

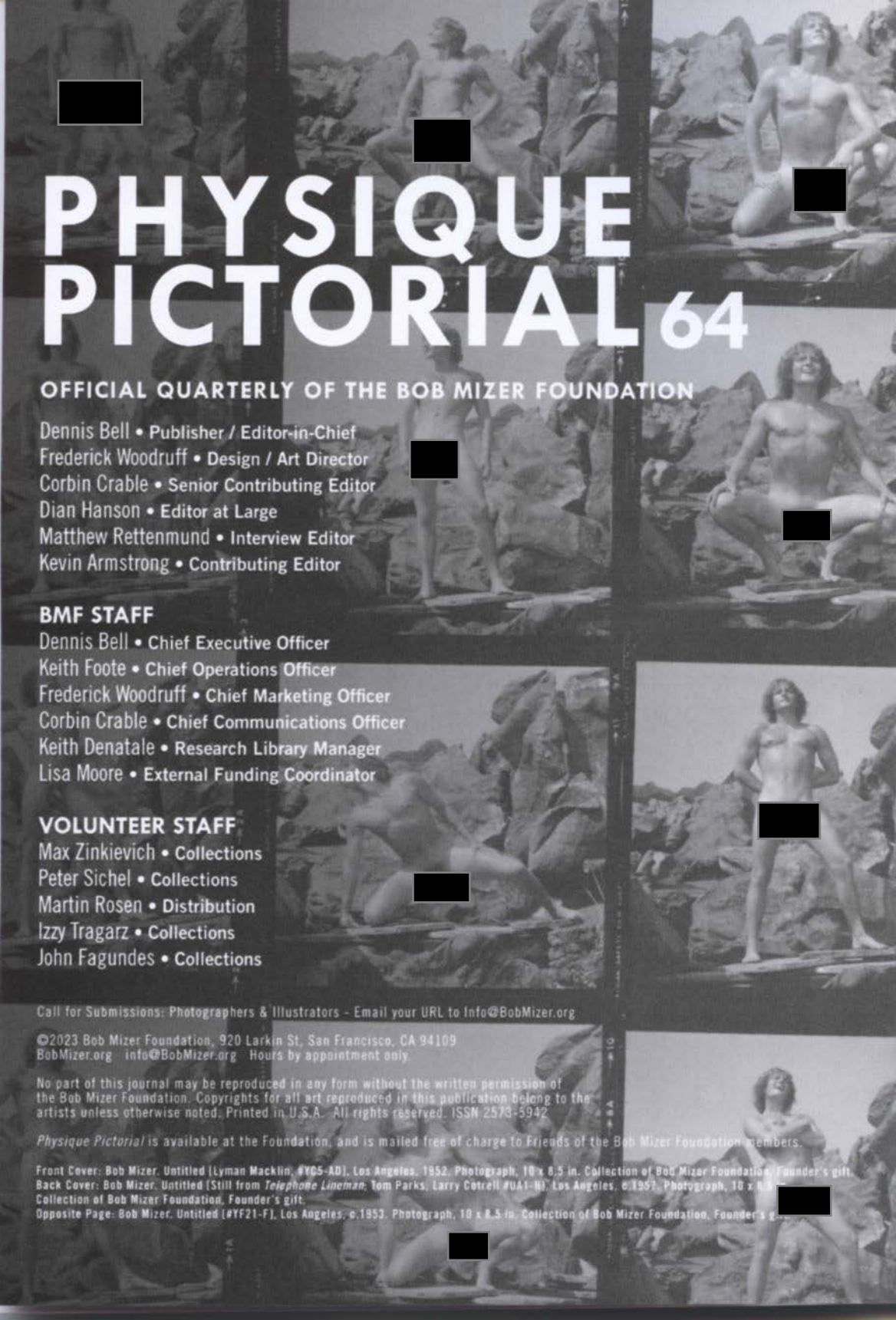
PHYSIQUE PICTORIAL 64

OFFICIAL QUARTERLY OF THE BOB MIZER FOUNDATION



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PHYSIQUE PICTORIAL 64

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Physique Pictorial is available at the Foundation, and is mailed free of charge to Friends of the Bob Mizer Foundation members.

Front Cover: Bob Mizer. Untitled (Lyman Macklin: #Y65-AD). Los Angeles, 1952. Photograph, 10 x 8.5 in. Collection of Bob Mizer Foundation, Founder's gift.
Back Cover: Bob Mizer. Untitled (Still from *Telephone Line*; Tom Parks; Larry Cotrell #UA1-N). Los Angeles, c.1951. Photograph, 10 x 8.5 in. Collection of Bob Mizer Foundation, Founder's gift.

Opposite Page: Bob Mizer. Untitled (#YF21-F). Los Angeles, c.1953. Photograph, 10 x 8.5 in. Collection of Bob Mizer Foundation, Founder's gift.

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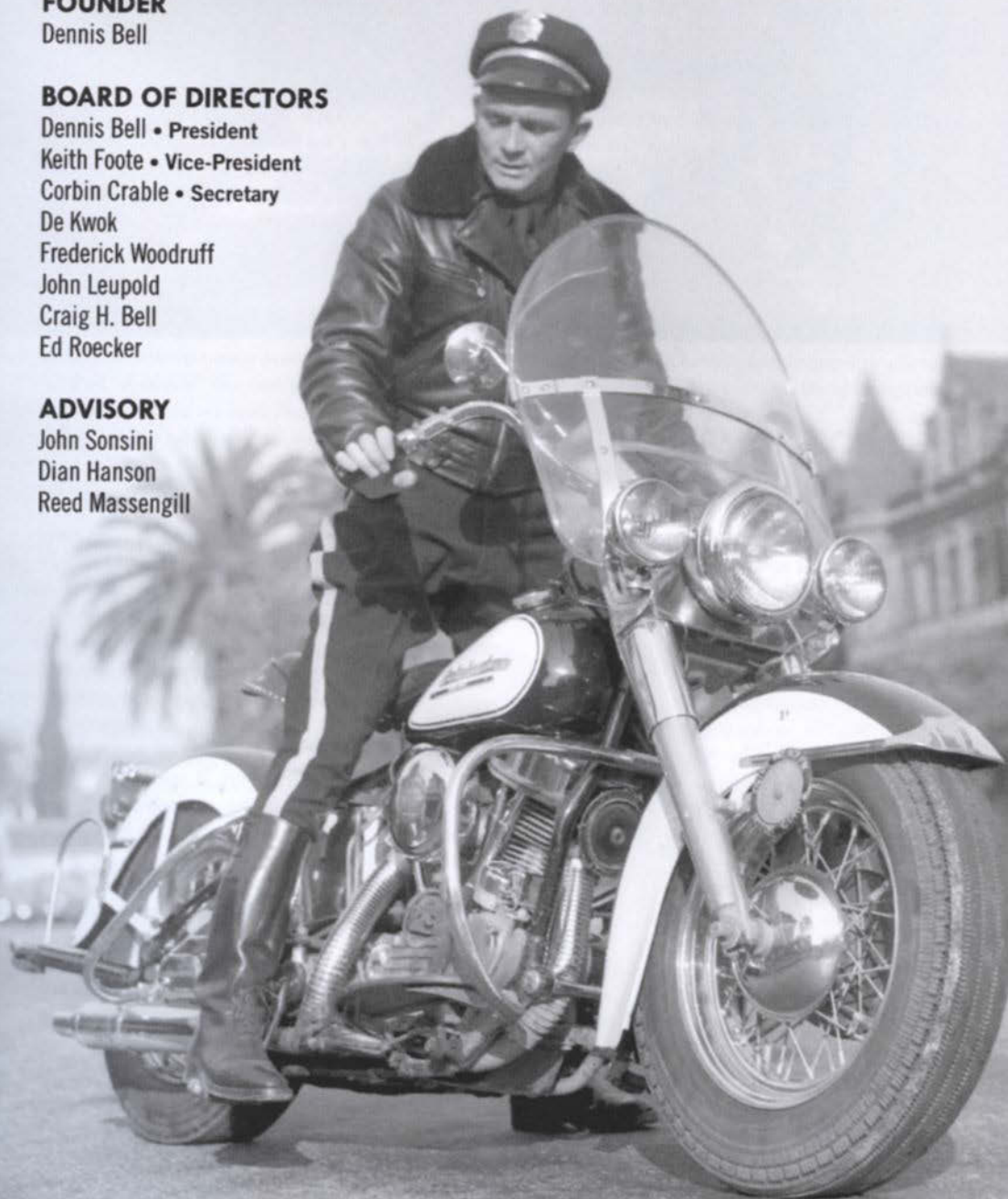
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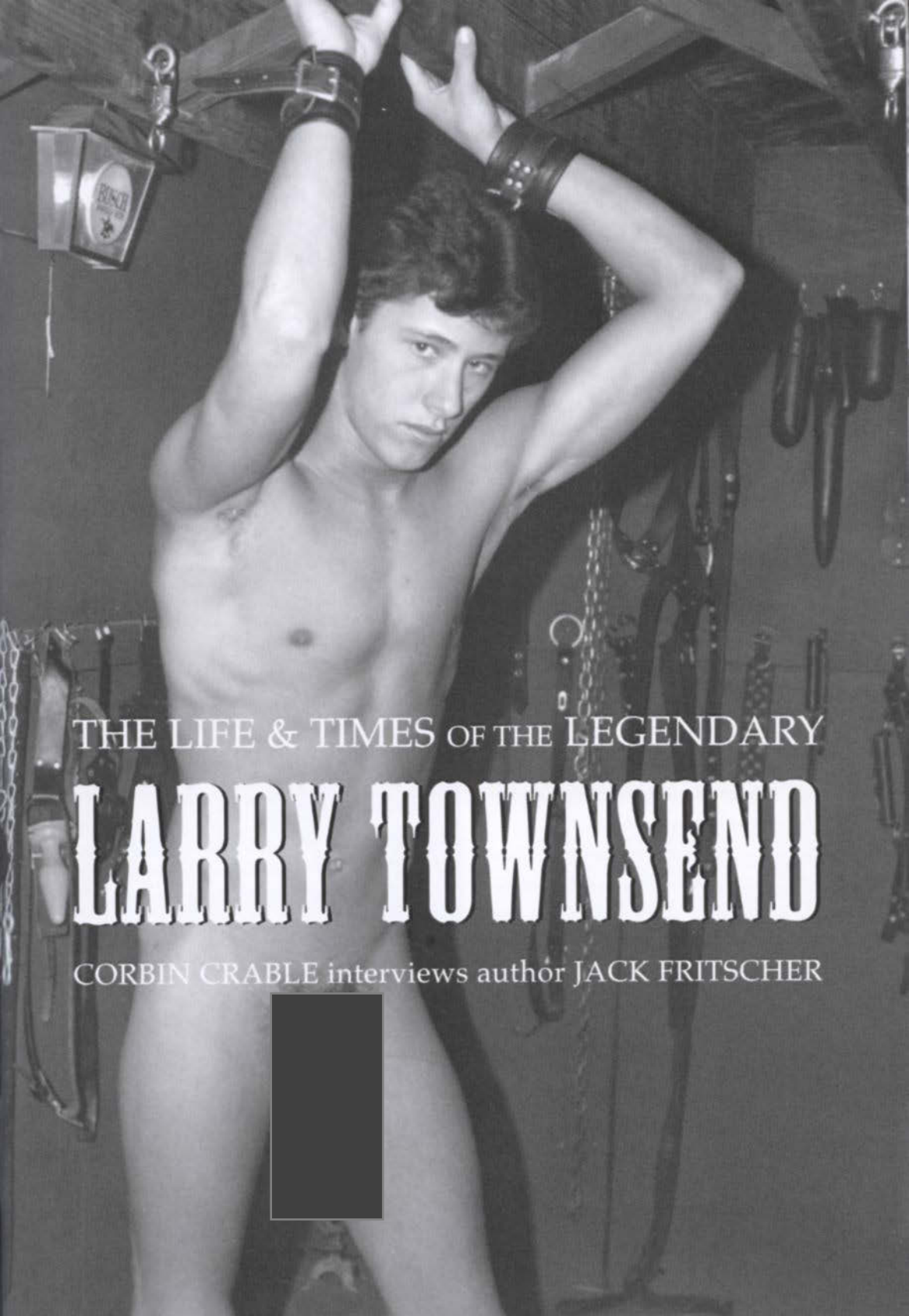
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THE LIFE & TIMES OF THE LEGENDARY

LARRY TOWNSEND

CORBIN CRABLE interviews author JACK FRITSCHER



How did you conceive of the idea to write this book about Larry Townsend?

Thirteen years after Larry Townsend died at age 77, I wrote my memoir about my friend of 40 years to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the publication of his *Leatherman's Handbook*. Published in 1972, it was the world's first analysis of leatherfolk identity and sexuality. Like Bob Mizer, Larry deserves foundational attention. Guys who like Bob's AMG images of dominance, submission, and worship are often also fans of Larry's leather books and photos.

So, at age 82, I wrote about this exciting writer, this activist, this man in full, from my personal experience of him and of his big booming voice, which I quote from his own vintage words folded inside yellowing periodicals, nostalgic letters, fading faxes, and recorded phone conversations.

What interests you most about his life and his contributions to gay culture?

Born Irvin Townsend Bernhard, Jr., in the years before Stonewall, Larry was one of the first gay authors to build a bond with readers who could not resist his powerful books. He was authentic. He was fun. He was political. He was also credentialed from his degree in psychology from UCLA, from his 1950s stint as Staff Sergeant in the U.S. Air Force in Germany, and from his hands-on S&M experience. He truly lived the leather life he reported on. By doing so in his

Handbook and in his 25 years of leather advice columns in *Drummer* and *Honcho*, he shaped and analyzed the emergence of leather life as we still live it.

He was fraternal, a brother to his readers. He was not at all patriarchal like some rude leather Daddy master. He was never Old Guard. He was always Avant-Garde. He never told anyone what

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

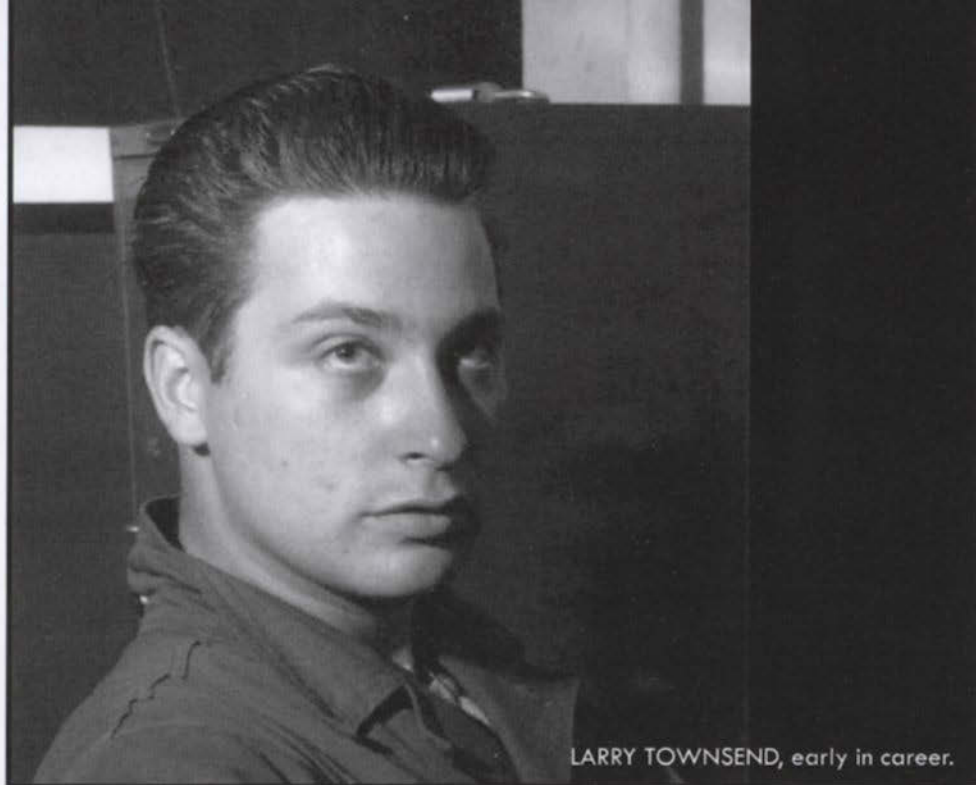


Saluting the 50th Anniversary of
The Leatherman's Handbook

Jack Fritscher

to do. He taught sex. He gave people ideas. His fans loved that.

What makes Townsend's *The Leatherman's Handbook* so compelling even today?



LARRY TOWNSEND, early in career.

Truth. Like Bob Mizer, his truth remains compelling. Larry was an eyewitness of the birth of post-war leather culture. In the closeted mid-century, he dared write the truth about the way we were. Authors have been jailed and killed for daring to do what Bob and he did. He was revolutionary. He was the same age as the two rebels without a cause, James Dean and Marlon Brando, two leather avatars who imprinted our homosexual culture. He shared a lover with that other leathery Hollywood star, Montgomery Clift. Unlike those rebels, he had a cause: gay liberation for men.

In the Hollywood of 1955, he came out in the Los Angeles bar, Cinema, which was likely the first leather bar in the world. Cinema was at the intersection of Melrose and Gower which was a hot cruising zone

appreciated by Bob Mizer who was always scouting talent for his Athletic Model Guild studio only five miles away.

From the 1950s to his death in 2008, Larry had his hand on the pulse and other body parts of sexually active homosexual leathermen who adored him for his honesty. He was a sexual freedom fighter. He encouraged his readers to dare do what they wanted. The Leatherman's Handbook remains compelling today because it is a book of sexual principles that defy time and enable young leatherfolk to use his insights to evolve new leather and kink identities in the 21st century.

Townsend was an out gay man when identifying as such could endanger your well being or even your life. How did he

and his works provide hope for closeted gay men in the post-war era?

As a teenager during the Second World War, Larry was a plane-spotter scanning the American skies for incoming Nazi fighters. That made him a perfect gay point man and lookout in our war against gay oppression. Serving in Air Force Intelligence, he was also a spy. He received an award from the German Embassy in 1955 for jumping fully clothed into the Rhine River to save a drowning German boy.

In 1972, he became president of the iconic Homophile Effort for Legal Protection (H.E.L.P.) which he helped found in 1968 to defend gays during and after entrapment arrests by the LAPD. As a writer, he also led the founding of the H.E.L.P. Newsletter, the yellow-pulp tabloid forebear of the slick and glossy *Drummer* magazine founded in LA in 1975. Larry was well aware of the dangers from sex fascists. He was arrested three times by the LAPD for having sex. He changed his name in 1972 to "Michael Lawrence 'Larry' Townsend" and put his new name on the line. He gave gay men hope.

Did you learn anything new about Townsend throughout the research phase of writing your book?

In researching his work, I discovered the connective tissue that held him together as a person and as an activist writer and photographer because he had given me full access to his files and archives. He was one of the most interesting people I ever met. He lived for 43 years in the Hollywood Hills not far from the Hollywood Sign with his genial and campy lover and business part-

ner Fred Yerkes who died in 2006.

Larry and I were friends for more than 40 years, so there were no real Ah-Ha! moments for me because I always held my chosen brother close in my heart and head. But I did enjoy, almost at a visceral level, weaving all that intimate connective tissue together for readers interested in what the Great Man did and what made him tick.

The real lesson in the book is that gay culture can drive a man mad. If Larry's history is anything beyond his skills as a writer, it is a cautionary tale warning readers about the danger of gay men growing older and losing their cool the way Larry did and others who "died of booze and revenge," according to his frenemy Edmund White—a fate Bob Mizer seems to have escaped.

If Larry had paid attention to any one of them, he might have learned not to become the litigious gay old man yelling at the neighbors' kids to get off his gay lawn, or he'd sue them for revenge! As happened, his righteous lawsuit against gay bookstores and a publisher whom he thought had done him wrong, was, in fact, the last thing he ever did.

How has the book been received thus far?

The reviews have been some kind of wonderful. It seems that this 50th anniversary of Larry's *Handbook* is the perfect time to revisit and enjoy his nonfiction and fiction books like *Run*, *Little Leather Boy*. Texts and emails to me reveal there is now a nostalgia for the leather past among men who lived it and among men who lived with HIV. For guys like that—from my own intimate life

with Larry—I tried to write an entertaining and informative book.

How have earlier publishers like Bob Mizer influenced Townsend's works in gay media?

Larry had great respect for trailblazer Mizer. Larry told me that before he came out into bars in 1955, he had been inching out reading *Physique Pictorial* almost since its founding in 1951. In fact, when Larry founded his mail-order company, LT Publications, in 1972, he built it on Mizer's tried-and-true independent business model for 1) creating one's own product of words and pictures, and 2) selling that product through mail order. Gay entrepreneurs like Bob and Larry were, in fact, the enterprising first gay small-business owners who were not owners of bars. Through their mail-order marketing lists, they created the first gay web linking men together coast to coast. They broke the loneliness of the closet. Then they broke the closet.

Both Townsend and Mizer's life works were very steeped in social justice and actively resisting censorship. Now that the battle has moved from the realm of print media to digital, what must artists do to share their works while advocating for freedom of artistic expression in the Digital Age?

Bob and Larry both deserve gay sainthood as social justice warriors fighting censorship while championing diversity of face and race in their published pages. They helped gay lib happen. People sometimes think of Bob as a photographer and forget that he was also an editorial writer

campaigning for freedom of the press. Larry through his political activism also fought against censorship. Both of them learned hard lessons about protecting their copyrights against pirates, and those lessons apply to creators in the digital age.

As mentioned in that dramatic 2008 lawsuit, Larry died trying to protect his copyright from, he said, a predatory book publisher who was selling unauthorized editions of his work. His lawsuit says everything about his lifelong mission to protect gay creators and their copyrights.

Ultimately, what is Townsend's legacy?

The point of my memoir is to highlight his legacy. Physically, his legacy is 80 books of fiction and nonfiction, dozens of stand-alone magazine-like booklets of prose and pictures, hundreds of advice columns, letters, emails, and an archive filled with clippings about the rise of gay culture and leather pride. His work is archived at not only the Bob Mizer Foundation, but also at Yale, the ONE Institute in Los Angeles, and the Leather Archives and Museum in Chicago. Emotionally, his legacy can be experienced by readers in the beating heart of his writings into which he poured his prayers, works, joys and sufferings. He gave his all. Who could ask for anything more?

Jack Fritscher is the author of the new memoir about *The Leatherman's Handbook* writer Larry Townsend, and is the founding San Francisco editor of *Drummer* magazine. His 20 books include *Maplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera* and *Some Dance to Remember: A Memoir-Novel of San Francisco 1970–1982*. Find more on Jack Fritscher at his website, www.JackFritscher.com.