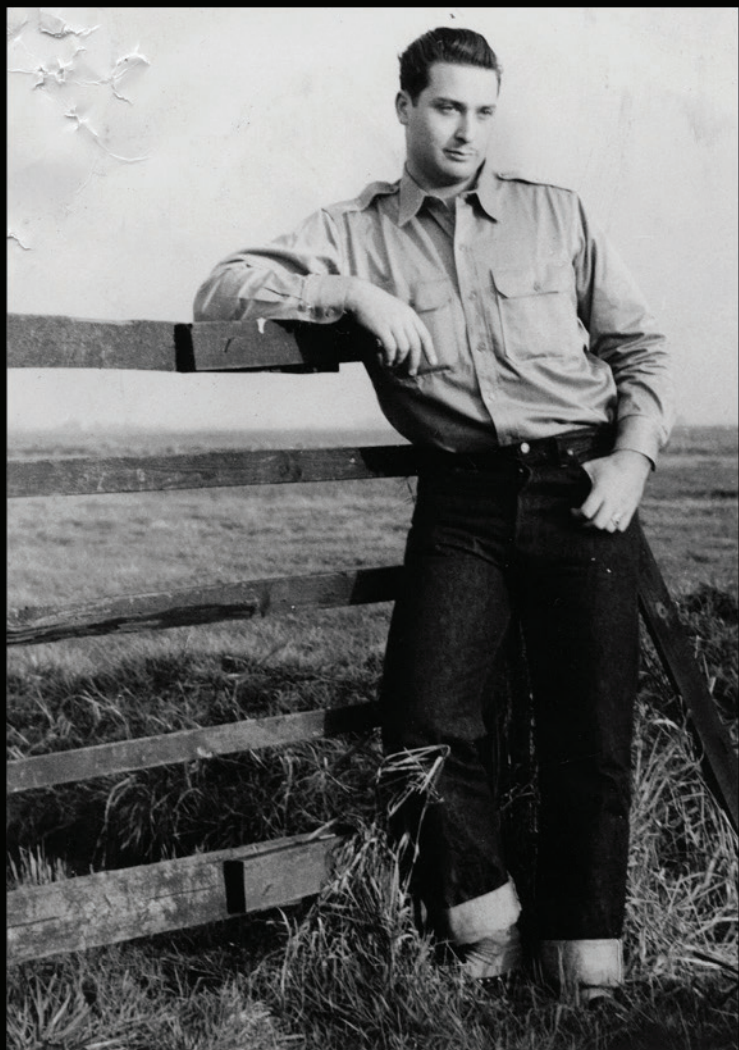


The Life and Times of the Legendary **LARRY TOWNSEND**



Saluting the 50th Anniversary of
The Leatherman's Handbook

Jack Fritscher

Hollywood is a strange country where appearance is reality that feeds the dreams and fantasies of the gay soul like no other city. This memoir reveals the comic rise and operatic fall of West Hollywood author Larry Townsend, the “Liege Lord of Leather,” whose *Leatherman’s Handbook* was a founding text for gay men worldwide in the 20th century. What Townsend wrote in 1972 describing his own iconic *Handbook* applies to *Drummer* editor Fritscher’s 2021 handbook about Townsend: “...a definitive exploration of the gay S&M leather scene...written by a qualified writer who has observed it all from the inside.” If you are an old hand at leather, or new to the kink scene, this candid memoir offers a fascinating, witty, and authentic true story of leather lives lived the way we were, and were forced to be, from the 1950s to 2021.

Review Comments

Who better than longtime leather author Jack Fritscher of *Drummer* fame to write a fast, fun, and fact-based account of early LA leather life as lived by the great Larry Townsend in this frank and charming memoir that raises questions such as “Where was the world’s first leather bar?” As a leather publisher, I think fans of Townsend will enjoy this well-told movie-like Hollywood backstory of how and why Larry wrote *The Leatherman’s Handbook* that “helped create the very leather culture he reported on.”

—**Dave Rhodes, publisher, *The Leather Journal***

The Leatherman’s Handbook remains a legacy guide for young S&M leatherfolk wanting to learn the way we were. Larry Townsend, who fought to protect the rights of authors and artists, was one of the most ethical and honest people I have had the pleasure of knowing. This is the Hollywood story of how he lived and how he died on Sunset Plaza Drive, five minutes from Sunset Boulevard.

—**Durk Dehner, co-founder, Tom of Finland Foundation**

Jack Fritscher lights up our Leatherworld skies in this West Hollywood memoir of his boisterous friend and collaborator, the

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HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE FROM THIS BOOK

Grand Leather Master Larry Townsend who came out in the world's first leather bar, and taught generations of leatherfolk how we might live. The fast-turning pages reveal the rise and fall of Townsend's roller-coaster life. Fritscher, who invited Townsend to write for *Drummer*, is the perfect eyewitness in this authentic story of pioneer leather lives.

—**Peter Fiske, author, *My Leather Life: Early Years***

In this lively memoir of writer, photographer, and pleasure activist, Larry Townsend, Jack Fritscher elevates this biography of his longtime friend by blending memories, anecdotes, and Townsend's work at *Drummer* for an expansive view of the man, his times, his frustrations, and his impact on his community. Fritscher celebrates this key figure in the leather/kink world not by putting him on a pedestal, but by capturing him in all his full unvarnished glory, and in doing so makes a significant contribution to an often-overlooked chapter of LGBTQ history.

—**Owen Keehnen, author, *Leatherman: The Legend of Chuck Renslow***

Larry Townsend's was the kind of brilliant life often canceled by puritans who devalue people who contribute to the sexual pleasures some of us dare to explore. I am thrilled that Larry's friend and fellow giant, Jack Fritscher—editor of *Drummer* magazine, author of twenty books, and muse to Robert Mapplethorpe—has written this awesome pop-culture memoir to remind leatherfolk of Townsend's importance to our history, and how much we owe to him for today's freedoms. Fritscher's writing is passionate, dazzling, and downright fun to read. What a life! What a book!

—**Thor Stockman, producer, *S/M at the Movies: The Good, The Bad, and the Ridiculous*, New York**

Larry Townsend's *The Leatherman's Handbook*, a unique amalgam of research, erotica and advice, was something of a founding text for the gay SM and Leather subculture of the late 20th century. Jack Fritscher's memoir of Townsend, and his pioneering social circle, is a wide-ranging, anecdotal insider's look at the West Coast Gay Lib and Leather scenes from the 1970s to 2008. Larry Townsend—author, researcher, advice columnist, and political

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HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE FROM THIS BOOK

activist—has been something of an unknown quantity in LGBT writing to date. Not any more! Jack Fritscher knew the old Master for many years. He has served him well!

—**Ian Young, author, *The Male Homosexual in Literature and Encounters with Authors: Essays on Scott Symons, Robin Hardy, and Norman Elder***

I really do love this book. Only the legendary Jack Fritscher could have written this engrossing, richly detailed remembrance of the equally legendary Larry Townsend. Who else could seat us at a restaurant table in West Hollywood to eavesdrop on bickering leather pioneers gesturing with steak knives? Jack's affection for Larry is palpable on every page, even when he recounts having to upbraid him over a misbegotten lawsuit. Much of the memoir centers on Townsend's fraught on-off relationship with *Drummer* magazine; its scheming publisher John Embry; and its LA editor, Larry's fickle "Leather Wife," Jeanne Barney. What emerges is an intimate, engaging, briskly paced, behind-the-scenes portrait of one towering figure, a master of literary leatherotica and nonfiction, told by another towering figure in homomascuine literature and culture. This memoir will cement both Townsend's and Fritscher's position forever in the upper echelon of the pantheon of homomascuine leather cultural icons.

—**Hank Trout, senior editor, *A&U: Art & Understanding* ("America's AIDS Magazine"), and editor, *Drummer* (1980)**

Over the past fifty years, Larry Townsend's writings about sex and BDSM have touched generations of kinky people, even those who today may not know his name. To them his friend Jack Fritscher offers the inside story of the legendary influencer's rise and fall. Through a mix of archival documents and photos, Fritscher puts us next to Townsend as he, his friends, and his rivals move through and, in many cases, establish the worlds of gay publishing, politics, and leathersex. Fritscher's lively, propulsive text reveals the private man struggling behind his public persona, even as he fights for the rights of other independent authors. In our culture that tries to separate the struggle for human rights from the sex lives of the people demanding those rights, Townsend's uncompromising

advocacy and unsanitized writing remind us of what we are fighting for, and Fritscher's act of friendship returns him to us.

—**Nayland Blake, artist, educator, curator, *Tag: Propositions on Queer Play and the Way Forward*, The Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia**

Jack Fritscher does it. Again. In this fascinating new memoir, he does for his iconic friend Larry Townsend what he did in his best-selling memoir of that other sexual outlaw, his lover Robert Maplethorpe. This fast-moving and entertaining West Hollywood story dishes up to the reader a vivid portrait of the larger-than-life Leather Guru Townsend by recounting their forty years of friendship against all odds. An acute observer of human nature and gay pop culture, Fritscher seems the perfect insider to introduce readers of a new generation to the complex and politically-incorrect influencer whose important and seminal *Leatherman's Handbook* taught the 20th-century gay world about leather and kink culture while he fought for the rights not only of the leather/BDSM community, but of writers, artists, and the LGBTQ community in general. I enjoyed this wonderful book immensely. A very welcome addition to the literature of LGBTQ leather history and of LGBTQ history in Los Angeles.

—**Lester Strong, special projects editor, *A&U: Art & Understanding* (“America's AIDS Magazine”), and writer, “blu sunne” blog at blusunne.com and aumag.org**

In 2008, shortly before leather icon Larry Townsend died, Jack Fritscher wrote to him about a new-guard magazine “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.” Fritscher's memoir offers old and young leatherbears alike an insightful and lavishly illustrated retrospective about the man who helped define queer leather life for as long as this old fuck can remember. Most importantly, we are given the chance to witness Larry's life firsthand as experienced by one of the great masculinist authors of our time.

—**Ron Suresha, author, *Bears on Bears: Interviews & Discussions* and *Fur: The Love of Hair***

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HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE FROM THIS BOOK

Only the bravest embark on authoring a history of a publicly misunderstood and overlooked community. In *The Life and Times of Larry Townsend*, Jack Fritscher, again, establishes himself as a cultural scholar who can impact an entire movement by not only writing about the present but also by writing about the past. Townsend's *The Leatherman's Handbook* created an undeniable impact, and Fritscher preserves it by narrating the cultural context and shift that surrounded it. This memoir is more than a tale of two friends bound in leather. It's a road map documenting an entire movement and takes readers into a loop of a time gone by. I learned so much.

—**August Bernadicou, historian, The LGBTQ History Project, lgbtqhp.org**

Comments Previous Work

“*Drummer* editor Jack Fritscher and his books are unabashed and uninhibited tour guides.”

—**Chuck Renslow, Founder, Leather Archives & Museum, and International Mr. Leather (IML)**

“Jack Fritscher writes wonderful books...careful writing...a world of insight.”

—**Geoff Mains, author, *Urban Aboriginals*, in *The Advocate***

“Veteran author Jack Fritscher is an anarchist of gay sexual prose, the man who invented the South of Market prose style (as well as its magazines...). Fritscher writes with sweat and wit.”

—***The Bay Area Reporter*, San Francisco**

“Jack Fritscher is a prolific writer who since the late Sixties has helped document the gay world and the changes it has undergone.”

—**Willie Walker, founding member, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco**

“Jack Fritscher reads gloriously.”

—**San Francisco Chronicle**



Larry Townsend, age 20, self-portrait, 1950, shot shortly before he volunteered for the U.S. Air Force and served as Staff Sergeant in charge of NCOIC Operations of Air Intelligence Squadrons with the U.S. Air Force in Germany (1950-1954).

The Life and Times
of the Legendary
Larry Townsend

Author, *The Leatherman's Handbook*
27 October 1930 – 29 July 2008

A Memoir

On the 90th Anniversary of His Birth
and the 50th Anniversary
of *The Leatherman's Handbook*

Jack Fritscher, Ph.D.

Archival Edition
Jack Fritscher-Mark Hemry Archives



Palm Drive Publishing™

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For author history and for historical research www.JackFritscher.com

Cover and book design by Mark Hemry

Front cover photograph by Larry Townsend

Back cover photograph by Mark Hemry

Published by Palm Drive Publishing, Sebastopol CA

www.PalmDrivePublishing.com

Email: publisher@PalmDrivePublishing.com

This memoir is a product of the author's recollections and is thus rendered as a subjective accounting of events that occurred in his life. This is a memoir book of humor, comedy, and satire meant to refract the author's eyewitness experience of what might otherwise be objective history.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021939197

Fritscher, Jack 1939-

The Life and Times of the Legendary Larry Townsend / Jack Fritscher
p.cm

ISBN 978-1-890834-99-9 Print

ISBN 978-1-890834-53-1 eBook

1. Biography/Autobiography. 2. Personal Memoir. 3. Homosexuality.
4. Masculinity. 5. Gay and Lesbian Studies. 6. Gay Studies (Gay Men).
7. Popular Culture. 8. Editors, Journalists, Publishers. 9. Sadomasochism. 10. American Literature—20th Century. 11. Feminism. 12. Homomascularity.

First Printing 2021

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

PalmDrivePublishing

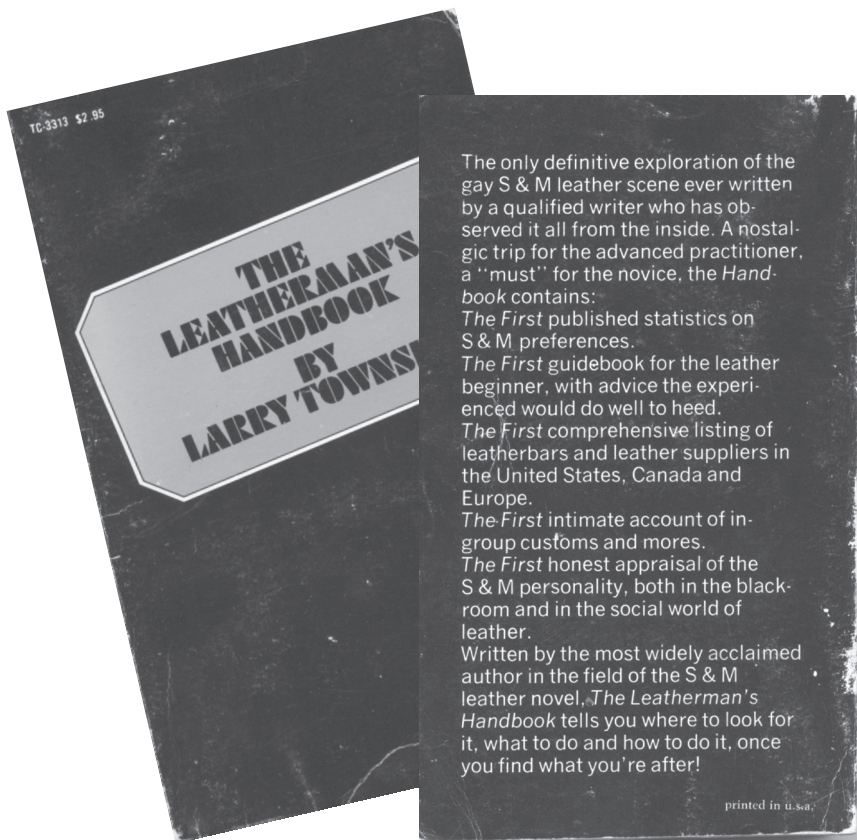
Dedication

To the memory of Larry Townsend
with gratitude to Jeanne Barney
for her eyewitness testimony
and to my husband and editor Mark Hemry
without whose remarkable diligence
over forty-two years this historic material
would have been impossible
to collect, analyze, and present

The Sexual Revolution
of the Titanic 1970s

Epigraph

They were careless people, Tom and Daisy
—they smashed up things and creatures and
then retreated back into their money or
their vast carelessness or whatever it was
that kept them together, and
let other people clean up the mess they had made.
—F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*



First edition. Back cover. The author described his book as: The only definitive exploration of the gay S&M leather scene ever written by a qualified writer who has observed it all from the inside. A nostalgic trip for the advanced practitioner, a "must" for the novice, the *Handbook* contains:

- *The First* published statistics on S&M preferences.
- *The First* guidebook for the leather beginner, with advice the experienced would do well to heed.
- *The First* comprehensive listing of leather bars and leather suppliers in the United States, Canada, and Europe.
- *The First* intimate account of ingroup customs and mores.
- *The First* honest appraisal of the S&M personality, both in the black-room and in the social world of leather.

Written by the most widely acclaimed author in the field of S&M leather novel, *The Leatherman's Handbook* tells you where to look for it, what to do and how to do it, once you find what you're after!

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***Los Angeles Times*, April 14, 1955**
UCLA Student Gets Medal for Rhine Heroism

Irvin T. Bernhard, 24, UCLA sophomore [name later changed to "Michael Lawrence 'Larry' Townsend," July 19, 1972], was presented with a medal and scroll yesterday by Dr. Richard Hertz, German Consul General in Los Angeles, for saving a 9-year-old German boy from drowning in the Rhine River at Bonn last August.

Gov. Karl Arnold of the German state of Nordrhein-Westfalen sent the scroll and medal to Dr. Hertz for presentation to Bernhard, who was a member of the U.S. Air Force when he performed the heroic feat.

The youngster had been riding along a Rhine River road on his scooter

when he had an accident and fell into the deep river. As a swift current spun the boy around in the water, Bernhard, who was eating at a nearby sidewalk café, got up, raced to the river, and dived in fully dressed.

"I swallowed an awful lot of the Rhine, but the two of us made it back to shore all right," Bernhard, who lives at 624 Veteran Avenue, West Los Angeles, recounted yesterday in the German Consulate at 3450 Wilshire Blvd. Accompanying the young man to the Consulate was his sister, Mrs. Ralph J. Tingle of 621 S. Barrington Avenue, who proudly looked on as Dr. Hertz gave the awards.

Los Angeles Times, April 14, 1955. "UCLA Student Gets Medal for Rhine Heroism" In Germany in 1954, Staff Sergeant Larry Townsend of the U.S. Air Force, age 24, jumped fully clothed into the Rhine River to save a boy from drowning. It was the kind of pro-active heroism that typified his character, his writing, and his life.