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VISIONARY

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DEPRESSION

**Wise words from GSV brothers
on the experience and
treatment of depression**

VISIONARY

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Gay Spirit Visions

Mailing Address:

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

E-mail: info@gayspiritvisions.org

Website:

www.gayspiritvisions.org

Council of Trusted Elders

David Salyer
Presiding Elder

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Elder of Finance

Kim Pittman
Elder of Service

George Miller
Elder of Archives

Jennings Fort
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consists of the Council of Trusted Elders and these Stewards:
Craig Cook & Al Taylor

Phil Robst, *Webmaster*

Journal Committee:

Al Taylor, *Editor*
Mike Goettee, *Design & Production*

Submission Queries:

visionary@gayspiritvisions.org
Please put "GSV Visionary"
in the subject line.

Advertising queries:

visionary@gayspiritvisions.org

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ELDER'S PERCH

I found Gay Spirit Visions in 1992. An ex boyfriend handed me the fall conference brochure he'd gotten in the mail and said, "Here, this looks like something you would be into." Knowing who I was at the time – a man with no spiritual life – I probably thought this gay conference thing was just a great way to get laid. So that first fall conference was a deeply challenging experience, as it might be for any good southern boy, especially one who'd been raised Southern Baptist, converted to Catholicism as a college freshman and was flailing about spiritually as a thirtysomething adult. I wasn't prepared for the energy...the Faeries... or the hugging.



By David Salyer

But something clicked for me and I was compelled to become involved with this organization. Not only has Gay Spirit Visions allowed me to interact with some truly unique and amazing men, it's provided abundant opportunities for emotional, intellectual and spiritual growth. I've done a little bit of everything over the years... overseeing this very publication, serving as project manager and editor of our website, and serving three years as Presiding Elder. I also hosted the annual fall conference talent show five consecutive years in a row—which is the definition of insanity!

Now, as many already know, 2010 has been a pivotal year for Gay Spirit Visions. Early in the year, a regionally diverse task force was assembled for the purpose of facilitating an organizational shift away from the traditional Atlanta-centric Council structure. This task force, which came to be known as Walks-Between Elders, will take over the operations, event planning and leadership of GSV in 2011. Transitions are rarely easy, but this work has the momentum of consensus behind it and the commitment of many capable longtime GSV brothers, in particular, Jim Jones, Paul Plate and Dennis Van Avery.

As long as anti-LGBT hate groups such as Family Research Council and Focus on the Family exist, I believe there will

continue to be a need for GSV, an organization that reinforces and advances the integration of sexuality and spirituality in the lives of gay and bisexual men. However Gay Spirit Visions evolves over the next year, my hope is that it remains an organization that encourages men to embrace their sexuality as natural, even sacred; it does not cancel out your spirituality. GSV should always stand in direct opposition to those who suggest we couldn't have rich spiritual lives or deeply personal communion with a higher power or the universe.

I'm facilitating the administrative transition from Council to Walks-Between Elders, but I won't be part of the process in 2011. Do I have any advice or observations for the men who will be? Hmm. Well, if they asked, I'd say it's not a wheel; you can reinvent it as long as you stay true to the mission. Also, change the name. *Gay Spirit Visions* doesn't mean anything to the young guys. I know; they told me so. And whenever the going gets rough or the conversation gets prickly, beware of any task force member who says something like, "Spirit will take care of it." Nope. Creating safe, sacred space is work. It takes commitment, not dismissive mystical catchphrases.

I could literally write a dozen more paragraphs about the experience of serving as GSV's Presiding Elder for the last three years. There were highs, like getting to invite legendary Native American cultural authority Clyde Hall, innovative performance activist Peterson Toscano and FTM transgendered author and performer Bear Bergman as fall conference keynotes... and the lows, which were thankfully few, far between and not worth the space. It's been humbling, challenging, frustrating, exhausting, exhilarating, joyful... and overwhelming (which is not necessarily a bad thing).

I'd like to think I brought some trickster energy to Gay Spirit Visions; I already know I brought kick-ass organizational skills. I was committed to it one hundred percent and I have no regrets. But sometimes, gentle men, you really do need to know when to get off the stage.

Involved with GSV since 1992, David Salyer is a retired journalist and HIV/AIDS educator living in Atlanta, Georgia. He has no idea what's next. Suggestions? Reach him at cubscout@mindspring.com.

Editors' Page

I hope you find some useful information in this issue of *Visionary*. It is my belief most gay men have suffered from depression at some point in their life. Many of us grew up thinking there was something wrong with us because we were gay, leading us to feelings of depression and anxiety. My mission will be complete if this issue helps you overcome any depressing thoughts today.



By Al Taylor

I battle with depression on a regular basis. I have been on and off several anti-depressants and seen a therapist during my struggles with being depressed. Both have been helpful to me. Through therapy I have realized my best results in fighting depression have been in keeping my attention focused on things that get me through the difficult days such as appreciating what is good in my life.

When I want to have an attitude realignment I focus on the good things in my life. I think one of the best antidotes for depression is to start appreciating what is working in your life. It helps to

make a list and then read it and keep re-reading it as needed. If you can't think of anything good in your life go to a homeless shelter and compare your life to those you see there. Shift your thoughts away from focusing on what you don't have and concentrate on what you do have. I think it is a natural instinct to focus on the bad. It can be a struggle to maintain appreciation. But keep working on it and you will notice the difference sooner than you think.

In this issue we have some brothers writing who have dealt with depression in their lives, either in their field of Therapy or from personal experience. Maybe they have dealt with it for both of the reasons mentioned, but regardless their words of wisdom are from personal experience. I hope you take some of this wisdom and apply it to your life. I wish you all a great day and hope you will put some effort into making a greater day for yourself.

Al is a depressed person in recovery and his mantra is "Make it a great day". He splits his time between Farners, TN and Atlanta, GA. You may reach him at albertdtaylor@gmail.com.

Gay Spirit Visions

Creating safe, sacred space for men who love men



Our Mission Statement

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 an online journal, and maintain Internet-based communications for men who love men.

GSV Task Force

The transition from an Atlanta-based organization to one utilizing a regionally diverse group of men to continue the GSV traditions of creating safe, sacred space has become the responsibility of the GSV Task Force. Communicating monthly in the tradition of the GSV Council, the Task Force members are accepting areas of responsibility as outlined below.

Help in any of these areas is very welcome !!!!

Contact any of the men mentioned below for ways you can get involved. If you do not have recent email rosters from conferences, use info@gayspiritvisions.org and contact info will be sent.

Walks Between Elders

Jim Jones, Paul Plate, Dennis VanAvery

Retreat Planners

Winter—Jim Jones

Spring—Paul Plate

Fall Conference Planning Committees

Keynote—(Andrew, Chase, Dennis, Mark, Bob)

Conference Schedule—(Chase, Tom, Mark, Gary, Bob)

Fall Conference Activity Responsibilities

Small Groups—Darryl Hansome & David Berger

Workshops—Dennis Van Avery & Tom Cummiskey

Mountain Contact—Dan Dewberry

Sacred Drag—Dan Dewberry

Erotic Component—Roger Beaumont

Talent Show—Bob Strain

Intimacy Space—Dan Dewberry

Ongoing Organizational Responsibilities

Organizational Structure—(Tom, Martin, Jim, Paul, Dennis, Mark, Gary, Tony)

Visionary & Communications—Tim

Flood (with Charlie Foesch)



A Travel Report

GAYLA: The Maine Event!

For 32 years men who love men have been gathering for a week in July at Ferry Beach, Maine. Ferry Beach is a Unitarian Universalist retreat center similar to The Mountain where GSV has been gathering for 21 years. I attended my first GAYLA this past July and was delighted to discover such a wonderful community with a rich history of ritual and tradition.



By Chase Robinson

I felt right at home with the opening ritual, talent show, game night, Mardi Gras tea dance, movie night with *The Wizard of Oz* sing-along, small group meetings, workshops, volleyball, the beach—I think you get the idea. All of this on a beautiful beach in Maine just south of Portland.

I felt right at home with the opening ritual, talent show, game night, Mardi Gras tea dance, movie night with *The Wizard of Oz* sing-along, small group meetings, workshops, volleyball, the beach—I think you get the idea. All of this on a beautiful beach in Maine just south of Portland.

Below is the GAYLA Covenant that says much about the gathering:

Rise with us, we are GAYLA
A circle of love, of men loving men.
Together we make this circle sacred.
Between us we make these promises;
With you we make this covenant:

I accept you without condition.
I will be truthful when I speak.
When you speak, I will listen so I may understand.

I will care for you. Help me care for myself.

When I have something to say, I will say it.
I will hold and shape our community's vision.

If I betray our covenant, help me.
If I betray myself, accept me,
And love me without condition.

Living our conscience is our goal.
Be with us, we are GAYLA.
A sacred circle; a circle of love,
Of men loving men.
Enough love to hold us all.

With you we make this covenant.

So if the idea of a 7-day GSV style summer gathering is enticing to you, consider attending the 33rd GAYLA Gathering: July 16-23, 2011. The theme: Our Stories.

For information on registration, scholarships, etc.

www.gayla.org

www.FerryBeach.org

or Chaser at gchasejr@aol.com



Save the Dates

The 10th Annual GSV Winter Meditation January 14-16 2011

An extra day, Jan. 17th, is available for those wanting to stay Sunday night.

Are you looking for a way to release accumulated stress and gain some peace of mind after a busy holiday season? How about a weekend of fellowship and shared meditative practices? This year, we'll be exploring chanting and silence—plus a few surprises!

The Winter Meditation begins with dinner Friday evening (please plan to arrive by 7 pm) and concludes with lunch on Sunday. Cost per person is \$195 (double occupancy), including lodging, all meals and program fee.

Join us in the peaceful environment of The Mountain Retreat & Learning Center for this unique and enriching annual event.

To Register:

www.gayspiritvisions.org/events

Any questions?

info@gayspiritvisions.org

GSV Spring Retreat

May 6-8

Celebrate springtime with the Dances of Universal Peace, led by Perry Pike.





Depression sucks. It's a clear sign that you need to start making changes soon, real soon, little changes, at first, that eventually lead to bigger and bigger ones, because untreated, depression may lead to years of unhappy living, or even ending your life.

If you Google the word "depression" you will come up with basic information on signs and symptoms of depression, how to prevent it, and how to treat it. I won't be repeating this information because it's readily available



to most people. This type of information defines depression as a mental illness and usually recommends medication and cognitive behavioral therapy.

Since I am addressing a community of spiritually awakened men, I'd like to approach the subject of depression from another angle. I intend to be thought provoking, inconclusive, and remain open to dialogue on the topic.

I posit that depression can be also understood as having a spiritual etiology or cause, that at its root is a temporary disconnection from Life Force, or however one may understand one's spiritual source. A depressed person then is someone who has experienced life events that have broken down their previously existing connection with Life Force. As such, a depressed person, instead of being seen as mentally ill, could be understood as a depleted person, as a being running on empty, so existentially

exhausted everything is much harder and even the easiest task seems like a huge burden. With this understanding, the ultimate solution for depression would be the reconnecting with Life Force, however the individual interprets that. Medication and cognitive behavioral therapy are useful, even life saving, steps in that right direction. Valuable as they are, they may not be the ultimate solution. The ultimate, long standing, core solution will have to be the spiritual reconnection with Life Force, with Spirit, with Supreme Energy, with God...whatever description you use.

I remember depression well. Back in the '80s my friends began to turn purple, literally, and look like prisoners from a concentration camp. I went to their homes, visited their hospital rooms, stood outside their ICU's, held their hands in their hospices, attended their funerals, and spoke at their memorials. Then one day, I collapsed with depression... clinical...and at risk for suicide.

I was spiritually depleted, spiritually indigent, and spiritually malnourished. If there is such a thing as spiritual anorexia, I had a severe case of it. Nothing had prepared me (nothing could have) for the on-going, jolting blows of living in the midst of the epidemic of the '80s, showing up for friends, and finding myself in unimaginable, indescribable and very challenging scenarios.

Eventually, I worked my way out of the dark, emotional landscape I had stumbled into. The reason I tell this story is that my story may move others forward. It is so good to know one's life experience can benefit others. Here are the highlights of my journey out of severe depression and into a better life.

I sat there one afternoon, at work, in front of the word processor editing a paragraph for an organizational newsletter. I kept checking the clock and hours were passing by and I could not get past one simple paragraph. I kept trying to finish editing it and just could not get through one simple 14 sentence text. I had lost my capacity to concentrate, my mind was shot. I recalled how desperate I had been feeling. I had failed to climb out of the absorbing quicksand of depression and was too exhausted to keep trying.

So I asked for professional help. In doing so I guzzled gallons of ego and broke a strict and absurd family rule. For several months I swallowed the pills and the pride, never missed a therapy appointment, and forced, forced, forced myself to be social. It all helped, brought relief and symptomatic relief.

The epiphany came several months into therapy. My life needed a makeover, better yet, a reconstruction, better yet...I actually needed to re-invent myself and go beyond symptom reduction. From the insights gained in therapy, I reconnected with eagerness, with enthusiasm, with passion, with a more creative way of thinking, with parts of me I had denied. In this re-aligning with who I really was but had not allowed myself to be, I not only emerged from depression, I went on to feeling more alive, more fulfilled, more true to self...happier. And from this new self, I went on to becoming a therapist and passing the good news on to others.

Today I know negative emotion has a positive purpose. I just have to know how to understand it and work my way up from it. Like everything else in life, it is a cultivated skill and one gets better at it with practice.

Depression sucks... but life doesn't have to.

Cami is a Miami-based psychotherapist who today has a lot of fun.

Overcoming Depression

I remember the time that I first made an appointment to talk with a former therapist of mine, a psychiatrist, about antidepressants. I had been in therapy four times previously working on life issues loaded with anxiety and



By Mike Katz

fear, and not once do I remember any of these therapists talking with me about antidepressants. I knew my formal diagnosis from each, all having to do with anxiety, and it took some conversations

with a therapist friend of mine telling me about his recent experiences with Paxil to awaken a sense in me that maybe I was depressed and would also benefit from medication.

I remember taking the pills without significant side effects and quickly beginning to feel a kind of feeling I call "having a good day." That was almost twenty years ago, I've stopped and started and stopped antidepressant medication several times, and after trying several other classes of antidepressant medications a few years ago I've been off them now a couple of years. I don't rule out starting them again in the future if that kind of support is what I need.

I can tell I'm in the middle of some important psychic struggle right now which I think is manifesting in a low level depression as I write this. My partner George still lives three hours away and hasn't found a way to move here and in with me; I'm 62 and very aware of changes in my body and my memory; a significant leg/ankle injury has made me unable to dance anymore, and dancing has been my meditation of choice for years so that my grief over no longer being able to dance without hurting myself is great; my mother has just turned 90, and I'm losing her a little more every week. And there is more; there always is.

One metaphor I have for my life is my moving boxes from one place to another for reasons that are important. Often the boxes feel light and I feel some real

satisfaction at the end of the day. Sometimes the boxes feel really heavy, some moveable by me only with great effort and some too heavy to be moved at all by me alone. When they feel really heavy and I ache or hurt, I feel the stress up to some point and then my defense system kicks in and I don't feel it anymore. I push on more or less without a lot of awareness that the day has gotten a little more gray or that my back hurts. Sleep helps some to rest and refresh but I focus on the boxes to be moved, I start counting the boxes and keeping track of how many I have left to move before the end of the day. I start to think of myself as a pack mule. I don't want to know how gray things are getting but I do pay attention after a while that I'm taking bigger portions of food, eating more comfort food, really looking forward to my meals, gaining weight. Right now that leftover piece of homemade lemon meringue pie is calling to me.

So this is the part of my story about depression and my unhealthy responses to it, which include obsessional thinking and increased addictive/obsessional behaviors focused on making myself more comfortable.

I like that the theme of this issue is "overcome(ing)" depression. I think this is the right way to say it, meaning for those of us whose life (environment, character and personality) has led us to depression, it is a lifetime struggle to live a healthy process.

I suppose it is worth it to say some words about what depression is not. I don't mean unhappiness in any of its forms--loneliness, sad, mourning, lost or confused, disappointed, powerless, insecure, etc. I accept that to live one's life present and committed is to risk all the feeling outcomes including the ones listed above and many other ones that are hard to experience. We westerners live in a culture that says we can pop a pill when we hurt or are unhappy; we can swallow something like a cup of coffee or a cocktail to change our insides. We want to feel better. We want to stop feeling bad.

I know this movement to change my

insides to feel better is the re-starting of the creation of depression. I know I have to feel what is real and true, experience it, do whatever I need to do that follows from the real experience (cry, get angry, take some action, etc.) to be done with the unhappiness, to finish it or release it.

I know that this is easier said than done because sometimes my experience of the pain or hurt is great, and I get afraid that I will feel as bad as sometimes I felt in the past. Because some pain never got attended to by the people charged with raising me, because I believed a lot of the problem was my fault, because things mostly didn't get better over time, I believed some secret truth that this was my burden, my fault, and I just have to work harder to move those boxes. Maybe then I won't remember some of those hard things that never changed and I won't feel the wounds still festering.

Yes, this is heavy. Life is hard for all of us, even the ones who make it look easy.

So what have I learned from so many therapy hours that I've gotten for myself and conducted with those people who have paid to consult with me? I have learned what Hunter Flournoy told us so simply in his workshop at the recent Fall Conference. It really is all about love and relationship. Not romantic love. The love that flows from a heart that is open, to myself and others.

Healing starts the moment I can know the truth that something is hard or wrong and that I hurt. At that moment I can bring the light of day to the pain. I can bring my own considerable resources to the moment or I can recognize when I am following strategies that I learned when I was a young child, repeating old patterns I've come to recognize as guaranteed to lead me further into depression or addiction.

I know the antidote to depression is relationship, which leads me out of my isolation. I can use new strategies and information I didn't know way back then that often help. I can talk to a partner or friend or the right family member or a therapist. I can kiss my own palm. I can ask for help. I can let other people

know what I have let myself know, which is that I hurt or I'm in need.

I can trust this new idea that it really isn't all my fault and often isn't about me at all. Sometimes life is just hard and I hurt. I can remember that I have people available to me now who never were around way back then.

What if I don't know what is wrong? What if all I have is that deep intuitive knowing that something is wrong and I don't know what it is? The choices are easy. I can protect my shame and hide this from myself and others, do whatever I can to feel better even if I feel bad and don't know why. Or I can look around my world for someone I intuitively think may be able to see what I can't see and go ask for help. This is such a huge step for the youngest self when real help in the past never came and we came to believe it didn't really exist. This is my adult self leading the way and believing that someone will know how to help and I can find him.

If the boxes are so heavy that I'm overwhelmed and at risk to succumb to the depth of the pain, I can allow myself to take medication in whatever healthy form works for me. I can tell the difference between doing something good for me versus doing something that feels good but only distracts me from my truth.

When I start to feel really ashamed of what I am calling my weakness, I can remember that I learned to judge myself and shame myself a long time ago when I didn't know any better. I can bring a tenderness and mercy to myself that I can often offer to others but will withhold from myself until that new healthy adult part of me kicks in and tells me to take care of myself, to love myself, to say I deserve it.

One amazing new trick I've learned as an adult is that I can help others get it right. Before, if others did try to help it was always easier to focus on how empty the glass was, how the help was not quite right, too little too late. Now I can remember how much I like it when people get it right and I can help them get it right. Like when someone scratches your back and he is scratching in the wrong place. I can say "please go up a little higher and a little to your left" and

I can feel how good I feel when he gets it just right. The more I'm willing to believe that "just right" exists and I'm willing to do my part to get it by telling the other person just what I need and how I need it... when I know that, the more my actions grow a new self with new self-esteem.

If I keep on doing these things that I've learned are healthy, slowly a new identity grows that is not just superimposed on the old one, the one that knows deep inside that I'm not okay. Another metaphor I like is the high rise tower where there are upper stories that are beautiful and clean but rest on a foundation and lower floors where there are cobwebs, dirty windows, and old abandoned furniture with mice and other creatures in the corners. Overcoming depression

is the process of committing oneself to clean and renovate those old stories, throwing open the windows to let light in, finding some new paint and getting rid of what doesn't belong anymore.

A new healthy self grows slowly that is capable of love and laughter and pride. From then on it is forever a choice to make when I become aware that I'm back on the old track, the one I learned so early when I didn't know better and that goes to the same old nowhere places. I can choose health and I can offer a loving heart to myself and the world.

Then I just have to do it all over again.

Mike Katz is a singer and a dancer, a father, a partner, a therapist/psychologist, and a recovering depressive. He lives and practices in Raleigh, NC.

Thoughts on Depression

It can often look and feel like the winter. It can be dark early. It may be hard



By Dennis Van Avery

to find the sun. It can bring hibernation, long sleep in a cave, comfort food or no food. In the slowing down look around at your life. Can you see or feel an underlying, frozen need that wants

some help, some love, a hearing?

Sometimes it is so dark that you still can't see. Light and insight are long gone. The lights are out.

Three things have proven to generate re-opening your heart, mind and soul:

1. Physical activity. Move, sweat, walk, run, swim, every day.
2. Begin with a brief evaluation from a psychiatric provider or your doc. They can help you choose a medication. Both medication and exercise may help you climb to a level of sight where you can begin to seek the meaning of the winter-time in the soul.

3. Seek support, therapy. Group and individual work allows you to begin a dialog about being in the winter cave. This is a noble and challenging journey that many of us have been on. It is worth finding others to help give it meaning.

Dennis is a psychotherapist in Asheville working with glbtg folks. He is currently serving GSV as a Walks Between Elder. He may be reached at vanaverydennis@yahoo.com.



Accepting Depression

I'm reminded of the strangler fig of India's rainforests, a parasitic plant that attaches itself to the bark of a tall tree, sending down shoots to root at the tree's base. These vines consume,



By Zachary Matteson

expand, and encase their victim in a thick oppressive skin. Depression serves a similar function, rooting in the soul's soft tissues and feeding on the mind's sappy, sweet nectar, contaminating our beautiful blank slates. But the human brain is not a tree, is not subject to the same whims. Unlike the strangler fig's helpless victim, the human brain has within it an irrepressible rebel, bucking at depression's tendrils. Namely, its inexplicable sense of self—that inexhaustible autonomy.

Ironically, it is depression's stranglehold that reminds us to breathe.

My friends: anyone who claims to be

an expert on depression is most likely trying to sell you something. One might as well claim to be an expert on blinking. I don't mean to imply that we can't learn from each other's insights, but mustn't we first acknowledge and accept the commonality of our depression, and do so with the same verve and dedication with which we chase after the sources of our human happiness?

I've struggled with depression and anxiety since I can remember. It is an integral element of my character, my worldview, and my artistic sensibilities. The causes are many and stem largely from years of childhood abuses. I write this not to elicit pity, but simply because it is true. It seems to me that we only deepen the despair of isolation by denying our true selves. And although I do not advocate ruminating on the inevitability of depression, I must accept that it exists and that, in all likelihood, it will continue to inform who I am for the rest of my life.

But I am not the summation of my depression any more than I am the rigid

constraints of my gender or the totality of my past transgressions. No label exists that defines me. And if I may presume, none exists that defines you either. But, I digress. For the sake of a common dialogue...

I can't offer answers to alleviate depression, as I don't believe in answers exactly. What I can offer are examples of what I do to cope. And that's exactly it, my secret ingredient: I do. I make myself present. I exercise. I take out the trash. I pound out distorted piano solos. I wash the dishes. I call a friend. I read. I write. I ramble on too long. I dance. Hell, a quick shower can change the whole day.

Whatever else you do, be good to yourself. Express your dysfunction without shame. Take comfort in your purpose, which needn't be grand to be great. And thrive, friends, despite the vines.

Zachary Matteson is a world-traveler who has attended and taught creative writing workshops for over 10 years, both abroad and here in the States; he currently teaches English Composition at Nashville State Community College. He may be reached at zachmatt14@gmail.com.

You're Not **crazy**. You're **Depressed**

This issue of the *Visionary* is themed on depression and several authors have written beautifully about their very personal experiences. When I think about my life and my life in relation to the people that I am grateful to know through Gay Spirit Visions, I think about many ways that depression can creep into our life experiences.



By Paul Plate

Since we are mostly gay men, there are several things related to this fact which trigger depression. Sexual orientation itself has been identified as a risk factor for depression among men.

These higher rates of depression have been linked to the negative attitude of the general community toward homosexuality. Gay men with long term, low grade depression are more likely to engage in unsafe casual sex. Gay men report higher levels of loneliness, and gay men who are not in committed relationships experience even higher levels of loneliness. The experience of loneliness by gay men is likely to result in a sense of social isolation and a lessened sense of belonging. (From a psychological perspective, a sense of belonging has been defined as the experience of personal involvement and integration within a system, to the extent that a person feels valued and plays a special role in the specific environment.)

This is an area where Gay Spirit Visions is so important because we create

community, in safe and sacred space, for men who love men. This is why at a retreat or conference, we feel a shift into feeling so good. Afterwards, we strive to maintain the emotional high we experienced in the presence of familiar men on a similar journey. This is why it is so important to continue our work of inclusion, of building networks and support systems. The richness and joy of our lives and of those we interact with depends on the relationships that we establish, actively nurture and maintain.

Many of us are HIV positive, which brings its own set of depression issues. Clinical depression is the most frequently diagnosed psychiatric disorder experienced by people with HIV infections. As our GSV brother Bernard Morin has suggested, there are issues of

post traumatic stress for all gay men related to the experience of living through the 80s & 90's and witnessing so many AIDS-related deaths.

We are now in the season which brings with it many triggers for depression before, during and after the holidays. With these come issues related to the darkness and dreariness of the time of year. Winter can be a time for slowing down, reflection and learning how to make realistic goals and plans. I would suggest the creation of specific, very personal and meaningful rituals that speak to who you are and what you believe.

We now know that, for many people, depression is not severe clinical depression and that we experience lower levels of depression which do not require major treatment and medication. Sadness, stress, unhappiness and a generalized sense of dis-ease are often attributed to depression. These are not always symptoms of clinical depression where length of symptoms, severity and impairment related to the symptoms need to be considered.

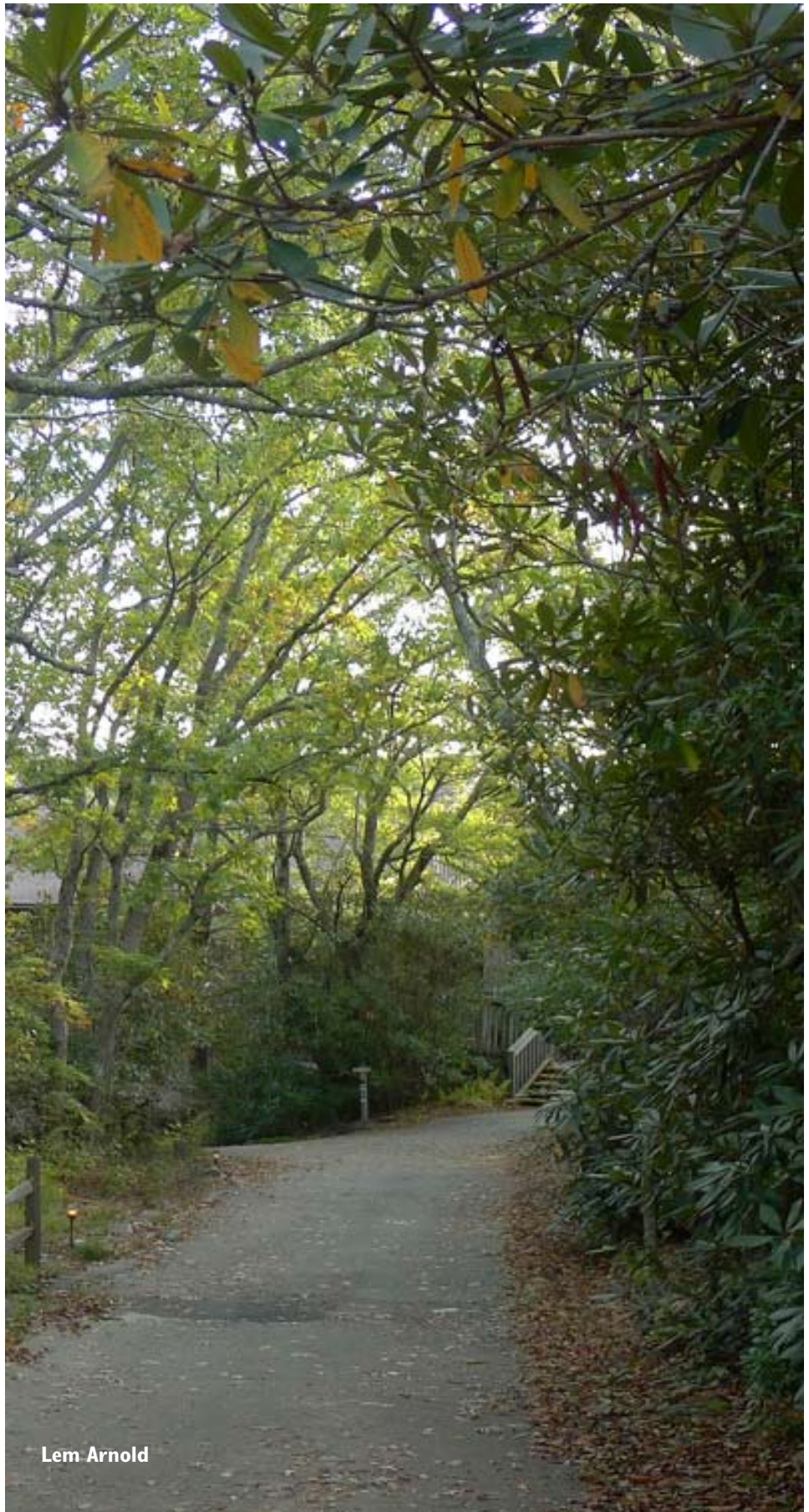
There are many other triggers: financial crisis, job loss, environmental destruction, species elimination, natural disaster, alcohol and drug use. All add to an increased sense of powerlessness and feelings of being out of control.

So... what to do? Consult with your doctor, and your counselor. Read books, research articles and academic studies. Search the internet and read the many articles as Cami suggests in his article. Learn about diet and vitamins, times to eat and what to eat. (Get a copy of "Potatoes Not Prozac" by Kathleen DesMaisons)

There is more to know about depression, but nothing more important than this: when you are depressed, you do not want to do anything. And the only way out is to do something.

So... do something! Even if its nothing more than a post to the GSV-List. And know that there are many GSV brothers who are walking or have walked the same walk.

Paul is the director of Positive Impact. He lives in Decatur with two dogs, two parrots and a kitty. What he wants now is a husband. He may be reached at (404) 702-9990 or Paul.Plate@PositiveImpact-Atl.org.

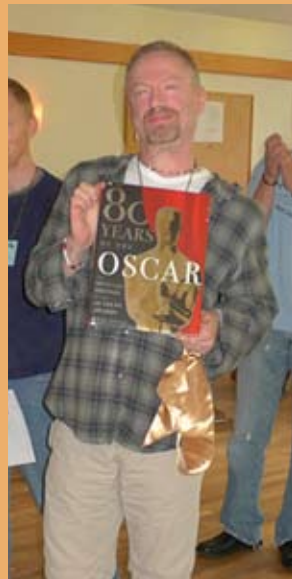


Lem Arnold



The 21st Annual
Fall Conference
September 30 – October 3





Photos by Lem Arnold