Who could have imagined, when Jim Kepner was born, how this child would one
day play such an important role in
helping to create a positive identity for
countless millions of people around the
world? From his lifetime of dedication as a
journalist, essayist, bibliographer and
chronicler, Jim worked to ensure that gener-
ations to come will enjoy a continuing ac-
cess to the historical legacy of “his people.”
Most Gays and Lesbians never had the priv-
ilege of a personal relationship with this
gentle, humble man. Yet his powerful influ-
ence continues to affect their lives in so
many ways.

Today millions of people
march in Pride parades through-
out the world, carrying their
panoply of rainbow flags unfurled
in proud recognition of a true self.
It is a pride built on increased
awareness of self worth gained
over the years through numerous
civil rights conflicts and victories
and reflected in our periodicals,
books, films and word of mouth.
It is a pride built largely on what
Jim Kepner—and a handful of
others—did over the past fifty
years to preserve, uncover and re-
store the true history of Gays and
Lesbians.

Ironically, during Jim’s generation, this
sense of pride and openness was only a
dream. Jim was thought to be eight months
old in September of 1923 when found aban-
donied under an oleander bush in Galveston,
Texas. When adopted by childless James
Lynn and Mary Peterson Kepner, it was
noted he had deformed legs and club feet
which would require an operation and the
wearing of heavy metal leg braces for much
of his youth.

At age four, Jim remembered his first
awareness of a special liking for men and
boys. His first schoolboy crush came in the
first grade. He also had childhood crushes
on some of the boyfriends his mother en-
joyed on the side. As a youngster he day-
dreamed about Buck Rogers, and other male
comic book figures.

Jim was the “good little boy” who did
well at school, faithfully attended bible
study at several different Protestant church-
es, and prayed for his arguing parents to get
along better. His mother, raised Catholic,
was prostituted by her father as a young girl,
and his father was a hard-working but swag-
gering, macho drunk.

Jim was unathletic and, with his un-
steady legs, did not care much for sports. He
preferred instead taking long walks and
going to the beach. He led a fairly sheltered
early life, saw few films until his late teens,
and rarely heard classical music. Visiting li-
braries was a favorite pastime and he took
solace in his books.

See Jim Kepner on Page 6

Movement Pioneers To Gather in L.A.

ONE Institute will host a truly historic
event on Friday evening, May 22nd, when
pioneers and leaders representing five
decades of the Gay and Lesbian movement
gather at the Academy of Motion Picture
Arts and Sciences in Beverly Hills for “A
Celebration of Jim Kepner’s Life & the Past
Fifty Years of the Gay & Lesbian Rights
Movement” (see back page).

It is expected that many of the move-
ment pioneers will participate in what
promises to be a moving and historic event.
Kepner was a virtual “I Claudius” of the
movement, devoting his entire life to chron-
icling the struggle for Gay and Lesbian civil
rights. Testimony of that fact are the tens of
thousands of clippings and papers in the
ONE/IGLA archives that document every
significant event and personality in the
movement during the last half-century.

Jim Kepner’s pioneer writing launched
activist debate and interest for more than
four decades, and continues to serve as a
point of reference for countless writers and
historians involved in Gay and Lesbian
research. He was one of the first to teach
courses in Gay Studies, and was a founder
and key activist in many Gay and Lesbian
institutions.

Among the many movement activists
already confirmed to attend are: Cliff
Anchor, Gay veterans activist and lover of
Leonard Matlovich; Jeanne Barney, a long-

See Pioneers on Page 18

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Lesbian Legacy Collection Growth & Activities

The Lesbian Legacy Collection is happy to report that we received a second grant of $10,000 from the California Community Foundation for our 1998 programs. We also received a donation of $500 from the Uptown Gay and Lesbian Alliance. In addition, The Liberty Hill Foundation gave LLC a grant of $7000 to help Alice Hom carry out portions of the Lesbian Oral History Project.

Outreach: This year, we will focus our outreach on under-served groups: Lesbians of color, youth and seniors. We have already offered two Cybersisters Surf The Net sessions to the Phoenix Encore, an L.A. senior Lesbian group, and one session to Lesbianas Unidas. History presentations included Southern California Women for Understanding in Ventura, Project 10 in a North Hollywood high school and a talk on butch/femme for a UCLA class. The History Forum co-sponsored by ONE/IGLA and the L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center at West Hollywood Park included myself as part of the panel.

New Materials: We have received 20 boxes of files and photos from the L.A.

Women’s Building, and we will also be housing their poster collection. Sadly, Page One Books, the second oldest L.A. area women’s bookstore, has closed—but owner Karol Walker donated 8 boxes of books and tapes as well as the store’s sign.

Other donations of materials have come from Tee Corrine (books) and Cathy Cade (slides). Jeanne Cordova has lent part of her collection of Lesbian Tide photographs to the LLC so they can be used by researchers. We also received a full run of Hag Rag from a sister in Wisconsin whom we found through the Internet. USC’s Leavens library is weeding out its collection and we acquired several hundred titles related to Lesbian, women’s and Gay history.

Volunteers: New volunteers include Jeannette Jarvis, who has begun scanning issues of various Lesbian journals. This means they will be available in full text on the World Wide Web! Folklorist Clodagh Harvey will be working with the Oral History Project.

More Room: In late May we will be tripling the space for the Lesbian Legacy Collection. This allows more space for materials and more space to work in. On Saturday, May 23, the LLC will sponsor an open house, pool party and reception for the veterans of the pre-Stonewall movement including Flo Fleischman, Barbara Gittings, Kay Lahusen, Phyllis Lyon, Del Martin and Stella Rush. All are invited to attend this event at the LLC site, 4 blocks north of USC. For directions please call 310-854-0271 or e-mail: retter@calvin.usc.edu.

Wish List: Volunteers and donations of materials and money are always welcome. Our wish list includes a computer, a printer, books, a printer (we will put your name on it), a video camera (Hi-8) and archival supplies. Donations are tax-deductible. ▼

Yolanda Retter, LLC staff librarian

Notes From Our Mail Box And E-Mail

- ECHO Pioneer Activist Checks In
  As a Gay history pioneer I will be attending the Kepner event on May 22nd. I came out in the mid-50s in L.A., and as a college student in Philadelphia was active with ECHO, the East Coast Homophile Organization. I was one of the 12 picketers in the first national Gay demonstration at Philadelphia’s Independence Hall on July 4, 1965 along with Frank Kameny, Clark Pollack and others. I’ve been active with various human rights movements for 38 years and invite you to take a look at a profile of me posted this month (April) on the bapuppy website. Looking forward to being with you all soon – Kiyoshi (Steven) Kuromiya

- General Mills Gay Pride Exhibit
  I am preparing a Gay Pride exhibit to be shown at the corporate headquarters of Gen. Mills in Minneapolis. The theme centers around the history of the Gay Games. It will include photographs, press coverage, printed materials and other memorabilia. I am wondering if you would be interested in participating in this exhibition at some level. – Chuck Smith, Minneapolis

- Found Us On The Web
  I’m not sure how I landed on your pages, but was pleased to find your on-line archives and collection of resources. – Uncle Donald’s Castro St. www.backdoor.com/CASTRO
Remembering Jim Kepner, My Dear, Feminist Friend

On page 9 there is a picture of my friend Jim Kepner sitting on the rail of his front porch at his home in Echo Park. That is where I first met him sometime around 1961. His good friend and neighbor was a wonderful Gay woman, writer, poet and schoolteacher named Betty Perdue. She was my friend as well.

Betty often bragged about her buddy Jim next door, whom she called “a self-made genius.” In those days I was pretty radical and anti-male. But when I met Jim that day, he changed my mind about a lot of things – here was a man who was a feminist, an activist and a humanist all rolled into one; a humble, intelligent human being. I was impressed, and quickly became a friend and one of his followers.

Jim invited me to join the Council on Religion and the Homophile which had just been born. We worked together at different conferences with mainly non-Gay ministers who tried to be sensitive to our Gayness.

Jim worked very hard with the CRH to teach them that our sexual orientation had nothing to do with our worship of God. Although Jim was not into organized religion, he had his own spiritual relationship.

We often met at Gay group meetings and would confer on a variety of issues.

In the sixties he mostly supported himself by being a cab driver. He once offered me a ride in his cab, but I said no. I was apprehensive at that time of riding with male drivers. He got a big kick out of that and he often overlooked my feminist lectures on how the male power structure affected every segment of society. Often he would agree with me, but other times he would give a good debate on why I might be wrong.

I remember when he was working on the first issue of his magazine, Pursuit. He gave me a copy and told me he was going to mortgage his house in order to continue publishing it. Jim eventually lost his Baxter Street house and everything he had, because the Gay community at that time did not support much of anything Gay-positive. Considering the times, Pursuit was too out-of-the-closet for most.

Years ago, the vice squad was arresting a lot of Gay men in Griffith Park and Jim called it “entrapped.” He organized a group of men and women to enter the park on Sunday afternoons and patrol the grounds in hopes of stopping the arrests.

Jim Kepner’s crowded Lexington Ave. apartment

One of my women friends asked why I volunteered for such a job because, after all, it was a “male thing.” I responded, “If it helps Jim I’ll do it, because Jim has always helped us in the many things he did.”

For the most part Jim always stayed in the background, never seeking the limelight, and he never asked anyone to do something that he wouldn’t do himself.

I remember when a buddy of mine named Jo insisted we visit his new apartment which was filled with all his Gay books. She wanted to browse. He had turned his apartment into a library, and I never did see beyond the books and materials where the man slept at night. His whole apartment was wall-to-wall archives.

Jim had a vision, and he was bound and determined to make that vision a reality. His vision is today known as the ONE Institute, International Gay and Lesbian Archives.

One of the most impressive things about Jim’s life was that he had risen from being a very poor boy without a real family, or formal education or college degrees, to become one of the prime benefactors of the Gay movement, greatly respected and admired by many.

Because of Jim Kepner’s philosophy his writings, and his archives, we can all walk tall and be proud of who we are.

Thanks, good buddy!
ell “Johnnie” Phelps overcame adversity to become a tireless activist on behalf of Lesbian causes. Dianna Linden, a friend, recalled that Johnnie “pulled no punches, tolerated no insincerities and was extraordinarily loyal to her causes and her friends.”

Johnnie was born in 1922 in North Carolina under dramatic circumstances. While on their way to Florida, her father was killed instantly in a car crash and her mother was taken to the closest hospital—which happened to be in an asylum where she lived long enough to give birth to Johnnie. The infant was placed in an orphanage, and at 18 months she was taken to be raised by a couple named Roper. Although her new father was kind to her, Johnnie grew up enduring the abuse of her mother and other adults. These experiences deeply affected her and seemed to toughen her, but as another friend, Jean Holz observed, “Johnnie was strong but vulnerable in ways most people missed.” As a result of defending herself against ongoing abuse, she was placed in reform school for several years. When she was released and returned home, she determined to excel at school and did so, graduating with honors.

Some time after high school, and for the sake of appearances, she married a navy man named Phelps. During WWII she enlisted in the newly created Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps. She was sent to the South Pacific to work as a medic and lost her first lover when their boat was bombed as they landed on Leyte (Philippines) in 1944. Later during that tour of duty, Johnnie was wounded and received a Purple Heart. When her tour was over she reenlisted and was sent to Germany as part of the Post-WWII “Occupation” forces. During that time, she was part of a corps of highly decorated soldiers assigned to guard Nazis who were awaiting trial.

Later, Johnnie was assigned to head the motor pool for General Eisen-howers battalion. One day, he asked her to prepare a list of Lesbians in the units. She gave her now-famous answer: “If the general pleases, I’ll be happy to do this...but you have to know that the first name on the list will be mine...” At that point Eisenhower’s secretary added that Sergeant Phelps’ name would be second on the list and hers would be first, since she was going to type it. Johnnie estimated that 97% of the women in the units were Lesbian and told the general that he would basically lose most of the battalion. She also reminded the general that the group of approximately 900 women had had no “illegal pregnancies, AWOLs or misconducts,” and that every six months while under his command, they had received commendations for meritorious service. Eisenhower told them to forget the order, but later, when he was President and the McCarthy witch-hunts ruined the lives of many Gays and Lesbians, Eisenhower did not intervene.

While in the service, Johnnie developed a severe thyroid condition, which her doctor chose to treat in an experimental fashion, thereby aggravating the condition. By the time she left the service she was hooked on the drugs she had been given in the hospital. She then settled in New York’s Greenwich Village where she worked at various show bars, including the famed Ernie’s Circus. When she relocated to L.A. in the ‘50s she determined to clean up, and did so in a recovery house run by two Lesbians. Once clean and sober, she became widely known on the AA speaker circuit. She worked for a time as a substance abuse counselor on Skid Row, and over the years was involved with the Alcoholism Center for Women (ACW) in Los Angeles. At ACW, she worked as a counselor, established The Center Press as a training program for women in recovery, and later served on the ACW Board as a member and as the Board’s President. In the late ‘80s, when ACW faced the sale of its leased property, she engineered a successful campaign to have its buildings declared historical sites, and a concurrent major capital campaign, raised enough money for much-needed building renovations.

For several decades, she and her partner Grace Bukowski (whom she met at ACW in 1975), lived in Valinda, near West Covina. Out of their home they operated a printing business, providing political printing for a number of sympathetic candidates including Jackie Goldberg when she first ran for the L.A. School Board. They also printed the first issues of the SCWU (Southern California Women for Understanding) newsletter. While operating the business, they continued a non-stop activist lifestyle. Together they joined NOW and Johnnie served as California State Treasurer. Later they formed a West Covina chapter of NOW.

Johnnie also became Chair of the Lesbian Rights Task Force, and founded the short-lived Women’s Equality Political Action Committee. Together they were active in the Stonewall Democratic Club in L.A. and participated in the 1980 March on Sacramento for Gay Rights, held in the pouring rain.

Judith Meuli (who recently lost her partner Toni Carabillo), noted that “Johnnie was a good ally to have and all activists, including Toni of L.A. NOW, could always count on Johnnie to be a willing fighter against all odds.”

Years after she left the army, Johnnie stepped in to lend a hand to Lesbians in the military. In the early ‘80s, when a number of women serving on the U.S.S. Norton Sound in Long Beach were accused of Lesbianism, Johnnie was instrumental in obtaining legal help from Susan McCreery, staff attorney of the Gay and Lesbian Rights Chapter of the Southern California ACLU. In the end, all but two of the women were cleared. Later, Gloria Molina appointed Johnnie to the L.A. County Veterans Advisory Commission and in 1993, Johnnie
received an award from a veterans rights group. She recounted her military experiences in a number of interviews and several films, including Before Stonewall and Trailblazers.

Throughout the years, Johnnie continued to cope with various health problems, including quadruple by-pass surgery. In 1996 she made the difficult decision to leave her home and move to the Veterans Home in Barstow. Grace noted that this decision was made out of love—Johnnie did not want to be a burden to her partner. In the same year, Johnnie adopted Grace, a strategy that would enable the latter to have rights often denied to partners in same-sex rela-

tionships, especially in situations where health and property are at issue.

Johnnie died on December 30, 1997. In January, people from various quarters of her multi-faceted life attended a memorial service at the veteran’s cemetery in Westwood, where her ashes were later buried. She is survived by Grace, “her partner in life and business,” and the many friends whose lives she touched in her irascible but deeply caring way. A web site was created to honor her memory at http://home.att.net/~go2sparks/johnnie_phelps.htm

—Yolanda Rettter

Note: Materials on Johnnie Phelps life are also contained in our Military - Veterans Special Collection.

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Gay writer, participating in the homophile movement of the 1950s, contributed more to the early Gay press in America, or was present to record the period more thoroughly, than was historian Jim Kepner. A co-founder of ONE Institute, and founder of the International Gay and Lesbian Archives, Kepner has assembled a collection of the most challenging and wide-ranging essays on Gay life and its political, social, religious, and historical aspects to appear in the pioneer Gay press in America. His book Rough News—Daring Views: 1950s’ Pioneer Gay Press Journalism, from Haworth Press is now available at ONE Institute.

Jim Kepner’s contributions to ONE Magazine, the Mattachine Review, ONE Institute Quarterly of Homophile Studies, ONE Confidential, and other publications, at a time when to produce or possess any such material was judged illegal and subversive, are invaluable. Included are religious and biological arguments on the subject. Students of Gay and Lesbian history, sexuality and the law need to study Kepner’s book for analysis of the progress and goals of the Gay liberation movement. It is also a popular reader for Gay/Lesbian people, researchers, teachers, and journalism students interested in the often overlooked history of the Gay and Lesbian movement before Stonewall.

The importance of Jim Kepner’s contributions to the 1950’s Gay press cannot be overstated. In the author’s own words, “I shed the apologetic attitudes, explored the meaning of Gayness, looked at various social and legal aspects of Gay life, and critically analyzed the homophobic views of many psychotherapists, theologians, and others, exploring our history and literature, and covering then-current witch-hunts against Gays and discussing how we could define and advance our cause. My articles covered... a wide range of Gay concerns, generally moving well ahead of the timid or homophbic thinking of most Gays at the time (though, as shown within this book, my own ideas also had some evolving to do).”

Kepner’s writings from the pioneer Gay press in America will help Gays and Lesbians today understand where they came from, how they thought about themselves five decades ago, how society treated them, and how Lesbians and Gays began to reject the definitions put on them by authorities to redefine Gays and their place in the world.

Rough News, Daring Views is approximately 380 pages, plus an extensive index. You can order this book from ONE Press, P.O. Box 69679, West Hollywood, CA 90069. Hard cover $49, paperback $24.
Soon after telling a dismayed male best friend in fifth grade that he felt about him the way he was supposed to feel about girls, Jim lost his first love when his father's work took him to Houston. With the move Jim transferred from public school to St. Paul's Lutheran Christian School, where he continued to excel in biblical studies.

Jim recalled his absolute stage fright at age 12 when he tried to recite Walt Whitman's "O Captain, My Captain" at a Lutheran declamation tournament. (Later in life Jim came to develop an intense fondness for Whitman.) But Jim would eventually master his fear of speaking before audiences as his journey in life—similar to Whitman's—led him to confront the ignorance and hatred of the era.

In February of 1936, a young cub reporter from the Houston Press, Walter Cronkite, interviewed 12-year-old Jim Kepner, who had recently completed five years of exemplary Bible study without missing a Sunday. In the lengthy piece Jim declared the Bible to be his favorite book and announced his plans to become a missionary for Jesus in Africa. His thorough knowledge of the subject would serve him well in years to come when confronting or debating religious bigots.

His home life continued to be dominated by his parents' drunken fights, but he tried to focus on the positive and block out the negative hate that surrounded him. The depression years were tough. The family took in boarders that his mom slept with while his father bounced from job to job, finally returning the family to Galveston.

In high school Jim excelled in English, Latin, history and science. Although not interested in military pursuits, he joined the ROTC to avoid gym classes and having to undress in front of other boys. The Nazis had begun to overrun Europe by then, and Jim had become a pacifist because of his revulsion of war. Nevertheless, he found it extremely difficult to quit the ROTC—to his own amazement he stuck it out, but refused to accept a lieutenant's commission. In June of 1940 he graduated magna cum laude from Galveston's Ball High School. His yearbook jokingly noted that he wanted to be a missionary, but because of his magnetic personality he would probably become a snake charmer.

During and following high school Jim worked as a soda jerk, a Western Union messenger and an office clerk in a railroad law office. He wanted to go to college but it wasn't financially possible—taking college courses was something he would have to put off until much later in life.

After high school he was accepted into Brazos Presbytery as a ministerial candidate. Jim recalled preaching a sermon on the biblical love story of David and Jonathan at a Presbyterian Church in Houston. His own beloved friend David sat in the front row, unaware of Jim's yearning. Years later he learned with disappointment that David was not Gay.

Ultimately, Jim's pacifism collided with his religious fundamentalism. After much personal turmoil, he quit the church and became a militant atheist. It was then that he began his search to find a better world for himself. Jim initially discovered this "better world" not in reality but in science fiction magazines, and began corresponding with other fans of what then was regarded by many as a rather odd interest.

In a discussion one day, where he heard a loathsome definition of homosexuals, Jim went to the dictionary to finally begin searching for an understanding of the feelings he had for other males. Soon after he found an advertisement in a newspaper that offered a series of five-cent "Little Blue Books" on a variety of subjects published in Girard, Kansas. Included among them were two on "Homosexuality." He ordered both—and a number of additional
small tracts, to mask his real interest from the publisher and his family. He needed to learn more about himself, and was delighted to discover he was not alone—indeed many other famous people throughout history also held these same feelings. It was a revelation for Jim.

Following Pearl Harbor, in the spring of 1942, Jim's father left Texas to work in booming San Francisco. In August he sent for his son Jim, who was just shy of 19, and Jim's 12-year-old sister Ella Nora. The image of his abandoned, worn-out mother, left behind in Galveston, would haunt Jim for years even though he would see her again on two occasions. Although he registered for the draft and was called up for military service several times, Jim never served because of his weak limbs and twisted feet.

It was in San Francisco that Jim joined an early sci-fi fans club known as the Golden Gate Futurist Society. He soon discovered sci-fi was popular with many others he believed to be Gay, each closeted from one another. It was late 1942 when Jim undertook a search of the San Francisco Library to find additional texts on homosexuality. Although he found virtually nothing, he did discover several books on the subject in the city's used bookstores. (Ironically, this man who spent his life discovering and purchasing thousands of books, never even saw a bookstore until a few months before leaving Galveston at age 19.) He soon began collecting what would become his unique library, and eventually the largest Gay and Lesbian archives in the world. His first find was "The Well Of Loneliness," a book by Radcliffe Hall first published in 1928.

Jim remembered few open images of Gay life during his youth in Galveston. He would comment how amazed he was to learn in later life that Galveston, a port city, was known as one of the major open towns in the country during the prohibition and depression years. It was even noted at the time as a place for Gay men to meet and socialize. Jim expressed his disappointment at remaining unaware of this underground community as a child. Its invisibility and isolation would later add to Jim's compulsion to uncover the "hidden history" of Gays and Lesbians.

His first sexual experience with a man occurred when he met a merchant marine named Nial, tragically for Jim, shipped out the next day to China. How unfair life seemed to be: After so many years Jim had finally found a person who had the same feelings, only to lose him as quickly as they had met.

Jim had learned that the "Black Cat Bar" was a Gay hangout, and eventually worked up the courage to visit the renown spot. But as fate would have it, the police raided the bar just as he was approaching, and Jim stood transfixed across the street witnessing "queens" cursing and struggling while being carried out by cops.

Jim staged a hasty retreat—he had not yet found the courage to overcome the fear carried by most Gay men of his era. However, he would remember being impressed by how these "queens" had bitterly sassed back against their oppression by law and society. Whenever others would condemn certain sections of the diverse Gay/Lesbian community, Jim would steadfastly refuse, remembering those "simply outrageous queens" as the only ones who would stand up and fight back at the time.

Shortly after this episode, which earned his respect for the "nelly queens" whom so many others in the closet detested, Jim became reacquainted with his merchant marine. Nial introduced Jim to the "Baroness," Jim's escort to a gala Gay wedding at the elegant Mark Hopkins Hotel. The Baroness was later arrested, providing Jim with his very first newspaper clipping for his archival collection that would eventually grow into thousands. In the '40s and '50s Gay bars in hotels across the country were considered the safest from police raids.

Nial also introduced Jim to his first long-term lover, John, who was fully closeted and hostile to the Gay community. John got Jim his war industry spot at the Kaiser Shipyards across the bay. Each day he traveled back and forth on a ferry boat, where he was warned that "faeries hung out on an upper poop deck," to which he quickly gravitated. There he would meet many open Gay men and women.

After breaking from John, Jim found an active Gay life in a dozen San Francisco bars. His first was Li Po's in Chinatown, which was only Gay for a few months (it was common to find patrons who spent their money at a Gay bar suddenly have a new guard at the door, saying, "We don't want your kind here."). By now Jim was finding sex regularly, meeting men on the streets of war-time San Francisco. Servicemen were everywhere.

In early 1943, a science fiction pen pal from Wisconsin told him about the "Sons of Hamidy," a national Gay rights organization named for Athenian tyrannicides Harmodius & Aristogiton, and supposedly led by U.S. senators and generals. Jim was anxious to join, but kept being put off by his pen pal.

Undaunted, Jim went ahead and organized a meeting of six Gay friends in San Francisco, and wrote to others inviting them to join the Sons of Hamidy. All wanted to know who was behind this group, but Jim didn't know, and his attempt to organize quickly fizzled. Other pen pals and visitors to San Francisco would later tell Jim that they heard Jim himself was the S.O.H. national secretary!

Realizing the S.O.H. was merely a fragment of the imagination of his Wisconsin pen pal, Jim lost faith in continuing, but not in the dream to some-day organize Gay peo-
The pen pal finally did admit to Jim that the Sons of Hamidy was a dream...but Jim had almost made it a reality! For months, Jim found many men for sex, and always asked them the same question: “When do we organize?” Responses were unanimously negative and homophobic.

Jim next turned his energies to publishing a mimeographed sci-fi magazine. He contributed a poem called “Sappho” to another magazine which looked to the day when “the nameless love shall stand up proud.” When he told several Gay friends he was putting together a publication called The Gay Fan, they all told him to never contact them again!

Soon, other sci-fi writers began making homophobic remarks in their fanzines about Jim’s Gayness. When San Francisco Gay life seemed to shut down for Jim in 1943, he followed the advice of a few friends who told him, “Why not move to Los Angeles, there has never been a problem with the police in the history of L.A.!”

This he quickly learned was not true.

Once in the City of Angels Jim cooled his Gay activity somewhat and joined the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society, becoming first its Secretary and later its President. But Jim’s open Gayness was destined to become something of a scandal. Soon he was publishing the first four issues of his mimeographed fanzine, Toward Tomorrow. He worked as a clerk-cashier at a soda fountain, then a warehouseman for the Pacific Electric Railway, and later as a machine operator making aircraft parts in an ironworks plant.

Jim was becoming more involved with those who were championing his concerns for Labor and Negro Rights. Most Science Fantasy Society members wanted only to discuss sci-fi mags, writers and artists, but Jim found five others in the group equally interested in social issues and the hope of building a better future.

In 1945 the six of them organized the “Futurian Society of Los Angeles,” modeled on an earlier New York group of Marxist sci-fi fans. After hearing speakers from Technocracy, Inc. and the Communist Political Association, five of their group, including Jim, made a decision to join the Communist Party, and began making plans to relocate to New York City. But their plans were derailed when it was discovered that one of the five was an FBI plant!

Jim hitch-hiked to New York City twice, first sharing an apartment at 23rd Street and Seventh Avenue with two non-Gay friends from Los Angeles, then later moving to 210 East Second Street with an unrequited love interest, a Polish fan from Connecticut. He published the fifth and final issue of Toward Tomorrow with a Marxist slant, as well as a few smaller fanzines.

In New York Jim worked at Horn & Hardart Cafeteria & Automat until he became a staff member at the Daily Worker, doing an occasional news bit or film review. He remained largely closeted while working in various Communist Party activities. He marched in three massive May Day Parades, and asked another closeted Gay man if he thought WE could hold a parade like that (Jim didn’t specify what he meant by WE, but the man apparently understood). They both agreed it could NEVER happen, yet the hope remained.

Just as he had earlier done in Los Angeles’ Pershing Square, Jim spent many hours among the soap boxes discussing politics, religion, science and other intellectual interests in New York’s Union Square and Columbus Circle. He would occasionally and carefully edge into Gay topics.

Jim was also involved in efforts to get meat packers to hire Negroes, and to get Lower East Side tenement dwellers to join in a massive march on Washington for rent control, similar to the large peace march on Washington.

Jim had hoped to quickly become a professional writer in New York City. But his participation in “Contemporary Writers,” a collection of leftist writers’ workshops, had led him to meet dozens of guys “who could write circles around [me] without even trying.” Writing was always hard work for Jim. He learned just how difficult it was to become a major writer.

As the Cold War geared up, liberal commentators were removed from the air. Jim was writing a column entitled “Around The Dial” for the Daily Worker, as well as briefly editing their cultural pages. In his role as the Newspaper Guild representative for the Daily Worker, he attended one meeting where the FBI and other government agencies told the assembled members of the working press that war with Russia was expected soon and all the newspapers would be commandeered.

He met Dorothy Parker, the only New York columnist writing about the banning of liberal radio commentators (and a woman he had “loved since high school”). She had organized a protest rally on this issue. Jim was taken to a party at the apartment Ms. Parker shared with another woman. She asked Jim if he was Gay and offered to set him up either with Langston Hughes (who turned out was out of town) or the heir to the Spaulding Balls fortune.

It was during a vacation to Los Angeles that Jim told an FBI stoolie what they were doing. Unfortunately, word got back to Party headquarters before Jim did. He was called in for unexplained and fairly hostile interviews, two afternoons a week for many months. “Standard personnel checks,” they told him. The Party eventually determined Jim was not in league with the FBI.

But Jim created another problem in his response to their final question: “I used to think I was a homosexual.” This led to several more intense interviews, and Jim was ultimately expelled from the Party as “an enemy of the people” (though he was told he could rejoin later).

Jim was devastated, and hitched to Miami. But when he could not find a regular job there, he hitchhiked again, this time back to San Francisco. Jim worked as a hotel night clerk, and recalled once watching the police vice squad arrest two young sailors for being found in bed having sex.
Jim also volunteered at the Communist Party’s California Labor School library. He wrote film reviews for the Communist Party People’s World. He opened the store “Books on Telegraph Hill” with Mel Brown, one of his friends who moved with him in his L.A.-to-N.Y.-to-S.F.-to-L.A. odyssey. The bookstore was denounced from the pulpit of Saint Peter’s and Paul’s Catholic Church across the street because it carried many radical, Gay and avant-garde books.

Jim met Djuana Barnes and her lover at his shop. The store’s best-sellers were The Divided Path, a Gay novel, and Dianetics, which Jim tried to talk his customers out of buying. During a trip to Portland, Oregon to attend a World Science Fiction Convention, Jim would author the first printed attack on the Dianetics book and its author, homophobe Ron Hubbard, who went on to launch Scientology.

The bookstore was a financial disaster—the cops even asked for protection money—but it entertained Jim and Mel for 18 months.

Back in Los Angeles, the duo moved to an old hillside house on Baxter Street in Echo Park. Jim lived there from 1951 to 1972, and again from 1989 to 1991. He raised cactus, and hosted twice-weekly gatherings of a mixed group of sci-fi fans, ex-radicals, and characters he met in Pershing Square. Several times in the early fifties he proposed to start a Gay organization or magazine, but it didn’t happen.

Jim began to hear rumors in mid-1952 about a secretive and closed Gay group called the Mattachine Society, but was informed he wasn’t allowed to attend their meetings. Later he learned that Mattachine had opened up with five guilds, each holding several discussion groups around the city. By then he was unable to attend, working nights at a milk carton factory in Vernon and depending on public transportation. Finally, in January of 1953, a neighbor friend, Betty Perdue, took him to one of the group’s meetings in a Hollywood home. After attending several more meetings, Jim was asked to join one of Mattachine’s Guilds. But trouble for the group was brewing just around the corner.

The Mattachine Conference weekends in April, May and October of 1953 proved to be a disaster. People came with sky-rocketing hopes to these conferences and tore one another apart. Jim thought he was the only person in those gatherings who saw that they did not all want the same thing nor could they easily agree on how to get it. Jim liked the newer guys, but found himself in agreement with the older founders. Compromise for the sake of unity was not an option to those gathered together at these meetings!

Mattachine began to stagger when Hal Call moved its headquarters to San Francisco. A long conflict between the San Francisco and New York City chapters ensued over the location of the Mattachine headquarters which consumed the organization. In November of 1952 a group of inter-ested people from a Mattachine meeting assembled in a kitchen to discuss the organizing of a Gay publication. From this group sprang ONE magazine, the nation’s first successful Gay periodical.

In the spring of 1954, during its second year, Jim became active in ONE, Inc. as a regular contributing writer. He joined the editorial board, often writing several articles per issue under the pseudonyms Lyn Pederson, Dal McIntyre, Frank Golovitz and others. (This was done by the handful of staff writers to give the impression there were far more people on the staff than there really were!) Jim used his real name in public gatherings, but for security reasons did not use it in the magazine until 1958.

Jim could see the immediate effect their monthly magazine was having on people—letters from isolated Gays arrived regularly, saying the publication had saved their lives. He loved having a direct influence with his writings.

In 1954, Jim joined Chuck Rowland and Bob Hull, both Mattachine founders, in an unsuccessful attempt to start a Gay group in Mexico. Later that year Jim also tried to start a ONE group in Tucson, Arizona with Dave Schaffer. In both instances, the idea of a more open community frightened the local Gays.

In the summer of 1956, Jim Kepner, Dorr Legg, and USC professor Merrit Thompson planned homophile studies classes in anthropology, biology, history, law, literature, religion, sociology and “Homemetics.” The foursome was concerned with how the material they assembled could be applied to help guide the Gay Community and Movement. In each field they asked what information (and misinformation) was available regarding homosexuals, and what techniques unique to that field might help the broader community acquire a greater sense of self-awareness.

Just as today, many Gays and Lesbians initially wondered, “What’s to study? I know all the positions!” But the academic quartet believed that to make real permanent progress, the community must learn who we
were and where we had come from, in order to envision where we had yet to go!

This concept of enlightened understanding was ridiculed by much of the educational establishment at the time. It was generally believed that Gay people needed psychological help to change their sexual orientation, not to learn about their cultural legacy and the broad range of Gay artists, politicians and notables who had contributed so much to history and culture.

But Jim and the others would not be dissuaded. For nearly thirty years ONE Institute offered two 36-week courses per year. Jim gave extension classes in Chicago, Denver, Detroit, Milwaukee and San Francisco. His talks electrified many of his Gay and Lesbian listeners, giving them an insight into who they were that many would carry with them for the remainder of their lives.

In 1956, Jim proposed that ONE Inc. rent an additional room for its so-called library—which, despite Annual Reports written by Dorr Legg, consisted of no more than a few boxes of books behind couches at Corky’s and Joan’s, or hidden away in Don Slater’s closet. Jim donated over 400 books, the core of his non-fiction collection, more than doubling the book count.

Don Slater began working in that small room as managing editor and librarian. This was the first Gay library in the United States, but it would not be the last that Jim would be responsible for starting.

It should be remembered that Jim obtained these books by working low wage jobs, scraping together every extra cent to purchase a particular book to add to his collection.

Jim’s personal library would eventually become much larger than that of ONE Inc. Other people were starting to use it and contribute to it. It would develop over the next twenty years into the Western Gay Archives, which later evolved into the International Gay and Lesbian Archives.

While ONE had planned to just publishing a monthly magazine, they soon found themselves offering counseling for people in need, on subjects ranging from legal to religious to psychological in nature—they had in effect launched the first Gay Center.

In the summer of 1958, Jim began the ONE Institute Quarterly of Homophile Studies, the very first American scholarly journal on homosexuality, and edited the first 12 of 22 issues. After many painful arguments with Dorr Legg and Don Slater, Jim reluctantly left ONE’s staff in December 1960.

He drove a cab and, 20 years after graduating high school, began attending Los Angeles City College for two years, studying philosophy, history, English and Arabic. He hoped to begin a course of study to teach Arabic-African History or preferably Black studies, the closest analogy he could then see to Gay studies.

Black nationalists had started to insist that Blacks teach Black studies, and Jim was understandably discouraged from proceeding.

During the course of his studies Jim gave two philosophy club talks on Gay concerns. In his philosophy class he wrote how to start the type of Gay organization he felt was then needed, a full decade before the Stonewall Rebellion. He graduated with honors in English, history and Arabic.

In 1965, Jim helped lead ONE’s second tour of Europe. The traveling group met homophile leaders in Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Paris and Zurich, and also visited London and Munich. This was long before the Gay/Lesbian travel agencies arrived on the scene.

The politics of the 1960s was starting to be felt in the Gay/Lesbian Community by 1966, when the militant organization PRIDE was formed in Los Angeles. Jim helped that group launch its newsletter, which he edited, and 16 months later became The Advocate. Jim became a major writer at The Advocate through 1976, and occasionally contributed afterward.

In 1966 Jim became secretary of the Southern California Council on Religion & the Homophile and edited ten issues of their newsletter, Concern. Also in 1966 and 1967, Jim published the magazine Pursuit & Symposium. He mortgaged his house to produce this magazine, which focused on historical materials instead of just bodies. But Jim was “before his time,” and he lost his house.

Jim was not invited to the first NACHO (North American Conference of Homophile Organizations) Conference in Kansas City in February of 1966. He did however participate in the August 1966 NACHO Conference in San Francisco, where he joined the controversial