

Author Preface

San Francisco's Golden Age

The Titanic 1970s

The First Decade of Gay Liberation
(Stonewall to HIV)

1970-1982

“Bliss was it that dawn to be alive,
but to be young was heaven.”

—William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*

“Whoever did not live in the years
neighboring the revolution
does not know what the pleasure of living means.”

—Charles Maurice de Talleyrand

This memoir-novel is a literary structure akin to independent film. Dialogue rules. Time is folded. Characters drive the plot. A voice-over guides nuance. The chapters are reels. The first sentence outlines the entire story. Scenes are numbered for shooting. Drama collides with humor. Beauty slips on a banana peel. The narrator, Magnus Bishop, is *auteur* directing the *mise en scene*—which is everything that appears on the page to aid the reader willing to time-travel to the past.

The narrator's point of view gives camera angles on characters, crowds, streets, cafes, galleries, bars, baths, clothing, furnishings, and rituals of sex and magic. His camera eye tracks through large and small scenes in medium shots and close-ups. The boom mike mixes sounds of music, voices, and flesh. The editing technique is collage, juxtaposition, re-vision, deconstruction, and double-exposure of dozens of texts real within the fictive world of the memoir.

Threading pop culture from John Dos Passos' *USA Trilogy* (newspaper headlines, newsreel films, journals) to Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (the O'Hara clan; Hollywood heroines' man trouble) and Andy Warhol's film *The Chelsea Girls* (twelve stories running four hours simultaneously on two screens), this “screenplay novel” purposely requires twelve hours of reading to reveal twelve years of history. For those who enjoy curling up with a book, such a layered story, such a longer-form novel, going wide and deep can be an absorbing journey out of oneself into otherness.

Erotic content is the essence of queer literature. Honest *eros* is not closeted to protect the reader from psychologically driven acts of human sexuality. This is not pornography. This is a documentary of the glorious mood swings of the first decade of gay liberation. The revolutionary 1970s enlightened sex the way the French Revolution enlightened reason.

This is also a fable of how we invented our lives through magical thinking, and pioneered a new lifestyle in that sanctuary window between the invention of penicillin and the viral *Götterdämmerung*. This is the fictive autobiography of a specific group of West Coast people in a specific place at a specific time. Real historical people walk through the story, anchoring the plot. Equally grounding, the very important subplot of a straight family melt-down protects the gay lifestyle from being singled out for criticism. All humans are in equal emotional extremis.

In the 1970s salon that surrounded *Drummer* magazine when I was editor in chief, and at 4,380 daily brunches during twelve years on Castro, I listened to men spin stories of their birth siblings from hell, of lovers who wouldn't stay, of lovers who wouldn't leave, and other archetypal tales of our bawdy Chaucerian culture. (The Castro is our Canterbury.) I had to be present to write this history, but I am none of the characters, nor are their politics mine.

I thank the critics from *The Advocate* to *The New Republic* for their reviews, particularly Samuel M. Steward, and Michael Bronski, who wrote in part:

My God, what a book! It's all there, done with Fritscher's usual elan and verve. I would not be surprised if he has written what will be looked on as that period's Great American Gay Novel. What lovely stuff!

—Sam Steward (aka Phil Andros)

There are scores of minor characters, hundreds of episodes, thousands of historical details, and a plot that makes *Gone with the Wind* seem like a short story....*Some Dance to Remember* is a great ambitious work and a rarity in modern fiction: a novel of ideas.... Fritscher is concerned not only about telling the truth of gay men's lives—how we lived and loved, struggled and survived—but in examining in the psychological and philosophical underpinnings of those lives—the intricate interplay of self-expression and self-destruction, of sexual autonomy and erotic dependency.... He has recreated more than a decade of gay history—its sights, smells,

nerves, and guts. If *Some Dance to Remember* both astonishes and bewilders, seduces and frightens us (often at the same time), it is because Fritscher has captured with intelligence and love, the way we live, both then and now.

—Michael Bronski, *The Guide*, Boston

Veterans of the liberation wars who survived the Titanic 1970s tend to recall that decade with nostalgia and gratitude. They were young, alive, and guests at the twelve-year celebration kicked off at Stonewall. As the 1970s party cruised forward, the innocents on board had no hint of the iceberg of HIV that lay ahead. Some of the survivors write me letters asking, “How did you read my dreams; how did you read my diary?” They assign my book to their younger lovers, and they lament revisionist Puritans who missed the party and disrespect the decade for decadence, disco, and disease. The 1970s didn’t cause AIDS. A virus caused AIDS.

In 1968, I was fortunate to be one of the founding members of the American Popular Culture Association, which helped introduce diversity to American studies. Long before Stonewall, I knew the professional importance of writing about queer culture as it happened. In the gonzo New Journalism fashion of the times, it didn’t hurt that the professor was also a participant. This memoir-novel is eyewitness reportage. In bars, baths, coffee shops, and airplanes, I wrote the first bits of this manuscript on scraps of paper in 1970. I finished the final edit in 1984. Various gay magazine editors published excerpts, which test-marketed reader feedback. In late 1988, the daring, darling, straight publisher Elizabeth Gershman wrote, “I’d fucking kill to publish *Some Dance*,” which she did on Valentine’s Day 1990. The manuscript was ready for publication in spring 1989, but I hated the 1980s. “So it won’t be the last book of the 1980s,” Elizabeth said. “It’ll be the first book of the 1990s about the 1970s.”

What think you I take my pen in hand to record?
...But merely of two simple men I saw today
on the pier in the midst of the crowd,
parting that parting of dear friends,
The one to remain hung on the other’s neck
and passionately kiss’d him,
While the one to depart
tightly prest the one to remain in his arms.

—Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*

This is a story of the way we were coming out *en masse* from the American closet. Because queer history has no more memory than the remembrance we give it, perhaps this book will be of interest to readers born years after this story ended in 1982. At the post-millennium corner of 18th and Castro, one can feel the ghosts, the haunts, the spirits.

Once upon a time after Stonewall....

The pop-culture soundtrack of this story is the Eagles' *Hotel California*. It infuses the emotion of "being there." The 1976 album spent 107 weeks on the charts through 1979. Every disco, bar, and bath dropped needles on its vinyl. Each track is a picaresque character study of ecstasy and excess: "New Kid in Town," "Life in the Fast Lane," "Wasted Time," "Victim of Love," and the title song with its dark, Sartrean no-exit lyrics. For readers open to mixed-media experiences, the opening chords of the song "Hotel California" are my *madeleine*. Play them at my funeral.

Some dance to remember.

Some dance to forget.