

PROFILE

Books to you

Mark Friedman makes house calls to spice up the literary lives of you and your friends

by Inga Sorensen

It's not that Mark Friedman doesn't love the abuse and stress spawned by the daily grind. And you can bet as a City of Portland parking enforcement deputy (read "meter maid"), the 39-year-old tangles with plenty of both.

"That's true," says Friedman, who—like so many others—harbors professional passions that lie elsewhere.

"Books," he says bluntly. "I love books." More specifically, writings by and about gay men and lesbians. "It's pretty much all I read now."

Housed in his inner Southeast Portland home is Friedman's pride—an estimated 3,000-title personal library, a testament to his claims. From queer comic books to memoirs to fiction to essays to sci fi, Friedman's got it all.

"Just call me a homosexual homophile," he laughs, though he is entirely serious. "I enjoy it so much, and get so much from the experience of reading that I want to share that with others."

And that's exactly what Friedman is doing via his gay literary "Tupperware" parties—an enterprise which takes the book lover into the domiciles of others to expound the pleasures of the page.

"I have about 40 different [gay-themed] books and I go to people's homes and talk about the titles. If anyone's interested they can place an order for the book right there, and I'm usually able to get it within a few days," he explains.

Among the titles he carries are Armistead Maupin's ever-popular *Tales of the City* series, local writer Tom Spanbauer's *The Man Who Fell in Love with the Moon*, Michael Cunningham's national bestseller *Flesh and Blood*, and the gay writers' coming-out anthology *Boys Like Us*.

Friedman obtains the publications through various wholesalers. Thus far he has held a handful of parties, all geared toward gay men.

"But my ultimate goal is to open a full-service gay and lesbian bookstore," he says. "A place where lesbians and gay men can feel really comfortable and have access to books, magazines and videos."

OK, so here we are in Portland, Oregon, which—with Powell's and smaller eclectic independents tucked in neighborhoods citywide—is often heralded as the book enthusiasts' capital of

the universe. So it should be a good place to establish a bookshop, right?

Time to play devil's advocate: Many existing shops already carry queer titles, and this is also the age of the looming superstore (Barnes & Noble Booksellers, Borders Books, etc.)—a phenom-

"Portland does not have a full-service gay and lesbian bookstore," he says, conceding that there are stores that target gay men (Northeast Broadway's Gai-Pied) or women (Southeast Hawthorne's In Other Words) or a smattering of both (Northwest's Twenty-Third Avenue Books,

Until then, however, Friedman intends to inject his devotion into others' lives via book parties.

"People are sometimes intimidated by bookstores. They go in and don't know what to ask for. They're kind of lost. At first I didn't understand that, because I've always felt so at home around books," he says. "But then I thought about how I feel when I step into a music store—all those CDs and tapes and records that I know nothing about. I feel like turning around and walking out the door. Now I know how some people feel about bookstores."

So Friedman gently eases folks into the rhythms of reading, opening doors to previously unexplored worlds—a subject he knows lots about.

After all, Friedman essentially came out in the library stacks 19 years ago as a college student. He devoured dry textbooks on homosexuality as well as the more flowing stories found in queer classics like the novel *Front Runner*.

"I read to affirm myself," he says. The rest, as they say, is history. Friedman started building his own library, and for the past seven years has been in a reading group.

"The best time of the month," he says.

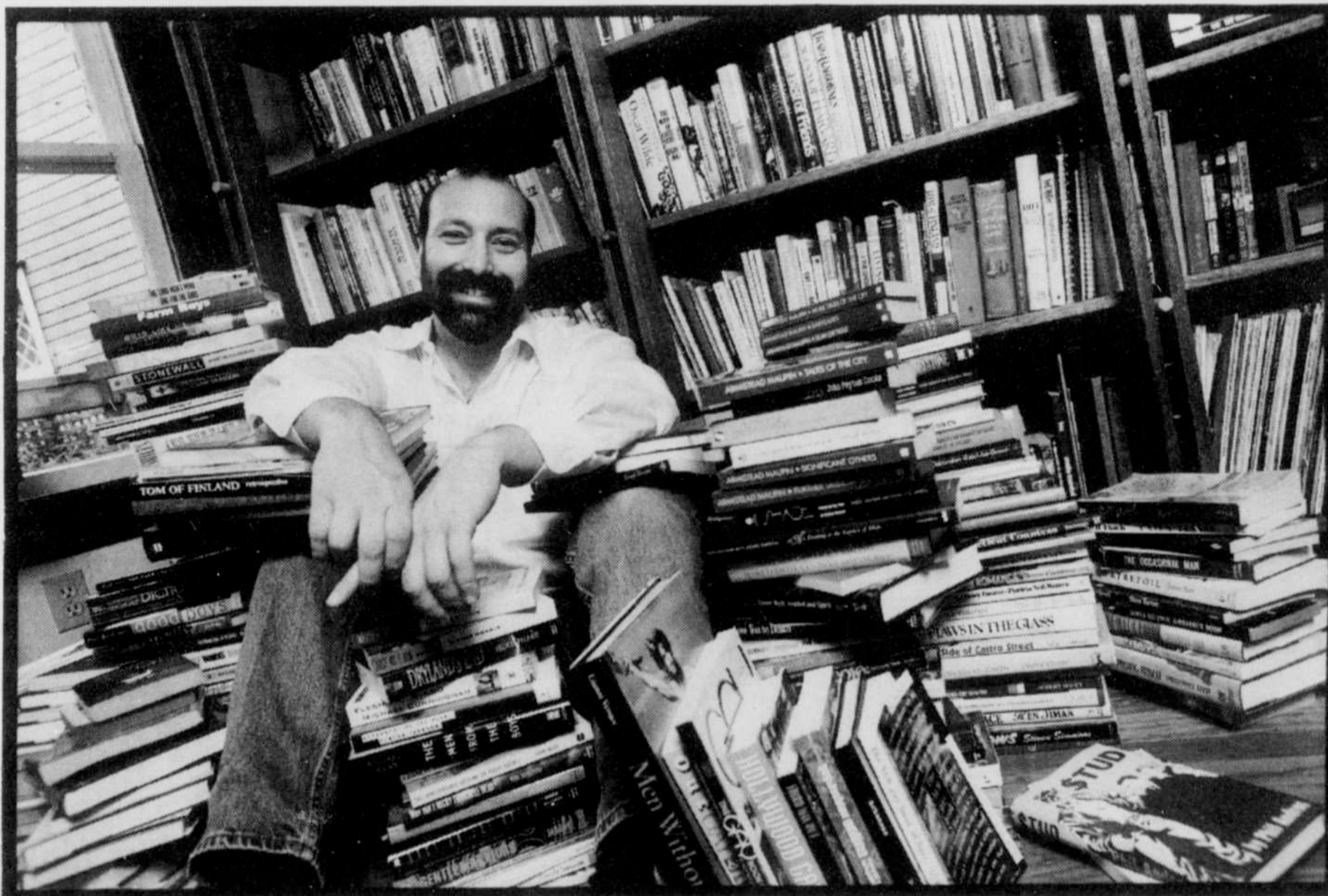
Friedman says he hopes his fervor rubs off on others. "I've read the titles that I bring to book parties. I can talk about them.... The beautiful thing about reading is that taste is relative. Whether you enjoy it—that's what really matters."

Friedman conducts his book parties free of charge. The gatherings unfold like many a political house party—e.g., people invite 10 friends to their home, perhaps supply snacks and drinks, and then, in this scenario, Friedman and the group discuss the titles.

Those who wish to purchase books fill out order forms and pay in advance. Friedman acquires the books and gets them to the person who hosted the party, who in turn distributes the titles to those who placed orders.

"I would love to do some parties in rural Oregon—places where people have little access to these kinds of books," he says. "That would be very fulfilling."

To learn more about Friedman's book parties, call 233-2003.



Mark Friedman

enon critics claim is knocking the more fragile independents out of the biz. Oh yes, and we forgot to mention things like start-up costs and overhead—rent, insurance, wages—all those nagging necessities that usually plop baby businesses into the red during the first few years.

"I have to admit that I have yet to develop a business plan," confides Friedman, who only began holding his literary gatherings three months ago.

Nonetheless, he's confident he can make a go of it.

Southwest's Annie Bloom's Books, as well as the various Powell's outlets).

But he says there is no Rose City equivalent to, for example, A Different Light (with stores in New York City, San Francisco and West Hollywood), which offers gay and lesbian literary atmosphere with knowledgeable staff and a sprawling collection of popular and lesser-known queer books, magazines, music, videos and assorted tchotchkes.

"I want to create a place like that here," he says.

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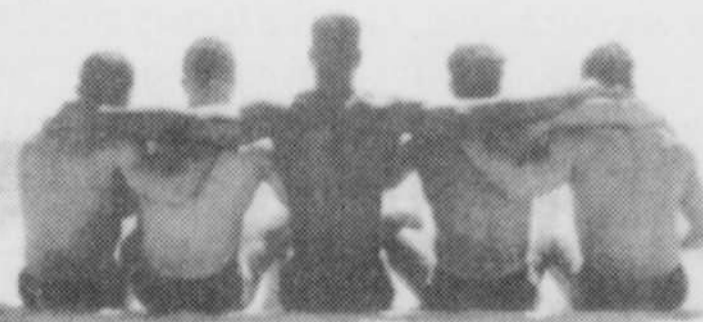
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