

11

BLACKLISTS AND GRUDGE MATCHES TO THE DEATH

By the nature of personality, Larry was a gay alpha male trapped inside a straight steak-and-bourbon body of a 1950s conservative right-wing Air-Force intelligence officer and Cold War veteran who disliked, he said, “subversives” infiltrating gay culture from the right and the left. In the political style of midcentury Republicans like Senator Joe McCarthy with his anti-gay House Un-American Activities Committee, and his sleazy gay attorney Roy Cohn, Larry kept a list of local gay political opponents, but, doing it defensively, he did them no aggressive harm unlike his frenemy, *Drummer* publisher John Embry, whose peevish blacklist insulted, exploited, and excluded talents like Robert Mapplethorpe, Tom of Finland, Fred Halsted, and frequent cover photographer Jim Wigler who all demanded proper bylines, copyright, and payment.

From time to time, Embry also blacklisted Larry and his own former *Drummer* editor Jeanne Barney whom he trashed virulently while I was editor in *Drummer* 30, June 1979—after which he blacklisted me for objecting to, among other things, his attack on her. I was still on his blacklist twenty-seven years later when he, who was not very tech-savvy, told Jeanne on November 13, 2006, that I was “stuffing Google” with my name and deleting his name because in his dog-eat-dog searches my name came up more than his. (I did not know I had such powers.) Embry, corporate president of his Alternate Publishing Inc, operated very like the dysfunctional Other Traveller and Olympia presses that exploited the talent.

Just as Jeanne was an intimate in the domesticity of Larry and Fred, she was privy to the domesticity of John Embry and Mario

Simon. In 2006, she painted a cosy, but lonely, picture recalling that John and Mario, life partners in publishing and real estate, enjoyed whiling away the hours sitting on the front porch of one of their homes at the Russian River—where they never invited Larry, so he said, on one of his frequent trips north—going over and over the blacklist of people they imagined had “done ’em wrong.” Jeanne wrote on September 24, 2006: “Personally, being on that list is almost a source of pride, rather like being on Nixon’s Enemies List.” Embry once described himself sitting in a chair and threatening his rental tenants “like the Godfather, smiling and cracking his knuckles.”

The grudge match between mail-order business competitors John and Larry began in 1972, and for all the publishing collaborations and the air-kiss brunches they shared in LA, it lasted till death. When Fred died in 2006, Embry wrote to Jeanne that she needn’t “bother”—his word—sending Larry’s address so he could mail Larry a sympathy card. Carrying his grudges, he said he did not recall hearing from Larry when his own lover, Mario Simon, died thirteen years earlier in 1993. And he sniped that when Larry and Fred came to San Francisco that Fred was the only one who would enter Embry’s building because Larry, carrying his own grudges, stayed in the car. When Larry lay dying in Intensive Care, I wrote to Embry to let him know.

From Jack Fritscher. To: John Embry, July 23, 2008. 3:33 PM. Subject: Larry Townsend in ICU. John, Our friend Larry Townsend is in ICU. Hopefully, he may rally, but the situation seems very distressed. If you want more info, please let me know. If you don’t want to know, let me know. May our world of writers and readers keep Larry in our thoughts and give him good energy during the next few hours and days. —Jack Fritscher

From: John Embry. To: Jack Fritscher. July 23, 2008. 6:02 PM. Subject: Re: Larry Townsend in ICU. [Embry writing in all UPPER CAPS] JACK, THANK YOU FOR NOTIFYING ME. ALTHOUGH LARRY’S AND MY RELATIONSHIP IS IN ABOUT THE SAME STATE

AS HIS AND JEANNIE'S [*sic*]. BE THAT AS IT MAY,
I WISH HIM WELL AND WAS VERY DISMAYED
AT FRED'S PASSING WHICH I AM SURE WAS
VERY HARD ON HIM. —John Embry