

HEADLINE NEWS:

Stonewall Riot Ends Prehistoric Gay Period,
Begins GLBT Civil Rights Movement!

Suddenly That Summer: What It Was Like to Be Gay and Alive That May and June of 1969

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“At Stonewall, gay character changed.”
—Jack Fritscher, *Gay San Francisco*

Do you remember where you were during Stonewall?
Are you younger than Stonewall?

Stonewall grew out of our larger American struggle for civil rights in the 1960s during the sexual revolution sweeping the world.

“Stonewall” was happening everywhere before it happened at the Stonewall Inn.

On April 23, 1961, recorded for the first time, there was the thrilling and uncloseted cheering of gay men’s voices on the live-concert recording of *Judy at Carnegie Hall*.

On the West Coast, queens stood up against the cops in Los Angeles at Cooper’s Doughnuts (1959), and in San Francisco at the Why Not? bar (1960) and Compton’s Cafeteria (1966).

Almost five years to the day before Stonewall, *Life* magazine in its prescient issue, June 26, 1964, documented San Francisco’s notoriously “out” gay bar, the Tool Box. The text and photographs, sourced in Marlon Brando’s gay-shaping

rebel film *The Wild One* (1953), were like an engraved invitation to queers everywhere to come out of the closet and immigrate to major cities where there was strength in numbers. *Life* trumpeted: “A secret world grows open and bolder. Society is forced to look at it—and try to understand it.”

Against the odds of straight history, the Stonewall Rebellion of June 28, 1969, became the earthshaking epicenter of GLBT culture, and ended our gay prehistoric period.

At Stonewall, we showed our true rainbow colors.

After a week of queer riots the media could no longer ignore, the *New York Daily News* headlined on July 6, 1969: “Homo Nest Raided, Queen Bees Are Stinging Mad.”

Ouch.

Jack Fritscher was not in Sheridan Square at the Stonewall rebellion; but as a university professor (since 1964) writing at that time about gay popular culture, he was an eyewitness to the media coverage of the events. In *Gay San Francisco*, he wrote in his essay “Homomascularity: Framing the Key Words of Gay Popular Culture”:

Reporting the Stonewall uprising six hours after the first stone was cast, a reticent *New York Times* in ten short-shrift paragraphs used the words *homosexual* once and *young men* twice. The *New York Post* in five paragraphs used *homosexual* only once but actually dared quote the framing chant of “gay power.”

In its Independence Day issue (July 3, 1969), *The Village Voice* nailed the gay *gravitas* with the headline feature “Gay Power Comes to Sheridan Square.” On November 5, activists successfully picketed the *Los Angeles Times* for refusing to print the word *homosexual* in advertisements. By June 1970, thousands of gay militants—veterans of civil rights, women’s lib, and peace movements—marched past news media cameras with signs reading “Gay Pride” and “Gay Power”

at the Christopher Street Liberation Day in Central Park.

So how did a routine NYPD raid on a Mafia-controlled gay bar in Greenwich Village on June 28, 1969, morph from a bar fight into a symbol for the Gay Civil Rights movement—in the same way that the march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, on March 7, 1965, became an archetypal “roots” moment for the Black Civil Rights movement?

Even though Stonewall wasn't the first rebel act in the “gay war of independence,” it scored the best newspaper coverage to date at that time. “Stonewall” was never reported in the world's then only streaming headlines: the electric news ticker famously wrapping around the exterior of One Times Square.

In the twenty-four months after the Stonewall riot, it was gay journalists, thinking and writing about the paradigm shift in gay lib, who did the math, and figured out the symbolism inherent in the *real politik* of the Stonewall uprising.

One of those authors paying attention, according to Willie Walker, founder of the GLBT Historical Society of San Francisco, was Jack Fritscher. Walker wrote: “Fritscher is a prolific writer who since the late 1960s has helped document the gay world and the changes it has undergone.”

Before Stonewall, Fritscher had written a dozen published short stories and his first novels *What They Did to the Kid: Confessions of an Altar Boy* (1965) and *Leather Blues* (1969), as well as his gay-infused dissertation *Love and Death in Tennessee Williams* (1967), and his “out” review of *The Boys in the Band* (1968) for the academic *Journal of Popular Culture*; and he was already journalizing the text that became his novel *Some Dance to Remember*. In February 1969 he had begun research inside San Francisco's gay demimonde for his nonfiction book *Popular Witchcraft* (1972) published four years before Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) and six years before

Arthur Evans' *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture* (1978). In a signature way, Fritscher's writing connects the axis between Stonewall and Castro Street. Harvey Milk was not the first or only gay person to connect the dots of "Stonewall" to San Francisco.

In the run-up to Stonewall, Fritscher was on the same civil-rights learning curve as so many other gays and lesbians who were learning to stand up for our own rights by standing up for the civil rights of others.

America registered to vote, and turned to the "New Left" under John F. Kennedy. In 1962 and 1963, Fritscher, having been schooled from 1953-1964 to follow the French worker priests, was getting a street education as a community activist. He worked under grass-roots political organizer Saul Alinsky and The Woodlawn Organization (TWO) on the South Side of Chicago, at 63rd and Cottage Grove, twenty-five years before Barack Obama (also influenced by Alinsky) arrived to do the same thing in the same neighborhoods.

Marching behind Martin Luther King, Fritscher was carried bodily by Chicago cops out of the first Mayor Daley's office:

Those cops were so powerful and drop-dead gorgeous I instantly felt the sexual edge of political resistance. With the Stonewall anniversary in June 2009 following the defeat of gay marriage in the California elections of November 2008, maybe the fight for the civil right of same-sex marriage is a "Second Stonewall," or "Stonewall II." Racism and sexism, including voting against gay marriage, are hate crimes.

In *Gay San Francisco*, Fritscher examined his pre-Stonewall participation on the South Side of Chicago and at the August 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago when hippies and yippies and gays, including Allen Ginsberg and Jean

Genet, fought against the Chicago cops clubbing the surging convention crowds who chanted in self-defense to the live TV cameras, “The whole world is watching.”

Fritscher wrote,

You don’t have to be Rosa Parks on a short bus to figure that the people’s resistance against the cops at the Democratic Convention in Chicago 1968 was a precise model and encouragement ten months later for the queens’ rebellion against the cops at the Stonewall Inn. Without Chicago, Stonewall may not have happened.

The spring of 1969 was a wild time in the Swinging Sixties. On June 9, 1969, eighteen days before Stonewall, gays throughout the world hosted parties celebrating 6/9/69. On June 20, 1969, seven days before Stonewall, Fritscher, an openly gay professor teaching at university since 1964, turned thirty. He was a constant observer in his lifelong journals of the gay push forward in “the revolutionary 1960s.” Four weeks before his birthday, he had returned from Europe where “in Holland a wild Dutch boy” had recruited him, “from a sex romp, into a rebel-student takeover of the University of Amsterdam.” That melee swept them both further to La Rive Gauche in “gay Parea.” He wrote:

Paris still vibed “red” with a peoples’ revolutionary brilliance that May 1969 after the riotous Prague Spring of 1968 when student strikes had shut down old-style Europe. The most popular songs worldwide on jukebox playlists in gay bars was the explicit pair of whispered duets by Serge Gainsbourg and Jane Birkin anointing 1969 sexually in their shocking “69 Annee Erotique” and “Je t’aime, moi non plus.”

Oh, mon amour!

During that passionate spring before Stonewall, gay novelist James Leo Herlihy and gay director John Schlesinger turned *Midnight Cowboy* from a conventional buddy movie into a complex male love story that won the Oscar for best picture.

And lots of us gay men shouted “Bugatti!” as we fell in love with the rebel-icon Vanessa Redgrave dancing in the film *Isadora*, naked and wrapped in the red flag, fucking handsome young Russian Communist revolutionaries.

It was there, in Paris, 1969, in the 5th *arrondissement* where, he wrote, “the bedroom windows reached from floor to ceiling,” and he

fell in, and out, of springtime love, and the Dutch lad shifted shape one night at Le Keller’s bar near the Bastille into a young Brit whose muscular good looks swept us both to London which was way more than the straight scene of the Beatles and Carnaby Street.

Our gay London was the leathery Coleherne pub in Earls Court, the cruisy third-run movie balconies in Picadilly, the wild nighttime sex in the woods on Hampstead Heath, and the steaming pleasures of the ancient Turkish baths tucked under York Hall on Old Ford Road. Those Victorian working-man’s tubs, next door to the Museum of Childhood, were perfectly situated for a little extra “cottage” sex in the busy, dank public toilet outside the Bethnal Green tube station.

The gay world of the Swinging Sixties was an ongoing orgy worldwide, long before Stonewall turned sex political.

Two days after the demarcation of his thirtieth birthday, and five days before Stonewall, he felt “the sorrow most gay

men suffered when Judy Garland died on the floor of a London hotel toilet on June 22.” As the night of June 27 turned into June 28, the mixed emotions around Stonewall exploded.

“If Judy Garland, the ventriloquist of gay code, had not died,” he says,

Stonewall may not have happened. Exactly as if citizens’ resistance to the police riot at the Democratic Convention in Chicago had not happened, Stonewall may not have happened.

I’m not the only skeptic to giggle at the huge crowd of people, some of them famous authors, who claim they were part of the Stonewall “resistance” when I know some of those authors could never “resist” anything. Seriously, the concentric rings around Stonewall were rather like this.

First, the 1960s Greenwich Village bar crowd, of which I was a part at the Ramrod and [the American] Keller’s, was aware of the incident in Sheridan Square. As were the men I knew whispering from cubicle to cubicle at the ever-lovely Everhard Baths at 28 West 28th Street.

Then the newspapers picked up the local-color story in a paragraph or two. The straight media dismissed us as “quaint queens.”

It took the next two years for the emerging gay press to manufacture the political symbolism of what the Stonewall riots meant. And that was a construct built entirely on the East Coast by eager gay journalists in Manhattan cleverly seeking a talisman “hook” to nurture Stonewall into a rally point surpassing any of the many gay fights against the cops that had occurred before.

Stonewall was a real historical event, but as a political and literary symbol it was like Shakespeare’s

speech in *Henry V*, rather much the cool invention of gay journalists and scholars who, retro-fitting the riot, were correct in wanting us all to rally around the Rainbow Flag. Stonewall was the gay “Saint Crispin’s Day.”

This day is called the Feast of Crispian:
 He that outlives this day, and comes safe home,
 Will stand a-tiptoe when the day is named,
 And rouse him at the name of Crispian.
 He that shall see this day and live t’old age,
 Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbours,
 And say “To-morrow is Saint Crispian”:
 Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars
 And say “These wounds I had on Crispin’s day.”
 Old men forget: yet all shall be forgot,
 But he’ll remember with advantages
 What feats he did that day. Then shall our names,...
 Be in their flowing cups freshly remembered.
 This story shall the good man teach his son;
 And Crispin Crispian shall ne’er go by,
 From this day to the ending of the world,
 But we in it shall be remembered;
 We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
 For he today that sheds his blood with me
 Shall be my brother; be he ne’er so vile,
 This day shall gentle his condition:
 And gentlemen in England now abed
 Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,
 And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
 That fought with us upon Saint Crispin’s day.

Without drag queens, Stonewall might not have happened.

Without writers, Stonewall might not have had much afterlife.

Those writers were correct to grow the week of riots around Stonewall into an international symbol. Writers are thinkers, conceptualizers, wordsmiths. We work our magic by spelling. Expanding the linguistics of GLBT culture is a gay writer's profession. As an ancient writer of gay history and gay fiction, I feel privileged to have been among that generation of Stonewall journalists and authors and magazine editors who took the concepts of gay liberation worldwide.

With Stonewall turning forty, and with Fritscher turning seventy, I have collected these stories together in this edition to see, first, how Stonewall may have affected the gay capital of San Francisco, and, second, how Fritscher's West Coast writing absorbed the aftermath of Stonewall.

What might the GLBT world feel as Stonewall reaches middle age? Or old age? I imagine that "Stonewall 50" in ten years' time will be a huge celebration, and will, perhaps, begin a true renaissance of GLBT culture that, even after Stonewall, has suffered so many years of bigotry at the hands of fundamentalists.

What will we know by 2019 that we don't know now?

Even as we gays disappear, we reappear.

Fifteen years ago, on June 26, 1994, marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of Stonewall, the Manhattan Gay Pride Parade for "Stonewall 25" was as peaceful as the Stonewall riot was violent—despite the 1994 cage-match between snarling gay organizations, and despite interference from the cross-dressing mayor and 2008 presidential failure Rudy Giuliani. Hundreds of thousands of people attended the "Stonewall 25" march, and 100,000 gathered at the rally in Central Park.

"If," Fritscher says,

in 2009, one in ten people is gay on our globe, with a population of nearly seven billion, well, that's inching close to one billion gay folk. Where gay "mail order" was the pace in 1969, electronic communication and the "Long Tail of the Internet" is, today, where our organizing power lies. Forty years ago at Stonewall, there was no Internet, no texting, no instant messaging, no viral call to action, no Facebook, and no video footage of the riots for youtube.com.

For myself as editor striving to present my information accurately, I must, in full disclosure, and in full transparency as a longtime media producer, admit that I have known Jack Fritscher intimately, as his lover and as his domestic partner and as his spouse, since the 1970s. As an omnivorous reader, I'm also a fan—which is why I am introducing this book as an important project marking GLBT history.

As Ian Richardson phrased so famously in *House of Cards*, may I say, "You may very well think I have access to the author's most intimate thoughts and private papers, but I couldn't possibly comment."

In theory, who better to be an eyewitness than a spouse sorting out how things went behind a writer's study door?

May I say that Jack Fritscher is a hyphenate novelist, historian, magazine journalist, and photographer who has dedicated his career to writing specifically about gay history in books such as his award-winning novella *Titanic* (1988), his Lammy Finalist *Some Dance to Remember: A Memoir-Novel of San Francisco 1970-1982* (1990), and his four-volume encyclopedic gay history *Gay San Francisco* (2008).¹

¹Fritscher's *Gay San Francisco* is available as a GLBT-research low-cost paperback and as a series of "free and green pdfs" at www.JackFritscher.com.

Is he the first "green and gay" author, and am I the first "green and gay" publisher to forego royalties in order to allow everyone everywhere—as a gay community service—free access to gay information?

Among his fellow authors Chuck Palahniuk, Michael Cunningham, Armistead Maupin, Dennis Cooper, Edmund White, Andrew Holleran, Ethan Mordden, Dorothy Allison, Allan Gurganus, and Felice Picano, Fritscher is the eldest of this senior group of early-bird specialists.

His distinctive contribution to gay literature has been his widening, precisely with his constant themes of humanism mixed with eros, the liminal diversity of the gay literary canon.

Stonewall surveys the fictive essence of his fifty-year career capturing the character, dialogue, and nuance of the gay culture whose emotional curves he loves.

Guided by a rather good sense of gaydar in this new collection, Fritscher celebrates our drama and diversity in nine tales orbiting the curvature of the gay Earth — from the 1906 earthquake in “Meet Me in San Francisco” through the 1969 Stonewall rebellion up to 1999 in “Mrs. Dalloway Went That-A-Way.”

Elaborating on the changes caused by Stonewall, and writing stories told with a humanist’s feel for the way we are, Fritscher uses the “omniscient narrator’s voice” to inflect his stories with humor, irony, and drama. He is a prose stylist who can turn a phrase with a flip that surprises and delights the reader. His dialogue seems as lively on the page as it is in some of the plays and screenplays he has authored.

The nine stories, connecting gay people together, range from a Greenwich Village bar to a Midwest movie palace, and from an Alaska cruise ship to San Francisco’s Castro Street teeming with gay immigrants from the American culture wars. His characters manage to survive, like Stonewall itself, against all odds.

The following “thumbnails” may reveal how some of Fritscher’s gay archetribes stories worked for me personally over the years, and professionally during the time my task was to select the stories for this *Stonewall* anthology.

The title tale “Stonewall: June 27, 1969, 11 PM” is a drag comedy with *All About Eve* dialogue *Will and Grace* never dared try. True to Aristotle’s classic unities of time, place, and action, “Stonewall” unfolds in the precise “Last Prehistoric Gay Period,” the sixty minutes leading up to the NYPD raid on the Stonewall Inn. It was encouraging to me that the first publisher of “Stonewall,” Thomas Long, editor of the prestigious *Harrington Gay Men’s Literary Quarterly*, wrote: “Fritscher’s ‘Stonewall’ is pitch-perfect.”

In the way the “Stonewall” story itself memorializes Christopher Street, two of the West Coast stories, plus the stage version of one of them, form a kind of “Castro Street Trilogy.”

- “Kweenasheba” is a comedy about two couples in the first days of gay gentrification on Castro Street surrounded by people self-fashioning new gay identities in the 1970s’ wonderful window between penicillin and plague.
- *Coming Attractions* is the author’s 1976 one-act play produced by San Francisco’s Yonkers Production Company. It is the companion piece for “Kweenasheba.” Both the play and the story were funded by a National Endowment Grant to the Humanities given to Jack Fritscher for writing studies at the University of California, Berkeley (1973).
- “The Barber of 18th and Castro” features two characters locked in one’s struggle to come out. This black comedy about sex worship confronts themes of gay lib, guilt, racial diversity, and blindness. Think Alfred Hitchcock directing a psychological thriller about existential fear and erotic fantasy on Castro Street in 1973, four years after the Stonewall revolution.

The other stories, diversely reflecting our gay hearts and minds, illustrate Fritscher’s quotable quote: “At Stonewall, gay character changed.”

- “Meet Me in San Francisco” is a romantic Valentine of teen boys in love, separated in the deadly serious San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906.
- “The Unseen Hand in the Lavender Light” is an existential profile of a movie-mad young gay boy abandoned during World War II by his waitress-mother at the Bee Hive café. Disoriented and confused, he comes out in a dark movie theater where, lit only by the light of the projector, he survives as an usher, and tries to make something of himself, as the 1950s of corporate Cinemascope evolve into the 1960s of personal Underground Cinema.
- “The Story Knife,” noted historically by legendary *Men on Men* editor George Stambolian, is the shipboard romantic comedy of a dedicated Catholic priest who discovers (without any postmodern irony, and not all to his dismay) that temptation has turned him into a sex-tourist beguiled by a seductive cabin boy from Genoa; so now what does he do?
- “Mrs. Dalloway Went That-A-Way” is a touching and stylistically complex story of gay marriage and eldercare and gay publishing. In it, Fritscher teases out Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* into a tender love story as fitting as Michael Cunningham’s Woolf homage *The Hours*.
- In “Chasing Danny Boy,” Fritscher resets the Celtic mythology of his own Irish roots, camping on bits of James Joyce’s style. His four young punks explore their poly-sexuality in the musical and sexual multi-cultural worlds of Dublin and Chicago. “Chasing Danny Boy” was first published as the title story in an international gay-fiction collection featuring “Last Rites” by Neil Jordan, director of *The Crying Game*.

- “Stonewall: June 27, 1969, 11 PM,” for its content and style, might very well be a nominee as one of the twentieth century’s great gay short stories.

Stonewall: Stories of Gay Liberation will not play in a DVD machine, but it may be suitable for coffee-house, commute, vacation, and bedside reading; and for GLBT studies classes; and for cross-shelving in public and academic libraries; and for special collections of gay literature; and for fun.

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