zine-sized gay bar magazine, a trial balloon, which he dubbed *Drummer*, in imitation (again) of the 1960s S&M magazine *Drum*, published in Pennsylvania by Clark Polak, with art direction by Al Shapiro whom Embry soon hired as art director for *Drummer*. His “proto *Drummer*,” however, was not S&M. It was a queeny bar rag filled

with camp, gossip, recipes, and ads for toupees, gay paperhanging, and the self-satirizing BlaBla Café. Those topics were already covered by the then infant *Advocate* whose advertising Embry coveted in an age when gay businesses, forbidden to advertise in the telephone Yellow Pages, turned to the gay press.

Eager to dig up an existing gay sales base, political or sexual, with its own members' mailing list, Embry approached the founding president of the Hollywood Hills Democratic Club, Larry Townsend, and his struggling "Homophile Effort for Legal Protection" organization, of which Townsend was also president. H.E.L.P. provided assistance to gays entrapped by the LAPD who would soon entrap Embry.

Townsend was editor of the twelve-page *H.E.L.P. Newsletter* and he, speaking as a novelist, told me how he always hated the burden of publishing a new issue every thirty days. Sensing an opportunity, Embry swore fealty to Townsend and his two organizations. He offered to assist H.E.L.P. publish its newsletter which he, as the new editor, quickly combined with what he had called in his first "proto *Drummer*" editorial "our brave little *Drummer*." Even though he published the Townsend short story, "The Loner," in a badly pasted layout in the first issue of his "proto *Drummer*," his next moves constituted a hostile takeover of H.E.L.P.

Townsend's *H.E.L.P. Newsletter* became Embry's *H.E.L.P./Drummer* which in June 1975, dumping H.E.L.P., became large-format *Drummer* with its own "Issue One." A legend was born. The games began.

#### 4. AGAINST HIS FOUNDING PEERS AT *DRUMMER*

At the beginning, *Drummer* was a Petri dish of creative, intellectual, and financial cultures. At the LAPD police station after the Slave Auction, Embry admitted in *Super MR #5* (2000), page 37, that he openly walked up to the man who owned the Stud bar and kissed him in some gesture of leather fraternity even though "the Stud's owner and I had been to court over an advertising bill and, when I won, he had ceased to speak to me." Was it a Judas kiss to endanger or embarrass the man in front of "twenty uniformed police" dripping with the homophobia of the raid? The ingrate Embry stirred up the deadly nightshade of his Blacklist when in *Drummer* (June 1979) he attacked the most important woman who had ever helped him, Jeanne Barney who, four years earlier, while still working for *The Advocate*, had come to hold his hand and to edit the first issues of *Drummer* (1-11).

As eyewitness editor-in-chief, I was embarrassed when Embry drew up his "bill of divorcement" from Barney. His attack was thrust on my full

attention in the last complete issue which was not gutted of my editing, “The Fourth Anniversary Issue,” *Drummer* 30, page 38. Thinking of Hester Prynne forcibly marked with an “A,” I asked Embry not to print his harsh notice against the first editor-in-chief of *Drummer*. With the divine right of publishers, he ruled what he would rue, and immediately, he revealed his moral character.

His private hit list came out of his closet as his Blacklist.

His lesson to editors, writers, artists, and photographers was, “Don’t cross me.” Nevertheless, his public denunciation of Barney poisoned the Kool-Aid at *Drummer*. Unlike Rowberry and his 1980s peers who thought of *Drummer* as a “job” interchangeable with other gay jobs, we dedicated and committed 1970s staff were not drinking it.

What no one knew in the 1970s was how Embry’s over-eager 1980s hand-puppets in his full and part-time employ, like John Rowberry and Scott O’Hara and John Preston, would take his divisive grudges and his Blacklist poison out into the nationwide gay publishing business the way the mythic “Patient Zero” spread AIDS, causing a 1980s second generation to blackball each other without knowing how the hate started.

Illustrating a kind of inherent abuse in S&M practice where ritual is sometimes confused with reality, Embry was like the leather priest Jim Kane, the property investor who rented his Pearl Street apartments to indentured masochists like Cynthia Slater happy to accept their slumdog units as no more than what they deserved from a leather top.

Embry exploited this card-carrying S&M “slave” concept to control and program some of his hired bottoms with his attitude, grudges, and untruths that they, in turn, dined off of as gossipy former *Drummer* employees spreading his Blacklist wherever they worked during the 1980s and 1990s. What happened at *Drummer* did not stay at *Drummer*.

Rowberry kept his own version of Embry’s Blacklist. When Rowberry became editor after my exit, the first thing he did, without Embry’s knowledge, was blacklist Larry Townsend who had finally consented to write his “Dear Larry” monthly advice column in *Drummer*. Two weeks before Townsend died, he told me in a recorded conversation that Rowberry fired him out of revenge. In 1979, when Embry had asked me to produce the first Mr. Drummer Contest, I told him producing *Drummer* was hard enough. I suggested that “Rowberry can manage the beauty pageant,” which the always-derivative Embry, was producing in imitation of Chuck Renslow’s International Mr. Leather Contest in Chicago. Putting Rowberry in charge of Mr. Drummer 1980, Embry invited Larry Townsend up from LA to be a contest judge in San Francisco.

Larry said, “Rowberry’s contributions to that contest were minimal. Mostly, he ran around with a clipboard, feeling up the contestants backstage at the Trocadero Transfer. I told Jeanne Barney what an embarrassing joke Rowberry had been, and,” Larry alleged, “Jeanne told Rowberry what I said.”

For years, Rowberry and Barney had been on-again-and-off-again friends, as were the sparring Hepburn-and-Tracy duo of Barney and Townsend, and the bickering trio of Embry-Barney-and-Townsend. Jeanne Barney told me that Rowberry, whom she often openly denounced with delight, had at one time in LA been close enough to give her a Miro as a gift.

However, after the 1980 Mr. Drummer Contest, when, according to Townsend, Barney told Rowberry that Townsend had poked fun at Rowberry, saying “Rowberry was a like sex-starved secretary with a clipboard,” Rowberry jumped to blackball Townsend from *Drummer*.

After a few months, when Embry, who rarely read *Drummer*, noticed that Townsend’s column was missing, he called Townsend and asked why. Twenty-eight years later, Townsend told me, “When Embry asked me to return to *Drummer*, I informed him I would if I never had to deal with Rowberry again.”

Rowberry’s reputation was known among contestants, writers, artists, and photographers. When Embry started his Mr. Manifest Contest, he tried to reframe the “sexual harassment” of leather contestants as a funny brouhaha and wrote in *Manifest Reader* 12, page 29: “Very little backstage grabbing.” In Chicago in 1985, as a pre-condition to buying *Drummer* from Embry in 1986, Tony DeBlase and Andy Charles insisted that before they would pay a dime or sign a piece of paper, Embry had to fire Rowberry. It took five minutes.

Very “LA,” Embry was a diva mogul who acted like he was head of a Hollywood studio. If staff did not do what he wanted, and if a contributor demanded payment for services, he’d thunder some equivalent of “You’ll never eat lunch in this town again.”

Just before that, in 1978 and in 1979, when I told Embry I wanted to be paid, or I’d quit, he asked me not to, sweet-talking me for a couple weeks with promises of payments and book publishing rewards. Embry was never stupid. He liked how I wrote hundreds of column inches to fill his rag and he figured my personal pals in the *Drummer* Salon might also stop contributing. When I again asked to be paid, he floated a little “threat” that he would drop my novel, *I Am Curious (Leather)*, which he had announced in *Son of Drummer*, September 1978, as “a forthcoming *Drummer* novel from Alternate Publishing.” Some threat: a year had passed since that promise.

Shortly after I exited, Embry told me that he was replacing *I Am Curious (Leather)* aka *Leather Blues* with John Preston's *Mr. Benson*, a nice-enough novella that I had personally edited for serialization which I began publishing in *Drummer* 29 (May 1979). Trying to pit Preston and me against each other, he was playing both ends against the middle. That is precisely how he grew his divisive Blacklist. That bit of intimidation forced the East Coast Preston, who was motivated by the lust all young writers have to be published, to be co-opted on the West Coast. Preston arrived at *Drummer* with his *Benson* draft but no job. After four years as a sex hustler, he claimed he found it difficult to sell his wares—that had sold in LA—to San Franciscans swimming laps in more free sex than the world had ever seen.

To make his novice career move seductively into Embry's *Drummer* Plantation, Preston knew that to get what he wanted he had to choose sides on the Blacklist to rescue his lifebuoy, *Mr. Benson*. According to *Out for Good* (p. 247), it was well known that Goodstein had taught Preston to be the enforcer of the Blacklist of writers at *The Advocate*. Preston, who had "curtly" blacklisted dozens of faithful *Advocate* writers, including the famous activist Arthur Evans, knew this divisive credential would appeal to the tempestuous Embry who envied all things Goodstein. Like most first-time novelists, Preston was desperate. He truly feared for his *Mr. Benson* because in 1979 there was no other existing publisher for it but Embry, and that manuscript was in bondage because Embry had so many puppet strings attached. Preston did not want his novel dropped as mine had been. Soon after Preston submitted and swore fealty, puppeteer Embry, sharpening his Blacklist words to a stiletto, went on to advertise the magazine-sized "book" *Mr. Benson* with the code words "original and unedited." That phrase was his cheeky swipe at my serial editing of *Benson* which readers liked in terms of the story. Embry's "book" edition was neither "original" or "unedited." In fact, all of Preston's writing required editing. Preston's friend, author Lars Eighner, wrote in "John Preston Goes in Search of an Author's Lost Manuscript," in [www.DuskPeterson.com](http://www.DuskPeterson.com):

Preston was always heavily edited [e.g.: *Mr Benson*].... Preston's stuff, which would have been perfectly clear told at a campfire, needed major surgery—often at the paragraph level—to put into print. Preston was very well aware of this, which is why he admired writers so much. Preston often told (wrote to) me that he needed a lot of editing. I thought he was being modest...until I was given the task of editing...his raw copy.

In truth, the magazine-sized “book” edition of *Mr. Benson* was no longer “original or unedited” because the manuscript had become a concordance of re-writes that was too mixed to be restored to Preston’s original draft. Protesting a bit too much, Embry wrote that “...the trade paperback edition has been completely revised [the operative eyewitness word that verifies my contention] by the author, with a revealing new epilogue from Mr. Benson himself.”

The phrase “Mr. Benson” thus became for awhile yet another pseudonymous mask for Preston himself—as if he *were* Mr. Benson. Embry shoe-horned him into a fictitious identity for marketing purposes, selling t-shirts saying “Looking for Mr. Benson” and “One of Mr. Benson’s Boys.” Fiction is not autobiography. In fact, Preston was a novice, if not ersatz, leatherman who like all hustlers could mime whatever the paying customer wanted for sex or for publishing. He knew how to strike an S&M (“Stand & Model”) pose. He merchandised himself as the *Drummer* photographer “Yank,” and as the “Dark Lord” on the cover of his *Tales from the Dark Lord*, published by the aptly named Masquerade Books. He was no more “Mr. Benson” than he was the “Dark Lord” than he was “Franny” in his best novella *Franny, The Queen of Provincetown*.

Like Embry who gestured at being a leatherman for publishing purposes, Preston seemed rather much a vanilla opportunist hooking himself up to the new leather literature which, more than gay literature itself, was hungry to recruit new writers. He calculated in the 1970s decade of very few gay magazines, after he was ejected as editor of *The Advocate*, that he might make a name for himself by hanging his bespoke leather manuscript on the S&M band wagon that was *Drummer*. Recycling his *Benson* idea with little regard for feminist politics, psychology or esthetics, he even contemplated a novel titled *Ms. Benson*, and under the pen name “James Prince” wrote a cliché-ridden spanking-and-fetish story about a heterosexual dominant mistress for *Penthouse Variations* titled “Ms. Benson’s Chauffeur.”

Conflicted about male S&M, Preston was no famous leather player in San Francisco. In search of a gateway into newly emerging gay magazine culture, he seemed rather much a “leather sex tourist” from the world of *The Advocate*. A lone ranger, he estranged himself from the wide-open fraternity of the *Drummer* Salon that even the elitist Robert Mapplethorpe liked. Even though we were polar peers in our professional relationship as author and editor, I must be morally honest about my eyewitness analysis of Preston because he died so young that he, like Mapplethorpe, never had a chance to mature fully into what his youth may have promised.



Born before him, I have lived nearly thirty more years than he whom Fate shortchanged; but, even with that empathetic perspective, I cannot ignore the *Drummer* history of my memories, my impressions, and my critical thinking about him at that time in that place in the “Preston Origin Story” where he bottomed to Embry’s publishing power. To gain the balance of others’ perspectives about Preston, the book that is essential is the admirably elegiac 1995 anthology edited by Laura Antoniou, *Looking for Mr. Preston: A Celebration of the Author’s Life - Interviews, Essays, and Personal Reminiscences of John Preston* with eulogies by twenty-seven literary friends including Antoniou, Larry Townsend, Sasha Alyson, Owen Keehnen, Andrew Holleran, Celia Tan, Carol A. Queen, Jesse Monteagudo, *Drummer* model Scott O’Hara, and 1990s *Drummer* editor Wickie Stamps. Conspicuous by his absence among the keening eyewitnesses was Preston’s Henry Higgins: John Embry.

As Cleve Jones, an intimate of Harvey Milk, finally said to the friends, fans, and idolaters of Milk, “He was not a genius and not a saint.” Among some fans, Preston’s premature death (age 49) elevated him to a certain cult status. But he died older than the Romantic poets Bryon (age 36), Shelley (age 29), and Keats (age 25), and passed about the same age as Mapplethorpe (age 42) and Milk (age 48). His being swept away in the epic drama of AIDS is a great tragedy, but that fact should not sway or coerce the subsequent history of facts and opinions about any public author’s life, personality, or oeuvre.

In 1989, no one gave Robert Mapplethorpe a Viking hero’s funeral, a memorial anthology claiming his legacy, or even a culture-war break. Instead, one hundred days after he died of AIDS, right-wing politicians, fundamentalist preachers, and vanilla gays trashed him personally and professionally in the biggest art scandal of the late twentieth century that saw him denounced on the floor of the United States Senate. That Preston died was a terrible loss; but how he lived his petulant life at *Drummer* and in gay publishing is a legitimate and essential measure of the man’s actions, at least during the turbulent 1970s. While every canonization requires a Devil’s Advocate, Preston, needing one, has not yet had one. As an eyewitness writing memoir, I am not judging him so much as I am holding him up to the same transparency to which I held my controversial Robert in my feature obituary, “Pentimento for Robert Mapplethorpe,” *Drummer* 133 (September 1989), which grew into my book about Mapplethorpe.

“Like Republicans constantly imagining what Ronald Reagan would do or say about the issue of the day, City Hall folks seem to

be channeling the late Supervisor Harvey Milk an awful lot....One of Milk's old friends is tired of all the, shall we say, "got Milk?" talk. The other day in the Castro we ran into Cleve Jones, an old Milk comrade and founder of the AIDS Memorial Quilt project, and asked him why everybody is trying to claim Milk. He said many members of Milk's community died in the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and '90s and took their firsthand knowledge of the supervisor with them....a generation of gay men was pretty much wiped out and we lost a generation of stories....[Milk] was a normal guy in most respects," Jones said. "He was not a genius and not a saint." —Heather Knight and Rachel Gordon, "Milk's Old Friend Tired of Claims to Legacy," *San Francisco Gate*, Gay Pride Sunday, June 24, 2012

Befriended by Anne Rice who cloaked herself as A. N. Roquelaure, and also wrote about S&M without being a known player, Preston figured that in the way Rice, and I, had a double career writing "literature" and "S&M literature," so might he. Constructing a public-relations dark image with his *vampyr* eyes, sunken cheeks, and sullen personality, he cultivated in the 1980s a commercial air of mystery to pull power to himself by editing collections of grateful writers. Social networking was his magic. His real literary distinction lay in his anthologies. He knew how to make people feel grateful to him during the great hysteria of AIDS dying. He was not far from the A-List Satanic aspects of Rimbaud, Verlaine, and Mapplethorpe. Yet he was no Lestat. As if he were impersonating Rice's characters, he tried to be bad, dangerous, and edgy. As a showman, he fueled his own *artiste maudit* cult by identifying himself with his own "Dark Lord." The tag line on his cover for *Tales from the Dark Lord* tub-thumped the word *erotic* twice to build his audience: "The Master of Gay Erotic Literature Presents an Incendiary Collection of Erotic Stories That Explore the Full Spectrum of Gay Sexuality."

That advertising blurb was a challenging power-grab. Iconoclast Preston wanted to usurp what the iconic Larry Townsend was famous for all his life: "The Master of Gay Erotic Literature." Preston, learning that Townsend was on the Blacklist, might have felt it was a career move to try to steal Townsend's literary stardom. I knew Larry Townsend for years, and I witnessed Preston's attempted coup. Townsend was not amused until Preston, realizing he might have gone too far, rolled over, and courted him. The dying younger author made an offer of endorsement that the older author could not refuse. Preston penned the introduction to the new edition of

Townsend's 1972 classic, *The Leatherman's Handbook*, that was published in February 1994, two months before Preston died on April 28.

Years later in 2003, Townsend sat in his home office on Sunset Plaza Drive and asked me to write a new introduction for *The Leatherman's Handbook: Silver Anniversary Edition* (2004). On his wall, I could not help but notice a framed black-and-white head shot of Preston, humbly signed to Townsend with a flattering message. When I agreed to write the essay that became "Leather Dolce Vita, Pop Culture, and the Prime of Mr. Larry Townsend," I suggested to Townsend that he should keep the leather history scholarship about his book in one place, and include Preston's earlier introduction along with mine, which he did.

According to Edmund Miller in *The Gay and Lesbian Literary Heritage*, Preston, in his soft approach to hard leather psychology, sentimentalized real-life S&M into the "S&M-Lite" of *Mr. Benson* in the very unsentimental hardcore *Drummer*. He adopted, Miller continued, the faux-shocked, faux-appalled, and stand-offish "had-I-but-known tone of [mystery novelist] Mary Roberts Rinehart." With this literary gimmick to explain himself to the New York literati he hoped would accept him, he disingenuously distanced himself from his own novella as if such "low-grade" writing about sadomasochism would damage the "real" literary reputation he craved. This attitude was one more motive for his downplaying, in his East Coast circuit, the genre of leather literature which he nevertheless, as a businessman, continued to mine for a couple more leather novels. Had he but known that *Mr. Benson*, the book he dismissively wrote "for a laugh," would crown his literary legacy.

I always thought the original manuscript of *Mr. Benson* as handed to me for serialization in late 1978 needed the authenticity of Preston's very own revising and editing, and it made sense that Preston and Embry eventually thought so as well. Even though Preston may not have liked it made public that the editor-in-chief of *Drummer* had edited *Mr. Benson*, as far as I know, beyond his general scowling at our editorial meeting, my changes and suggestions were never objected to by the heat-seeking Preston.

If pages of Preston's typewritten manuscript exist, along with all the other writers' and artists' missing *Drummer* primary work among someone's souvenirs, it would be interesting to compare his first-draft "book chapters" to the final-draft "magazine chapters" I serialized in *Drummer*. Whipping his first and only draft into shape, I did nothing to subvert his authorship or his voice. Although I left all the *Benson* original pages with Embry, who probably threw them into our office closet piled deep with the discarded makings of previous issues, I have since found in my possession

only one surviving and archived original chapter hand-typed by Preston: the last chapter of *Mr. Benson*.

Back in the day, it was thought that to control Preston as a former *Advocate* employee and as an East Coast legman and reporter for West Coast *Drummer*, Embry “Higgins” teased more work out of his “Eliza” by holding *Mr. Benson* hostage, delaying its publication as an actual trade paperback book for more than thirty-six months to keep Preston dancing to his tune while Embry blamed the delay on printers. Embry may have thought he was playing sadist to Preston’s playing masochist. In human terms, he seemed he was just being cruel to Preston, with his unnecessarily protracted tease delaying publication of that book version of *Mr. Benson* for those nearly four years (1983). Embry cited censorship problems with the printer, but, if those claims about the printer were true, those delays were caused by his, and Preston’s, absolute insistence on explicit illustrations and not by Preston’s tame text.

Lou Weingarden (1943-1989), the owner of Stompers in Greenwich Village, told Robert Mapplethorpe and me that Preston himself, fighting with Lou’s lover Bill Burke, caused another delay when Burke aka the artist Brick took his enmity out on the tempestuous Preston and withdrew the drawings he had made specifically for *Mr. Benson*. Founded at the end of the 1970s, Stompers was a boot-fetish emporium and gay art gallery. Like Robert Opel’s Fey-Way Gallery around the *Drummer* Salon in San Francisco, it was also a hive of talented Manhattan personalities and extrapolated gossip.

In the real world, as opposed to the *Drummer* publishing microcosm, author Preston would have demanded that Embry’s magazine illustrations, which were not necessary for a book, be dropped as were the drawings yanked by Brick. But during this first decade after Stonewall, gay literature was the domain of magazine publishers. Preston had no existing gay book publishers to turn to until the mid to late 1980s. Nor did I, till signed by Gay Sunshine Press who in 1983 bought my novel, *I Am Curious (Leather)* aka *Leather Blues*, as well as my short fiction for my leather anthology *Corporal in Charge and Other Stories* which was the first book collection of *Drummer* fiction. That caused Embry to add Gay Sunshine publisher, Winston Leyland, to his Blacklist.

Within leather-heritage literature, John H. Embry should be remembered as a prolific publisher of homomale S&M books, but not in the small “trade paperback” size. Having written his *The Care and Training of the Male Slave* in the late 1960s, Embry excelled in the 1970s “gay book genre” of large-format “magazine-size books” sold at magazine prices. He advertised his “Alternate Book Series” to his mail-order list as “Complete

Books in Magazine Format Lavishly Illustrated. \$9.95 Each.” His bibliography of gay fiction included a hundred titles, many of them authored by Embry as “Robert Payne” as well as by dozens of other genre writers: *Mr. Benson* by John Preston, *Slaves of the Empire* by Aaron Travis, *Captain Morgan* by Frank O’Rourke, *Cort: Imperial Warrior Slave* by Frank Albright, *The Brig* by Mason Powell, and several volumes of *Care and Training of the Male Slave* by Robert Payne. He also published magazine-format books showcasing photographers such as Rick Castro and artists such as the old master, Bill Ward, and the new master, Teddy of Paris.

What Embry did vilifying Jeanne Barney in *Drummer* 30 was an over-the-top archetype of what kinds of subtle defamation happened to everyone on the Blacklist that was viral and contagious. In publishing John F. Karr’s review of Felice Picano’s *Like People in History* in *Manifest Reader* 26 (1995), Embry revealed his West Coast bias against the so-called literary establishment on the East Coast who seemed mostly too good to write for his magazines from *Drummer* to *Super MR*. It wasn’t so much the bad review as it was the snarky personal attack on Picano whom Embry sabotaged after he had published his short story “The Deformity Lover” in *Drummer* 93 (August 1986). When the East Coast writers read Karr’s review, it would have been natural for them to dismiss with extreme prejudice any writer ever involved with Embry’s many magazines, fueling yet another round of gay civil war.

Felice Picano...has been self-consciously literary, as if he had to live up to the reputations of his fellow members of the writing group known as The Violet Quill. Indeed, in the shadow of Edmund White, Andrew Holleran, and even the over-rated Robert Ferro, Picano has been rather shrill about his participation in the group. His 1989 memoir, *Men Who Loved Me*, and especially his brand new *Like People in History*...are stilted with literary pretension, clogged with commas.

Picano’s characters...are neither likeable nor anti-heroes.... Further, Picano’s gay badinage is neither new nor witty, and his opera fanatics are rote and uninformed...the author never lets passion breathe.... (*Manifest Reader* 26, pages 92-93)

Finally, on this point, even while I was one among many blacklisted, it is only honest that I be the first to blow the whistle on myself for objective, critical reasons regarding some things I have written about Embry. In the back-lot movie musical of *Drummer*, I once had motives as strong as Fred Halsted’s or Jeanne Barney’s or Larry Townsend’s or Robert Mapplethorpe’s

or Robert Opel's to trash John Embry. He did, by my measure, all of us wrong. Did he cause actual professional harm that cost us all money for which damages and reparation could be sought? No one can prove that intuition any more than Dick Saunders in 2006 "knew," but could not prove, who it was who burgled Probe disco in LA and set it ablaze in 1981.

Was there glee in Embry's trying to contaminate us through his Leather Mafia puppets? Some of the brainwashed who drank his Godfather Kool-Aid continued to do his bidding. They perpetuated his Blacklist even post-*Drummer* when they went out for coffee or a symposium; or, worse, when they—as accomplices after the fact, or as infected victims of Embry's disinformation—carried his defamations to work as "background noise" at book and magazine publishers other than *Drummer*.

Preston, Rowberry, and the rest of Embry's chain-gang staff of "leatherboys" might have recalled the puppet Pinocchio: "To become a real boy, you must be brave, truthful, and unselfish." The first line in *Some Dance to Remember* is a warning about the dangers of living with only a gay heart: "In the end, he could not deny his human heart." In all my writing—in my constant theme of surviving in a fallen and lost gay Eden, there exists an archetypal, lubricious, viral, and disingenuous queer snake just as dangerous as the serpent that curls around straight hearts and minds.

An x-ray of Embry's Blacklist revisionism can be read in *Manifest Reader* 22 (1994) where he lied, and I select that word purposely, in his obituary for John Rowberry who died December 4, 1993. Embry's eulogy was propaganda and lies of both omission and commission. Methodist Embry broke the Protestant Ninth Commandment when he bore false witness that my "Tough Customers" was a "Rowberry concept." He also lied in *Manifest Reader* 26, January 1996, when he wrote that John Rowberry had been "editor-in-chief." In truth, there were only two editors-in-chief of *Drummer*: Jeanne Barney and I. Barney told me that she, not claimant Embry, invented the "Getting Off" title for the *Drummer* editorial column, and "Dear Sir" for "Letters to the Editor." Thirty years on, she remained adamant about Embry stealing her history of her origination of her own concept titles for columns inside *Drummer*.

When I invented my column, "Tough Customers," for *Drummer* 25 (December 1978), I did it alone. In *Drummer* 188 (September 1995), page 23, and in *Manifest Reader* 26 (January 1996), page 47, Embry claimed the creation of *Drummer* was his solo act: "It was," he wrote, "a solitary, if not immaculate, conception." He had no problem staking his claim, nor should the other founders of *Drummer* because it took a village to create its evolving identity, content, and aura.

Embry was the founding publisher. Barney was the founding Los Angeles editor-in-chief. Al Shapiro was the founding San Francisco art director, and I was the founding San Francisco editor-in-chief.

Rowberry's pecker tracks were nowhere on my work. Rowberry's name was nowhere on my *Drummer* mastheads, not even as a contributor. In fact, it was only with my last fully edited *Drummer* 30 that Rowberry's name appeared on the San Francisco *Drummer* masthead. Even then he was listed—and this is precisely accurate—not as part of *Drummer*, but as editor of *The Alternate*. While I was editor-in-chief of *Drummer* issues 19-30 (plus hybrid issues 18, 30, 31, 32, and *Son of Drummer*), Rowberry was sitting off by himself in a small office, very *mondo depresso*, very withdrawn, chewing chocolates and spying on how I managed my *Drummer* staff. He was working on *The Alternate*, and as “assistant editor” on *Mach*, had absolutely nothing to do with how I conceptualized the gestalt in my essentialist run of *Drummer*.

Rowberry water-skied in my wake: my own original feature on Pasolini and *Salo* (*Drummer* 20, January 1978) was followed a year later by Rowberry's feature on *Salo* (*Alternate* 8, January 1979). With his gift for lip-synching leather themes, Rowberry was John Embry, Jr. He was not a “Son of *Drummer*.” Like Preston, he was not even a friend of *Drummer*. He was a “Son of Embry.”

Edmund Miller writing in *The Gay and Lesbian Literary Heritage* pegged John Rowberry with a profile in an obituary summary of his talent which gives objective correlative to my eyewitness testimony: “John Rowberry (1948-1993) who has since [*sic*] become a critic and bibliographer of gay video porn, is perhaps less important as a storyteller in his own right than for encouraging writers like [Aaron] Travis [Steven Saylor] and [John] Preston when he [Rowberry] was editor of *Drummer*.”

In fact, Rowberry was never Preston's mentor for *Mr. Benson*. As noted, long before Rowberry became editor, I had accepted, edited, and serialized the entire manuscript of *Mr. Benson*, and had published five of its ten chapters eighteen months before Rowberry followed me with the full title of “editor.” The *Drummer* masthead shows that Rowberry succeeded me only as “Associate Editor” (January 1980) and did not succeed me as “Editor” until thirteen months after my exit when his job description was bumped up with *Drummer* 40 (January 1981). Even that title was a discount Rowberry fumed about because he wanted to be editor-in-chief.

Miller concluded with an insight into Rowberry's dissonance: “Though he [Rowberry] certainly plunges into all the mythic themes [the way he tried to plunge into the esthetics and erotics of *Drummer*], the vision is always a little off.” (Page 263)

Rowberry and I never had one single conversation about my *Drummer*. Nor one cup of coffee. It may sound terrible to latter-day leather discussion groups, but in the sexual class-and-caste system of the 1950s-1970s, tops like me and bottoms like him rarely spoke. Even if not overtly invoked, leather ritual behavior affected daily life and attitude. It *was* an S&M magazine after all.

When Rowberry, with empty drawers, approached me to help fill his *Alternate* pages, I explained I was identified with *Drummer* and *Drummer* only; to write for the *Alternate* would take time from *Drummer* and would confuse readers about the separation of the two magazines.

Truth be told, this was the real-life S&M pecking order and the leather culture custom at the time when I was editor-in-chief. The new-hire slave-boy, Rowberry, queeny and snotty with LA attitude, was dismissed as, we all joked, “the office boy.” He was a closet chicken hawk, and no leather player on Folsom Street. Within minutes of my exiting *Drummer*, Rowberry cozied up to the kindly art director Al Shapiro who was himself exiting because of cash and copyright issues with Embry. Rowberry sought some quick mentoring and gave Al a signed black-and-white photograph shot by Richard Fontaine that is a “signature” and characteristic picture satirizing Rowberry. In the overhead shot, looking down, he is outdoors, naked, with a long rope noosed around his neck, and he is crawling up cement stairs nude on his hands and knees, which is pretty much what he did to become editor of *Drummer* by attrition. Rowberry inscribed the photo: “Thanks, Al, for making it all possible....JWR.” Having helped Rowberry whom he did not want to work with, Shapiro shrugged, gave the photo to me as a joke, quit *Drummer*, and took employment as art director for the risqué book and video publisher, the Dirty Frenchman, at Le Salon, 1118 Polk Street.

Fifteen years later, Tony DeBlase and Joseph W. Bean, editor 1989-1993, both correctly credited the naming and invention of the “Tough Customers” column to “Fritscher” in *Drummer* 188 (September 1995), the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Issue. Joseph Bean specified: “The first generation of *Drummer* offspring are the spinoff publications created by the publisher and staff... *Tough Customers*...started as pages devised by Jack Fritscher, and became a new publication when Paul Martin and I hatched the [separate magazine] idea years later [in 1990].”

In *Drummer* 143 (October 1990), pages 18-22, I purposely re-staked my intellectual claim to my “Tough Customers” concept in the feature article I wrote for Mikal Bales and Zeus Studio titled, “Radical Nipples: Photography by Zeus Studios and a Few Other Tough Customers.”



My “Tough Customers” had import as the first self-fashioning identity column of leather masculinity filled by the readers. With the dawn of video on the horizon, I had planned to develop my “Tough Customers” concept into a line of *Drummer* videos. Considering the media mentoring I did aiding the startup of the video businesses of Old Reliable (1981), of Chip Weichelt’s Academy Training Center (1989), and of Beardog Hoffman’s Brush Creek Media (1995), I could have made Embry a million dollars in video that would have supported *Drummer* forever. Instead, I started my own company, Palm Drive Video in 1982.

“Tough Customers” as a high-concept was also “borrowed” for the tag line inside an ad for the wannabe *Drummer* leather bar in Houston called “The Drum” (*Drummer* 65, page 78).

Embry was still spewing in 1995, zinging in little digs in his *Manifest Reader* 26, page 54, in which he, Saint Embry, protesting too much how very conscious he was of writing true history in *Drummer*, misspelled my last name. I mention that only because it was a small thing indicative of his larger dismissiveness, and an index of his pettiness. *Fritscher* is no harder an ethnic name to spell than John *Embry* or Mark *Hemry* or Sam *Steward* or Jim *Stewart* or Robert *Mapplethorpe* or Robert *Opel* if one is paying attention. He could have practiced writing my name on those checks he never paid me. This über-publisher’s accidental-on-purpose blunder was a monkey-wrench tossed to deflect research accuracy regarding the “true history” he claimed to value. It was as if he knew Google was coming. To a debutante of Embry’s generation raised on the manners of Emily Post, misspelling a name is a major social *faux pas* because one always spells given and surnames exactly as spelled by the person named.

Pronunciation follows similarly. For instance, it insults the memory of Robert Mapplethorpe when someone chats me up about “Mmm-*Apple*-thorpe,” and I, without any particular inflection of accusation, reply with Robert’s own pronunciation, “May-pole-thorpe,” and the questioner continues to say “Mmm-*Apple*-thorpe.”

In that same *Manifest Reader* 26 in which Embry claimed he was feeling like gay avatar “Scarlett O’Hara,” (page 49), his politically correct feminist reviewer John F. Karr took a swipe at my “*Drummer* novel,” *Some Dance to Remember: A Memoir-Novel of San Francisco 1970-1982*. In the course of damning Felice Picano’s *Like People in History* (page 92), Karr griped that the publishers of both books and some reviewers, had touted each as “the gay *Gone with the Wind*.” In fact, before Karr reviewed my novel, David Perry in *The Advocate* called *Some Dance* the “gay *Gone with the Wind*.” Karr slammed his review shut with: “I only finished the book [*Like People*]

because my editor [Embry] told me I had to in order to review it.”

Such hand-jive gives some measure of the longevity and reach of the Embry grudge system and Blacklist. Six years after *Some Dance* was published and won a Finalist Lambda Award, Karr lumped Picano and me together: “This isn’t the first time we’ve seen ‘The gay *Gone with the Wind*’ bandied about on a dust jacket.”

Margaret Mitchell’s novel, and the movie that played repeatedly at the Castro Theater in the 1970s, was a paradigm of gay survival. In an age of AIDS, I wanted to make that connection. In *Some Dance to Remember*, the protagonist’s name is specifically Ryan O’Hara and his nickname is “Scarlett O’Hara.” The “American Civil War” and the “Burning of Atlanta” prefigure the “gay civil war over gender” as well as the “burning of the Barracks on Folsom Street” at the same moment that GRID/HIV/AIDS and the VCR changed gay culture in 1981.

Despite Karr’s politically correct *a priori* feminist principles that estranged him intellectually from considerations of homomascularity, he was nevertheless an insightful arts critic whom I liked personally. As a principal reviewer for the *Bay Area Reporter* in San Francisco, he penned generous reviews of my books and videos, and particularly my magazine work, for which any writer would always remain grateful.

Jack Fritscher is an anarchist of gay sexual prose, the man who invented the South of Market prose style (as well as its magazines, which have never been the same without him). In anthologizing his work from the dozen magazines in which it originally appeared, under the title *Corporal in Charge of Taking Care of Captain O’Malley and Other Stories*, Gay Sunshine Press has done Fritscher’s fans and his initiates a favor, and also thrown down a gauntlet (black leather, of course) to other writers. Fritscher’s writing is a cold slap in the face, an awakening to words and the expression of sexuality that never loses its sting....His sex is decidedly unsafe, most at home with spit and slaps, piss and dirty rec-tums. It is aggressive, abusive, extreme, and at times (I have to say it), politically incorrect....Fritscher has roamed the furthest corners of sexuality, and can lead you on head trips unequalled by any other gay writer I know of. You may resist, as I did, some of the aggression, machismo, and sexual practices, only to be won over by Fritscher’s prose....Fritscher is a knee in the groin. —John F. Karr, *Bay Area Reporter*, June 27, 1985

When I investigated emerging homomascuine queer theory in the fiction of *Some Dance to Remember*, his feminist bias overcame his esthetic analysis of the text he rejected as too “butch” in his review “*Some Dance to Remember: The Rise and Fall of Butch*,” *Bay Area Reporter*, April 12, 1990. Why did Embry hire a male feminist to review books and videos for the masculine-identified readers of his *MR* magazines? May masculinists write for feminist publications? *The Harvard Gay and Lesbian Review* told me, literally, it did not know how to review my novel *The Geography of Women: A Romantic Comedy* (1998) because it was a story about women written by a man. Goodbye to Henrik Ibsen’s Hedda and Nora! So long to Tennessee Williams’ Amanda, Blanche, Stella, Maggie, Serafina, Violet Venable, Alexandra Del Lago, and Mrs. Stone! Gore Vidal claimed, “There is no actress on earth who will not testify that Williams created the best women characters in the modern theatre.” That *Gay and Lesbian Review* sexism from the 1990s seems a subject for another GLBT literary panel. Karr was a prolific journalist. So Embry paid little heed to Karr’s politics because the disciplined Karr could meet deadlines with column inches to fill his hungry magazines.

Surviving my thirty years with Embry, I moved on professionally, like others on the Blacklist. I absorbed Embry’s enmity, sucked it up, got a hard-on watching him self-destruct, and let my work speak for itself.

Following Larry Townsend’s contentious, and temporary, 1980s “peace accord” with Embry in order to get free publicity for his LT Publications in *Drummer*, I sent Embry a kiss-and-make-up letter on August 25, 1989, ten years after our breakup, and one year before his rental Karr tried to run me down. I saw no reason to exclude Embry from my work in 1990s *Drummer* and I wanted to include him in the pages of this book which was already several years into production.

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Mr. John Embry  
PO Box [number deleted]  
Forestville CA 95436  
August 25, 1989

Dear John,

So much time has passed since we have seen each other and talked that the statute of limitations must have run out on whatever, as they say in Hollywood, creative differences colored our past in the highly charged '70s. Playing in *The Rose*, Bette Midler says to her audience:

"I forgive you. Will you forgive me?" If hatchets need burying, let's do it. If there is no hatchet, then let's put our heads together.

My proposal to you is as professional as personal. *Drummer* has asked me to write a continuing column on the history of international leather called "Rear-View Mirror." [See *Drummer* 125, February 1989, page 82, for the DeBlase announcement of Fritscher anchoring "Rear-View Mirror."] I mentioned to Tony, who had also thought of you and heartily agreed, that the time had come to document the history of your conception and invention of *Drummer*. (The LA stuff, Jeanne Barney et al., Ed Davis, your exodus to SF, etc.). However, we'd like to consider a broader interview that is you telling your story for journalistic and gay popular history from even before *Drummer*; then including *Drummer*; finally progressing to your new and current projects and publications.

If this very professional approach pleases you, we can do the interview in person, on videotape, so that your story and your image can exist for gay archives present and future; or we can do it over the telephone as we chat and record your history.

In the issue of *Drummer* due out around September 20, I have an article on Robert Mapplethorpe. I recently was on the interviewee end of a five-hour recorded phone call from Manhattan, as Robert had given a list of friends to the journalist Patricia Morrisroe (who has a major Random House book contract and has interviewed RM's family). It turns out Ms. Morrisroe said that I am the only one on that particular list from the '70s who has survived....Because the A-word has so decimated our ranks, and because you and Al Shapiro and I happened more than one gay generation ago, it's important that you tell your story before others start telling it. As I recall, we had a basic human respect for each other, more than a little professional respect, and some creative fun. (I'll never forget your always trying to put dialog balloons on photo spreads and me always trying to pull them off, and both of us getting our way alternating issues.)

Besides, to tidy things up, it would be nice to collaborate once again. When you arrived in SF, you had a new mag that needed a voice; I had a voice and needed a mag. Ours is almost a boy-meets-boy comedy. You didn't give me my start in publishing, but you certainly gave me a free-handed and free-spirited opening that with you and Al Shapiro (who truly became my intimate friend who drew his last drawing for me) turned *Drummer* into a gay popular culture publishing phenomenon. I like to remember those days in the best of lights, because when they were good, they were very good, and because these days, almost ten years into the plague, with so much death all around us, anyone a person knew "then" has become valuable not only as a link to our personal and gay-group past, but as a

survivor who can tell the whole new generation who has come out in the last ten years all the different versions of the way we once were in the golden days when we were Inventing It All.

Please write or call. We live so close to each other here in the country. We can meet for coffee or we can set up a date for the interview, or you can say, what I hope you won't say, thanks, but no thanks. The point is for us survivors to get your story, who you are, where you came from, how you invented an institution, and where you are and are going.

Of course, best regards to Mario, who, if he likes, is most heartily welcome to be part of the interview, because he too has been a part of this whole scenario which has gotten bigger than any one of us.

Sincerely,  
Jack Fritscher  
cc. Anthony F. DeBlase

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Embry, who never buried a hatchet, never responded to my 1989 letter. Perhaps he declined because of his undying disdain for Tony DeBlase. Nine years later in early 1998, he himself phoned me for the first time in twenty years. He was finally a one-man band. In our leather Bloomsbury, he had achieved Virginia Woolf's dream: He had a room of his own, "five-hundred pounds a year," and a computer. He wasn't so much a solo act as he was abandoned by everyone "who done him wrong." As I had brushed up on graphic design for *Drummer* at UC Berkeley, he had learned PageMaker at Santa Rosa Junior College. He proposed to trade some of my photos and stories on disc, not for pay, but for free ad space for my Palm Drive Video. He was designing and building pages for his new magazine venture, the "MR" brand magazines, *Manifest Reader*, *Manhood Rituals*, and *Super MR* which combined *Manifest Reader* and *Manhood Rituals*.

Neither of us gentlemen made any mention of our past other than to agree that the 1970s had been "the Golden Age of *Drummer*." When *Drummer* changed owners in 1986, DeBlase had Embry sign a non-competition clause. When the limit expired in the 1990s, Embry jumped back in business. As I had done in the 1980s with both *Man2Man* and the *California Action Guide*, Embry followed suit and created yet another "Virtual *Drummer*": his own *Manifest Reader* series.

In the third act of his life, waxing nostalgic for those classic issues of 1970s *Drummer*, he decided to revive those glory-days. In his 1990s resurrection, in *Manhood Rituals 2*, he editorialized on the inside front cover:

But talk about de javu [*sic*! Our *Drummer* business manager Jerry Lasley [who arrived and disappeared in the 1980s through the revolving door that was *Drummer*] has reappeared to again do what he did so well....It would have been something to have had Marge [aka Marj as the lady signed her name], our lady typesetter pounding out the copy, cigarette hanging out of her smiling mouth. And A. Jay, our art director, and Jeannie [*sic*] Barney and/or John Rowberry editing. We even received a photographic offering from former editor Jack Fritscher of what he claims Robert Payne *should* look like. Out of that long ago, there were writers and artists and photographers whose contributions made magic.

The cover-quality photo I had sent him was of my Palm Drive Video model, Chris Duffy aka Bull Stanton. My little joke was that after all these years a photograph of the fictional “Robert Payne” ought to have aged a bit into a guy at least thirty-something and hot. Making no mention of *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*, I offered a sexy pseudonymous face to fit the pseudonymous “Robert Payne” to whom the unimaginative Embry had never tried over thirty years to give a signature “face” that identifies a brand. As it happened, Embry fell for the photo of Chris Duffy, but not to front “Robert Payne.”

In *Manhood Rituals* 3 (1999), page 2, he wrote:

We have been pouring through the first 100 issues of *Drummer*, not so much to lift, or re-live, but to check what to seek out, what worked and what to avoid duplicating. It is not a simple task but one pleasantly filled with powerful memories of other times and people and circumstances.

We even looked up our third issue of *Drummer* which might have been no great shakes by today’s publishing standards but, considering there was no one else doing it, issue #3 wasn’t so bad.

Embry’s claim-jumping ego and his revisionist history, declaring “no one else was doing it,” conveniently denied all the pioneer magazines that existed around the startup of *Drummer* twenty-five years earlier in 1975. *Drummer* was no immaculate conception born in a vacuum. *Drummer* had gay pop-culture roots. In truth, Clark Polak’s *Drum* (1964-1967) had been “doing it” with a circulation of 10,000; *Queen’s Quarterly* (1969-c. 1980) was “doing it”; *Blueboy* (1974-2007) was “doing it”; so was *After Dark* (1968-1982). Their publishing standards in form and content were

professional. In fact, only six issues after *Drummer* 3, Embry acknowledged the superiority of the competition in *Drummer* 9, page 72, writing about *Blueboy*:

This publication, out of Miami, has made great strides in circulation, appearance, and national acceptance....Its pages are lush with color, arty as hell, and they have come as close as anyone to the oft aimed at ideal of a “gay *Playboy*.”....It even has some “straight” advertisers.

In March 1977, when Embry offered me the San Francisco job of editor-in-chief, I almost turned him down. His LA version of *Drummer* was inferior in form and content to the competing magazines he envied. He himself was a train wreck of psychological and legal troubles from the Slave Auction bust. Nevertheless, I took his offer as a challenge because I saw I might actualize the potential of *Drummer* among the hundreds of leathermen I knew well enough to reflect them and their interests. Two cards that I didn't know were in the hand Embry dealt me were the “wild deuce” of his cancer, and the “Joker” of his obstructionist personality.

To resurrect some of “his” 1970s greatest hits from *Drummer*, he asked to reprint my “Cigar Blues” and “Prison Blues.” Although Embry had never put my byline on the cover of *Drummer*, he surprised me with cover billing when he actually printed my name for “Cigar Blues” on *Manhood Rituals* 3 (1999). In *Super MR* #5 (2000), he republished my “Gay Deteriorata” from *Drummer* 21 (March 1978). Was Embry being passive-aggressive? Whereas in *Drummer*, Al Shapiro had designed my *Desiderata* satire as a full-page hippie poster, Embry buried the text on the masthead, reduced it to an eye chart of around eight-point type with my name bylined in maybe a four-point. In the same *Super MR* #5, he reproduced two Sparrow-Fritscher photos of Mike Glassman aka “Ed Dinakos” on pages 6 and 82, crediting them insufficiently to my former lover “David Sparrow” who had died of AIDS in 1992. He also published a half-page photo ad, page 57, for my Palm Drive Video feature *Sunset Bull*. When he serialized “Prison Blues” which he re-titled “Confessions of a Jailhouse Tour Junkie,” he listed the title of the feature itself on the covers of both *Super MR* #6 (2000) and *Super MR* #7 (2001).

In 1975, as the forty-something Embry had relied on stills from the 1970s movie, *Born to Raise Hell*, the seventy-something Embry wanted to publish my photos of Duffy who starred in my 1994 feature, *Sunset Bull*.

Embry famously lacked graphic courage and edge for his covers. Most of the eleven-year gallery of covers he chose for his *Drummer* were not so hot,

often predictable, and repetitious. Perhaps with censors, printers, distributors, retail sales, and photographer and model fees driving him, he selected, at his worst, generic torsos, or, at his best, pleasant Mr. Drummer contestants who posed for free. Very few of his covers leapt off the page. He had erred on his campy “Cycle Sluts” cover (*Drummer* 9). He had trashed the “Authentic Biker-for-Hire” Mapplethorpe cover (*Drummer* 24). Yet he was on the phone, not exactly hat in hand, but drumming up “my “writing and photography to recreate “his” nostalgia. In *Super MR #5* (2000), page 6, Embry recanted his strange grudge against the 1978 Mapplethorpe cover when he reprinted that cover with the caption: “Robert Mapplethorpe’s first cover anywhere was on...*Drummer* 24 due to the efforts of then-editor Jack Fritscher.”

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The Chris Duffy Story:  
Mr. America, Chris Duffy, in *Sunset Bull*(evard)

Embry was lured by Chris Duffy’s universal appeal. Duffy had “It.” My cover photos of Duffy had appeared on several magazines rivaling Embry’s on the news stands: *Thrust* (November 1996), *International Leatherman* (March 1997), and *Bear 62* (September 2000). My photos of Chris Duffy also appeared in the coffee-table photo book, *American Men* (London, 1994), and on the cover of the second American edition of *Corporal in Charge of Taking Care of Captain O’Malley* (2000).

Embry, however, had a wicked backhand. Was it spite or stupidity? He squandered the pictures of the international bodybuilding champion Chris Duffy who was passionately followed by legions of fans. He published him not on the glossy cover in color, but six times on interior pages in black and white in *Manhood Rituals 2* (1998), page 32 (as a particularly bad “inkblot”); and twice inside *Manhood Rituals 3* (1999), pages 27 and 35—with an additional photo credited to “David Sparrow” which he must have found buried in the *Drummer* files he claimed he “bought” from Robert Davolt; and twice in *Super MR 6* (2000) on page 16 as well as on page 76 in a Palm Drive Video ad I took in trade; and in *Super MR 7* (2001), page 42, as part of his Wings Mail Order Catalog.

His spiraling downgrade of the spectacular Mr. America Chris Duffy, fresh off his own ESPN bodybuilding show, was an esthetic and marketing blunder. Duffy’s face and body sold thousands of magazines and videos. Once again, Embry made a graphic design mistake. On cheap rag paper, his inkblot presentation of Chris Duffy lacked the punch of a glossy color cover showcasing Duffy’s “universal appeal.”



Embry lost synergy. A Chris Duffy color cover would have bumped up sales of his magazine as well as my video, *Sunset Bull*, being sold by his own mail-order company, Alternate and Wings Distributing.

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Distance, rather than dinner and dancing, defined Embry and me. Through his attitude-free employees, my pals, Rick Leathers and Frank Hatfield, he made a couple more overtures about writing and video. Frank Hatfield aka the *Drummer* author, Frank O'Rourke, was also his own mail-order company as Hatfield House producing and selling S&M audiotapes, and as XYZ Enterprises selling video from a Guerneville P. O. Box at the Russian River.

Frank Hatfield told me that he had worked internationally as a diplomat-spy. It was as if he wanted me to take him for a double-agent reporting to both Embry and me. He colorfully claimed he was a convicted gay bank robber, "an international bank robber," whom I interviewed on tape. He told me he was connected to the Mafia and had celebrated New Year's Eve with Meyer Lansky in Havana the night before Castro took over Cuba on January 1, 1959. One-upping every prison fantasy in San Francisco, he had done time, he said, at San Quentin before becoming advertising director, beginning in *Drummer* 54 (June 1982).

When Embry sold *Drummer*, Hatfield moved north of the Golden Gate Bridge with him. On the split-personalities masthead of *Manifest Reader*, featuring John H. Embry as publisher and Robert Payne as editor, Hatfield was listed as "Associate Editor Frank O'Rourke" and as "Frank Hatfield, Distribution." He was also manager of Embry's Wings Distributing and Alternate mail order, running the book-and-video business out of Canyon One Road under the redwoods in Rio Nido, one village east of Guerneville, where he lived in a house owned by Embry who was his landlord. Alternate Publishing had a P. O. Box one village to the south in Forestville. Their mass-mailer of brochures and magazines was located one more village to the south in Sebastopol. The "Buffalo Enterprises" bulk-mailing service Embry chose happened to be the mailer, and a friend, I had used since 1985 for my Palm Drive Video brochures. I hoped this zero degrees of separation was not a cosmic force field dooming us to be locked together as old souls forever.

Frank Hatfield facilitated Wings' distribution of the features I was directing for my Palm Drive Video. He sold hundreds of my videocassettes for Embry. Soon enough, payments due fell in arrears exactly as had the payment of salaries and fees due at *Drummer*. In no causal order, Hatfield

trying his best to conduct daily business, was attacked and bitten severely under the armpit at the Russian River by a large dog that tried, he said, to eat him. He died soon after. Or maybe he joined the disappeared. Perhaps his name wasn't Frank Hatfield.

During those years, only once did Embry and I physically see each other.

In March 1996, Rick Leathers, who had begun working with Embry as early as *Drummer* 56 (August 1982), invited Mark Hemry and me to a reception Embry was hosting upstairs at his 18<sup>th</sup> and Castro Alternate Publishing office, the Wings Galleria. In the zero degrees, my friend, the Hun, who was a frequent artist in *Drummer*, had discovered a protégé in "Teddy of Paris." In 1994, the Hun had produced an attractive run of sixteen Teddy prints titled *Commando Three*. The severe leather-discipline drawings immediately inspired Embry into debuting the magazine-format book of Teddy drawings, *Magnifique* (1996). Two months later in May, Mark Hemry and I visited Teddy in Paris where our two documentary videos of New Orleans photographer, George Dureau, were inducted into the permanent collection of the Maison Europeenne de la Photographie. Dureau's work was featured in "Maimed Beauty," *Drummer* 93 (1986), pages 8 through 11.

At the Wings Galleria, Embry had not changed much physically, and his temperament was jolly enough, but, for all the *bonhomie*, a personal gulf yawned between us. Trading on nostalgia, we yet once again bonded professionally through the next years.

On June 20, 2000, Mark Hemry sent Embry the discs he had requested for my original-recipe *Drummer* articles such as "Prison Blues," as well as newer pieces such as "Horsemaster," "Wait Till Your Father Gets Home," and "RoughNight@Sodom.cum" (*cum* is correct), and a half-page ad for PalmDriveVideo.com. Embry and I were growing old separately together, and *Drummer* was our adult child who had died a year earlier in September 1999. I remember that death date specifically because *Drummer* and I had shared June 20 as a birthday. In 2000, I turned sixty-one, and Embry turned seventy-four, and *Drummer*, if it had survived the twentieth century, would have turned twenty-five.

Embry, sticking strictly to my 1970s writing, republished "Cigar Blues" (from *Drummer* 22, May 1978) with six of my Palm Drive Video photographs in *Manhood Rituals* #3; and "Prison Blues" (from *Drummer* 21, March, 1978) in *Super MR* #6 (2000). Inside Mark Hemry's package, I enfolded a handwritten personal note that I tried to conceive without irony:

Dear John Embry,

Congratulations on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Drummer*. You created a legend with that magazine, and I am proud I was part of your dream. Thanks for making me your first and only San Francisco editor-in-chief. In many minds, we are inextricably bound together. *Wunderbar!*

Yours as always,  
Jack Fritscher

Finally, on the subject of the Blacklist that traveled poisonously cross-country with Embry's apparatchik John Preston, I must add the "fair play" which historical novelist, Steven Saylor as Aaron Travis on Embry's payroll, gave me in his *Drummer* reviews of my books, such as *Corporal in Charge of Taking Care of Captain O'Malley* and *Leather Blues* in *Drummer* 81 (February 1985). Travis was also the creative "associate editor" of fiction to "editor" Rowberry; so he stood in proximity to my work published at the same time by Rowberry in East Coast magazines published by George Mavety, such as *Inches* and *Studflix: The Gay Video Magazine*. Saylor/Travis, while he adroitly pioneered the first partial *Drummer* "Fiction/Fetish Index," even with its alleged Blacklist "omissions," seemed to have escaped the Embry experience at *Drummer* with his spirit in tact, although he wrote in former *Drummer* model Scott O'Hara's *Steam* magazine (Volume 2, Number 1, 1994), that working at Embry's 1980s *Drummer* "was mind-boggling and mind-numbing—we were underpaid, disrespected and over-stimulated on a daily basis...."

However, in Saylor's obituary for Rowberry in *Steam* (Spring 1994), he miss-spoke when he wrote that Rowberry "created all the MMG [Mavety Media Group] magazines virtually by himself." Saylor ducked and covered with the word *virtually*. His adverb and verb choices should be carefully examined, because history is in this way revised. Saylor meant that as a packager for Mavety Media Group, Rowberry filled the existing magazines as a solo editor by collecting the talent together between the covers. In my meetings with Rowberry in his MMG office South of Market, he was alone, but he had plenty of technical, financial, and corporate backup from the "Italians" in New Jersey. Rowberry did not start up, nor did he invent, the magazines, *Just Men*, *Inches*, *Skin*, *Skinflicks*, and *Studflix* which, my stream of archived letters prove, I had helped Bob Johnson create and start during 1979-1981, years before Rowberry came on board.

Rowberry may have launched *Foreskin Quarterly* (1985)—with photographs I had obtained from my friend, German art-scatologist Gerhard Pohl—as well as *Uncut* (1987), but both magazines were commercial applications of the sincere and passionate writing of Joe Tiffenbach and Bud Berkeley in their *Uncircumcised Society of America (USA) Newsletter* and their book *Foreskin* (1983). Tiffenbach, whose name was Lou Alton, was the photographer who shot the cover of my *Drummer* 20 (January 1978), as well as the photos for my article, “Arab Death,” which I bylined as “Denny Sargent,” my protagonist in *I Am Curious (Leather)* in my *Son of Drummer* (September 1978). Those Tiffenbach photos of a nude young man rolling on wheels in the sand had been shot on assignment earlier in 1975 in Palm Springs. Having paid Tiffenbach for the shoot, Embry insisted that I reuse the three-year-old images for *Drummer* 20 because he wanted to squeeze his money’s worth from the generic photos that in sunny concept and vanilla content really had nothing specific to do with leather or with *Drummer*.

The “Prince of Reprints” Embry ordered me to re-write “Arab Death” from pages he had torn out of some men’s adventure magazine from the 1950s. The source was something like *Argosy*, one of those mags with an American air pilot tied spreadeagle with a busty Nazi wench poised to torture him. In fact, many of the longer written features in Embry’s *LA Drummer*, such as the “Great Sadists in History” series, especially when signed by “Robert Payne,” were re-writes plagiarized out of 1940s and 1950s men’s pulp-adventure magazines and history books that were popular when he was a teenage masturbator. Some examples of Embry/Payne’s “found” articles printed as “filler” in *Drummer* 14 were “The Third Degree” and “The Foreign Legion”; and, in *Drummer* 15, “Devil’s Island” and “The Greek Way.” At that time, my analysis of this theft of uninspired and stolen stories indicated that *Drummer* needed all the mouth-to-mouth resuscitation original writers could give to make it breathe fresh on its own as a gay men’s adventure magazine. With that in mind, and to meet our monthly deadlines, I began writing my own original bespoke stories and features.

Decoding Rowberry personally and professionally in his magazine and video writing, I witnessed that Rowberry, who never met a twinkie chicken he didn’t like, was deeply disturbed, even emotionally disturbed, by mature hairy men and facial hair. From 1984-1996, I sported a very full, long, and red-black Walt-Whitman beard down below my pecs. Rowberry once demanded of me: “Why? Why? What’s it mean? What’s it for?” I responded: “To wrap around cocks.” He never asked again. His myopia for twenty-one-year-olds who looked fourteen, made him shortsighted as a journalist and a reviewer of gay culture. He did not get the emerging concept and

mature needs of the homomale population making an erotic virtue of its own ageing by glamorizing male secondary sex characteristics the way I had begun in *Drummer* with my theme “In Praise of Older Men” and with my features about Daddies that six years later evolved into the new bear mystique.

At age 45, John W. Rowberry died as an adolescence-obsessed LA queen whose horizon, limiting to gay psychology, was “Youth” itself. He completely missed the gay pop-culture phenomenon of bears that publishing guru Richard Bulger glamorized in *Bear* magazine (1987) and that I then folded back into *Drummer* 119 (July 1988) along with the new gay-applied term, “mountainman,” as a category with “biker,” “cop,” “cowboy,” and “daddy.” The 1980s bear concept of butch, rugged, and hairy men grew out of 1970s homomale in *Drummer*. Insofar as Rowberry did not “get” bear masculinity, did he also not understand leather masculinity in the issues of *Drummer* he edited before he was fired by Embry? He was so personally distant from the *Drummer* mystique that his introductory biography to his personal papers catalogued at the Young Research Library for Special Collections at UCLA significantly listed all the magazines he worked for, but made no mention of his stint at *Drummer* which he never really valued.

Unlike all the real-world talent who rebuffed John Embry, slave-boy John Rowberry, like sex-hustler John Preston before him, sold his soul to Alternate Publishing in order to be published. Rowberry virtually moved bag and baggage into Embry’s “Hotel California”—that particular ring of gay hell where, if you check in, you can never leave. *Drummer* exacted a huge toll on Rowberry. His business identity destroyed his personal identity. In the world’s worst tutorial, Embry’s tactics became Rowberry’s values. Because women are born to teach men irony, Jeanne Barney drew back the curtain when she observed the following damage:

As for Rowberry’s lover, the art collector, Charles “Bob” Musgrave, well, he basked, not entirely by choice in Rowberry’s light. There was room for only one star in that family, and that was John Rowberry himself.

Charles Musgrave, an artist and a so-called “known art collector,” was a person of interest, if not a suspect, in the detective case Robert Davolt later raised about “the missing art at *Drummer*.” Musgrave, with his own degrees of easy access to the wealth of art piled around Rowberry’s feet, was also listed as a contributor, for instance, in the Embry-Rowberry *Manifest* (without the word *Reader*) 11, April 1983. An example of Musgrave’s talent was

printed as a book review column in *Drummer* 41 (September 1980), page 67. Musgrave is so smug about airing his own superiority to the books he chose to review that he unwittingly deconstructed Rowberry's editing skills and judgement. First: None of the three books fit the interests of *Drummer* readers and should not have been reviewed at all. Second: If the books were as bad as Musgrave said, there was no reason to review them other than to let Musgrave and Rowberry vent their inner kveens. Their tea-for-two salon around *Drummer* was way different from my international salon around *Drummer*. Years later, a photograph shot by Musgrave was dug up from the archives to illustrate Guy Baldwin's "Ties That Bind" in *Drummer* 131 (July 1989), page 13.

Before Embry and I, in our third act, matured into "working together" again—at arm's length, the following 1979 "Notice," repeated here from an earlier chapter, but with additional annotations, is typical of how Embry waxed his moustache and twirled his cape as he pinned a "Scarlet Letter" on Jeanne Barney who claimed in 2006 that Embry still owed her thousands of dollars, plus interest.

What was Embry's mystique? His ability at fascination? In spite of everything, Barney remained on-again-off-again friends with Embry for thirty-five years until he died in 2010. Like Embry, Larry Townsend ran equally hot and cold, from estranged to ambiguous, with his frenemies from 1970 to his death in 2008, when he was on the outs with both Embry and Barney. I myself was bewitched, bothered, and bewildered by Embry from 1977 to years beyond his passing.

If this shrill "Notice," a kind of slut-shaming of Jeanne Barney, was how Embry spoke in public, imagine what rage he roared in his unguarded voice to his staff and to his contributors, in person and in private letters and emails. Quoted exactly, the Blacklist vendetta that follows was Embry's anti-Barney rant. As editor-in-chief, I told him I did not want his personal harangue in my issue, *Drummer* 30, page 38, which was nineteen issues and three years after Jeanne Barney quit Embry. What is the length of a grudge?

NOTICE: Mrs. Jeanne Chelsey Barney, aka "Barney" and "J. Barney" [Note his hissing high dudgeon about her aliases as opposed to his. And his paternalistic dismissal of her as a heterosexual "Mrs."] is representing herself as the owner of the LEATHER FRATERNITY and is operating out of a mail drop box in La Crescenta, California. [As if a PO Box is somehow proof of crime in a magazine full of postal box addresses.] She has solicited memberships in this "Fraternity," promising subscriptions to *Drummer*

magazine as part of its benefits. Later, after being cut off by *Drummer* and two of its distributors for nonpayment, she is substituting a multilithed “Newsletter,” promised monthly and containing offers of merchandise in the “Fraternity’s” name, membership pitches and solicitation of contributions as well as scurrilous attacks on ALTERNATE PUBLISHING and its people. Notice is hereby given that THE LEATHER FRATERNITY is a fully protected name since 1973 [Again, this claim of the specific word *protected* which he may have chosen because it is illegal to say something is trademarked when in fact it is not] and has no connection whatever with Mrs. Barney’s effort.....It does not publish names of members... as Mrs. Barney has done. Mrs. Barney is offering remnants of her unpaid-for [with Embry, it’s always about the money] *Drummer* inventory at inflated prices....We would appreciate being notified of any checks to *Drummer* or ALTERNATE PUBLISHING endorsed...by anyone other than this company [spinning a charge of embezzlement Barney never did].

When I asked Jeanne Barney in 2006 about this slam in 1979, she wrote: “Oh, for Christ’s sake! There are so many inaccuracies in his rant as to be laughable!”

## 5. AGAINST OTHER GAY MAGAZINES: LITERARY FEUDS

Is it good business for feuding publishers to trash other magazines to gin up publicity and controversy? Embry took potshots gratuitously attacking magazines such as *Blueboy* (*Drummer* 9), *In Touch*, *Honcho*, and *Man2Man Quarterly*. For instance, the minute after *Man2Man* first hit the stands, claim-jumper Embry added this new tag line to *Drummer*: “More Man-to-Man Personals Than Any Other Magazine.” He also added it to his *Manifest Reader*. The phrase “man-to-man” was a commonplace of American language. My father often said it to me. But it had not been mentioned in connection with post-Stonewall homosexuality, and, except for my announcement in *Drummer* 30 (June 1979, page 18) about the arrival of a new magazine, it was likely never written in *Drummer* before the first publication of *Man2Man*. (By 1982, Mark Henry had bought MAN2MAN as the vanity license plate for our red Ford F-100 truck used in so many photo and video shoots, including the cover of *Drummer* 140, June 1990.)

Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery, but, with his light-fingered co-optation of my coinage, I figured Embry gave envious evidence he

would have liked to have included my *avant-garde* concept of *Man2Man* as a feature inside *Drummer* exactly as he had my concept of “Tough Customers.” Had he paid me for editing *Drummer*, it is conceivable that my *Man2Man Quarterly* would have appeared within his empire of *Drummer* magazines along with *Tough Customers*, *Mach*, and *The Alternate*. When Anthony DeBlase published the landmark *Drummer* 100 (October 1986), he introduced the “Dear Sir” personal classifieds as “Hot Man-To-Man Contact for a Cool 50-Cents Per Word.”

Let me play the American pop-culture scholar I became with my analyses of gay popular culture in the 1960s, and continued to be in *Drummer* which I subtitled on the masthead of *Drummer* 23 (July 1978) and in my editorial: “The American Review of Gay Popular Culture.” With that, I was planting a flag for a declaration of gay independence, an assertive vision of the new direction and new character of a *Drummer* that reflected its grass-roots readers and how we lived in the emerging gay pop culture of that first liberated decade after Stonewall.

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Editorial written May, 1978; published in *Drummer* 23 (July 1978):

#### GETTING OFF

*Drummer* expands to bring you the same filth,  
but now disguised with socially redeeming scholarly significance...

*Drummer: The American Review*  
of Gay Popular Culture  
by Jack Fritscher

All right! So where's *Drummer* get the leather balls to assume, yeah, assume to track, report, and chronicle what's happening in the masculine world of gay men? How legit can a rag get without losing its j/o quality? Pretty g . d. legit and pretty hard-assed. No other mag sticks it into the gay subculture the way *Drummer* sticks it for you. No other gay mag touches the same raw nerve of what goes on in a wide cross-section of gay heads after midnight, after the lights go down low. *Drummer* dares to reassure you that even with the extremes that you fantasize about in your most secret heart of hards: you are not alone.

GAY POP CULTURE: A REFLECTION OF YOU, NARCISSUS



*Drummer* is no plastic fantasy. Every issue increasingly reflects what our readers want as they send us more of what and where they're coming from: photos they snap, stories and articles they write, artwork they draw. *Drummer* exists by popular demand. Readers need their *Drummer* fix. We can't come out fast enough. IF *DRUMMER* DIDN'T EXIST, WE'D HAVE TO BE INVENTED. *Drummer's* lucky enough to be a distinct medium for a genuine level of popular consciousness in the gay community. *Drummer* assures guys it's okay not to be locked into a 21-year-old all-American boy image, because our readers (you) are not boys. You're adult men.

#### EVEN BLUEBOYS GET THE COWS

You prefer hard sex the way you prefer men. You're not afraid of your rich fantasy life. You're not afraid of actualizing your fantasies. You've begun to notice that some gay periodicals, like *Blueboy*, are little more than soft-focus clones from erotic-photo mail-order catalogs. *Drummer* has always had a different, harder beat. *Drummer* isn't *Vogue* in butch drag. *Drummer* is increasingly a voice of a now less-closeted part of gay society. *Drummer* is a forum for men who enjoy authentic S&M Sensuality and Mutuality.

We want to touch the way you really are "after dark." When you've gone beyond the pretty-baby stage, you want articles, interviews, and fiction that stroke your head. We're not the last word on gay pop culture; but we're the first, and we're working to be the best. We dare to publish attitudes others repress. First, because you want our point of view which we picked up from you. Second, because certain subjects need to be printed to give full dimension to the genuinely alternate ways of being an adult, masculine, gay man in this country at this time.

#### *DRUMMER* IS AGGRESSIVE

Just you mention *Drummer* in a roomful of guys. You'll get a heavy feedback of attitude. They either love us or hate us. They either understand us (meaning themselves) or they refuse to understand us (again, meaning themselves). Some of them have every issue from Number One. Some of them wouldn't let *Drummer* sully their art-deco coffee tables. But lots of them interestingly enough, are closet *Drummer* boys: they keep their secret copy of our latest issue hidden handily under the bed next to the grease, the poppers, and the clothes pins.

YOU ARE OUR VOICE: YOU "OUT" THE *POPULAR* IN POP CULTURE

*Drummer* is a duo-purpose magazine. As we slowly evolve, we want to get your head off as much as we've always gotten your, uh, other head off. In short, *Drummer* has the balls to assume to report, rehash, and reshuffle at a certain expressive level of gay pop culture, because you keep buying and demanding this certain stuff, issue after issue. You keep telling us what you want to see and read. We go beyond "models"—hot as they are. We prefer to reflect more authentic, real-life men. You ask for the same in our articles and fiction. It's you after all, who put the *popular* in pop culture. Your very special, adult, masculine voice gives *Drummer* its very definite responsibility, purpose, and direction.

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Considering how Embry himself alarmed the LAPD with risky topics of necrophilia, bestiality, coprophagia, blood, and slavery, it is odd that in *Drummer* 9, page 72, he faulted *Blueboy* (September 1976) for its special leather feature, "S&M 1976." When Embry called the feature a "campy bomb" that "can set off" the "homophobic police," he spoke from experience because he was still clipping newspaper articles about his own Slave Auction "bomb" out of the *LA Times*, the *LA Herald-Examiner*, *The National Enquirer*, *The Sentinel*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle* whose Charles McCabe in his column, "Himself," headlined satirically: "Crimes Against Nature (2)."

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In the zero degrees of San Francisco journalism, when the Irish-American columnist Charles McCabe was found dead from a fall in his Telegraph Hill apartment on May 1, 1983, his daughter needing someone to quickly board up the door the paramedics had kicked down, contacted my friend, the carpenter John Turngren, who needed my truck to transport sheets of plywood. With awe and respect, he and I found ourselves standing alone on the edge of the bloody carpet, hammers in hand, amidst the books, typewriter, clothes, and coffee cups of the popular journalist and activist who had opposed the Manhattanization of San Francisco in the late 1950s when he and his fellow columnist Herb Caen successfully crusaded to block construction of a US Steel Tower, near the Embarcadero YMCA, that would have risen eighty feet taller than the West Tower of the Bay Bridge.

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John Embry attacked Don Embinder, the publisher of *Blueboy*, for what he himself had done tenfold. In attacking his rival publisher, Embry

gave the first and only glimmer that in his heart of hearts he knew he himself had set off Chief Ed Davis and brought the LAPD down on his own head. He was already diverting the accusation that followed him all the years since.

Embry alone nearly destroyed *Drummer* on Saturday night, April 10, 1976.

Deep down, was this man, who never admitted to shame, covering his guilt through the subterfuge of attacking *Blueboy*?

Less deep down, he was competing in a marketing turf war with *Blueboy* by trying to destroy Embinder's reputation.

That was the bully Embry's core technique for his Blacklist: To destroy the reputation of anyone who resisted him.

It is gut-busting hilarious to read Embry's *Drummer* 9 editorial desperately ridiculing *Blueboy*, founded in 1974, a year before issue one of *Drummer*, for venturing

...into an area it was completely unqualified for...the result is disastrous. Four pages of a suicide in a bathtub, with the blood going down the drain. A simulated (we assume) corpse may be somebody's idea of S&M [said Embry, the indignant publisher of the "Fetish: Necrophilia" feature in *Drummer* 4 and the "White Death" snuff poem in *Drummer* 5], but it isn't ours. There are glittering razor blades slicing nipples [raged the publisher who soon after printed Mapplethorpe's photo of a cut-and-bloodied cock and balls tied to a bondage board in *Son of Drummer*]....There are interesting shots of somebody's dungeon entitled "Black Room" [said the publisher who printed photos of his own *Drummer* dungeon and Fritscher photos of the Catacombs].... The feature article on "S&M 1976" is written by a woman who starts off admitting she knew nothing about the subject [complained the sensitive publisher whose founding Los Angeles editor-in-chief was the woman Jeanne Barney]....We have no intention of starting a rhubarb with *Blueboy* [said the publisher who owned a rhubarb patch].... A campy bomb like this [said the publisher famous for pasting camp cartoon balloons on serious S&M photographs].... May we respectfully [said the man who disrespected the writers, artists, and photographers who suggested topics to him] suggest topics to *Blueboy* other than this one. *Drummer* promises to steer clear of seascapes, travelogues, fashion shows [said the founding Barnum of the Mr. Drummer Contest] and the avant garde [said

the anti-*avant-garde* publisher who would soon work with Opel, Mapplethorpe, and Fritscher].

Seven years later, Embry, the Sisyphus, continued rolling his grudge uphill in the April 1983 issue of *Manifest [Reader]* 11, when he wrote on page 5, his “Publisher’s Page”:

Things We Never Knew Department. We received the promo pictured at left [a display ad from *Torso* magazine touting, “How did *Torso* become the #1 gay magazine in only 5 issues?”]...which asks a question we would *love* to hear answered. *Torso* is the combined effort of former *Blueboy* publisher Don Embinder and [George Mavety’s publishing group] Modernismo (*Mandate*, *Honcho*, and *Playgy*). But perhaps you didn’t realize it was the #1 gay magazine either. We certainly didn’t—and don’t.

In Embry’s unending shell game, he had the gall to print a full page ad in *Drummer* 14 selling—via his own mail-order company—the very issue of *Blueboy* he had condemned in *Drummer* 9. The ad trumpeted what Embry wanted for *Drummer*: the buzz of censorship and scandal that promotes sales. About *Blueboy*, Embry wrote: “Banned in Canada and Belgium. Now a Collector’s Item! Only 500 Copies Left!”

## 6. AGAINST HIS TALENT POOL OF WRITERS & ARTISTS

Here I can only allege how famous *Drummer* contributors felt fall-out from the Blacklist, because the living, even my lovers and friends on this *Drummer* Salon list, may have other versions than my *Rashomon* recall: Larry Townsend, Tom of Finland (who was Blacklisted over money and never got a *Drummer* cover from Embry), David Sparrow, Robert Mapplethorpe, Al Shapiro, John Rechy (*Drummer* 16, *Drummer* 17, page 90), Crawford Barton, Fred Halsted, David Hurles (Old Reliable), Sam Steward (Phil Andros), Jim Kane, Ike Barnes, Ed Franklin, Rex, and Colt Studio co-founders, Jim French and Lou Thomas.

In *Drummer* 9 (Halloween 1976), Embry ran a half-page ad for the “Colt 1977 Calendar.” Because of that issue’s misdirected “Cycle Sluts” cover, Colt withdrew advertising for *Drummer* 10, and re-appeared no more than once again in the centerfold featuring Colt’s Manfred Speer in trade for a Colt Studio ad in *Drummer* 19. Rumor abounded that something caused Jim French to refuse any further association of Colt with *Drummer*. Or was

it with Embry? It is worth some scholar's essay in queer studies to opine why, like Tom of Finland, the iconic Colt Studio went missing for years from *Drummer*? What a perfect twenty-four-year marriage of homomascularity and leather that could have been. Perhaps Colt was too sunny and too LA, and *Drummer* too dungeon-dark and too San Francisco, to be a match the way Lou Thomas' sweaty Target Studio in New York, spun out of the original Colt Studio, was just right for a dozen *Drummer* covers and centerfolds.

In later and less outlaw incarnations, Colt, like the Tom of Finland Foundation, launched a clothing line of leather fashions. Imagine if back in the day, mail-order retailer Embry, who sold *Drummer* t-shirts, had designed his own label of *Drummer* jeans, jackets, and boots, suitable, of course, for the fashion-week runway at the Mr. Drummer Contest and at the International Mr. Leather Contest. A man need only sniff his armpit to figure how a *Drummer* cologne in the 1970s might have been distinct from the scent introduced by the Tom of Finland Foundation in 2008: "Etat Libre d'Orange, 'Tom of Finland,' Eau de Parfum Spray, 50ml, \$90, free shipping." While Embry had advertised his mail-order amyl nitrite poppers as potent "aromas" and fragrant "room odorizers" enhancing wild sex, Tom of Finland separated its Parfum from the "stank" of sex with the assurance that it was "...not a pornographic scent. Nor is it shocking."

My longtime associate, Robert Mainardi, editor of the handsome Gmunder book, *Jim French: The Creator of Colt Studio* (2011), mentioned to me the possibility that French perhaps refused to allow Colt photos in *Drummer* because French, taking a page from David Goodstein's *The Advocate*, did not want his noble Olympian photographs sharing a page with ignoble dildo ads. Such ostracism is a part of a possible answer because French's Colt photos and display ads appeared in dozens of other gay magazines and papers, all rivals of Embry when he was his most contentious in the late 1970s and early 1980s, including *The Advocate*, *Blueboy*, *Honcho*, *Mandate*, *Numbers*, and *Stallion*. They all featured erotic toy ads of one kind or another, so was there some personality conflict, or creative difference, that flared up between the tempestuous French and the tempestuous Embry shortly after French moved Colt Studio to LA's San Fernando Valley in 1974? French's former New York partner in Colt, Lou Thomas was happy to have his Target Studio photos published on the covers and centerfolds of *Drummer* in return for the free ads Embry gave in trade. In 1989, when Thomas died, however, he bequeathed his 1970s Target Studio photos not to *Drummer*, but to his pioneer inspiration, Chuck Renslow, founding photographer of 1950s Kris Studio and of the Leather Archives & Museum in Chicago.

In the zero degrees of separation, Embry did not calculate the intimacies and alliances of the shared pasts in the *Drummer* Salon such as I had with Lou Thomas, Robert Mapplethorpe, Sam Steward, David Sparrow, Jim Kane, Jim Stewart, and Al Shapiro who had been pals with Jim French from the time in the 1960s when Shapiro and French both lived in Brooklyn Heights off Joralemon Street in a building so gay its camp name was “KY Flats.”

Pissing off both Mapplethorpe and me, Embry’s “Inner Brutus” stabbed the two of us. On my own initiative, after Robert had flown from New York to show me his portfolio, I had produced, cast, designed, and personally paid for the Mapplethorpe cover shoot which Robert, unlike other *Drummer* photographers begging to be published “for free,” would not do unless he was, in fact, paid. Embry sniped with intent to control and hurt the feelings of both Robert and me with a statement that was not true: “That Mapplethorpe cover was the worst selling issue we ever had.”

Embry further angered Mapplethorpe when Embry, suffering a huge case of “Penis Envy,” tried to shoot his own photograph to recreate Mapplethorpe’s crucified-dick picture which I had published in 1978’s *Son of Drummer*, page 16. In his first *Drummer* after my exit, Embry published his own graceless imitation of a Mapplethorpe picture: *Drummer* 31, page 73. For that bit of loose plagiarism, my Satanic Robert pledged to put a joke-y curse on Embry. Instead, Robert claimed he had his attorney send a letter threatening suit for violation of copyright, which, if true, would have made jealous Embry even angrier at me, the zealous editor, who was always pushing him to publish every contributor’s copyright in line with the new Copyright Law of 1976 that went into effect January 1, 1978, at the height of the Golden Age of *Drummer*. Was it obstinacy that in the special issue, *Drummer Rides Again* (1979), scofflaw Embry reprinted Mapplethorpe’s crucified-dick photograph, with no credit line and no copyright, to illustrate his own “Robert Payne” column on page 62? Was it accidentally on purpose that Embry toyed with the intellectual property of Robert Mapplethorpe in Robert Payne’s *The Care and Training of the Male Slave II*?

Embry, republishing Jim Stewart’s photos from *Drummer* 16 (June 1977) in *The Care and Training II* magazine, credited Stewart’s photo on page 28 to Mapplethorpe who was militant that his photographs not be confused with any other leather photographer. Stewart himself received no credit for all his photos used as illustrations. In fact, the whole photo spread in *Care and Training II*, was so loosely credited that the only byline was for one photo by LA leatherman Dave Sands. Embry’s layout seemed purposed to give the readers the “large” impression that virtually all the photos on

pages 25 to 27 were by rising star Mapplethorpe. Furthering this grand illusion, Embry also published an authentic Mapplethorpe photo without permission at the end of this photo layout. By its key position, the photo with its accurate credit line, seemed to suggest to the casual reader that the entire photo feature was indeed by Mapplethorpe.

In his vendetta to disrespect Mapplethorpe, Embry, on the last page of *Drummer* 32, did an “end run” calling his theft “fair use.” Because I was no longer editor-in-chief, I could no longer stop him. So the trickster published a “picture within a picture,” skirting the intellectual property laws. The clever photo by Efren Ramirez showed the back of my friend, Ike Barnes, standing in uniform at the 80 Langton Street gallery (March 21, 1978), and looking at a wall hung with two Mapplethorpe photographs. Embry had directed the talented photo-journalist Ramirez, a frequent *Drummer* photographer, to aim his camera so the focal interest was not Barnes’s back, but the exhibited full-frontal “Bloody Penis” photograph by Robert that Embry was forbidden to publish or imitate.

#### 7. AGAINST *DRUMMER* PUBLISHER #2: ANTHONY DEBLASE & HIS CORPORATION, DESMODUS, INC.

Was it separation anxiety? Was it a control issue? Within the first year after selling *Drummer*, Embry, like an obsessive parent who cannot let go, trashed DeBlase and Desmodus, Inc. The occasion was the obituary I’d written in *Drummer* 107 (August 1987) for Al Shapiro who had died May 30, 1987.

At the height of the AIDS emergency, none of us, including publisher Tony Deblase, was taking gratuitous swipes at Embry so much as trying, in the face of tragic deaths, to write satirical comedy about the institutional life of *Drummer* during the three crazy years of the 1970s sex farce when Shapiro had worked as art director with me under Embry from March 1977 to February 1980.

The Embry-DeBlase publishing feud was between them, but Embry was ready to take on any comment about himself in Deblase’s *Drummer*, even while he continued to advertise—in trade as part of his terms of sale—his *Manifest Reader* in two-page spreads in *Drummer*.

In *Drummer* 117 (June 1988), page 85, leather pioneer and reviewer Thor Stockman tore the “shameless” publisher and editors of *Manifest Reader* into tiny bits for reprinting stories printed earlier in *Drummer* to which they no longer owned any rights.

Similar comments also appeared in *Drummer* 145 (December 1990). While Embry railed against me, he railed also against Deblase’s “almost

monthly slurs” about Embry that had nothing to do with me, and everything to do with the public disdain around his reputation among staff, contributors, and subscribers. During that period, my work appeared only in *Drummer* 100 and *Drummer* 107. Hardly monthly. After the first nine issues (98-107) created by DeBlase, Embry exploded. He penned a “Letter to the Editor” slashing *Drummer* for what he felt was bias against himself.

Big mistake.

DeBlase was an S&M sadist top who thought it great sport to let bottoms torture themselves, and to let windbag Embry make fun of Embry. So he published 98% of Embry’s letter dated August 18, 1987, and sent me a photocopy of the entire 100% excerpted here.

Gentlemen: It would probably be best left ignored, but your almost monthly slurs and innuendoes regarding *Drummer*’s past management must be addressed. This past issue (#107) was too much even for me to laughingly pass off as *I cried all the way to the bank*. [Italics added.] In the guise of an “In Memoriam” piece on the passing of Al Shapiro, one-time editor [in chief] of *Drummer*, Jack Fritscher, whipped up a self-serving vendetta [said the inventor of his own vendetta, the *Drummer* Blacklist] that you have published without question or even editing [DeBlase and editor JimEd Thompson vetted my satirical essay, and judged it legally true and accurate for publication]....

The following final sentence—2% in Embry’s original letter—was deleted by DeBlase from publication in *Drummer* because DeBlase knew it was false. Did DeBlase’s deletion make Embry angry all over again? While he was crying all the way to the bank?

...In compensating Jack Fritscher for the article, please be advised that he still owes *Drummer* nine issues [not true] as editor for which he was paid in full [not true; Embry, who famously defaulted on his payments after publication, never paid anyone in advance; nor did he ever even suggest he had cancelled checks to prove such an advance]. —John H. Embry

In truth, much careful editorial and design discussion went into the heavy-duty collaborative tailoring of that DeBlase-Fritscher-Jameo Saunders-JimEd Thompson production of the A. Jay obituary in *Drummer* 107. In the specifics of content and style, we four were honoring one of our own



beloved dead, Al Shapiro, who was the founding San Francisco art director of *Drummer*, as well as the creator of his own monthly cartoon-strip satire, *Harry Chess*, which he had begun in the 1960s in *Queen's Quarterly* and continued in the 1970s in *Drummer*. Besides the vetting of the essay by associate editor JimEd Thompson, my rhetorical style had its satire enhanced by the virtuoso art director, Jameo Saunders, who designed the comic-strip layout with so much brilliant whimsy on seven pages that it looked as if the recently deceased *Drummer* art director Al Shapiro himself had come back from the dead for a laugh.

In short, DeBlase, having bought *Drummer* from Embry only a year before, delighted in publishing the feature obituary on A. Jay as a tonal rebuttal to the kind of jealous gossip Embry was spreading about Deblase and the new *Drummer*. From personal experience, Deblase was an eyewitness of how Embry treated himself and others, and Deblase, with *Drummer* as his platform, felt no fear in being one of the first leathermen to come out of the closet of leather history and dare condemn the contrary Embry in print. *Drummer* had long been Embry's smart bomb, and DeBlase hoisted him on his own petard.

#### 8. A GRUDGE AGAINST *DRUMMER* ITSELF: EMBRY'S SELLER'S REMORSE

In the "Grudges Never End Department," John Embry never missed a chance to praise *Drummer* and to bury *Drummer*.

In *Super MR* #7 (January 2001), he published two notices. The first was a five-page editorial concerning his recent health which recalled the crisis of his cancer that had so impacted my iteration of 1970s *Drummer*. The second notice, like a Mardi Gras call-and-response song, published inside the echo chamber of his *Super MR*, was Embry responding to an "anonymous" "Letter to the Editor" which he had also written. In it, he ranted as if Dutchman Martijn Bakker, the third publisher of *Drummer*, had somehow done something wrong in keeping up with the twenty-first century by selling twentieth-century *Drummer* to American leather businessman Mike Zuhl who produced leather shows like his DNA: Drummer North America Contest, and had announced plans for building an online *Drummer*.

In his page five editorial, Embry wrote:

A funny thing happened to me on my way to the International Mr. Drummer Contest in Florida. All dressed up in cowskin [to him leather was "camp"], armed with carry-on cases, heading to the

airport, I ran down the stairs, missed several and ended up into [sic] the next landing.

I spent the contest weekend and the past weeks recuperating from a broken hip.... Now, months later, I'm still not completely functional, but at least I'm mobile.

...The healing process takes a lot of energy, leaving little for the creative process. [This was precisely my point when his 1978 cancer made him AWOL from *Drummer*, leaving Al Shapiro and me space, time, and energy to creatively grow *Drummer* from an LA magazine to a San Francisco magazine.]

Now the holidays have come and gone, and it is time to get our act together.....you should see the changes in size and content. We have merged with Terrance Hawke to become Alternate Hawke Publishing.... It's a big step for someone still on a couch....Thanks for your patience —John H. Embry

Flat on his back on his couch, Embry, at age 74, continuing to think feuds and controversy incite publicity, decided he would print a general press release from Jake Staley who was representing himself as the new editor of a new generation of *Drummer* Online under Mike Zuhl who soon after founded his spin-off leather-contest organization, Drummer North America, with its clever acronym, DNA.

Embry had not owned *Drummer* for fifteen years, but after he sold it in 1986, he increasingly suffered the world's worst case of seller's remorse.

Characteristically, in his trashing of twenty-first century *Drummer*, ventriloquist Embry tooled his words through his *Super MR* editor Robert Davolt, who was also the terminal editor of San Francisco *Drummer*.

In the end, in this *Super MR* #7 (January 2001), Embry revealed his heart. He bore a grudge against *Drummer* itself. With an introductory sentence, Embry, in league with Robert Davolt, re-published Jake Staley's press release in "Letters to the Editor" (page 6-7):

#### DIFFERENT DRUMMER

*This letter [written by the new editor of the new Drummer Online who was accusing Embry of lying about Drummer] was forwarded to us by one of our readers...[Embry's italics]*

Jake Staley: *Drummer* – Still Hot, and still America's leading Leather Magazine. We have been reading recently in the leather

press, surprisingly numerous but false reports [including Embry's] of *Drummer's* passing. Our favorite European hard sex magazine [title not mentioned] (which, sadly, has not shown up since June) editorialized earlier this year over "the late *Drummer*," and the current issue [of *Super MR*] from a well-known American publisher [the unnamed John Embry] who moons wistfully over the *Drummer* years as if it were past and shows up only in old copies of former issues. Gentlemen, it is not so.

Anyone who actually believes that *Drummer* is dead, is simply not paying attention to what we are doing. In the year 2000, *Drummer* looked seriously at where it had been and has started with exciting boldness in a new direction, but with a familiar purpose—to deliver the timeless message of *Drummer*, using different and contemporary ways of delivering that message.

*Drummer* Online brings *Drummer* magazine to the internet and, thus, to a wider community of leathermen than ever before. In addition, *Drummer* has just put on the most smashingly successful International Mr. Drummer and Drummerboy Contest ever. Professionally produced this year by Mike Zuhl and Drummer Contests International, Inc., this too, is the new sound of *Drummer*, with a familiar ring to it—hot men, hot leather, hot sex, with completely fresh energy. The Contest brought us sixteen of the hottest new Mr. Drummer and Drummerboy titleholders you could want to see. And you will see them in the coming months.

*Drummer* is now, as it always has been, necessary to leathermen and to the life of the leather community, wherever that community happens to be.

Jake Staley, Editor  
[*Drummer* Online]

Embry responded to Jake Staley in his signature *Embry über alles* fashion by writing his own "Letter to the Editor" in his own magazine. He hid his authorship by signing it with the name of "Robert Davolt" who had been the nominal last editor of *Drummer* when it closed in 1999.

Editor: We are paying very careful attention. It is *Drummer* that lately seems always to be looking the other direction while the world passes it by.

This is an amazing piece of work [Staley’s press release], considering about the only thing vaguely “American” about this new *Drummer* is their eagerness to take U.S. dollars. The new debut online *Drummer*, based in Amsterdam, consists of exactly four “pages”—more than half of which was taken up with this letter.

New direction? In fact, *Drummer* [which Embry did not own in the 1990s] has been trying to launch a successful website since 1996, with dismal results. The U.S. operations of *Drummer* were discontinued last year and the name “rented” out to a Pittsburgh organization [Zuhl], turning the fund-raising Mr. Drummer Contest into a for-profit venture. [Coincidentally, Embry himself had caused the Drummer Slave Auction bust by changing its purpose from a private fund-raiser for the community to a for-profit event for himself, and on those essential changes, the LAPD based its justification for the raid that cost thousands of taxpayer dollars.]

When the magazine ceased publication, employees, advertisers and subscribers were left dangling in the wind. In this letter the “new” *Drummer* clearly takes direct credit for that decision [sic]. *It was Super MR who, as a goodwill gesture, offered Drummer subscribers and advertisers a credit equal to their unfulfilled subscriptions and advertising.* [Wrote trickster Embry! Italics added.] It may be difficult to seize the legacy and at the same time dodge the responsibility.

Whatever Zen sort of moving-to-the-next-plane-of-existence spin you put on it, *Drummer*, as we knew it, is plainly gone. It is particularly embarrassing [sic] to Alternate Publishing who originated the title 25 years ago, [that] the name is now just an empty trademark. In this case, with limited apologies to both Mark Twain and Mr. Staley, rumored signs of life (or certainly of any continued credibility) are greatly exaggerated.

—[Signed] Robert Davolt