



# **A Walking Tour of South of Market in the 1970s**

•  
**San Francisco, California**

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Ed Forbes 1977

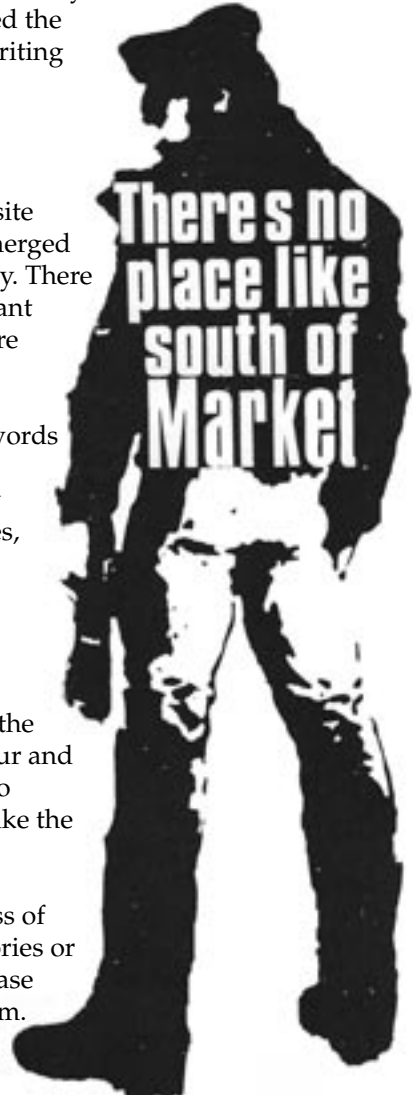
## Overview

This is a walking tour of the area known as Folsom Street, a central site in the formation of San Francisco's gay male leather scene in the 1970s and early 1980s. The quotations below emerge from ten years of research into gay men's cultures in the United States from 1973–1984 and capture the sentiments of some of the San Francisco-based men in my study. My study includes lengthy oral histories with 100 diverse gay men who lived through this period of time throughout the entire U.S.; it focuses on the ways gay men forged identity and community during this period. I have just completed the data analysis phase and have started writing the book.

Please keep in mind a few things:

- The tour cannot cover every SOMA site and, instead, focuses on sites that emerged as significant for the men in my study. There are many other valuable and important spaces and events that took place here during that era.
- The quotations in this book are the words of people who visited these spaces during this era. Their memories may be different from your own memories, but I preserve these memories for historical purposes. Please add your own about these and other sites.
- If you are interested in viewing a fascinating website on Folsom St. in the 1970s visit [justinringold.com](http://justinringold.com). The tour and this site are independent and have no relationship to one another, but we like the site very much.
- This tour involves a continual process of recreating history. If you have memories or corrections or other information, please send them my way at [gmhs3@aol.com](mailto:gmhs3@aol.com).

*Enjoy the tour!*



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**Nice people. Waiting for you. At THE ENDUR.**

A dance bar on the corner of Sixth and Harrison in San Francisco.

**JOCKEY SHORTS CONTEST Sunday, June 5th**

# Folsom Street Area: Overarching Memories

*Hans Ullman, interviewed on May 19, 1999, said:*

“I would say I also went a lot to the Folsom Street area, which was in those days (1968-1973) more leather-oriented, or more, the term was ‘butch’ not ‘macho.’ And I had never seen, even living in New York, this leather scene. It was quite prevalent here. And it was amazing. I was shocked and somewhat delighted, but more shocked when I experienced it the first time. . .

“I thought it was strange, for one thing. I met this person in New York, who brought me out to California, and he showed me every bar in town the first month. And I remember that he brought me to Folsom Street. That was sort of quite raw compared to anything else you had seen of gay bars in the past. Bars like this did not exist in New York. And it was so free, I remember, and so open. . . . People showed their sexuality. But it was pretty much kept within the area of Folsom, Castro, and you know, inside the bars.”

*From Jacob Kohn, interviewed on June 20, 1999:*

“First of all, it’s funny. Folsom Street, as far as the bars, although I would go to some of them, I always felt somewhat estranged from that scene. I felt more comfortable in the Castro scene . . . well, the Folsom Street scene being more leather-oriented, a lot more of the macho posing and posturing thing. Which I still see as kind of exaggerated masculinity, you know, I was sort of turned on to somewhat more androgynous or at least not so self-consciously masculine guys. And it seemed like the Castro had more of that type.”

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Friday, Feb. 10th  
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Saturday, Feb. 11th  
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## **The Arena, (1977–1985) 399 9th Street**

*Rick Barton reported during an interview on December 17, 1999:*

“It was a relaxed leather and Levi atmosphere, where there wasn’t a lot of posturing and posing and stuff like that. It was just a comfortable environment to go meet guys in.”

*Huck Roberts recalled on July 6, 1999:*

“The Arena was sort of a mix of western and leather. Levis and leather. It attracted a nice crowd. That’s where I met Brian.”

## **The Barracks, 1147 Folsom**

*Sean Cousineau recalled on June 6, 1999:*

“My preference changed with time. The Barracks was my favorite originally, because a friend of mine from the Peninsula had gotten a job in the city at the Barracks, as they were starting to open. So he was doing basically like handyman work, plus staffing the front desk. And Rob gave me a ton of passes, which were three by five cards that had been stamped with the logo of the business. So Rob gave me a ton of these, which meant I could come in on a Friday night and leave Sunday morning. I’d be there for two whole days, or I’d come in the evening, drop acid, and leave the next morning.

“I’d come in on Friday night, settle into my room, sort of like a person would settle into a hotel room. Didn’t bring clothes or any—I did bring a sort of toilet kit with me, so I could brush my teeth, shave, and do those kinds of things. Get myself settled into the room, smoke a joint, see who was there, wander around the rest of the floor, and then probably grab a snack at the snack bar, which could’ve been anything from a candy bar to a bowl of Cheerios. It was an extension of the gay hippie culture, where things were very mellow, a little bit of drug use, nothing very heavy like speed. And at that time, I don’t think we even knew what speed was. But was a drug kicking around that time called MDNA, which I think is what is now called Ecstasy. Good drugs, but the next day you knew you’d done drugs the night before.”

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**Big Town**, 115 Harriet Street (Folsom at 6th)

*Scott Greenville reflected back on Big Town on July 8, 1997:*

“Big Town, it was down where the Sutro Baths used to be, on Sixth and Folsom . . . Big Town was a two-story building, three story it might have been. I haven’t thought of this in years. There was a disco. There was a bar for like a sweater crowd, although I don’t think they were called sweater crowds then. There was a part of the building that was for leather, for the butch crowd. There was a restaurant upstairs, and I believe there were one or two shops upstairs. . . . There was a shopping center in Los Angeles—I use the term “shopping center” loosely—called Dude City. And Big Town was supposed to be San Francisco’s idea of Dude City.”

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100 Harriet St., (off Folsom at 6th)

APRIL 25, 1978 THE BORGERS Page 10

# BIG TOWN

115 HARRIET STREET  
(off Folsom at 6th)

## CALENDAR

FRI. MARCH 30 — GRAND  
OPENING CELEBRATION  
HOSTED BY MARCUS AND  
HIS COURT — FROM 8PM.

SUN. APRIL 1 — S.I.R.  
"40's REVIEW"  
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**The Black and Blue, (1978–1979) 198 8th.**  
at Howard (cite: thanks to Gayle Rubin)

*Ronnie Costanza recalled on June 8, 1999:*

"The Black and Blue was a bar that was kitty-corner to the Club Baths, and it had a big motorcycle I think strung up on the ceiling. And that's where I met Doug, out in front of the Black and Blue at two in the morning. And he picked me up and that was that."

*Rick Barton reported during an interview on December 17, 1999:*

"The Black and Blue was over on Eighth near Howard. I think it was on the corner of Eighth and Howard. And it was a heavy, heavy leather bar at the time. I hadn't moved here yet and this friend of mine who had moved here—I was visiting him—and he took me down there. And I'd never been to a leather bar in my life. It was very intimidating. I had to buy a pair of jeans and I borrowed a leather vest, and I had a pair of black leather shoes that I could wear to get in and, you know, feel comfortable in the place. Around 1:30 in the morning they used to take a guy and hang him over the bar by chains and at about five minutes before two they would undo his jock strap and jerk him off at 2:00, and of course the bar closed at that time. And then they had a back room that you could go and play around in. So it was an interesting place to go to . . . and it was, for me, a little intimidating."

*Huck Roberts recalled on July 6, 1999:*

“The Black and Blue was fun for a while and then it didn’t really appeal to me . . . for reasons I didn’t understand at the time. I now realize I should’ve spent more time there . . . It turned out that the Black and Blue was probably the first of the S and M oriented leather bars . . . There were things happening in the Black and Blue that I was unaware of . . . people being tied up and whipped and, at certain late hours.”

## **Boot Camp, (1971–1985) 1010 Bryant Street**

*Domenic Nunziato, interviewed on June 13, 2000, remembered:*

“I’d never seen anything like the Cauldron and the Boot Camp in New York . . . I’m not sure if they were bars because I never drank. They were bar-like. They had bars, and then they always had slings. The Boot Camp was two stories with the back. One, there was a sling, and then in the back there were two or three bathtubs for watersports and then upstairs there were just rooms to have sex. And you know, people were just walking around having sex . . .

“It was on Bryant and Eighth. At the Boot Camp the clientele was a little more casual. You know, they weren’t as hardcore as they seemed to be in the Cauldron. And I don’t think I ever saw fisting at the Boot Camp. Certainly you couldn’t miss it at the Cauldron.”

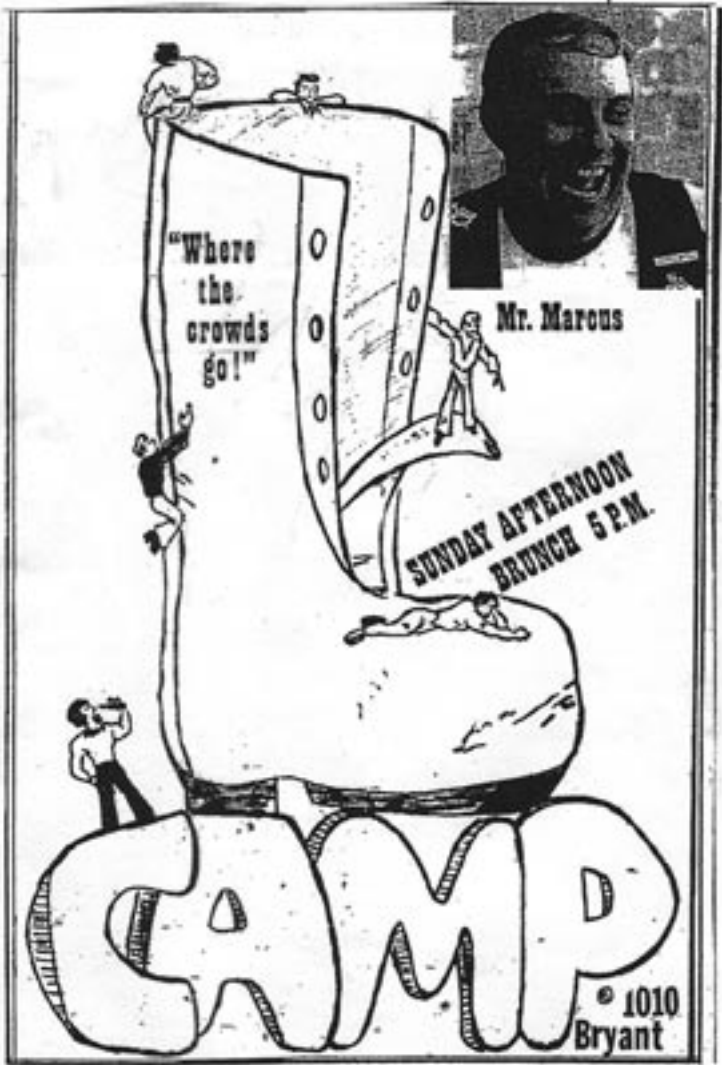
*Ellis Chan recollected on July 19, 1996:*

“Another club I went to was the Boot Camp. It was primarily a pissing parlor, I guess you can say. They had a couple or three bathtubs upstairs I believe, and guys would like in them and there were people pissing on them and stuff like that . . . The reason I went to the Boot Camp was I’m very much into leather and the look of leather, and I know that they advertise certain nights as leathermen get in for half-price or free or whatever.”

*Tom Drew provided a detailed description of the Boot Camp on June 22, 1999:*

“The Boot Camp was in a very nondescript Victorian two-story, probably had been built as a home. It was on Bryant Street, 1010 Bryant, just a block from the police station actually . . . Very nondescript. There was a small sign outside that was sort of a combination of rebus and spelling out. It was a huge Army boot, black Army boot, and the word CAMP in block letters across it. And that was about the way you knew you’d gotten there. There was an empty lot right next to it, where if you were driving you’d park. Always a lot of motorcycles out front.





"The Boot Camp was a private sex club, so they were not licensed to have alcohol, so it was bring your own booze. They had two big refrigerators behind the bar, and you put your beer in there and were given tokens to redeem it later. There was always a bartender. The bar was to the right as you entered. To the left was what was probably a closet when it was still a house, and it was the leather or coat check area. And there was somebody in there, and you could check as much or as little of your clothing as you wanted. There was no policy about how much dress you had, how much clothing you had to keep on or how little you could be in.

“There was a little bit of a barrier, so that if anyone opened the door you couldn’t immediately see into the whole place. You walked around like a little partition, and were in the main, what probably was the front parlor, I suppose. And there was a pool table in there, and I would say roughly half the time men were playing pool on it, and the other 50% of the time men were having sex on it. It was a very popular place for fisting, as well as fucking. There was an alcove further back to the left, that had a big barrel with peanuts in it, and a glory hole partition into probably what had been another closet, and had a door on it so you wouldn’t really know who was in the closet, behind the hole.

“There was a staircase a little bit further that went up to the second floor, and once you passed that, there was a door out to the back. When you went outside, where normally would’ve been the back yard, it was covered over with, I think it was probably that fiberglass sheeting that we had back then, that would allow light in but that you couldn’t see through it. And there was a bathtub out there for people who wanted to engage in watersports, play with urination, and then what probably had been a garage before was just simply a very dark, large room, with two padded tables in it for, I guess to aid in anal intercourse probably, because they were about at the height that you could bend over them, to be fucked.

“When you went upstairs, all the bedrooms had sort of been converted into theme rooms. One was a bunkroom that had about eight bunks with little mattresses, all wooden. Another room had slings in it, and this was the first place I had ever seen a leather and chain sling hanging from the ceiling, and it was so popular that there was a second room that also had a sling in it, because there were usually men waiting to go and lay in the sling, to be fucked. There was a room towards the front of the house that was just a dark, open room, and another room that had sort of a plywood maze, that had glory holes in them.

“That was in essence the whole decoration. It was a very dark house. The windows were all blacked over. There was dim red lighting. There was a very strong smell of poppers, of amyl nitrate, of semen, because there was a lot of come probably all over the floor. There was an odd smell of peanuts. There was a smell of beer, because a lot of beer probably got knocked over. Oh, there were barrels in some of the rooms where you could set your beer down while you were having sex. So there was the smell of beer and peanuts, of semen, of poppers, and that wonderful smell of old lube, of old lubricant. It kind of is like stale Crisco smell. A lot of that, particularly in the sling rooms, because fisting would occur in there as well. But it was a very heady, masculine aroma.

“Downstairs, you got all of that combined with a lot of smell of leather, because a lot of men in their full leathers would stay downstairs because it got fairly warm upstairs, and it was all you could do to venture up to the upper floor in full leather, because you’d be sweating up a storm in no time, it was so hot. There would probably be, on a weekend night I would imagine 100 men in the Boot Camp. And so when you have that many men packed in close proximity in a small Victorian two-story, a lot of leather got checked downstairs, and so there was a very strong leather smell down there. It was, looking back on it, probably the most wonderful combination of smells. Even to this day, that, combining all those in my mind right now is like instant, if you put those all in a room I would close my eyes and say “Boot Camp.” It was just—it was a combination of smells that didn’t occur in other places. Like the Club Baths did not smell that way because they were forever cleaning it, so you got a much more, you know, April fresh clean smell or whatever. But the Boot Camp just had these wonderful oral stimulations.

“My ideal weekend? I’d come up Friday evening. I’d have classes until Friday afternoon. I’d go home and shower and pack whatever I was gonna bring for the weekend, drive up from San Jose, have dinner somewhere in the Castro, head to the Boot Camp. Get there probably around, try to get there around 9:00 or so. Although most places at the time, you didn’t even start going out until 10:00 at night, at the Boot Camp a lot of men swung by there to have sex before they went out. And then they would come back. You could come and go. Have your hand stamped, or whatever. So I remember weekends when I went there on Friday night and didn’t leave until Sunday afternoon when I drove home, literally did not leave the Boot Camp. Chinese food would be delivered, pizza would be delivered. There were showers. The bathrooms were working, so there were showers. There were facilities to douche. There was just a never-ending supply of lube and poppers. And so you just, your wallet was checked downstairs and you could, when you were hungry you could order pizza or whatever to be delivered. And so you didn’t even have to leave. As far as what went on, my God, you could indulge any fantasy you wanted to I think in there.

“The only thing I never saw personally was scat, sex involving feces. I loved getting fucked up on the pool table. Somehow getting fucked with an audience was just incredible to me. And when you did it on the pool table, I mean anybody that walked in was gonna see it, as well as anybody sitting at the bar drinking, as well as it was in the direct sight line of anybody coming down the stairs. I mean it was just like, it was wild to be fucked up on the pool table. I was in the glory hole rooms a lot, because I was very oral. I loved that. I was in the orgy room a lot, if I felt like I

wanted to just be anonymously fucked. Never actually ever got in the bathtub for water sports. That didn't do much for me. Although the Boot Camp was the first place I ever had experience of a golden screw, which is after someone fucks you and comes in you, then they pee in, inside of you, so they never take their cock out. That was the first place that had ever happened to me, and I didn't even know it was going to happen to me until the man did it, and it was the most wild feeling. And then I learned what that was. So I did do that there, but I never actually climbed into the bathtub for the water sports, to be peed on. I mostly hung out at the pool table or in the glory holes, and just, as I say, cycling 100 to 200 men through there, it was pretty amazing.

"Men that went there tended to be very much clone or leather men. Very seldom would you ever find little blonde boys there. I mean that just wasn't their milieu.

"Bottom would be being anal receptive in intercourse, being the one to give blow jobs, being the one to do rimming, being the one to be tied up if there was bondage. I think that was fairly much the extent of my sexuality at that point. When I really enjoyed being—God, I never know which one it is—(getting) blow jobs. I don't, I'm always confused about whether that's receptive or ac—it's the passive, I suppose. I started that at twelve years old, and so I always knew I enjoyed it. I really liked it, and was good at it, and that primarily was the draw for me to go to the Boot Camp, because there was so much of that there. I enjoyed anal intercourse as well, and actually at the Boot Camp was the first time I ever topped someone, I was the insertor. And realized how wonderful that felt. And when I had my relationship in college, I was the top in that relationship so I was doing the fucking, getting blown, kind of a reversal, and that was an interesting time period too. Mostly in all of those, I stuck pretty much to the vanilla things, because, which would be intercourse and oral sex, because anything that required leather or bondage or things like that, I really wanted to be able to negotiate with the partner what we were gonna do, where we were gonna do it, and how far it was going to go, things like that. And those sort of spaces weren't as conducive to that, like the Boot Camp or the baths in Sacramento or whatever. They weren't as conducive to that as meeting someone in a leather bar and going home with them, and talking about what you wanted to do, or using the hanky code to tell people what you wanted to do. Using handkerchief colors to tell them. So I would say mostly it was fairly vanilla in all of those locations."

*Huck Roberts recalled a special evening at the Boot Camp when he was interviewed on July 6, 1999:*

“I was there one night when there was a power failure. It was pretty wild. Just everybody’s—a lot of touchy-feely going on. That was a pleasant bar. I always felt a little unsafe in there, because it only had one front entrance and it was very, you couldn’t move very fast, and when it got packed it was almost impossible to get in or out . . . it made me concerned that if there were a fire, or something happened . . .”

**The Brig, (1979–1985) 1347 Folsom**

*Ellis Chan recollected on July 19, 1996:*

“The first place I went to was the Brig. I walked in there. I didn’t have much leather on. Didn’t have chaps at the time. I didn’t have boots at the time. I did have a jacket. But I walked in there and I was absolutely terrified because everyone was in leather, head to toe. And I was the only one who was wearing Levis and a regular shirt. I was the only one who was not in full leather and that was a time I was terrified, visually, at what I was seeing, excited at the same time—tremendously excited . . .

“Oh, I stayed, and what happened was that my fears instantly vanished. I’m not exaggerating when I say that. The conversation that people were carrying on involved opera and poodles.”

**The Cauldron, 953 Natoma Street, between 10 and 11, at the back of the parking lot (cite thanks to: Gayle Rubin)**

*Domenic Nunziato recalled on July 13, 2000:*

“It was every fantasy you ever wanted, and then a fantasy you didn’t think of was in the next room. I mean there was sex everywhere and there was absolutely no pretension. You know, people want sex. They’re not going to say, ‘I’m here because you’re interesting.’ They’re there because, you know, they’re interested in you because you have a big dick. Big pecs or a big dick or a cute face or a great ass, or you’re just plain sleazy . . .

“I think you had to have a membership at the Cauldron, also. There were tables set up just for fucking. There was like a square table in the back where people would just bend over and people would just . . . the table was there so you could kind of brace yourself while you’re getting fucked doggie style”

***Ellis Chan recollected on July 19, 1996:***

“The Cauldron was not a bathhouse. I don’t think they had showers. They just had a lot of open areas that people played in, some dark areas. Mainly J.O. I would think, and a line of men at the time.”

***Joe Mayo thought back to his days at Cauldron on March 28, 1997:***

“The Cauldron—now that was a big part of my life. It was a plain and simple sex club, with the lights up. It was like the baths but with the lights up. It was South of Market, on Natoma Street, in a little commercial district, and it’s hard to find, but my car went on automatic pilot after a while. And it was a warehouse type space with two or three different rooms partitioned off. You brought your own booze and your beer’s all you’d bring. And they had clothes check and they had free lube, and everything else you could imagine . . . and Lemon Joy to wash up with. For some reason, I still get turned on when I smell Lemon Joy . . .

“Everybody would go there. Mostly, I think the reason I was attracted was because it was mostly natural men, men who looked naturally masculine, and they had facial hair and body hair. Somewhat rugged. They could be leathery, they could be trashy, but you almost never find real flight bar queens, you know, pressed clothes and half of ‘em were naked and half were in jocks and other fetish stuff. . . I’d done sex clubs in New York, but I liked the Cauldron because the lights were up, it was friendly, you could talk to people, you could see people. You could actually engage in conversation in the front and if you wanted to play, you could start something and take them in the back . . . It probably opened in like 1979 and closed in about 1985 or 86. That’s my hunch, because it opened before I moved here, but it did close after I was here.”

***Bob Thomas said on March 12, 1997:***

“I was a member of the San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus in 1981, and the Cauldron was built with, by two guys in the Chorus, with the funds from their real estate deals or something. See, it was—now, he’s got a porn name and he’s got a real name. Jim Gilman. And another guy, I don’t remember. But he was the guy, not Jim, but the other one was the guy that invented the concept of splitting movie theaters into small houses. So I know he got rich off that idea, and then Jim—well, anyway, it was a Chorus tradition to go out Monday after rehearsals, to go have pizza and then to go to the Cauldron. And they’d play loud classical music on Monday.

“The Cauldron was open on a Monday only for the Chorus members. Yeah, and they’d play Wagner full blast. And that was a real trippy difference than, you know, the usual disco-driven beat that’s, so it was a new ex-

perience for not a whole lot of guys would go. Sometimes as much as two dozen. But less, usually. So the Cauldron was a big warehouse, with walls built around, and various rooms. There was a big bathtub in one area, and there was a very dark room in another area. And I don't think there were glory holes, but I do know there were at least two, maybe four slings.

"And my favorite part was way up in the front, at the bartender's station, there's this big butcher block table, and benches, and a big barber chair, I think it was. If it wasn't a barber chair it might've been a gurney from a hospital. And—yeah, I remember being very interested in trying every scene, and so I said to Jim at one point, I knew he was into spanking, so I thought I would receive that from him, in a, just to try it, you know. And I got off on it, but after he was done, and he did really whip me, and he said, "You don't know any limits. You don't know when to say 'stop.' You don't have a safe word," and all that jazz, and so—it's true, but I manage to live."

## **Club Baths San Francisco, 201 8th Street**

*Rick Barton reported during an interview on December 17, 1999:*

"I started out in bathhouse environments, because it was comfortable. It was somewhat anonymous, and it was a good place to experiment without embarrassing myself. You just don't know what to do and how to do it and you have to go practice someplace, so I think that seemed to be good, and so a lot of my activity was centered around the baths."

*Tom Drew provided another detailed description, this time of 8th and Howard baths, on June 22, 1999:*

"... Very seldom would you ever find little blonde boys there (at the Boot Camp). I mean that just wasn't their milieu. They would go to the Club Baths. It was at 8th and Howard Streets. I imagine that it had been some sort of a warehouse before they ever got it, because the windows, there were windows, huge, probably, I'm thinking twelve, sixteen-pane windows all around the second floor of it. It was probably—I'm trying to think. About a fifth of a city block in each direction of it? It was two stories. You entered off of 8th Street, and you were checked in at glass windows. And they buzzed you in.

"There was a locker room, where if you didn't have a lot of money you had a lock and put your clothing and your, whatever else you wanted to keep in the locker, and put your towel on, because the towel was the thing that you wore at the Club Baths. You wore a white towel wrapped around your waist, usually. But once you got past the lockers, on the ground floor, there was a snack area, I remember with a lot of vending machines. There

was a television room that had regular-size televisions, with regular programming going. There was, along the far right wall was a hallway that went to the very back corner, where you went out of a door and there was an area to sunbathe in, a rather small area for the size of the building and the physical plant. Along the back wall were the showers and toilets, and in the back left corner were—I want to say five. It may have been three or five glory hole booths. Each booth was probably about four feet by four feet, with glory holes that attached to each other booth. And I'm kind of blanking out on what was in the rest of the bottom floor.

“Upstairs was a lot more vivid because I spent a lot more time upstairs. There was a stairway in the front of the building and in the back. There was a wider stairway at the back. Once you went upstairs, at the very front of the building was a huge movie room, porno room, that ran the whole length of that front of the building. And it had kind of a set-up that I've never seen. It had these plywood—trying to think of how to describe them. They were slanted pieces of plywood that were built sort of like in the shape of a sawhorse, that ran from the wall out into the middle of the room, and there were large pillows propped up against those slants. And it was a big TV screen, huge TV screen, and I would say that movie room would probably have accommodated 50 people easily. And so there were no chairs, you just sat on the floor.

“And beyond that were the rooms—oh, that's what else was downstairs, of course. There were some rooms, cubicle rooms. Upstairs were most of the rooms, over on the left side. On the right side was the huge, huge orgy room, that had sort of open beds, bunk beds, kind of a naugahyde-covered platform, big platform in the middle. Back of that, there were some more glory hole cubicles, and at the very back were more showers, more toilets, an along the back wall a row of glory hole cubicles. So there were an awful lot of glory holes in that bathhouse, and maybe that's one of the things that made it popular to me. But also because the movie room was so open, these slanted-back plywood things only went probably three feet up, and so anyone could stand around and watch whatever was going on. And since I liked sex with an audience, that was a very pop—and I loved porno. That was a very popular room for me, and I did well in that room. And in the orgy room I did well, also. I enjoyed that. The glory holes in the back could be very hit-or-miss. The ones downstairs, I would have better luck with.

“As I said before, there wasn't, there was a strong smell of poppers, because they were very prevalent, but it was a much more clean smell because there was all this cleaning solvent and disinfectants going around all the time, so you didn't get this hyper-masculine smell. There was also



not the leather smell, so you didn't have the chance for the lube to accrue and have that sort of smell. It just sort of—trying to think of the, it's not really ammonia but it's something in, some cleaning thing like that, and poppers, were the two smells that come to mind when I think of the Club Baths.

“I think there was a much broader spectrum of men at the Club Baths than it was at the Boot Camp, certainly, because you didn't have, the prevalence of leather men was not there. It was much more either clone or the little blonde guys. Certain times of the day it could be an older crowd, men in their fifties, sixties. It was, I don't remember an awful lot of men of color being there. I think oddly enough it still seemed pretty segregated, and I'm not sure if that was by choice or by chance or by policy. I really don't know. I remember having sex with men of color there, but they certainly weren't in any way near parity with white men. I think, it seemed to me like there was a pretty even mix of tops and bottoms, sexually. There never seemed to be like, “Oh, my God, everybody here tonight's a bottom, and there's only two tops, and we are all having to fight for the tops.” It seemed like it was a very even mix, and I generally left there very happy and very sexually satisfied. And a lot of out-of-towners, so that was I think one of the draws, because it was so near to some of the hotels, and Greyhound bus station was a block over, and I think there were things that a lot of out-of-town tourists came there. And it was a huge bathhouse.”

***Randy Marks recalled on June 6, 2000:***

“8th and Howard was more like just raw sex. Just, the specific purpose in mind for the, going there. And this was the bathhouse that would turn away people if they were wearing cologne. And you know, Todd and I reinforced that belief that it was not appropriate to wear cologne to a bathhouse . . . It was the self-invented set of social strictures, or rules, you know, and it was basically just—my, I'm imposing my own aesthetic on you, basically. . . . I think 8th and Howard was probably the most popular bathhouse. The second floor was a huge U-shaped hallway, and it was lined on both sides by rooms. And it became this grand tour, to walk around the entire circle, and just decide, based on whose door was open a crack, or where the people were gathering. And because of that layout, the floor plan, it lended itself perfectly to that intense, heavy cruising that a lot of guys went for, I mean specifically to there, forgoing all the other options in the city and just deciding on that, because it was a concentration of sex right there.”

## **The Handball Express, 975 Harrison Street**

*Clem Fotter on July 22, 1999, recalled,*

“Handball Express was another similar operation. There were quite a few of ‘em South of Market. And unlike the, something like the Howard Street or the Ritch Street Baths, where they had taken a big industrial building and put in a lot of little partitions that didn't have ceilings, and narrow cots where people could lie down and have sex, these were, the rooms would be maybe six by eight, or eight by ten, so they were bigger rooms. Usually they were equipped with a single bed, maybe a bedside table. Hopefully a mirror. But you had room to move around, could close the door. And the Handball Express obviously was designed to, for handball, for fisting. That was one of the things they sort of advertised.

“Handball Express was on Harrison Street. It's still, the building is still there. Probably between Seventh and Eighth, or Eighth and Ninth. And they had, again it was the same kind of arrangement. I think there were two, three floors. And they had erotic paintings on the walls in the hallways to sort of set the tone. But otherwise they were just rooms with beds in ‘em, and pretty, most of these places, there was a place called Animals, there were a couple of other places. And they were pretty busy on the weekends. Weeknights, if you were into that kind of stuff you could probably find somebody that was, you think. Took a longer and the pickings weren't very good. But real estate in those days in that neighborhood was very cheap, so you could go in, paint all the rooms black, or just, you think, put beds in ‘em. And I think, you think, people were making pretty good money at it. They were opening all the time.

“Among people who were into fisting, it was considered a very high art. It was, for many people who were into fisting there is a spiritual element to it, that the connection that you have with your partner or with the universe in the act of fisting is a very special and unique. So there was a real bond among people who were into fisting.



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If somebody else was into fisting, you had a special connection to them. It was almost like coming out in those days, where just by meeting another out gay man you had a connection with him, even though you may not have anything else in common. Sharing those stories of coming out, sharing those stories of fisting were, was a very—I think for a lot of people it was a little uncomfortable? They weren't quite sure what it was. It seemed dangerous, it seemed painful, it seemed—a lot of people who didn't know much about it would put it in the same category as S and M because it somehow was a painful, degrading thing. I never—I don't know, the people that knew I was into it, I don't know but they, I never got a sense that they thought I was a bad person or anything. Not at all."

## **Hot House, 5th near Harrison**

*Sean Cousineau recalled on June 6, 1999*

“At the Hothouse, one of the rooms had, in addition to the regular door opening into the hallway, a second door that looked like prison bars. So the outside door would be open, and then would be the prison bars, which, allowed a person to see who was in the room, but effectively prevented them from just walking in. . . . It seemed to work well. And within that bathhouse culture, somebody would lie with their door open, either naked or costumed on the bed, and somebody was interested they walk into the room, and if the person in the room wasn't interested, they would just say, “I'm just resting.” Which was the code for “I don't want to have sex with you right now.” So there was a very clear-cut set of, not rules, but behaviors that were appropriate to those two bathhouses in particular. Those were the South of Market bathhouses, the Barracks and the Hothouse.

## **No Name Bar, (1973–1976) 1347 Folsom**

*Jim Donald remembered the No Name when he was interviewed on July 6, 1999:*

“No Name must've been over up on, between 8th and 9th and—It was all, like you go in there it was all a lot, most guys dressed in leather. And it changed my image of what the leather scene was . . . Because here I was just, I would wear jeans, and a t-shirts. I started with, we started with t-shirts, but the guys in leather, and I was standing there, and I was drinking our beer and so forth and I stepped back, and I stepped on this guy's boots. And I went, oh, my God. Because I turned around and there was this guy in full leather, and the armbands and everything, and I looked at him, I thought, oh, God, he's gonna kill me. So I looked up and I said, “Oh, I'm sorry.” And he said [note: unexpectedly clicking his tongue], “Oh, that's okay.” And I, it's like me not being, you know, a masculine and all (like that) but it just like just threw (. . .). “What?” This—this is the leather bar, and you're supposed to really answer real butch to me, or something like that, and I thought—so I really relaxed a lot more with that.

“But the No Name Bar was like, you could not get into the bathroom. There were so—the people were on the floor, at the latrine. My first experience with water sports happened there. And I just, it just came upon, you know, this incident happened. I really had to go to the bathroom, so I stepped in, and I had to step over bodies, and I was trying to find a place at the urinal. And all of a sudden over in this corner was this really hunky man. And he says, “Do you have to pee?” And I said yes. And he said, “Here's a place.” So I stepped over that, took, and took my cock out, and

all of a sudden he went right down on me. And what I was thinking, I just let him do it. And it felt good, and I, but I thought, my God, I had this image of like what those kind, of what—I, from Midwest I guess, it was like learning. I had this image, like, well, the guys who are really into water sports or—I don't know what kind of image but it was supposed to, they weren't posed to be good-looking like this guy. Just a hunk. You're like why would he be doing this when he could have anything else, what he wanted to do? Why did he want to do this?"

## **Ringold Alley**

*Ronnie Costanza recalled Ringold Alley during his interview on June 8, 1999:*

"In the mid-1970s and early 80s I'd drop down to Ringold Alley. I used to do Ringold Alley. That's a cruisy area, a one-block street, I think it's between 9th and 10th . . . or 8th . . . yeah, 9th and 10th, and Folsom and the next one. I would often wait till late, like 1:00, because people don't want to pick you up early, you know, you need to work the hour of desperation. So I would go out there at one and see what I could pick up. But often guys were like too drunk by that time, more of a hassle. . There would be maybe twenty guys or so, just walking around or standing around, sometimes guys having sex. There seemed to be some little driveway or something that people could stand in."

## **The Slot, 979 Folsom**

*Clem Fotter on July 22, 1999, recalled,*

"The Slot was one of the old single room occupancy hotels South of Market. If the building is still there, it's on Folsom Street, maybe between Fifth and Sixth or something. It was a decrepit old place, but it was one of those buildings that's slowly sinking, that's kind of leaning? And it was a sex club. And it was very popular with the leather crowd and the fisting crowd. If I wanted to do any fisting I was, if I went there I was sure I could do it. There was always gonna be somebody there to play with. And it was a pretty, it was a crummy place, but it was erotic. It was available, and was—there was a story that when they needed to clean the carp-, they needed to replace the carpets, and the carpet layers came in and they wouldn't remove the old carpet, it was so disgusting. Full of Crisco and shit and, you think. It was filthy."

## **The Stud, (c. 1969–1987) 1535 Folsom**

*Jacob Kohn summarized it nicely on June 20, 1999:*

“The Stud, where all the beautiful gay hippie boys were.”

*Larry Day, interviewed May 27, 1999, recalled:*

“I used to go to a bar called the Stud, which always had a great Wednesday night. And there was a transition going on there at the time, I remember, between the way people dressed—it had been a very hippie bar, because San Francisco was very oriented toward long hair and marijuana. You know, sort of easy, loose attitudes. And yet there was a reaction . . . of people in blue jean jackets and blue jeans and sort of masculine haircuts and a sort of rejection of the feminine side of things. And I remember noticing that and reacting to that, and watching that sort of take over.”

*Michael Kennedy, interviewed on June 5, 2000, reported:*

“The Stud was just a magical place, right until the night it closed. It just had the right balance and mix in its environment. It had a circular bar. And then along all the three sides were a variety of improvs for seating. You could sit on little railings, or the beer boxes, or something. And then there was the seating around the bar, a long, oval bar. And at the fourth end, where the restrooms were and a little dance floor, then you could like get on what we called the freeway, which was just a circle of traffic that went round and round the bar, and you could get on and off anywhere. . . . There were pinball machines, it had a sleazy restroom. I have a great black and white photograph of the men’s room at the Stud . . . I would say for me the Stud was in its height around 1975 though into the early 1980s . . . There were men and women, there were the typical blue jeans, moustache, longish hair look of its day.”

*Troy Reich, recalled the Stud, when interviewed on July 22, 1999:*

“The Stud then, because where it is now, it’s not where it was. And I don’t remember the address. I remember that one side of it was kind of an alley, and then the front of it was a small street but, and it was a bar that later became a disco as well. It sort of enlarged into a sort of a U shape, and then you could dance towards the back. And it was just the most popular place to go. Yeah.

“I was living in San Anselmo, in Marin County, in this commune, and my roommate was gay, and he was going out with Sam who would become my future roommate. And so they both were like, they knew that my story immediately, and said, we have to take him to, they managed to convince

me, “You’re gonna love it. It’s wild.” Because I, you know, I was, like I said I was, I like anything that was wild. So they took me there, and then I walked around for, with a hard-on for like a couple hours and, yeah. Wasn’t long after that.

“The men were like gay but they were men. It was strange. Also, there were a lot of hippie men still, because it was still blending, you know? I mean a lot of men with long hair, but you know, wearing—what do you call this? Plaid shirts and, or white t-shirts. But there’d also be people with like trousers and suspenders, you know, and long hair with a ponytail, and yeah. And plus you could take drugs there.”



*Claude Gold-Swallow recalled on July 21, 1999:*

“There would be hippie guys in there, country boys at the Stud. There would be, I don’t know what the term is. People really drugged up. There would be people there that would just be drinking Calistoga water. Anything went at the Stud. There was no conformity. There would be leather queens in there; there would be no-leather queens in there. There would, you know. There’d be drag queens in there; there would be no-drag queens in there. The Angels of Light would all come pouring in after a show, and you know, it was just this wild mix of wonderful party that seemed to just continue on despite the growing prevalence of conformity around us, or communities separating. There would be women in there. There would be lesbians. There would be straight women. It was a very mixed, celebratory place.

“The Stud to me was like, you know, it was a wonderful place. I didn’t go a lot, but it was always a good time when I went . . . I would say it was the only place in San Francisco, up until the time it closed and moved, that was really, I don’t want to use the word counterculture, but a place to go and be yourself.”

*Clem Fotter, on July 22, 1999, recalled,*

“The Stud was a place of intelligent, interesting, very sexual men. There was a feeling of optimism and joy, and just a little insanity about the place, that characterized a lot of my life. It was a very happy place to be. And

unlike the leather bars, which were the first places I had been exposed to because my partner, my first partner Joe was heavy into the leather scene, which I found forbidding and frightening, and dark, and threatening. I mean parts of it, I didn't know what it was all about. But at the Stud, people were friendly. I met people, I became friends with a group of people there and then other groups of people there. It was a place that I felt very welcome. It was a place where I felt I could get laid pretty frequently. It was a place where, it was always an interesting mix of people.

“Men who went to the Stud were sort of the hippies, there were the long-hairs, there was certainly a drug culture there but it was a psychedelic drug culture that I knew about. Not a speed, you think, drug, or any of the other hard drugs. There were professional men, but they were interested in the arts, they were interested in—they all seemed to have a back porch full of plants. Living things were very much a part of their lives. The arts were part of their lives. And I, working in government, was kind of the strange one, but always felt very, very welcome there. And sexually they were erotic people. They were people who like me had been, you think, you couldn't have sex. Sex was bad, sex was nasty. And the people I met there found it a very reaffirming, very positive kind of experience. It was a way of meeting people and sharing yourself, literally, I mean sharing your bodily fluids, sharing your body with somebody else in a very positive way that was so unlike anything I'd ever experienced.

“It was almost all gay men. There were usually a few women. There were people in coats and ties who wandered in from time to time, and you never knew if they were straight people from out of town, or in town, who were just kind of curious. I know that gay friends brought their straight friends there, although they were probably equally hippie so you, they weren't easily identifiable. And one of the things I remember vividly was, there was always a little coterie of men, gender-fuck, into gender-fuck. They wore, they had beards but they had glitter in their beards. They had hairy legs but they had fishnet stockings on, they wore Dr. Pepper jackets, you think, band uniform jackets, and—. And they all seemed to be tall. They all seemed to be tall men, and they were all on platform shoes, so they were really tall. They sort of towered over—and invariably there were four or five of them, and a little group of them, and they always stood sort of in the same place, near the center of the bar on the right hand, on the right side of the bar. And then there were men in—I call them the men in the brown leather jackets. It wasn't black leather, it was bomber jackets, and very sexy, somewhat more aloof than the others. I found them enormously sexy and very attractive.

“Well, the first year, when I was still living in Oakland, I would usually go on a Friday and/or a Saturday night. And I would get there about, maybe



9:30 pm or so in the evening. Initially, I would go alone. And actually I think with the Stud I very often went alone. But I was always sure of seeing people that I knew there, so it was a place to hook up with friends. And very often I went with the intention of meeting a stranger to have sex, so I didn't go with a group of people to socialize, although I would do that while I was there. But you think, it gets to be 12:00 pm, 12:30 pm and you start figuring out who you're gonna go home with that night, and sort of making that nice with them, and then doing it . . . I would go home early as possible. It was usually about 12:30 am, 1:00 am. I very seldom stayed till last call."

*Huck Roberts recalled on July 6, 1999:*

"The original Stud was between 11th and 12th on Folsom, almost across from Hamburger Mary's, but a little closer down to the other corner. And that was sort of a funny mix even in those days, of young punks and leather men. You know it was always a strange mix."



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