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**PREPPIE, SERGEANT, SEX TOURIST,
LEATHERMAN**

As Larry's family moved from New York to Boston to Los Angeles, he grew up as a big-boned blond boy of Swiss-German heritage a few houses from Noel Coward and Greer Garson. He ate cookies with his neighbor Laura Hope Crews who played "Aunt Pittypat" in *Gone with the Wind*. At age fourteen in 1944, during World War II, he entered the elite Peddie School in Hightstown, New Jersey, a non-denominational college-preparatory boarding school near Princeton where, before girls were admitted, he wrote for the school paper, swam in the pool known as "the bathtub," and was nursed in the school infirmary by the long-serving and coincidentally named matron Miss Eva Townsend.

During World War II, the Peddie School was mobilized as an airplane spotting post with students like Larry acting—so like a Townsend sex story—as air-raid wardens keeping 24-hour watch against Nazi invasion. As wartime students came and went with military service during his four years there, his schoolmates in grades nine through twelve plus post-grad, included liberal Democrat Dick Swig who became the owner of the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco, and the conservative Republican author Richard Hornberger who later, after serving as a surgeon in the Korean war, took the pen name Richard Hooker and wrote the 1968 novel, movie, and television series, *MASH*, just as Larry was writing *The Scorpious Equation*. It was that kind of school, and he graduated in 1948 marked with the education he received.

In 1950 at age twenty, he photographed himself—a portrait of the artist as a young man—in a brooding black-and-white head-shot. He staged it framing himself against a writer's filing cabinet topped with a bondage padlock. He intended it as his

passport photo into the literary world of authors. He was a freshman at the University of California Los Angeles, and was about to join the Air Force. He was impeccably groomed, poised, and beautiful the way the young are beautiful.

From 1950 to 1954, he was stationed as Staff Sergeant in charge of NCOIC Operations of Air Intelligence Squadrons with the U.S. Air Force in Germany. In the election for president in November 1952, he voted Republican for Dwight D. Eisenhower and Richard M. Nixon. In August 1954, he saved that German boy (who would now be seventy-five) from drowning in the Rhine River, finished his military service, and returned to the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) as a sophomore on the G.I. Bill.

Having cruised in the closet of his car since his teen years, he came out to his own formal satisfaction in 1955 at the primeval LA bar, Cinema, on Melrose Avenue which was likely the world's first leather bar, predating the Argos leather bar founded in Amsterdam in 1957, Chuck Renslow's Gold Coast leather bar in Chicago in 1958, and the Why Not and Tool Box leather bars in San Francisco in 1962. The dive was perfect for him and the new gay motorcycle clubs, like the Satyrs founded in 1954, hosting mixers for sadists and masochists who were also military veterans. In his "Introduction" to his *Handbook*, he describes the Cinema interior and action in detail, saying it was "what a leather bar should be."

During his European service, he, whose father was a spy during World War II, worked with spies and spying. He told me he was lucky that, while he was stationed at Essen, a civilian bisexual who graduated Cambridge and was a Fulbright scholar, figuring Larry was gay, tutored him in discretion, and introduced him to reading such as Gore Vidal's 1948 novel *The City and the Pillar*.

Traveling on his own more often in mufti than uniform, Larry, who based so many of his novels on historical people and epochs, day-tripped wandering through Europe on his motor scooter soaking up culture, food, and drink while reading around in sadomasochistic literature in quiet cafés and *bierstubes*. His knapsack on his back was a traveling library of books like Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs* which he praised with passing mention

of Gilles Deleuze in his *Handbook*, Jean Genet's *Our Lady of the Flowers*, and Pauline Réage's just-published *Story of O*. If he could spy for the Air Force for underground Nazis, he could spy for himself. So he set out gathering useful "leather intelligence" about sex dynamics in gay boltholes like public toilets—all later reported in *The Leatherman's Handbook*.

Gathering intelligence ran in his family. He showed me his 1950s government "Personnel Security Questionnaire" in which he explained he had not been a child-spy for the Wehrmacht:

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

Mustering out after his closeted tour of duty, he came out into a world of available men at UCLA before coming out into the 1950s underground of the LA gay scene where he and Hollywood star Montgomery Clift, who sported a wicked leather jacket in *A Place in the Sun*, shared a lover. That romantic triad ended when Clift, fresh off shooting *Suddenly Last Summer*, spirited the ham in their sandwich away to Cuba for the wild New Year's Eve before Fidel Castro marched his revolution into Havana on January 8, 1959.

In the mid-1960s, Larry began photographing some of his leather partners for a scrapbook he continued most of his life, and for illustrations in the many magazine-size S&M short-story

booklets he published in addition to his pocket-novel books. Always prepared, he kept rolls of film and a loaded camera on a tripod in his dungeon. His accounting parallels the *Stud Files* that erotic novelist Samuel Steward began keeping on his rough-trade tricks at the suggestion of Dr. Kinsey in the 1950s.

With his degree in industrial psychology from UCLA (1957), he began several years' work in the private sector as a probation officer at a juvenile camp managing teenage delinquents shaped by 1950s rebel teen movies and rock-n-roll. As a counselor he had undergone the therapy required to advise others, but, he told me, he could find no guilt in himself about his own proclivities. During his forty-four-year home-relationship with his partner Fred Yerkes, a wisp of a lovely man who died two years before him in 2006, the S&M master was a committed animal lover favoring Doberman Pinscher dogs whom he called his "Doberpersons," and Abyssinian cats who were the only creatures ever really able to top him.