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THE EMAIL LETTER: DROP THAT LAWSUIT! A TIMELINE OF DECLINE DYING IN PLAIN SIGHT

Responding immediately to Larry's distressed June 28 email, I wrote him insisting he drop the lawsuit. Because we had bonded so sweetly those confessional nights in his Escalade, I wrote as tactfully as I could because I risked losing a most interesting friend whose alpha intransigence I tried to break with insistent repetition:

Dear Larry, So happy to be under the covers again with you. Actually, we were under the covers together twelve years ago when you asked me to write an introduction to the "Silver Anniversary Edition" of your first *Leatherman's Handbook*. What fun! I'm always so happy to be together anywhere with you.

If I may suggest, and if *Honcho* is willing to do it, presuming you are willing to do it, make a deal with them to continue writing your monthly column—minus a paycheck—in trade for a free sixth-page ad (that costs them nothing) for your mail-order books. However, *Honcho* probably wants to move on into the future, and that leaves old fucks like you and me (nothing personal but we are both so last midcentury) out of the new DNA of the changing leather LGBT picture.

I don't wish to piss you off, so don't get mad at me, but from all the feedback I've heard about your attorney suing the bookstores, perhaps the only press release you [aided by Durk Dehner] should do is to advise bookstores

you are dropping them from this case which is about Nazca Plains only.

Think of it: bookstores may never order a single more copy of an LT book because there is no way for them to know that it is a legit copy.

The word is that your attorney has gone too far. If you never listen to me again, listen to this: drop the bookstore suit, have your attorney back off the bookstores, and send out a PR notice about that news.

I can tell you for sure that you will destroy your career in bookstores. I am hearing things that you will never hear as the person suing these people. What I'm telling you here, frankly, dear Larry, because I love you, is that you are also doing yourself damage in dollars if your attorney does not back off and APOLOGIZE to the innocent bookstores who have enough troubles.

Don't let your righteous take on Nazca ruin your years-long relationship with bookstores. If that happens, Herbert wins.

You win if bookstores continue to carry your books, and I, to tell you the truth, my dear friend, have been told in these last two weeks (by bookstore owners) that if you continue this pursuit of the bookstores you will be blacklisted by them, and at our age, with so little time left, that is not a good thing.

I want you to be remembered as the good and gracious Larry Townsend, and not as the "bitter and senile old man" cliché which some bookstores are beginning to use to diminish and define you. You deserve better.

I don't want you ever to become angry with me, but... the bookstores see this suit as the kiss of death for you.

Dude, don't let your career end this way. Have the lesbian attorney back off NOW TODAY and send a letter NOW TODAY dropping the suit against the stores. You and Durk Dehner might send out a conciliatory, if not apologetic, press release that will save you and your wonderful lifetime's work from this terrible backlash.

I beg you not to get angry with me. I beg you to listen....Everyone thinks we have been *Brokeback* since 1970. Actually, the bookstore owners like you very much, and they are appalled at this turn of events, and they want to know what the fuck is going on with you. Don't even think about this; just do it. Stop the suit against the few bookstores that remain in business. They may not be all that great, but they are all you have because you have so banked on LGBT bookstores over the years.

I wish your hands were better, and we are both happy your voice recognition is working. Let the bookstores hear that same cheery LT voice they have heard over the years.

Thanks for asking. We are both okay after the horrible accident, although we still do not have our Volvo back which is a problem because tomorrow we want to drive into San Francisco for the Gay Pride Parade to march with its first honeymoon contingent of married couples.

As your friend, I must tell you: you have no choice. You MUST drop this suit against bookstores IMMEDIATELY and get word to the bookstores ASAP.

Call if you have any questions. Love, Jack and Mark

On June 30, Larry and I discussed the lawsuit in a 45-minute telephone conversation. That same day, Durk Dehner sent Larry's attorney a press release from the Tom of Finland Foundation supporting the lawsuit.

On July 2, Larry wrote:

Jock [He often called me "Jock" or "Herr Doktor Fritscher"], If you will tell me which bookstores you have heard from specifically, I'll make sure [my attorney] drops them. I'm meeting with her next week...Thanks, Larry.

In a telephone call on July 5, I told him again, when he asked again, to drop Lambda Rising Bookstore as well as all the other small bookstores. It was a friendly call and it was the last time Larry and I spoke before he died.

On July 9, with him having only four days of consciousness left, I wrote:

Dear Larry, I'm sorry to be caught in the middle of "The Case of the Publisher-Bookstore-Author"...I hope it's not a no-win situation. In response to your email request to assist you, I have taken the time since to query some of those involved. However, in the same way that you told me you can't be in touch with the bookstores because of the plaintiff-defendant relationship, the bookstores don't wish at this time to be in touch with you either. It would be easier for me to skate a Figure 8 on an ice cube. Other than what I wrote to you in my long email, there seems to be nothing else I can do. Believe me, Mark and I are in your corner about Nazca and wish that Herbert had never [allegedly] done you wrong. Mark and I are a team of a couple who are always both here for you. We hope this all works out for you...

On July 12, leather historian Boi Gwen Hardy wrote from Florida thanking me for answering her request to write a thousand-word toast-and-roast biography for Jeanne to be read to the audience when La Barney received a Lifetime Achievement Award at the Pantheon of Leather Weekend in Chicago, July 18 to 20. Vi Johnson, founder of the Carter/Johnson Leather Library, had nominated Jeanne for the award granted by Pantheon owner Dave Rhodes who wrote me: "I respected and learned from Larry. He self-published, cutting out the huge and expensive middlemen."

Needless to say, the springtime announcement of Jeanne's Lifetime Award added to the royal rumble that summer between Jeanne and Larry who reminded her he had received his own Pantheon Lifetime Achievement Award thirteen years earlier.