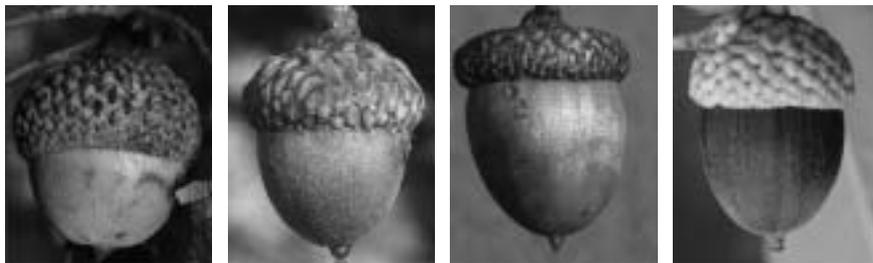


Gay Elderhood



As we grow older, we gain, hopefully, experience and wisdom that only years of living can bestow. Several of our brothers reflect on the richness and opportunities of Gay Elderhood and what it means for our community.

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ELDER'S
COURT

IVAN:

A GSV CONFERENCE JOURNAL

Thursday night: That sound, a dull hum, like a jet engine. I remember when I was younger. It was like a little tornado that ripped through the woods on the back of our land in Ohio. There was that sound.



BY CRAIG COOK

Now I was panicky!

"We've got to go!

Find somebody!

Find Tom! I said to

Jennings and Chase,

gathering our wet

clothes, shattered

umbrellas and

flashlights. We bid

Michael Chavez a

safe good night and stepped into the black chaos. The screen door slammed back hard against the wall. The deck was covered with 400-year-old oak debris, no lights.

At Tom Warth's cabin we met Bruce, fiddling with the phone, his flashlight flickering in the dark office. "Anything?" I said. "No, it's dead. Lets try Tom's door!" he answered.

We knocked hard over and over, but there was no answer. Of course our knocking was lost in the roar of Ivan. My head needed answers. "Is it getting worse? Is anybody hurt? Where is the staff?"

In the Lodge the ceiling was dripping badly and the floor was soaked. It was a scramble to get the piano, art and sofas into the corner, covered and dry. The water that had flooded The Treehouse's basement had been dammed up and swept away. Don't know what else to do!

God, I hope everybody is OK. We left for our cabins (hopefully dry), with sleep only a remote possibility.

Friday morning: Not much has changed. It was still dark at 7:45 a.m. Ivan's anger still not spent. In the dining hall, breakfast was in full swing. David Michael was serving bacon. Bernie was on coffee detail. I felt reassured, realizing that we had taken our night in stride. Instead of wimping out, weak and helpless, as the outside world might expect us gay men to do, we had yet again stepped into our power. Looking across the dining hall, seeing faces rumped and tired, but bright and strong with spirit, I thought, "Oh man! I guess we're gonna keep going!" Then the wind hit us from the west and we got Ivan's backside.

Friday evening: In the Treehouse with our crystal-shaped obelisks finally lit, the Homo Locomation Prom was a blast. We celebrated out of our hearts, together, dancing.

Saturday afternoon: With King's ashes scattered, we cried in the sunshine. Even in the sun the shadow was still part of our weekend.

Sunday morning: With the joy and laughter of the talent show still in our heads, the shadow spoke again with the news of the deaths nearby of a Mountain employee's family members. With our goodbyes, our hearts wide open, proud, empowered, in love, we knew in a way that no one else could understand. But for those of us who walked in Ivan's anger, we shared our power, our sweetness and our will to survive and be together again.

In awe and in service,

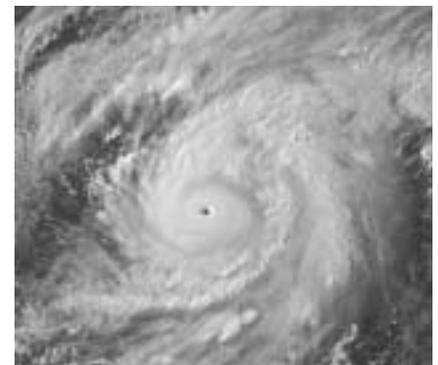
With all my love

Craigalee

Craig Cook is a long-time Atlanta resident.



Mike Goettee





APPRECIATING ELDERHOOD

In my hometown, I knew a man, Clarence, who came out late in life. When he was well into his 60s, with his wife dead, his daughter grown up, he decided to start his new life as a gay man.

Clarence had gray hair, thick glasses and had grown up poor on a farm in eastern North Carolina. He was active in the MCC Church and had lots of gay friends. Clarence was friendly, always

BY JENNINGS FORT



laughing a little too loudly, talking to you for a little too long and always quick with a joke about his favorite pastime – sucking cock. Clarence was famous in the small gay circle in

Gastonia, NC, for his expertise and insatiable desire. You might say Clarence was making up for lost time.

People closer to Clarence said he frequented interstate rest stops, flea market bathrooms and gas station restrooms, somehow convincing men – gay and straight – to let him pursue his hobby. I heard that men came to his home regularly by appointment, probably. I was always amazed that he wasn't attacked or killed. His best friend told me that Clarence had gotten beaten up once for his aggressive cruising, but this was on a trip up north. This didn't slow down Clarence a bit.

At a trip to the River's Edge gay clothing-optional campground in rural Georgia, he described an experience with a younger, attractive naked man. Clarence approached him with supreme confidence, telling him how good-looking he was. Clarence continued masterfully, describing his skills at his favorite form of pleasuring. When the guy responded with an erection, Clarence smiled and said, "See. It wants me."

In his 70s, he discovered he had prostate cancer. It progressed slowly and he turned down surgery or chemotherapy because he felt this would reduce his quality of life. He wanted to live and do what he wanted to do. And he did for several more years until the disease spread and he entered a nursing home

before he died. At the time, he was the oldest gay man I knew.

Was Clarence a good example of a gay elder? Years ago, I'd laugh and shake my head. I'd put him in the same category with other men over 60 I'd see in gay bars who stared hungrily at me. Now that I've gotten older myself and met men of all ages through GSV and elsewhere, I can see older gay men in a different light. I see many of them as gentle, loving spirits who can offer valuable teaching based on their own life experience. Their calming, steady influence can help me make better decisions and serve as an example. Unfortunately, it seems most of the gay community and our world disregard or ignore our elders and the rich guidance they can offer us.

In this *Visionary*, five GSV brothers describe their thoughts about reaching or appreciating gay elderhood.

Hopefully, Spirit willing, most of us will reach gay elderhood both in years and experience. I remember Clarence and realize that maybe he made the best of a challenging situation to create a colorful, satisfying life for himself. He loved life and lived exactly the way he wanted. There is wisdom in this. And knowing the wonderful elder men in GSV teaches me that there are many ways to lead your life as you get older and that there is much grace, dignity and wisdom that can only come with years.



Jennings Fort lives in Atlanta and can be reached at jenman@mindspring.com.

GSV potlucks in Atlanta, are held the fourth Saturday of the month at 7:30 p.m., unless otherwise noted. **GSV potlucks are drug- and alcohol-free events.**

GSV Heart Circles are held the second Sunday of every month at 7:30 p.m., hosted by Wendell Johnson and Lem Arnold. For location and more information, contact Wendell at louis8@hotmail.com or Lem at lem1951@mindspring.com

November 27 – GSV Potluck Hosted by Jennings Fort and John Ballew, 537 Linwood Ave., Atlanta. Contact them at 404-659-5175 or jenman@mindspring.com.

Well-being seminar for gay men

Saturday, Oct. 30, 11 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Conference room of Ponce de Leon branch of the Atlanta-Fulton public library
980 Ponce de Leon Ave., Atlanta
Free and open to all

A free seminar for gay men to learn more about well-being from a number of perspectives. Presenters: Franklin Abbott, psychotherapist; the Rev. Sedrick Gardner; Joseph Smiddy, M.D. and William Smith, attorney. Also discussion and a question and answer period. The Ponce de Leon library branch is home to the Atlanta-Fulton Public Library's GLBT collection. Feel free to bring relevant books, videos, DVDs and CDs to donate. More information: contact Franklin Abbott at 404-874-8294.

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.

AN ELEGANT, MAGICAL SPIRIT

We say farewell to a gifted artist, wizard, leader and founding force of Gay Spirit Visions.

Our Presiding Elder-Elect and dear friend, King “Wing of Men” Thackston, passed from this life on Sept. 5, 2004 at his Atlanta home.

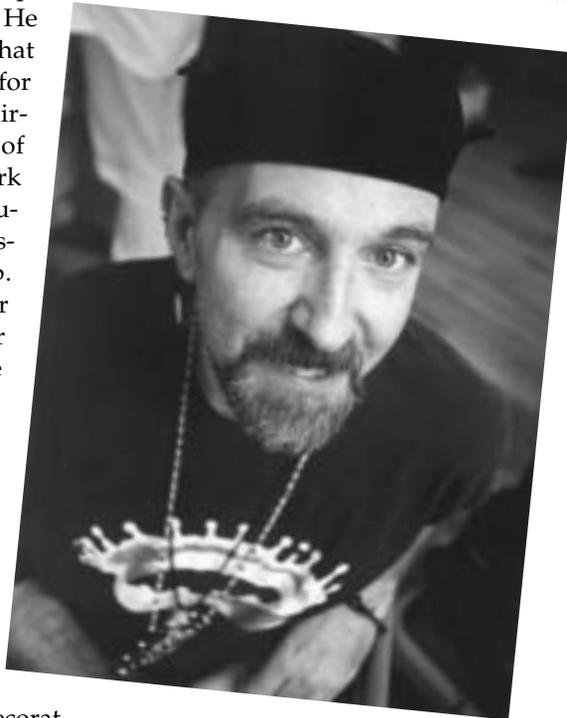
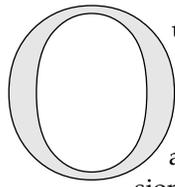
On the GSV Planners’ Council, King was a quiet, thoughtful presence, who was passionate about this work. His involvement in our group since the beginning years gave him a mantle of respect recognized by all. Planners listened when he spoke and he often guided us by reminding the group of our original purpose of creating a safe space for gay men to celebrate their spirituality. He took a leadership role in many issues, including developing our Winter Meditation. He believed it was important that GSV offer an opportunity for silent introspection that mirrored the resting season of nature. Throughout his work with GSV, his words were usually carefully chosen and resonated through the group. As “Miss Manners” at our Fall Conferences with her tasteful pillbox hat, white gloves and always-appropriate pearls, King reminded us of proper boundaries and to take advantage of possible once-in-a-lifetime spiritual opportunities.

Many of us remember the GSV potlucks and other gatherings at his former Grant Park home; the provocative art and objects decorating his house; his frisky, black cat, Oskar; the energy and impression of the place that left you thinking: “A real wizard lives here.”

King leaves us another magical legacy of thought-provoking beauty through one of his greatest passions – his art.

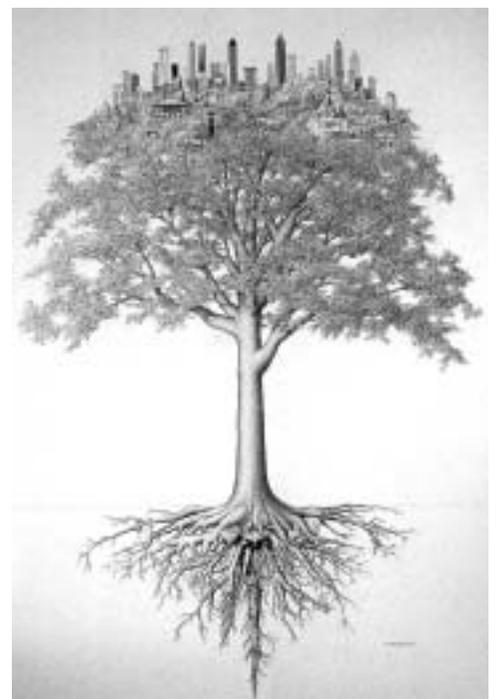
King was one of four gay artists who founded the art collective TABOO to coordinate shows of unconventional and politically edgy work by Atlanta artists. He showed work at several Southeastern galleries, including Blue Spiral 1 in Asheville, NC. His art ranged from striking and amazing mandalas in colored pencil to his “Wrong Side of the Tracks” model railroad depicting a lynching and other disturbing images in a small southern town. Trees and nature were important in much of his work. For the international arrivals hall at Atlanta’s Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, he completed a drawing of a huge tree supporting recognizable Atlanta landmarks, making a statement about local developers’ impact on the environment. One of King’s most memorable creations was Green Man, mysterious eco-shaman, a suit of dark green leaves which he often wore at Fall Conferences. One of his last works in progress was an Atlanta airport proposal showing the history of man in flight.

We will miss King’s elegance, his exquisite style and his passion for our tribe.



*Love Right Now to you,
Wing of Men.*

*Please continue watching over us
and keep working your magic.*



THE FOURTH ANNUAL
Gay Spirit Visions
Winter Meditation

January 14-16, 2004

At The Mountain Retreat and Learning Centers, near Highlands, NC

Come, join your Spirit Brothers to experience the universal language of Spirit – silence.

We will explore:

Tibetan sitting meditation • Eroticism as a meditation practice
Sacred reading • Silent yoga

Join us by the crackling fire in the Lodge as we listen to the spirits who have guided us for over a decade.

Register by calling the Mountain at 828-526-5838 or download a registration form at www.gayspiritvisions.org and mail directly to the Mountain.





Gay Elderhood

THE RICHNESS OF YEARS

Harold Cole has been attending GSV Fall Conferences for 10 years. He is a retired person who spends much of his time counseling, teaching and writing and lives in a log cabin in Kentucky. In his 80s, he is one of our eldest brothers. Harold answers a few questions about Gay Elderhood.

What experiences have given you wisdom for living that comes only with age?

I've discovered patience and acceptance over the years. Disappointments, losses, reversals and renewal of hope have influenced these ideas.

How is being your age better than being 25?

In many ways I do less and in other ways I do more. At 25, full of adventure and spark, I expected much more from life. I've managed to keep that adventure and spark. But now I can look back on experiences and loves I've been privileged to share. Best of all – I don't have to work and have learned how to live on my pension. I live better now because I know there's an end. I live moment to moment. I know that no matter what I plan or where I am, this may be my last meal, pleasure or love affair and it's alright. A ride home is a new, joyful experience because I'm still here. At night I never know whether I'll wake in the morning but I do and there's another surprise. This provides a certainty but I know younger persons may see it as uncertainty. It's a perspective and a reward that comes only with age. I'm more considerate, kinder and mellow with myself than ever. As a younger man, I was goal-oriented, eager for the next project. Now I appreciate the "process" of things and how life progresses. I'm more willing to follow a slow driver or wait for a left turn. It's a time to unfold my arms and encompass others to give them the freedom to grow without my interference.

What are the benefits of being 40, 50, 60, 70 or 80?

At 40 you know more of a third of your life has passed in learning and building relationships for a stable future. School years are over and you devote most of your life to building equity for yourself and loved ones. At 50 you *know* your life is half-over. The concrete is set and you have the path and challenges before you. At 60 you prepare for retirement – what you're going to do with the rest of your life, how to live on less, how to prepare for moving forward a goal or an unknown future. At 70 you realize you spent a third of your life learning, a third working and now it's proper to give back. You can't give back to everyone. But you can help those around you in need. At 80 you've acquired useful skills to counsel and comfort others.

How do you want to live as a gay elder?

I'd like to live in a gay community. Since I don't have a lover, I need a place where someone will care for me when I'm near 100. But there isn't a place because the few gay communities are built for persons with lots of money.

I'd like to counsel gay youth, to empower and help them realize the sacrifices of all who've gone before them. I'd like to teach the history of the gay revolution, of the two-spirited persons and the role gays played in the civil rights movement. It wasn't Martin Luther King – he was only the front man. He learned Gandhi's non-violence ideas from Bayard Rustin, who was gay and my lover for a while. He not only taught



BY HAROLD COLE

King about passive resistance but designed strategies that made the movement successful. I want young gay people to know how proud we are as a tribe and how we helped form this nation.

Few of us do this and we need to expand. Even a commonsense magazine could offer advice for young people without trying to get them into bed with us. We need to move from the hormonal level of a 25-year-old to the level of giving for giving's sake. Now if we can only work together to get them to listen.

Does being gay make our elderhood different?

We've always seen the world differently than the hetero community. Gay elders are more vulnerable to economic and health concerns, to being ignored, unwanted and unaccepted. There's a lack of respect for our wisdom and most young people fail to see us as persons. This hurts, since it's like your own family member not recognizing you anymore. This may sound like self pity but it isn't. I realize the young are mostly interested in the bodies of those around them and reject us.

Can gay elders make special contributions?

Definitely! We can be good caregivers, excellent counselors, role models and kind, patient persons. But just because gay people are old doesn't mean they're mature. Some are still confused and haven't figured out why they're on this planet. So our roles are partly our own failures to earn respect and part desperation because we've not learned how to separate real love from sex. The crux is learning and transmitting the real love without getting involved in activities that have nothing to do with love. We can make special contributions because we're all special. We need to use these abilities to express what we truly are. 

A FATHER ELDER'S EROTIC MENTORSHIP

"Please
accept
this necklace
as a token of
our love and
respect."

With these words at the recent GSV Fall Conference, 10 of our sacred brothers over 60 years old received recognition of their Father Elderhood in our tribe. The necklaces were blessed by a Wiccan high priest and each contained beads from the magic box of our recently transitioned Wizard-Elder, King Thackston.

In my recovery program, those with long-term "clean" time are called "old timers." One muse said you achieve this status by not using alcohol or other mind-altering drugs *and* you don't die. Likewise, in our tribe of men who love men, you become a Father Elder by continuing to show up and by not transitioning.

Although I'm now comfortable with myself in every aspect as an older gay man, the necklace ritual was my formal initiation into eldering and mentorship (another one of those "rites of passage"). As I approach three score and 10 years old, I'm aware of my gratitude for the will, imagination, clear vision and faith in my own (and higher) power that have brought the personal transformation and growth known as experience. In other words, I can only mentor and teach others what I've learned myself. Four of the most valuable qualities for me in teaching are caring, honesty,

respect and responsibility.

In the book *Geeks and Geezers*, the authors say that, among older people, every person able to continue to play a leadership role retained qualities of curiosity, playfulness, eagerness, fearlessness, warmth and energy. Instead of defeated by time and age, they were "open, willing to take risks, hungry for knowledge and experience, courageous and eager to see what the new day brings."

As an Erotic Pleasure Activist, I'm grateful for our tribe's acknowledgment that eroticism and sex magick are powerful energies for creative and healing experiences which need to be addressed in our group consciousness. My dream and vision is for a safe, sacred, ritualized temple for men so that all males – gay and straight, younger and older – can experience erotic community and play with one another.

Two years ago, my straight, older psychotherapist suggested I write a book for heterosexual men on erotic energy's power in creativity and healing, besides just sex. He said my erotic explorations in our gay tribe were revealing for him and that we really knew how to "run" erotic energy. Last year at The Mountain I shared with my small group the intention to write that book and John Stowe and others suggested gently that I write an article first. Duh...good advice. So I wrote on my daily spiritual and erotic practices but still kept musing about how to approach the straight community. At the Gay Spirit Culture Summit in New York last May, I again shared this desire. Collin Brown (Body Electric) and Don Shewey (New York sacred intimate) affirmed that, when I was ready, my student would appear.

Two days after arriving home, I received an e-mail from a straight, mar-

ried man, 35, from the rural Southeast inquiring about our Atlanta FULL MOON Taoist Erotic Massage group. He had taken one Body Electric course, had read everything he could find on erotic and spiritual practices and had signed



BY GEORGE
MILLER, EPA

up for a six-week study course with Joseph Kramer of EroSpirit Institute in California. He wanted to be mentored erotically. YES!

I mailed him a copy of my daily erotic and spiritual practices and a day later he asked to spend a weekend with me to prepare for his eroticism pilgrimage. He wound up spending three weekends and I taught him everything I knew about self-pleasuring, breathing, running erotic energy, cleansing and fasting, enemas, colon hydrotherapy, prostate health and massage, Living Foods, meditation and yoga. And it all worked so beautifully because of clear and positive intention, communication, negotiation, clear boundaries and timed ritual.

My young friend did well in California and will soon return to Atlanta to teach me. Ah, yes, Andrew Ramer, there *is* a radiant, ecstatic inner child and luminous, erotic inner elder in each of us. Much love to each of you and all my relations. Namaste. 

George Miller is a semi-retired Atlanta dermatologist, a practicing colon hydrotherapist certified by the International Association for Colon Hydrotherapy and medical director of a physicians well-being program. He is a passionate Erotic Pleasure Activist and sacred intimate, a member of the GSV Council of Trusted Elders and sings bass with the Atlanta Gay Men's Chorus. Contact him at aagm8888@aol.com.

A HEIGHTENED SENSE

Reflections on gay elderhood

Elder Experience Type 1: A heightened sense of frustration

In the Georgia mountains where I live, there are bimonthly potlucks for fags and dykes and their friends. Most attendees are well over 50 but two men in their early 20s have been to each event I've attended. They're both natives still living with their families. They appear to be "sisters," not "lovers," though if one trusts in the "opposites attract" nostrum, it's possible to imagine the latter.

And there's the source of my frustration. In repeated conversations we can't find language that allows me to understand their lives beyond the fact that they "don't have anything to do on Saturday night."

All they know about me is that I'm frustrated by my inability to be of much help to them. These guys need an Auntie. They show up every 60 days in the place where they are most likely to find one.

What happens?

Not much. Except I feel like I've failed. I pray they don't feel the same about themselves.

Elder Experience Type 2: A heightened sense of integration

On Nov. 4, I'll turn 60. And only recently have I sensed that my Jupiter has finally aligned with my Mars. (If you are elder-, or Broadway-impaired, this is "Age of Aquarius" from the musical *Hair*).

Did age alone get me here? I won't go down the existential rabbit hole on this one, but say that, based on what I know about my genetic history, it's surely an important contributor to my sense of wholeness.

But, in no particular order, I'm sure that my increased sense of ease in the world would be less without: the right prescription drugs; a gazillion years of psychotherapy; a dog who adores me;

BY GARY KAUPMAN



the men and experiences at Running Water Farm and Gay Spirit Visions; friends who indulge me; men who loved me by fucking me well; The New Yorker magazine; living in the mountains; National Public Radio and a deeply intimate, complicated relationship with a straight man for more than a decade.

Elder Experience Type 3: A heightened sense of acceptance

My 12+ year relationship with John, the man mentioned above, has challenged, taught and reassured me more than I could ever imagine.

Point(s) of clarity: John hates being called straight – this season's descriptor for his sexuality is "a queer man who loves vaginas." We have a "committed" relationship, but what we call each other changes as often as the names for his sexuality. Ditto with what that commitment means. And that's the lesson here, not what he and I, or he and his girlfriend do or don't call each other or how we engage our eroticism.

In learning to accept the simple facts of our mutual love and commitment, and that our love doesn't fit neatly into any socially sanctioned, easily described box, I have learned to accept (even appreciate) many people and relationships that previously gave me hives.

Most important, I've learned to accept and appreciate the parts of myself that others may judge as peculiar. Witness the signature on my personal e-mail: *If you can't be a good example, then you'll just have to be a horrible warning.* I'm pleased to be either.

Elder Experience Type 4: A heightened sense of God as nature as God

Every morning when I walk my dog through the head-high weeds in the field behind my vinyl-sided, doublewide trailer home, I am awe-struck by their simple beauty and ongoing changes.

Even when the ragweed opens my sinus' floodgates, my jaw drops as I ponder the sun refracting through the 10 trillion or so tiny dew beads clinging to its

yellow flowers. As Woophous and I return from the creek, the weeds and water and sun and insects are still the same, yet completely different.

Words fail.

(Gay) Elder Conclusion:

Objectively, the experiences I'm describing are likely independent of gender or sexual orientation. But this is a time when social constructions have given birth to groups like GSV (where you and I met, or will meet) and Body Electric (where John and I met). And so, this man who loves men must conclude that being gay (along with parents, my therapists, my successes, my failures, etc.) has deeply affected the elder who I am. And, lord willin' and the creek don't rise, I will become.

Who knows how I'll feel when the creeks do rise. I suspect I'll sigh and cry some. I hope I'll laugh, too. 

Gary Kaupman lives in Ellijay, GA, with dogs, Woophous and Walter, and cat, Dr. Laura. He discovered the Radical Faeries in 1981 and has attended all the GSV fall conferences, save one. He will turn 60 in November.

John W. Mungo, LPC
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RADICAL ELDERS

Mrs. Smith sat on her porch and talked, which was not unusual during a Southern summer. But unlike most adults, she talked to me like an adult, about the mysteries of

By **ANDREW
LAWLER**



neighbors, and music, and the wider world. She was a plain woman with flat dark hair and an uncertain past who lived next door in the old Victorian which had been carved up into dark and dank apartments. Raising two troublesome teenage boys, she had no husband, relatives, or job. The neighborhood women avoided her. To my sheltered, perfect-nuclear-family 12-year-old self, she exuded a cool and natural sophistication verging on degeneracy. Shaded by a big old magnolia, we drank ice tea on slatted chairs and I was at a Manhattan cocktail party.

Mrs. Smith moved, the rambling house was bulldozed and the magnolia felled. What survived was a rare feeling of being seen, heard, respected. Little queer boys learn not to be seen, or heard, or to demand respect. But the old women in my life—the Mrs. Smiths, the wise black maid, the outrageous grandmother—made no fuss and plenty of room for me to join the human circle.

So where were the men? Out duck hunting or fishing or watching football, I suppose. Certainly not sitting on a porch shelling beans recalling what the Yankees did and who was descended from Pocahontas and how to make the best succotash. The women carried the stories, the secrets, the spirits. And once you were in with them, and you were not a child, but another human with a story, a secret, a spirit. No doubt the butch straight boys were learning secrets while baiting their hooks and sitting in their blinds among the elder men. But I had no doubt where I wanted to be.

Now I am a middle-aged man living

far from a land of porches and magnolias. I'm raising a boy with no interest in Virginia pedigrees or shelling beans and who would rather go outside and throw a ball, my own private childhood nightmare. The idea of elderhood in the way I've understood it feels irrelevant—a sweet but sentimental idea removed from my life now.

Or so I imagined. Last week I went to a country fair with my 5-year-old, my farmer-boyfriend, and Houston. Houston is an 87-year-old openly gay man who drives an open jeep, builds furniture, and describes himself as "a very affectionate man" as he embraces you and then playfully cops a feel. He regularly scandalizes the small town where he has lived all his life. We walked along, this odd foursome, and I watched as Houston greeted people, delighted in the animals, marveled at the men, and stopped to pick up a dusty rubber band that he bet might prove useful some day. He reminded me of an old monk I once met at a Benedictine monastery who had a slightly crazy smile and a gentle manner with a touch of the rogue. "That's what happens after the ego is rubbed away," a friend explained. "And they say it can take 70 or 80 years."

You can't accept another into the human circle if you are on the outside yourself. You can't see or hear another if you are filled to the brim with your own visions and jabber. You can't give respect when you are filled with self-doubt and loathing. These are the simple lessons it takes a lifetime, if we are lucky, to learn. Despite a community's shock, Houston celebrates his sexuality. Shut out of neighborhood society, Mrs. Smith let me in. The true elders are the real radicals, challenging us to a life where love requires courage, where the circle is never closed. *ML*

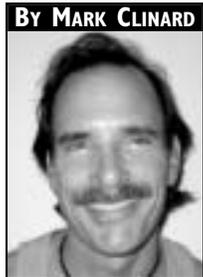
Andrew Lawler is a writer living in Boston.



A JOURNEY TO SELF-ACCEPTANCE

For me, "Gay Elderhood" means feeling comfortable in your own skin, knowing that being gay is a gift we must give back in our daily lives. There have been places, events and people guiding me to self-love and acceptance. And, like coming out, the journey is a life-long process.

I was born in the town of North Wilkesboro, NC. The first place I felt comfortable was a gay bar in Charlotte, NC, two hours away. Still in high school, I felt free to be myself there. It was the first glimpse of my family, other than my family of origin.



The bar defined my view of myself as a gay man. In college in Greensboro, NC, I was at the local gay bar every weekend. If I didn't find someone to go home with, I felt I'd failed. It was all about conquest and seeking approval in the arms of strangers. I like to say, "I double-majored in love and marijuana in college."

After college, I settled down with a lover I'd met on a dance floor and began a five-year journey of living with an alcoholic. It was my first relationship and I tried too hard to make it work. Only when I finally gave up and moved away was I able to regain any sense of self.

I went to Gastonia, a half-hour from Charlotte, and found refuge. I'll never forget the exit sign off the interstate: "New Hope Road." What I didn't find, at first, were other gay men. But in the Charlotte gay newspaper I saw a rehearsal notice for One Voice gay chorus. I thought, "what a great place to meet guys." It wasn't so much "guys" I met, but rather a man who would become my best friend, Jennings Fort. He too lived in Gastonia. "I'm not alone," I sighed in relief.

Later, I found a Southern Voice ad describing the GSV Fall Conference. It spoke of workshops and chakra-balancing and men who love men. I was sure I belonged to the "men who love men"

part, but I didn't know about chakras or if I wanted to have mine balanced. Fear kept me away. But a year later I put aside that fear and went to The Mountain alone to find out what it was all about.

My first Fall Conference was like a gay bar of spiritual awareness. But unlike a bar, it played out in the light of day, with hearts open. I saw men in skirts and learned about sage sticks and heart circles. There I made another friend, Brad "Meadow" Pitts from Decatur, GA, and we began a letter-writing correspondence and formed a friendship that endures. We became sacred-brothers. On The Mountain, with men who love men, I first learned that there was a spiritual part to being gay. This was incredible. I went from defining myself by whom I slept with, to seeing myself in a new light of gay spirituality. The Conference men became my new family.

After learning to feel comfortable with the word "Spirit," I could ask for something missing from my life. I wanted another chance at a long-term relationship. The previous year I'd been diagnosed HIV positive and I thought this would complicate finding lasting love.

That opportunity came in Tampa, FL, at a worldwide gay and lesbian choral festival of 5,000 singers. By the end of the week, I'd fallen in love with Roger "Blue" Freeby, from Denver. My HIV status didn't stop him from asking me to move in with him. During the next three months we exchanged letters in an old-fashioned way of discovery. Part of my story was about GSV.

He attended the next Fall Conference with me. By then, I'd decided to move to Denver. Saying goodbye was a delicate blend of joy and pain. No longer would The Mountain and the Fall Conference be in my own backyard. I had to keep what I'd learned and hold it in my heart as I followed my bliss.

Eight years later, our relationship as loving companions is a dream come true. But we both sense a deep spiritual emptiness. Next year we'll move to Atlanta where we'll never miss another Fall Conference

and have the GSV Brotherhood in our daily lives. And since Jennings now lives in Atlanta with his partner, John, I won't have to search for happiness any further than my own backyard.

I've been blessed with people along this "rich pageant of life" who've loved and supported me on my journey. I believe Spirit gives us people to assure us we're on the right path of self-acceptance and maybe even Gay Elderhood. These people are life's greatest treasures. Take care of them and they will take care of you.

Mark Clinard can be reached at
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“...You must think of initiation in conjunction with the Wheel of the Year...In the spring we rejoice and plant anew, in the summer we tend and nurture our crops. And in the fall we work very hard to garner in all that we have sown, and hoard the surplus for the spring planting. However to all you new priests and priestesses, at whatever level, the work is just beginning.

So where does a true Elder fit in? Well, we are somewhere between fall and winter, a time of introverted thought coupled with a warrior attitude in defense of our younger children. We have a paternal or maternal attitude towards you all. We watch and listen and do not interfere, unless it is absolutely necessary. We, the Elders are there for all of you on a 24-hour/seven-day-a-week basis. We are the grandparents to whom you can let off steam, seek advice and council and totally rely upon to do what is best for you, under any circumstance. *But*, we have, in the main, to be asked. Ask of us, and you will always receive the benefit of any wisdom we may have gained through our long lives...”

— Excerpt from a missive on Initiation and Elderhood from Lord Merlin, Elder High Priest of Ravenwood Church and Seminary of the Old Religion, in Atlanta

Retrospective:

"Gay Spirit Drawings"

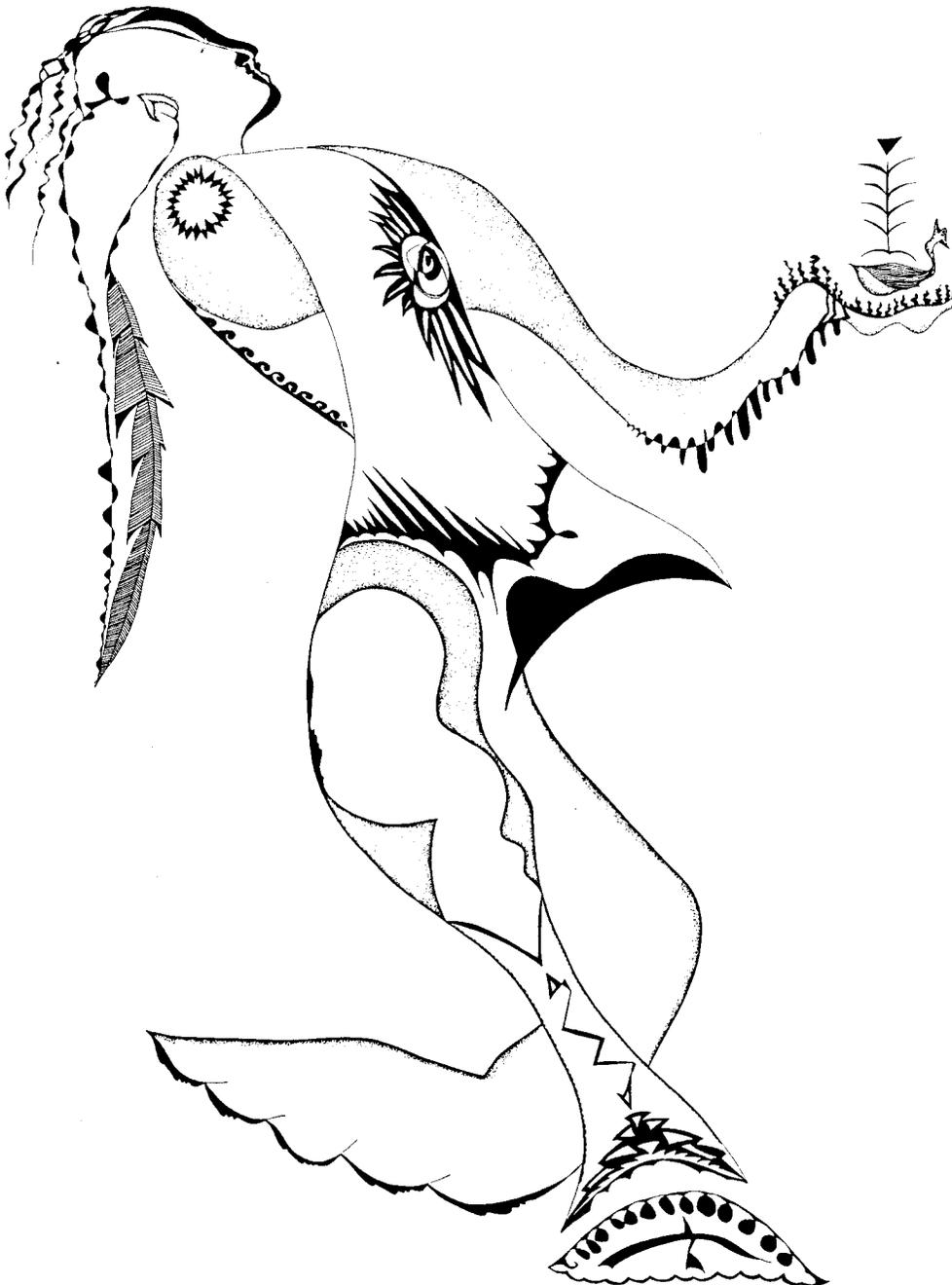
A show of works by Raven Wolfdancer

Opening: Nov. 14, 2004, 3-6 p.m.
through December 31st

First Existential Church, Atlanta
470 Candler Park Drive

For Hours And Directions, call
404-378-5570

Sponsored by Gay Spirit Visions



An opening of a retrospective of works of the late Raven Wolfdancer, a co-founder of Gay Spirit Visions, is scheduled for 3 to 6 p.m., Nov. 14 and runs through Dec. 31 at the sanctuary/gallery of First Existentialist Congregation, 470 Candler Park Dr., Atlanta. Presented by Gay Spirit Visions, this exhibition of drawings, photographs and memorabilia honors the 10th anniversary of Raven's death.

Raven, an original Radical Faerie, lived in Atlanta for most of his last 20 years and worked as a landscape designer and gardener. He was very active in the gay men's spiritual community and attended the first gathering at Running Water Farm in 1978.

He was a gifted artist and worked mostly in pen and ink. His drawings evoke both spirit and sexuality. He invented and drew new archetypes (or rediscovered old and long obscured ones).

At the end of his life he was very ill with AIDS. His life ended in tragedy and mystery when he was murdered outside his home. The murder has never been solved.

The "First E" has a special place in gay spirit history. It was the site of the first urban faerie gatherings in the Southeast and the place where Raven's memorial was held. We are working toward making some drawings available for sale to benefit the Raven Wolfdancer Scholarship Fund for GSV conferences.

For other times to view the exhibit, call 404-378-5570.

THE GAY SPIRIT CULTURE PROJECT

Creating everyday bliss

Being at the GSV Fall Conference was, once again, an amazing experience. I realized breakthroughs in relating to peers, in my self-esteem and in my sexual expression. I love being in the magic of the community we create together. For me it's a place where I know I am respected for who I am, yet it takes time for that to sink in. It takes time for me to relax and truly value myself in this amazing context of loving, supportive community.

BY PATRICK
MACNAMARA



I wish my entire life were equivalent to what I experience at The Mountain. I know it can be. In my life, I am working toward being aware and engaging in that energy, connection and presence on a daily basis. I know that I am

the one responsible for how I perceive the world, for how much I value myself and for how I support my own inner transformation. Still, the context or culture in which I live and work seems to play a part in how easy it is to be in a state of everyday bliss. A group of sacred brothers and I have set out to change the context in which we live.

The Gay Spirit Culture Project is working to create a "new culture," as Andrew Ramer said in his Fall Conference talk. Our intention is to create a way of being in the gay world where people live in a deeply-connected space – in Mountain space – in everyday bliss all of the time. Of course, this means something different to each person. To some it might be being tuned in to their intuition constantly, for others – it's being immersed in caring, compassionate community and for still others it might mean living out their spiritual values in day-to-day situations all of the time.

We, as gay men, are transformers of culture. We lead fashion trends; we change slums to vibrant neighborhoods. If we can support each other in our own healing, growth and empowerment, we can bring about a change in the gay com-

munity and the larger culture. Of course, in the end, each one of us can only change himself – and in my opinion, that is what is most important.

This project, which was born in the fire tower at The Mountain, erupted at a summit (described in the last issue of the *Visionary*), is now in its second phase. It's about expanding the network of 200 visionaries, change agents and organizations to 20,000 – a point so large that we become obvious and commonplace. And it's about building the visibility and energy of this matrix so that gay men on the street or on the Web will bump into us. I



mean he'll bump into the workshops, retreats, books, communities, gatherings, psychologists, healers, massage therapists and even heart circles that support, encourage and foster his spiritual growth, healing and empowerment. Gay men are yearning for what we at GSV experience together. The Gay Spirit Culture Project is making a difference by inviting inner transformation, the sacredness of our sexuality and depth of connection to be a standard part of gay life.

More specifically, we are:

- Creating a definitive Web-presence for gay men seeking deeper connections and inner work.
- Increasing visibility by securing media placement of mind, body, spirit material in gay press and on the internet.
- Strengthening local communities by encouraging regional summits.

Growing our community of change agents, organizations and healers to 2,500 by 2007 so we are a highly visible presence in the gay community.

We invite your help in our quest to

transform ourselves – and in doing so, transform gay culture. Please visit www.gayspiritculture.org to find out how you can support this important work.

Patrick McNamara, coordinator of the Gay Spirit Culture Project, has lived in spiritual community from Santa Fe, NM, to Findhorn, Scotland. He now resides in Fredonia, NY.

Yoga to benefit you and
our community.

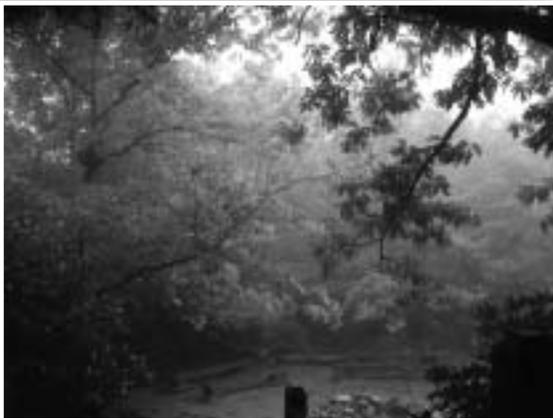
GLBT Yoga • Sundays 6:00 pm
Donation only class benefits YouthPride

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A scrapbook from the
15th Annual Gay Spirit Visions Fall Conference
September 16-19, 2004

Abound!



Photography
by Lem Arnold

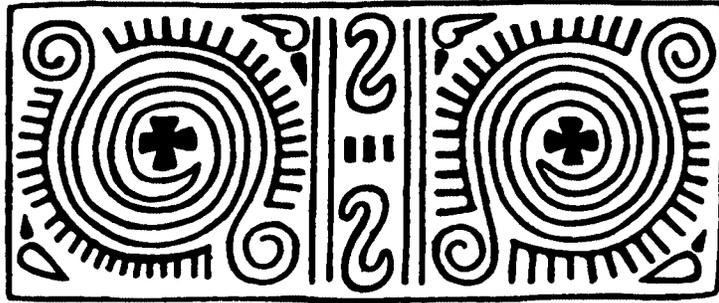






Reveal Your Inner Fabulosity





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