

# VISIONARY

Volume 8, Number 1

THE JOURNAL OF GAY SPIRIT VISIONS

Spring 2002

## MORE OF OUR SPIRITUAL STORIES

The men of Gay Spirit Visions bring a richness of life experience to our group. GSV includes many faiths and many spiritual paths.

Five more of our brothers tell the stories of their spiritual journeys and how they find the divine.

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### Gay Spirit Visions

#### Mailing Address:

P.O. Box 339, Decatur, GA 30031-0339

Voice mail: 404/377-5933

E-mail: gayspirit@mindspring.com

#### Website:

www.gayspiritvisions.org

#### Council of Trusted Elders

Martin "TreeWalker" Isganitis,  
*Presiding Elder*

Craig Cook,  
*Presiding Elder-Elect*

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**Advisors:** Andrew Ramer, John Stowe

#### Journal Committee:

Jennings Fort, *Editor*

Mike Goettee, *Design & Production*

David "Lightwing" Salyer, *Advisor*

#### Submission Queries:

jenman@mindspring.com

Please put "GSV *Visionary*"  
in the subject line.

#### Address changes & advertising queries:

gayspirit@mindspring.com

## ELDER'S CIRCLE

### THE STATE OF OUR UNION

As I reflect on the state of GSV at the beginning of 2002, I can't help but be awe-fully proud of you men who love men and the loving, sacred spaces we create for each other. Just weeks ago we held our first Winter Meditation at the Mountain. More than 50 men shared journeys of deep, silent reflection. Pot luck suppers and heart circles abound in Asheville, Atlanta and Charlotte. Plans are well under way for our Spring Retreat at the end of April. And we have spent time journeying in Spirit to envision our 13th Fall Conference. There are even plans for a Summer Beach vacation!



Friendships deepen. New friends find their way to our circles.

I know many of us are facing profound personal challenges with our health, finances, work and home lives. But we do so stronger and with greater confi-

dence because of our love for each other. We've long held the idea that we make a difference in each other's lives. But I'm seeing that difference become real more and more often. Spirit is reaching out to us through each other to help heal old wounds and to restore and renew our individual spirits.

Overcoming homophobia and hatred is primarily an inside job. In my experience with GSV, I have seen this happen to me and to others when we deconstruct the erroneous messages we learned growing up and replace them with the truth of who we are. GSV continues to be a place to nurture this process. And many of us are now reaching out to the world at large and offering our gifts freely, becoming more and more ourselves.

That old "victim" role still likes to be played out once in a while. We must pay attention to its lessons. We must focus our efforts where they will have the greatest results – stopping ourselves from continuing the cycle of victim, rescuer and/or perpetrator of the wrongs against us. We must stand in our power to choose and we must make our choices wisely. ▼

*Comments and questions are always welcome. Address them to: TreeWalker PO Box 339 Decatur, GA 30031-0339*

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## SPIRITUAL PATHS

Two days after the last Fall Conference, I was laid off from my job. The work in our department had been dwindling for some time and we had never received the authority to do what we were supposed to do. It wasn't a total shock. But it sure didn't feel good.

By JENNINGS FORT



I wouldn't miss the dysfunctional working atmosphere but I knew I would miss the people. I would miss my boss especially. We'd gotten along from the start. She was a year older

than I and was a great manager. She always shared as much information as possible and treated us fairly, even though our work situation was out of her control. She never shamed me when I made a mistake. She was fun and we often went to lunch with co-workers from nearby departments.

I had a lot in common with her. Because her sister was a lesbian, my boss wasn't at all bothered by my homosexuality. Her mother, in poor health in a nursing home, was an alcoholic, like my father had been. And my boss' family life had been chaotic at times, like mine. She told me that one December, she came home to find everyone fighting and was shocked to see the decorated Christmas tree thrown on the roof. Once when my boss was a teenager, her mother became so angry with her and her brothers and sister that she threw everyone out of the house. My boss spent the night in her car in a parking lot. I could relate to this kind of family craziness. Last year at work, she got a call one afternoon and I heard her gasp from a few cubes away. She made another quick call and I heard her ask "Is my mom dead?" She sounded like a little girl, stricken, the same

girl who found the Christmas tree on the roof. She called other family members and started to cry, unable to stop it. My heart ached for her, thinking about my own father's death.

After my boss' boss fired me, I walked back to my cube, in shock, to gather my things. My boss came by to tell me she was sorry and offered some advice about finding another job. I handed her my ID badge, knowing I'd probably never set foot in the office again.

A couple weeks later, I met the office people for lunch to catch up. My boss gave me and my laid-off co-worker a card that read "a gift awaits you" at a local plant nursery. When I stopped by for the gift, I was overwhelmed by a \$100 gift certificate. I'm sure this gift came from her own pocket. I looked around the store and decided to buy daffodil bulbs, dozens of them. I stuffed bags with names like King Alfred, Pheasant's Eye and Sky Rocket, some tiny, others onion-sized. I planted them in January and am watching for them now. I hope the bulbs will thrive and multiply so that every spring, I can think of my boss.

As other men tell their spiritual stories in this issue of the *Visionary*, I think my experience with my old job is part of my spiritual journey. I like to think that even in getting laid off from a frustrating job, I can still recognize the grace in making a connection with a kind, giving person. I hope I can continue to see and appreciate Spirit's blessings all around us, always, and be grateful. I have a temporary job now and am working toward a permanent position and I don't know if I will meet someone like my old boss. But I hope, as my own spiritual story continues, I can keep my heart awake so that sometimes, I can let it open to others like a blossom in the spring. ▼

*Jennings Fort lives in Atlanta and can be reached at [Jenman@mindspring.com](mailto:Jenman@mindspring.com).*

**GSV potlucks** are held the fourth Saturday of the month at 7:30 PM unless otherwise noted. If you would like to host a potluck, please contact [gayspirit@mindspring.com](mailto:gayspirit@mindspring.com).

**GSV Heart Circles** are held the second Sunday of every month, hosted by Ben Linton at 7:30 PM. For location contact Ben Linton at 404-373-9869 or email [benlinton4@aol.com](mailto:benlinton4@aol.com).

**GSV yoga** in Atlanta, taught by Rocky Beeland, meets Tuesdays at 6:30 p.m. For details and more information, contact Rocky at 404-607-7492 [rockybeeland@hotmail.com](mailto:rockybeeland@hotmail.com), or Martin Villarreal 404-365-9811 [martinv@mindspring.com](mailto:martinv@mindspring.com), or Jim Braden 404-627-2438 [buffalonimbus@yahoo.com](mailto:buffalonimbus@yahoo.com)

**March 23 – GSV Potluck.** Hosted by Jim Jones, 45 Tanglewood Road, Newnan, GA 770-304-0120, [moonxdragon@earthlink.net](mailto:moonxdragon@earthlink.net)

**April 20 – GSV Potluck (Note: 3rd Saturday).** Hosted by Chris Uberto, 727 West Ponce de Leon Ave., Decatur, GA, 404-386-1784, [CUBeMan@Mindspring.com](mailto:CUBeMan@Mindspring.com)

**May 25 – GSV Potluck.** Hosted by Al Taylor, 3599 Vanet Road, Chamblee, GA 30341 [adtatl@mindspring.com](mailto:adtatl@mindspring.com)



## Gay Spirit Visions

### A Mission Statement for Our Second Decade and A New Millennium

We are committed to creating safe, sacred space that is open to all spiritual paths, wherein loving gay men may explore and strengthen spiritual identity.

We are committed to creating a spiritual community with the intent to heal, nurture our gifts and potential, and live with integrity in the world.

We are committed to supporting others in their spiritual growth by sharing experiences and insights.

To fulfill these goals we facilitate annual retreats and conferences, sponsor social events, publish a newsletter, and maintain web-based communications for men who love men.

# TELLING OUR SPIRITUAL STORIES

## MY JOURNEY

**W**hen I hear someone is “a bit light in his loafers,” I snicker because it describes me perfectly. I realize now that my consciousness was born, not into a body, but into a shamanic space. It is that state of lucid dreams where your awareness is keen but your body says you're floating. Maybe we're all born into this, but I can't speak for others. I remember it was difficult or impossible for me to be in a body. I was most aware of this when I attempted anything requiring dexterity. It demanded that I leave that state or, at least, struggle against it. I believe I was what would now be called “autistic.” I

BY BERNIE MORIN



I could observe the world and learn from it without the struggle to be “of” it. For instance, the world wasn't solid. I could make walls turn into waves. I could see through people. I could close my eyes and fly and observe things I felt were seen only by me. Transparent waves emanated from people, flowers, rocks and hills. The temporal world of school, phys-ed and neighbourhood baseball was terribly uncomfortable. I felt humiliated, awkward, and, worst of all, incapable. I wasn't sure I should inhabit a body at all, at least not right to the feet.

But some things fascinated me; rhythmic movement, spinning in circles, perching on rocks in rushing water, driving toy trucks back and forth in the sand, twirling strands of hair between my fingers, marching to music in circles in the living room. Then there was that magnetic drug called sexuality.

My orientation was clear to me by age 6. But it was a puzzling embarrassment.

Surely I was insane. No one ever talked about attraction for other boys, and no one else had terrifying “nightmares” like mine. I was horror-struck when a force would appear in my room and paralyze me. I would find myself in a blindingly lit place. I was frozen except for my eyes, and I saw shadows and silhouettes of short beings that probed my abdomen with a needle-like instrument. Later, back in my room, I felt like Drain-O ran through my veins. I told no one, more sure of my insanity. In order to survive, I felt I had to abandon my secret world and act as if I was truly “of” the world. The trick to being “of” the world, though, is owning your body and living in it. Since I had no clue about this, I decided to mimic other boys' walks, gestures, words and ways of speaking. Years later, at 22, living in England, I used this for a different purpose.

In London, I was fascinated with a bag lady who pointed her finger angrily at traffic daily, cursing and muttering. I wondered what it was like to be in her body and decided to mimic her. At a mirror in my room, I perfected the mimicry and walked “in her body.” Suddenly I knew a lot about her. She had been beaten down psychologically and couldn't express anger at home. I felt her obsession, victimization and rage. Though I felt compassion for her, it was eclipsed by the passion the experience released within me.

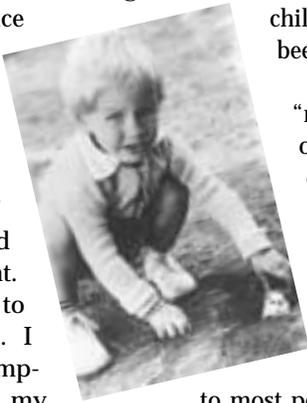
Soon I found I could “tune in” to people by mimicking their faces. In a few weeks I could tune in to people from almost any distance. At the same time I would meet with a friend who noticed that people with similar disabilities shared similar thoughts, experiences or beliefs. “The legs are about career,” she said one day. “Yes,”

I concurred. "But, the left leg is about career environment and the right leg is about career and will." The next day's newspaper said then President Richard Nixon and General Franco of Spain both had phlebitis in the left leg. Nixon was facing impeachment; Franco was facing loss of his power. Evidence was everywhere. My observations became a passion.

My insanity fears faded as I met more gay people. However the "nightmares" and discomfort remained until my first Reiki treatment. I felt like I had come home to the safe, childhood space. I began work with a New Hampshire healer and discovered my "tuning in" ability could heal when used with respect and boundaries. I learned that my collected observations of people were part of a growing body of knowledge called "psycho-neuro-

immunology."

At a Shamanism course, I discovered my childhood safe place was not only intact, but had a name. It was a "parallel reality," a reality full of wisdom that people have experienced throughout history. I had dismissed it as daydreaming. My childhood experience had now been ratified.



Later in a hypnosis class, my "nightmares" surfaced as memories of abduction by off-planar beings. Though this was hard to accept, the truth in my body was undeniable. My fear now made sense. I wasn't insane. I had simply experienced strong, unusual truths, unknown

to most people. With this knowledge, I gained the courage to come out of my spiritual closet. I began using my awareness to move energy for the highest good.

I owe a lot of awareness to AIDS. A friend once said, "There is AIDS and

there is the fear of AIDS and I'm not sure which is more deadly." I had contracted the fear of AIDS. I then wrestled with it on the floor for 2½ hours and managed to clear myself of it. Afterward, I pondered who I had become. Was I now over-identified with my body? Who was I beyond my body? What brought me awareness of my soul?

So, I sat with my life's mysteries—early childhood knowledge, dreams, my sacred retreat space. I began to understand that the trick of living on earth is to balance spiritual awareness with physical existence. My body is simply the current vehicle of my expression. Most importantly, I must live in it with a sense of humour. I often need to remind myself of this. ▼

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*Bernie Morin is a teacher of Shamanic Journeying and the spiritual practice of Reiki. He lives in Peterborough, Ontario in Canada.*

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## NOT SETTling FOR A LITTLE BIT OF GRACE

I was born into a loving spiritual community and family. The eldest son of then Deacon Russell L. Teague and Sister Alyce Jean Teague, leaders in Westminster Baptist Church of Kansas City, MO. As a child, I loved the Rev. Dr. Charles C. Wheeler III and our church's ritual and community. From my arrival in my parents' arms, Westminster Baptist Church loved me.

BY DUNCAN TEAGUE



Jena Jones

As an infant, I learned that spirituality is embedded in family and community.

I felt I was a good Christian boy even into puberty when the things that made me a wonderful, bright child changed. I was praised for being so powerful spiritually, mature for my age, but was beaten up for being a sissy.

As a teenager I wondered how I could be an "abomination" if I was a virgin. How I could be saved, love Christ and be gay anyway? Why wasn't "it" washed away with the rest of my sin?

I came out to myself, comparing my "sin" to the family illness of alcoholism. I figured if God would heal me, then I had to own it first, like alcoholism. I was still a youth leader in church, the district organization and at the Kansas City

Catholic Diocese retreats.

I said aloud "I am gay" the summer before my junior year of high school. I told my best friends, Crystal and Tony. Their loving acceptance saved me. That was grace.

In college I thought I could be a whole person who happened to be a closeted gay. It didn't work. I was too effeminate and too happy investigating my sexuality. The more I accepted myself, the less I believed in deliverance from homosexuality. The Goddess of Synchronicity sent me to a dorm mixer to meet my first boyfriend my first week of college. I knew our feelings were natural.

My sophomore year, the Universe sent me the biography of David Kopay, the out NFL player. Kopay's story wasn't just about being a gay NFLer but also being Catholic. The book outlined what my parents did when I came out to them a month later. They followed Kopay's

*Section continues on page 10*

# THE FIRST GAY SPIRIT VISIONS WINTER MEDITATION

January 25-27, 2002



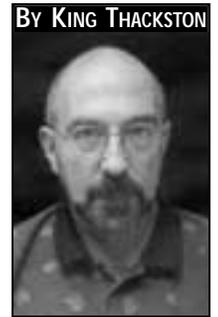
Photography  
by  
Ramón Noya

# THE POWERFUL FORCE *Of Gentle Men*



The first Gay Spirit Visions Winter Meditation took place on a clear and sunny weekend in January at The Mountain in Highlands, N.C. Fifty-plus men who love men, sitting in intentional, spiritual silence.

In his article "The Spiritual Dimension of the Gay and Lesbian Experience," in Dignity USA magazine, our guest speaker, Daniel Helminiak states: "When I say 'spiritual'...I refer to something that is simply human. Something in human experience goes beyond the here and now. We have in us an opening to a beyond. That something is spiritual. Different people might experience this in different ways: watching the stars at night, listening to a symphony, seeing a child at play, walking through a forest, jogging down a road, dancing to a disco beat, gazing out at the ocean, making love. There is a dimension to human experience that pulls us out of ourselves and lets us know that we, our very selves, are caught up in something that is vast and marvelous. We are bigger than ourselves. We experience self-transcendence. Sometimes this experience is intense. But it need not be. In a less dramatic way this same kind of experience is a part of our everyday lives. It happens whenever we use our minds. Every time we become aware of something new, we have been pulled out of ourselves. Every time we understand something and have an idea, we have broken out of our former world. Every time we learn a new fact, we have moved in reality beyond ourselves. And every time we make a decision, we change ourselves and the world."



BY KING THACKSTON

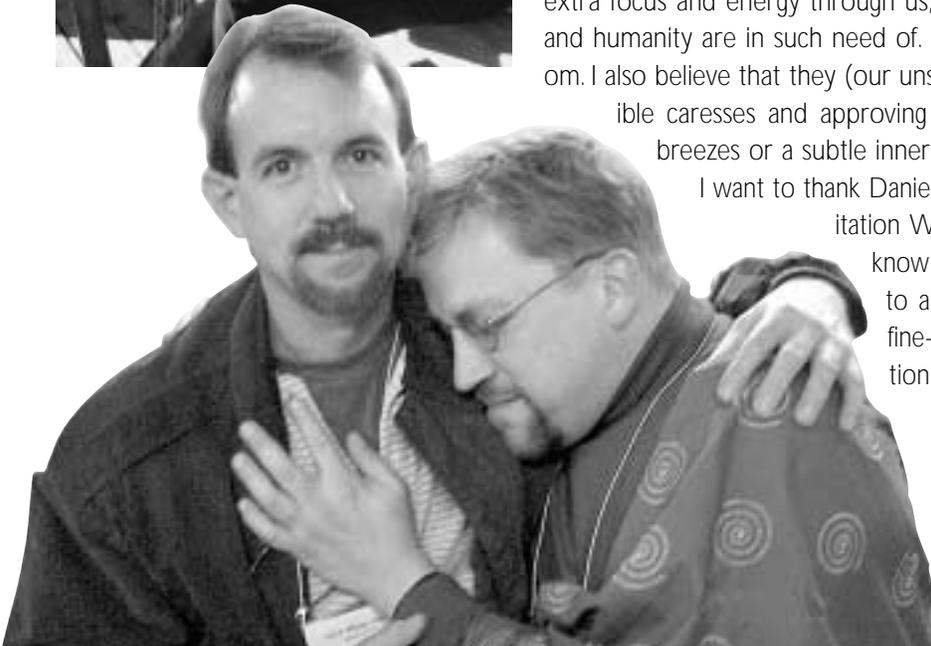


In addition to the obvious, personal benefits of removing oneself from the din of noise and stimuli that have become our civilized world, I feel there is another, additional, subtle, more universal, good thing that occurs.

I believe that we all bring with us our guides, angels and spiritual helpers and healers to a sacred space of intentional, spiritual thought. And our presence together allows a convocation of all our joined spiritual brothers on another plane. So that they are given extra focus and energy through us, to do the healing ecological work that the planet and humanity are in such need of. And, of course, the work that we can't even fathom. I also believe that they (our unseen brothers in Spirit) were thanking us with invisible caresses and approving pats to the head that may have felt like passing breezes or a subtle inner sense of well-being.

I want to thank Daniel and everyone, again, who helped to make the Meditation Weekend such an enriching experience—in ways we know and ways we don't know yet—and congratulations to all the men who felt called to be there. With a little fine-tuning, the second Gay Spirit Visions Winter Meditation should be something else. ▼

With you in silence,  
King "Wing of Men" Thackston,  
Elder of Archives



# A CATHOLIC JOURNEY

**G**arden City First Baptist Church was my childhood spiritual home. We were one of the church's oldest families. My grandfather was a deacon and my mother taught Sunbeams and Girls in Action children groups. My grandmother, 90, still plays piano in Sunday school.

I attended Sunday school, Training Union, Royal Ambassadors (Southern Baptist-style Boy Scouts) and youth choir. I remember Bible stories, favorite teachers and Bible drills. In these drills, the speed and accuracy of identifying passages read by our Sunday school teacher determined our love for God. I didn't do well in this drill. At 8 or 9, I accepted Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior and was baptized. It wasn't about being saved. My best friend and classmates had done it so it seemed to be the thing to do. Besides, it made my family proud.

Around adolescence I began exploring my sexuality (playing around with other boys). My biggest disappointment was when the youth choir members asked me to leave the group when my voice changed. But I had a secret. At home I draped myself with a sheet as a self-styled chasuble (Mass vestment), got Kool Aid and Ritz Crackers and celebrated my own mass. Encyclopedias and movies helped because I'd never attended mass. We rarely discussed Catholicism because Catholics were idolaters, placed the Pope before Christ and drank alcohol.

I joined the Boy Scouts and learned about other religions, especially Catholicism. We had non-denominational services and I usually led them. At that time, a visiting evangelist warned children in our church against pre-marital sex because Christ himself couldn't forgive this sin. In my pre-adolescent reasoning, I concluded that if Christ couldn't forgive this, he couldn't forgive any sin. So I left the church. I got away with it because of family turmoil

from my father's raging alcoholism and camping weekends with Scouts.

But my idea of God was changing from a bearded man with robes always in a bad mood. God became loving and accepting and could be found in the mysteries of the Catholic church. I read more about the church and questioned Catholic friends. I sensed a joy in them that I wanted.



At 18, I began conversion. This created a small schism in my family but I assured my mom that Catholicism was a Christian religion. My grandmother told me that her father, who died before I was born, had been Catholic. I was baptized at Our Lady of Lourdes Church during Easter 1980 and was confirmed the next Pentecost. In 1981 the Diocese of Savannah accepted me as a seminarian.

My seminarian duties included receiving my pastor's spiritual direction and helping in the parish, doing almost everything except saying mass and hearing confessions. I was Diocese youth director and helped the bishop when possible. I also had a part-time job and a full-time course load at Armstrong State College. At Savannah's Benedictine Priory, I went to confession and participated in prayers with the monks. I chose celibacy but accepted my sexuality even though I frequented Savannah's only gay bar then, The Who's Who. When I confessed I was gay, my confessor told me that he was too and that it was OK if I remained celibate. Here was my role model, hero, telling me I was fine as I was. He later used this to sexually molest me under the guise of a back rub. I short-circuited and didn't know where to turn. I couldn't tell anybody for fear of church officials accusing me of leading him on and forcing me to leave my studies. My family, then, was falling apart because of my father's alcoholism and I was preparing to leave for Mt. St. Mary's Seminary in Maryland. Two weeks before I was to leave, I contracted

hepatitis and was hospitalized for two weeks, postponing seminary for a year.

I recovered slowly and convinced my doctor to let me take a college class so I could graduate the next spring. But the vocations director insisted I take a full course load and resume my parish and diocese duties. Even though my health wouldn't allow it, he wouldn't reconsider. I appealed to the bishop and wrote to him that if this was how seminarians were treated, I didn't want to know how priests were treated. I withdrew from seminary and completed my BA in 1984.

Until 1994, I attended mass, anticipating returning to seminary. But when I began dealing with family issues and realized the church's views against homosexuals, I gradually stopped attending mass. The hypocrisy was too much and I found deeper spirituality among friends. Religion's crucifixion of gay people is telling; churches have a history of silencing prophets. Didn't the master teach that prophets tell the truth and are usually harbingers of change?

I still call myself a Catholic and I'm grateful for the church's spiritual influence. I'm grateful for Al-Anon and The Experience for teaching me that you can find spirituality outside of religion. I now apply the monastic Rule of St. Benedict to my daily life. This is my spiritual manual, finding God in ordinary things. It resonates deeply with me. I believe Christianity has something for us and I can't disregard the entire faith. I'm rediscovering my priestly calling in my daily life. I also trust that I'm living up to my spiritual name, Numinous, by showing others God. I hope they see God in me. Where my path will lead, I don't know. I'm grateful to my family who started me on this path and gives me spiritual strength and loves me as I am. I also appreciate the opportunity for growth and service in GSV and the unconditional love I receive in that family of choice. ▼

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*Ben Linton is a consumer credit counselor who helps the homeless, drug and alcohol treatment clients and the incarcerated restore their financial stability. He lives in Atlanta and can be reached at [benlinton4@aol.com](mailto:benlinton4@aol.com).*

# Killdeer

*"Trick was...if you acted like you were looking for killdeer, you'd never find killdeer. You had to be killdeer."*

There's a funny thing about my spiritual story: sometimes, there are times when what I'm doing is what I think I'm doing; other times, what I'm doing is really just preparation for what I'm gonna be doing that I don't know about yet. One event can bring everything else into focus, can recast an entire spiritual path in a different light, like the way the last piece of a puzzle can completely change the whole image.

For instance, if I were to have told you my spiritual story, let's say, last July, I'd have told you something like this: I was born and raised in Alabama, and stayed there, fearfully in the closet and in denial, until 1983, at age 27. That's when I moved to Atlanta and came out within about eight months. Clueless, I hung out in gay places, trying to make sense of my new life until I started connecting to the leather community. In 1989 I found and moved into town an out-of-town boyfriend who turned out to be an abusive spouse. That experience burned my life down to the ground and laid the foundation for everything that happened since.

In 1991 I started writing for *Southern Voice*, found the Celebrating Gay Spirit

By AL COTTON



ly connected to it until 1999. In 1995, to deepen my spiritual practice, I went looking for a meditation practice to add to my life, and ended up at the Atlanta Shambhala Center. In 1998, I reconnected to Body Electric by becoming its local coordinator and found Caroline Myss, whose Energy Anatomy tapes gave me a vocabulary and understanding of how energy works in the world. In August 2001, I headed to a month-long meditation retreat in Nova Scotia to qualify myself for higher meditation training.

That's what I'd have said on, let's say, July 2, 2001. But on Sept 2, 2001—a week after getting back from the retreat, a week during which I absolutely refused to go back to the cushion—I got arrested, for the third time in my life, for DUI. And now, when I overlay my drinking history on top of this chronology, the image shifts.

There was the gregarious roommate who taught me my bar socialization skills, helping my cluelessness and providing an important part of my drinking process. The abusive relationship, I had completely forgotten, was drenched in alcohol. The second DUI, in 1995, I came to recall, was the

Visions conference and attended a Body Electric massage workshop. When the GSV planning committee started in Atlanta in 1992, I became a planner and stayed intimate-

reason I went looking for the Shambhala Center in the first place, knowing I needed grounding in a serious spiritual program. Yet my deep appreciation for the teachings I got there deflected me from paying attention to the fact that drinking is not discouraged there. I picked a "church" that fueled my addictive spiral.

And all of a sudden, the elephant that seems to have been sitting in my living room all these years came into clear view. Or maybe the proper animal metaphor is that of killdeer, who plays a game with its predators in Tom Spanbauer's novel, *The Man Who Fell in Love with the Moon*. When someone gets too close to the killdeer's nest, the bird walks away from it, holding her wing in a way that makes you think it's broken. When you follow, and go far enough away from the nest, she flies off, and you have been led somewhere you didn't think you were going. And when you get there, you find that what you were really doing is not what you thought you were doing at all.

With me, once the bird flew away, I found myself back in front of the door that leads into the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous. I had found myself there in 1995 as well, but then, instead of going in, I waited in the parking lot for about five minutes and drove off. In 2001, I went in, and the journey has begun again. ▼

*Al Cotton is a former GSV planner, the founding editor of Visionary and Atlanta's Body Electric coordinator. He can be reached at [acotton@mindspring.com](mailto:acotton@mindspring.com)*

# ALONE WITH GOD

I come from a fairly typical Jewish American family—an assimilated and rather unobservant one. I had a superficial religious education. I had a bar mitzvah. I was active in a Zionist youth group, mainly for the community of friends it provided.

When I was 16, my mother died. I thought: this proves there's no God. They never saw me at temple after that.

By JONATHAN LERNER



My interest in—or, my conscious attention to—spirituality has varied over time. But spirituality that speaks to me is always grounded in the tangible world of people, places, power and politics.

That doesn't exclude nature, or sex, or mystery. And I don't mean that I want a

Still, I got one aspect of Judaism very well—the commitment to social action we learn from our scripture and our history. That was part of why I spent years as an activist in the New Left. It's part of why I am a writer.

spirituality that is social. Though it gives me an orientation, an alignment, a center from which to act in the world and with other people, my contemplation of and relationship to God are quite solitary. As I go on, I'm finding that I need it that way. Layering God with organization and ritual has a certain appeal—the security of connection, the comfort of the familiar. But ultimately, spiritual organization and ritual make me nervous.

Anyway, I don't have to look for them, or invent them. As a Jew, I already have them. I don't need to learn arcane chants in languages I don't understand. I can already sing from memory dozens of Hebrew prayers which I *Continued on page 10*

## ALONE WITH GOD

*Continued from page 9*

couldn't translate to save my life. There's even a reinvented, contemporary, feminist, anti-racist, gay-loving, and quite understandable American form of Judaism available now, called Reconstructionism. Once in a while, when I want to connect spiritually in a group, or am feeling nostalgic, I attend a Reconstructionist service.

I got involved with GSV mainly to find community. In it, I've made friends I value. I've learned about a variety of paths and practices. I've found a supportive context in which I could get in touch with my spiritual needs and thoughts, and consider how being gay is a part of them. I've had fun and been dazzled. Maybe I just bore easily, but I've also found diminishing returns here. A paradox: GSV was never meant to have a core ideology. But the

absence of one makes GSV feel to me like a club, party, an entertainment, a theatrical—and too formless and freewheeling. In it, I often feel at the mercy of other people's ideas of ritual or of what's important to discuss. As you may have noticed, I've withdrawn lately.

For several years I've been attending services and classes occasionally at the Church of Religious Science. It does have a core ideology, one that speaks to me (and a lot of gay people) because it's all about recognizing and using the power (of God) within you. It's about denying the power of what's outside (like the bully who called you a fag in 8th grade or the bill collector who keeps calling during dinner). I love this teaching; through it I've become stronger, more expressive and more powerful in the world. But that doesn't keep me from being creeped out by the church's social and ritual aspects. The constant

(though admittedly restrained) invitation to join the church, attend social events, go on retreats, etc., makes me feel like I can't breathe. The songs that open and close the services—based on homely 19th century Christian spirituals—and the money collecting during services (which is alien to Judaism) make me feel, ever so slightly, that I am betraying who I already am. I appreciate what I've received from this church, and support it in many ways. But I don't expect to be formally joining.

I crave community, and have often made major life choices (and mistakes) to get more of it. I love my friends passionately, and always want more of them, and more from them. But with God, I feel alone, and I'm happy about that. ▼

*Jonathan Lerner was a GSV planner from 1994 through 1998.*

## ...LITTLE BIT OF GRACE

*Continued from page 5*

parents' behavior to the letter and then some. I knew that book was part of the divine plan.

I was spiritually powerful then because my faith had become distinct from my parents. I had to mature spiritually. I had to do this even when we sat in the same pews. I even changed the perspective from which I sang every church song.

In Atlanta after college, I was called to help in the HIV/AIDS epidemic. I naively expected the church to support my friends with mercy and care. Not only was the larger black church unwilling to care for its own sick but was violently in denial. My own parents responded coldly to my grief over friends who died. They were deliberately silent about my AIDS education work. I was angry and hurt by them, their God, and their church.

A career in AIDS education changed my life. I then searched for spiritual community or church. I found the Atlanta MCC and that was all right. But I was mad at the Christ-followers, including the queer ones.

I was also learning what I didn't get from Sunday school or as an activist.

From Queer Movement leaders, like Harry Hay, I learned about indigenous people's spirituality that embraced "two-spiritedness" and affirmed effeminacy. I learned there were holes in the King James Version like Swiss cheese and that I had a right to use many ways of spiritual exploration.

At a Black and White Men Together dance, I discovered the First Existentialist Congregation that hosted the event. I was invited to Sunday service. There, the music was familiar and good. The words had been changed to reflect an accepting community. The minister, Lanier Clance, preached, not talked. He preached philosophically about acceptance, existence and finding his own truths. The place was packed with casually dressed lesbians, families and a few men, some I knew were gay. I've been in that community ever since.

I found a place that accepted me just as I am—in search of Spirit, truth. A place that supported my activism, my relationships, my drag and the start of my own ministry there. After having accepted a calling (not sure from whom), I was offered a lay ministry position last January.

When I finally went to GSV, the Fall Conference was successful and growing.

I stretched my spiritual wings on the Mountain. I worked on the Planning Committee to share GSV, especially, with my African American gay brothers. I learned a tremendous amount about working for diversity.

My spirituality today requires a high level of freedom for my searching. I don't settle for spiritual bargaining for a little bit of grace. I demand a full, free access pass to the light. Mainly because of the communities I have joined, I feel as though I have it. ▼

*Duncan E. Teague, former GSV Planning Committee member, is currently a lay minister at the First Existentialist Congregation of Atlanta and senior member of ADODI Muse: A Gay Negro Ensemble.*



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## SPIRITUALITY WITH NON-GAY MEN

The most powerful spirit-work I've done in the past few years has not been in a gay/bi context. Each Tuesday night in Knoxville I meet with a group of five men for two hours. After a ritual check-in, we do focused work on issues of our own choosing—it may involve goals, conflicts, relationships, losses, highs, lows . . . whatever comes up. The work is heart-focused and takes a variety of forms. The work we do is an outgrowth of training we've all received at a weekend intensive offered through the non-profit organization Mankind Project.

In my experience, doing core emotional work in a group setting requires something more than collective good will. If the work goes deep enough to make an impact, it inevitably brings up volatile material. This in turn can send men directly into their defenses and withdrawal strategies, which can easily splinter and disperse even the most well-intentioned group. Mankind Project provides a foundation sturdy enough to let men confront their own wounds and shadows and to see their way through to a renewed sense of life mission.

It's by chance that I'm the only non-heterosexual guy in my local group. In this intimate setting, surrounded by straight men, I've sometimes had to stretch to make myself understood. I

BY KELLY CRESAP



know that my presence and some of my issues stretch the group as well—my willingness to talk frankly about sex and my strong attraction to guys. But the circle seems wider for all this stretching; and our differences fade to insignificance as we delve into more important concerns. Someday I hope to do this kind of committed small-group work with other gays and bisexuals.

In the meantime I keep revising my opinion about straight men. One thing I've had to discard: the notion that being queer is an entitlement, that it makes a person exceptional, automatically more spiritual or insightful than straight people.

Several things prompt me to weigh in about this work. It's an extraordinary pathway, one which I want my GSV brothers to be aware of. Writing about it is a way of forging a connection between two life-sustaining faith communities. The spirit-surge I receive several times a year at the Mountain is irreplaceable, and yet it can't fulfill my desire for more regular communion with men. I also write because I feel that Fall Conference keynote speaker Rudy Ballentine's advice, post-Sept. 11, to cultivate greater sensitivity and receptivity, isn't the whole story. Speaking for myself, these

traits take me only so far. Taken to excess, they can lead to wallowing, self-indulgence, spinelessness. I'm not advocating insensitivity, but the development of corollary virtues.

The four archetypes explored in the book *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover* by Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette, make me aware of how much I've gained from the magician and lover and how much I have yet to learn from the king and warrior. This book is central to the Mankind Project vision. Together with Sam Keen's *Fire in the Belly*, it has clarified for me the project of reclaiming masculinity. This project is not a return to machismo and patriarchy, but rather is a means of revaluing robust male energy and channeling it in productive directions.

I'd be happy to talk further to anyone interested in this kind of work; or you can check out the website [www.mkp.org](http://www.mkp.org). Initiation weekends are offered periodically around the country and Atlanta was recently added as a host site. Incidentally, training is also available to women. I'm not suggesting this is for everybody, nor that it's the only sturdy option around. But it continues taking me to places I couldn't have found on my own. ▼

*Kelly Cresap, PhD, is a writer, educator, performer, and NPR commentator. He may be reached at [kcresap@utk.edu](mailto:kcresap@utk.edu) and at [www.laughingmuse.com](http://www.laughingmuse.com).*

GSV NEWS AND INFORMATION

## GAY SPIRIT VISIONS 5<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL SPRING RETREAT

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Craig Cook: 404-351-6282

There was a time when the Devas, Beings of Light, roamed the Earth and all men could see them. They took Energy in all its potential combinations and with the influence of their Spirits, created Form and Beauty in Nature. Joyfully they shared their energies with man and taught him The Ways of the Spirit.

The Beings of Light are available now to offer gentle reminders of our connection to all things, and to open our hearts to quiet the cry of Mother Earth. To some they will appear in the mists, borne from ancient times...in a dewdrop on a flower...to others...sliding down the rainbow revealed through crystal light, or...in the mossy crevasse of a rock...even on a shooting star. Each Deva seeks its kindred spirit here on Earth. Devas will choose You. They bring with them their legend, their friendship, their help and their support. If asked in a true spirit of cooperation, they will share their energy and they will answer. They are the small still voices in your dreams, if only you will learn to listen and remember.



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