

GETTING IT ON IN HOUSTON

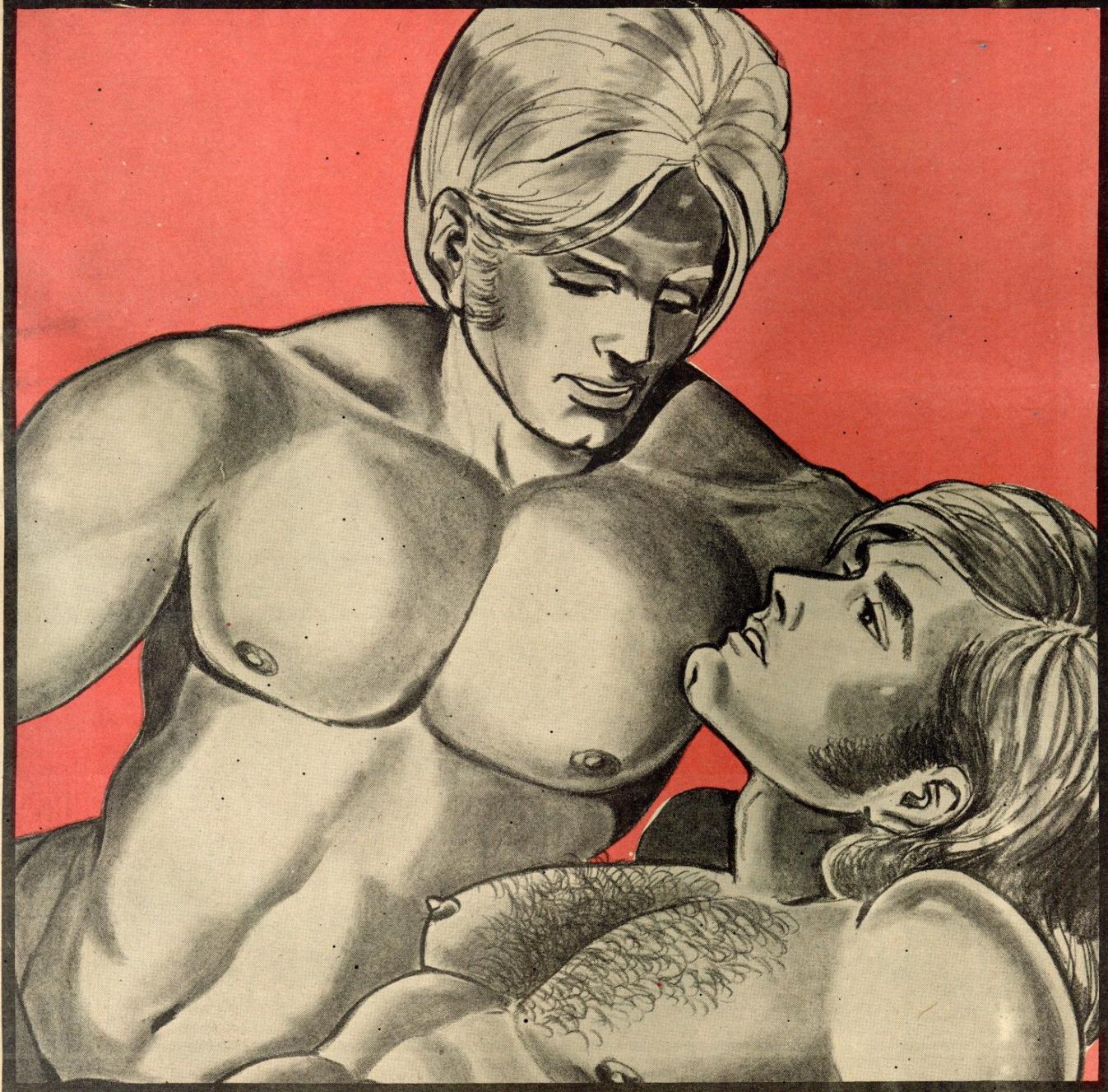
THE HUSBAND/CASEY DONOVAN/GAY GUIDE

GAYTIMES

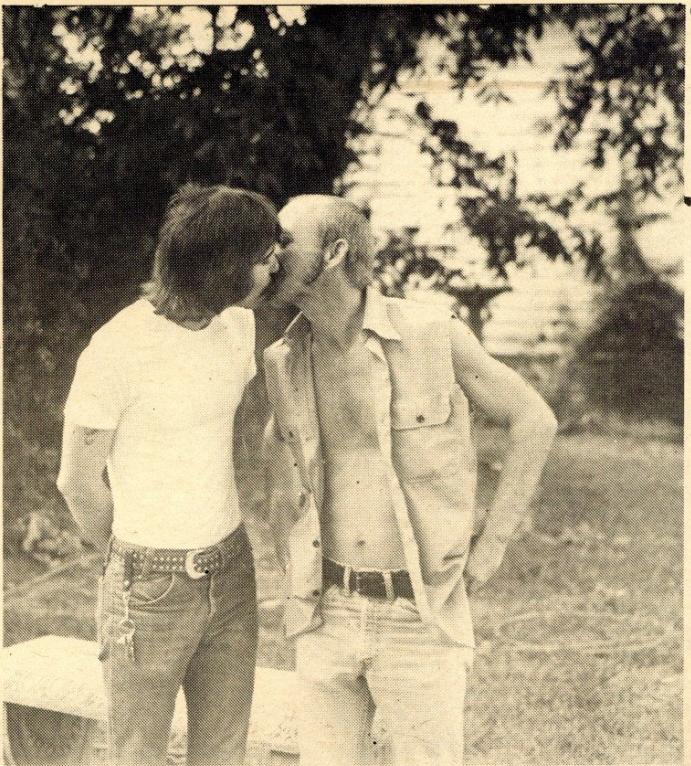
ISSUE 22

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ADULTS ONLY



PERSONAL ADS FROM GAYS IN THE U.S. AND ABROAD



Two of the friendly bartenders at Mary's Lounge. They'll give you a warm welcome when you arrive.

GAYSCENE Houston, Texas



by Robert Leighton

I've come to expect that when I set out on a trip that I will start tired. There are always so many last minute details to see-to, loose ends (no pun intended) to plug, etc. When my lover Eddie and I left for Houston this July the fatigue was a little more intense than usual. We had just spent three days in the *Gaytimes* Kissing Booth at the Los Angeles Gay Pride Carnival, the last day of which coincided with the march down Hollywood Boulevard and the rally following the march, all of which we were on hand to cover. The carnival ended at midnight Sunday and we left the next day, by car, for Texas.

We expected heat crossing the desert in July, but I was not prepared for the intense combination of heat and humidity that greeted us on our arrival in Texas. Eddie, who lived in Texas for most of his life before coming to California a year ago and entering my life, of course knew what to expect. My only experience of Texas had been crossing the panhandle which is desert country. So I was first struck by the green of Southern Texas, so similar to the East Coast, and then by the extreme humidity, again reminiscent of the East. As the days passed I was more and more reminded of Cincinnati where I had spent a few months several years ago. Except for the absence of hills, Houston bears a strong resemblance to Cincinnati in an architectural sense and even more strikingly, by the daily rainfall in summer that I remembered more than anything else about Cincinnati. I thought then that I was in the tropics because

you could almost set your clock by the afternoon rain, and the sense of dej vu was strengthened by that same phenomenon occurring in Houston.

But there the similarity ended. Where I found the people in Cincinnati rather reserved and clique-ish, the people of Houston were the opposite - warm, hospitable, very friendly and extremely horny.

Although Houston is not noted for being a center of gay liberation, most of the gay men that I met there were surprisingly open about their gayness. We stayed with a friend of Eddie's in what can only be described as Houston's gay ghetto. But unlike the mental picture that the word ghetto brings to mind, this area is especially attractive.

Known as the Cherryhurst section of Houston, mainly because of a rather cruisy little park that bears that name and is the center of the area, it is bordered by Westheimer Street, one of the main drags through town. Westheimer is about as Western a street as you can find these days and it is dotted with gay bars and restaurants.

I was told that ten years ago there were only a few "closet" gay bars in Houston. Today the city supports close to 40 gay establishments, including Mary's Lounge, probably the most down and dirty and the friendliest among them. The Locker, Houston's new "patent" leather bar housed in a former drive-in, dry cleaning establishment with signs still intact; the Farmhouse, Houston's all-new dance bar, located in a huge building that is only partially opened; and a branch of the famous Club Bath chain near the downtown section.

In addition to a large number of gay bars, the city also supports several low-key gay liberation organizations, a chapter of the Metropolitan Community Church and since the beginning of this year, *Contact*, a paper that bills itself as the Gay Newspaper of the South.

Since this was primarily a vacation trip for us, I didn't do my usual routine of trying to hit every bar in town and interview every gay leader I could contact. For once, I tried to relax, forget about *Gaytimes* for a few days and just behave like an ordinary tourist. We spent most of our time visiting with friends, doing the Houston Shuffle (consists of running from air conditioned house to air conditioned car to air conditioned bar and back again), quick trip to the beach in Galveston, where I thought we would escape the heat and found it even worse than in town (the Gulf of Mexico does not produce cool breezes like the Pacific Ocean), and of course, visits to the gay bars and baths that I've already mentioned.

Because of the friendliness of the crowd, I liked Mary's best, although it is not nearly as crowded (maybe that appealed to me too) as some of the other bars we visited. By any standard Mary's is relatively small, but it does boast an enclosed patio where at night, at least, the action is reminiscent of the back rooms that flourished for awhile in New York bars and are still to be found in San Francisco and L.A.

A local cynic first applied the "patent leather" description to The Locker and naturally I had to see that for myself. After finding my way to the back door of the former dry cleaning store I found myself in a large room it was bisected by a bar so that the word is able to move in a circle through the bar, the pool table section, behind the bar to a smaller room where they project slides of nude men (the only notable and recognizable pictures of John Holmes, famous for his enormous cock) and back again to the entrance.

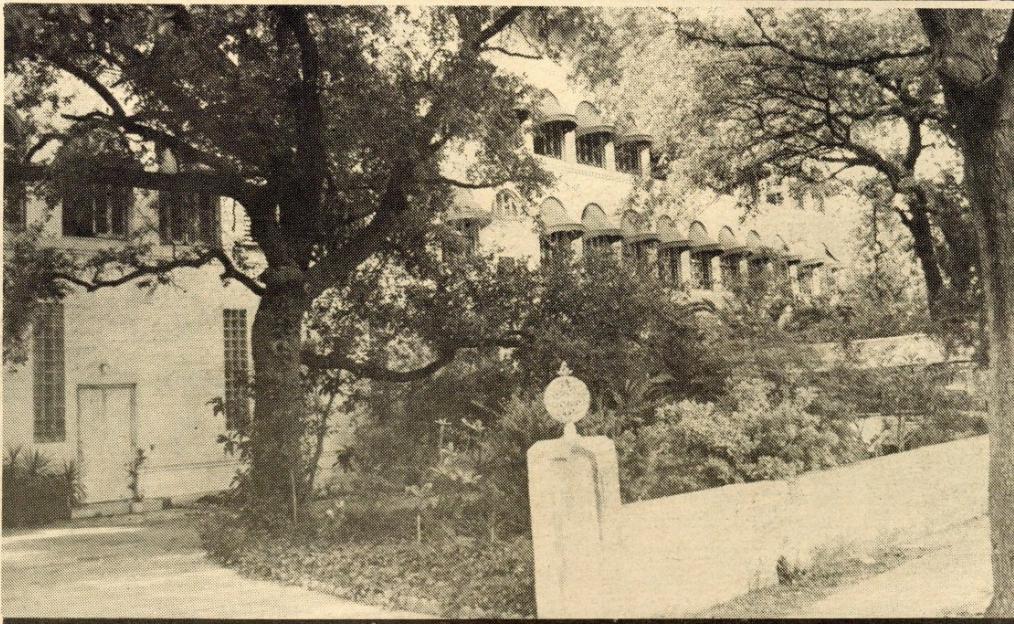
The slide show apparently was considered very daring because the management felt obliged to intersperse nude slides with some innocuous ones of some rather unattractive men, fully clothed, at a picnic. I assume these were included to give the show "redeeming social value." Unfortunately, the bar seemed to be filled with the same type of redeemerly valued patrons. One would have had to be told that this was a leather in advance. There were a couple of authentic looking cowboys there, complete with rawhide chaps (I later learned that they were visiting from Illinois), but the crowd for the most part could have easily melted into any bar crowd, especially any of those noted for their "look but don't touch" atmosphere. Two circuits of the show was enough for me. I beat a hasty retreat to Mary's.

A short walk down Westheimer Street, where both of these bars are located, would be enough to convince anyone that he was in a primarily small town. It appeared that the quickest way to make sexual contact in Houston was to walk the streets, riding by car is a characteristic of smaller cities that I have visited or lived except in Houston it is even more popular and open. In just a few blocks I turned down several offers of blowjobs. I attribute this to the fact that, contrary to popular myth, there are very few tall Texans and even fewer tall women. Since I happen to be both I had to stand out in crowds and in bars, even more so on a deserted sidewalk. Whatever the reason for my lack of sidewalk popularity, it did wonders for my ego.

Since Eddie loves to dance a visit to Houston's most popular dance bar was imperative. The Farmhouse has been around for several years, starting out in a rather grubby location, but recently moved to what can only be described as a gay dream of a building. Larger than Tara, it was once the home of some sort of lodge—Moose or Elks, a type of organization—and really ideal for a Hollywood type bar. It's located on a side street, shielded by a row of tall trees and is three stories high, although only the ground floor was in use while we were there. There were several large rooms, three separate bars and two lounge areas adjacent to a dance hall which was extremely crowded. Houston's flash and glitter was filling the place nightly with a packed crowd of guys and girls. Except the Texas drawls we could have easily been in a dance bar in L.A., San



The Locker, Houston's patent leather bar, is closeted behind the dry cleaning sign.



The Farmhouse, in this huge building, is where Houston's glitter set gathers to dance.

Francisco or New York.

I chose Saturday night to visit the Club Baths. The only other branches of the chain that I had visited before were in Akron, Ohio several years ago and the New York club last summer. (When I was living in Cleveland several years ago I belonged to the original Club Baths but it bore little resemblance to the present links in the chain.) The Houston Club advertises widely and lives up to its claims. The crowd (and it was crowded) was 75% young, mostly attractive and all very friendly and direct. In addition to the usual cubicles, there is a small indoor pool, a large shower room and adjacent steam room, two orgy rooms and a large, fenced patio that was as active as the indoor orgy rooms.

It must be the semi-tropical climate. I was left with the impression that if

Texans aren't as tall as their myth would have it, they more than make up for that lack with their seemingly insatiable sexual appetites. The cars cruise from early morning to late at night, the bars seem to be as busy in the daytime as at night. I met two young men at the baths from Odessa (twelve hours into the desert) who had checked into the Club three days beforehand and were still going strong when I ran into them. You could liken that to the thirst of a man lost in the desert for a few days, but I also met several men from Houston who regularly spend more than a night at a time at the baths.

Although Texas is still politically conservative, the fact that so many gay establishments operate openly without police harassment is indicative of the changing attitude toward gays, although there are some bars that still

get occasional visits from the man. Some of the larger bars, such as the Farmhouse, hire off-duty cops to act as security guards, which apparently insures them against police harassment of any kind.

For prospective visitors to Bacchus-alia-by-the-Gulf I offer three pieces of advice. (1) Don't go to Houston in the middle of summer unless you dig a twenty-four hour steam bath climate—spring and fall are the best periods for comfortable weather. (2) Abstain from all sexual activity for at least two weeks before arrival if you want to be able to enjoy the sexual opportunities of Houston to the fullest. (3) Be prepared to drink a lot. Houston rivals New Orleans at Mardi Gras for alcoholic consumption.

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STRAIGHT TALK

BY ROBERT LEIGHTON

Do you ever get the feeling that your world is slowly (or quickly) collapsing around you and that you are absolutely powerless to do anything about it? And the only comfort you can get is finding out that everyone you know seems to be having the same experience? Who do you blame? The stars? Bad Karma? Or a little of both?

For a couple of days in July I didn't know who or what to blame — I still don't — but I sure thought someone or something had it in for little me. It started with an automobile accident one morning that caused \$900 damages to my car and left me facing the prospect of daily medical treatments for the next few months. Depressing enough? Two days later I was arrested on suspicion of auto theft while driving a car loaned to me by a friend.

The accident was the first portent of a disastrous weekend. I was just a few yards from the office, waiting to make a left turn, when a funeral procession approached. I waited at the light while a long line of cars, marked with windshield stickers and lighted headlamps and accompanied by a motorcycle escort, proceeded through the intersection. It passed just as the light turned and I started to complete my turn when a woman, who later claimed to be following the funeral, but without benefit of windshield marker or headlights, came barreling through the by-then red light and smacked into me head-on.

Since my car was left totally undriveable, a good friend came to my rescue with his second car. Two nights later I was driving through Hollywood when I noticed a sheriff's car following me. Since I knew that I hadn't done anything wrong I didn't pay any further attention to the cops until I parked a few blocks later and found myself surrounded by four patrol cars with eight (8) sheriff's deputies pointing guns at my head while ordering me to come out with my hands up. (Since my seat belt was still fastened I was in a real quandary. I didn't dare move my hands with all those guns trained on me.) Finally one of the deputies released me from the seat and I was then subjected to the usual search before being handcuffed and hauled off to jail.

This mess was caused by a bureaucratic snafu with the California Department of Motor Vehicles. They had failed to record the transfer of the owner's personalized license plates from another car he had owned to this one. It took until 5 a.m. to clear the problem up, but by that time I had been booked for grand theft auto, fingerprinted, questioned, and otherwise thoroughly shaken up before I was finally released. By then the car had been impounded and a \$20 ransom had to be paid to secure its release.

The cops were very nice. They presented me with a certificate that declared that I hadn't been arrested — just detained. Even though the charges were dropped, the arrest record will be with me for life.

But I still have my certificate. It's currently at a frame shop and will soon adorn a position of honor on my wall.

In a recent column I mentioned the problems we have had getting *Gaytimes Cruiser* out. We're beginning to think the project is carrying a bigger jinx than your long suffering editor.

The very latest word is that the magazine will be published and distributed this month, and that subsequent issues will be forthcoming. All subscriptions will be honored and fulfilled. Despite the many problems we have had with this first issue, we fully expect it to be as successful and well received as *Gaytimes*.

We want to thank our many subscribers for their patience and cooperation. We will do our best to live up to the trust you have placed in us.

IN THIS ISSUE: Cal Culver/Casey Donovan is the subject of the *Gaytimes* Profile. His many fans will be happy to know that he has not completely turned his back on the type of film that first brought him to prominence. Dick Garfield, one of our favorite fiction writers, is back with another perceptive short story, *The Husband*. And our usual mix of articles, advice and reports on gay life around the country.

Keep it up for *Gaytimes*!

