

VISIONARY

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GAY ARCHETYPES

Andrew Ramer's Originals
Celebrated by GSV Brothers



VISIONARY

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the many fabulous things

IN THIS ISSUE

My predecessors as editor of the *Visionary* are all men I have known, to one degree or another, over the many years of my connection to GSV. Only time will tell whether I am standing in line behind them, on their shoulders, or wandering aimlessly about, but for now I want to invoke their names, in love and in gratitude, for keeping this journal of our many "fabulous trips around the sun" these last 21 years. They are Al Cotton, Joe Chancey, David Salyer, Jennings Fort, and Al Taylor.



By Tim Flood

My taking the reins of the *Visionary* now is in some ways emblematic of where GSV stands in its own history. Living 500 miles from Atlanta as I do, I could never make the commitment to join the Planning Council, with its membership requirement of attendance at monthly meetings. As many of you know, GSV is now moving away from being exclusively Atlanta-based. Organizational responsibilities have been assumed by "Walks-Between Elders" and members of a multi-city, multi-state Task Force, who meet monthly on conference calls, and are committed to continuing GSV's mission to facilitate safe, sacred space for gay and bisexual men. Several members have spoken about their motivations to serve on the Task Force for this issue of *Visionary*. Their words appear under the "Task Force Perspectives" banner, replacing (for now) the customary "Elder's Perch."

Our "Winter Meditation" weekend in January was a tender, peaceful experience thanks to the steady hand of our own Jim Jones, assisted by Dennis Van Avery. The presence of new brothers from GAYLA (see *Visionary*, Fall 2010) brought a new depth, and not a few new laughs to our gathering. These delightful guys from Massachusetts, Connecticut and Ohio were inspiring with tales from a world parallel to our own at GSV. Thanks to Miguel Molina for sharing his thoughts on the weekend in this issue.

Noticing how the GAYLA men studied us and our ritual suggested the theme for this issue. They asked questions about the talking stick ("It's so GAY!"), its case and its glyphs. This led to discussing our own Andrew Ramer's gay archetypes, which struck the deep chord of common ground it always does, transcending any regional or other petty differences. Thanks to the four GSV brothers whose words appear in this issue to invoke and celebrate these unifying insights.

Reminders of our deeper connections will become all the more important as GSV moves towards a greater diversity, geographically and perhaps in other ways as well.

The fire still burns...the journey continues. It's good to have you with us! Wherever you are!

Tim Flood is from St Pete, FL, where he facilitates intra-organizational teams and leadership training programs. He is a certified enneagram instructor-coach.

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.

TASK FORCE PERSPECTIVES

Visionary asked several members of the Task Force to express why they have volunteered to explore ways for GSV's mission to evolve into the future:



FROM JIM JONES

I have always experienced something special regarding GSV, something I have not found in other gay organizations. It is hard to say exactly what it is or what causes it. Most simply put: I find that I like who I am when I am with this group of men.

During the years I have been going to GSV events, I have been introduced to many spiritual practices that I doubt I would have encountered in any other way. I have always been interested in alternatives but not especially persistent in seeking them out. But at GSV, I've trusted the safe space and felt free to experiment.

Another part of my experience is showing up – again and again and again. There is a sense of shared community in seeing these sweet men from different areas year after year. I feel known and loved for myself. I feel like I belong. And of course with GSV now in its 21+ year, I really do get the sense of journeying together through time.

I was lucky enough to live in and around Atlanta and have the opportunity to be part of the Planning Council during some of those years. I realize in retrospect that almost everyone I know or “hang with” these days I met through a GSV connection. We talk about learning to carry the Mountain experience with us through the rest of the year. I think that is done through connection.

Because I definitely want GSV to continue, I participated in the initial meetings which became the GSV Task Force. This is charged with the responsibility of growing a process that allows interested committed men from all over the country to join in the planning and organization that allows GSV to evolve into the future.

We need to join together to keep this joyful, playful, loving atmosphere where we can be ourselves. I believe we all need to develop a sense of ownership in the future of GSV. We can do that by

sharing our ideas about interesting spiritual practices, speakers, and themes; by volunteering to help with the *Visionary* and the staging of the conferences and retreats; by attending or starting local area networks of GSV men. We are all worthy of love and belonging. This is a way to have that.

Jim Jones, aka Moon Dragon, is a Walks Between Elder of the Transition, former Planning Council member, and GSV's crown prince of the crochet hook. He may be reached at moonxdragon@earthlink.net.



FROM PAUL PLATE

When I reflect on my participation on the GSV Task Force, I think about the impact that GSV has made on my life and the number and quality of lovely friendships that have developed over the eight years since I first attended a spring conference. What comes to mind is the incredibly creative talent and energy demonstrated by individuals, smaller groups and the larger group. What also comes to mind is the fragility of our wounded lives, the regular and thoughtful opportunities for healing, and the many ways that people step up to provide loving support.

When the Elders suggested the possibility of ending after twenty-one years of service, I felt a painful sense of loss when I thought about how my world would be without GSV. I realized that I had a clear sense that I have a contribution to make and that I can make a difference. I also knew that there were many others who could say the same thing and that there were even more who had not yet come home to GSV. We need to continue to provide both of these opportunities.

The welcoming of new, fresh and multi-regional ideas combined with the challenge to continue the creation of safe sacred space for men to explore who they are and how they want their journey to go, seems like an incredible opportunity

for both service and personal growth.

When I consider my role on the Task Force, I think of many things. It all started with facilitating the Planners Retreat in the fall of 2009. It was there that the concept of establishing a task force emerged. The Task Force was empowered to hold the vision for how GSV would move into the future. It evolved as a multi-state working group with many committees all working by teleconference.

Sometimes I am a cheerleader, sometimes a listener and confidant, sometimes a committee chair, and sometimes a facilitator. I find that I am mostly a listener. I try to listen carefully and take what I hear and translate it into opportunities and actions that support the vision of the organization. I also like to encourage each person to find their place at GSV and to commit to making service work with GSV part of their personal life journey.

As an Elder Who Walks Between I am concerned about meeting the intent of the by-laws, focused on finances and being legally current while loving the energy that comes with designing and offering sacred ritual. GSV and the Task Force have given me a voice that I enjoy. (More and more... I actually know what to say!)

Paul Plate is the director of Positive Impact and 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.



FROM DENNIS VAN AVERY

Often, when I walk in this world, I find my voice is that of a facilitator, one who asks questions, one who is

curious. GSV has always supported my facilitator voice, and I have deeply appreciated that support... to share my voice with dear men has fed my soul. So once again, I step into that role and offer (20!) questions I have answered for myself

over my years with GSV in many different, enriching ways... which have led me to become involved in our transformation.

Does GSV help you look inward and see yourself differently?

What have you learned about other men through GSV?

What doorways has GSV opened?

What lesson of intimacy has GSV gifted you with?

If GSV were your beloved, how would you embrace it?

Has it helped you be a more loving, integrated and wise man?

If you were a wise elder and mentor, what wisdom would you share with GSV?

What keeps you coming to GSV?

What keeps you from coming to GSV?

Has coming to GSV ever hurt you?

Has coming to GSV ever it helped you heal?

If you were to pick from the past to create a future for GSV, what would you pick?

Go out three years... what are you and GSV doing?

If you were to name a positive quality GSV has, what would it be?

Can you name a quality GSV needs now?

If you were celebrating your anniversary with GSV, what would be your toast?

How could GSV look inside itself?

What might be the result of a transformed GSV?

Has GSV touched your soul?

Might you step forward and contribute your wisdom, talent and energy to GSV?

Dennis VanAvery is a psychotherapist in Asheville, NC, working with glbt folks, and was among those attending the first GSV conference. He may be reached at vanav-erydennis@yahoo.com



FROM DAN DEWBERRY

In 1992, after spending several years searching for a spiritual connection in my life I found GSV. It changed my life dramatically.

No longer adrift, I had found a community I instantly felt was my family.

When the possibility of this community dispersing was seriously considered, I had to do what I could to prevent that

happening. So I volunteered to be on the transition team. I didn't know what I could contribute from hundreds of miles away but that wasn't important. I had to offer my support to this community.

My journey with GSV has taken me places I never would have imagined. The deep connection has inspired me to stretch my boundaries, expose myself and be vulnerable in an open hearted way that only this group could support with such grace.

When a gentle man who showed up in drag for the entire Fall Conference stopped attending the Conferences I felt the void deeply. The next year I showed up in drag, although I'd never done it before, and I've done it ever since.

A few years ago George Miller called me and asked me to help him "decorate" the intimacy space. Who could refuse George? So now I'm managing the set up and tear down of the intimacy space. Who would have thought this little Catholic boy who wanted to grow up to become a priest would become a Sacred Drag Elder and offer space for men who love men to be intimate.

Thinking about it, I might not be that far off a priestly calling, but that's another story.

The reason I tell you these things is that you never know where GSV will lead you. If you think you don't know what you can do or how you can help, it doesn't matter. Just becoming a part of the group is enough. As you hang out with those involved, over time, opportunities for service will arise on their own.

Thanks for listening, and I welcome you to the ongoing, likely to be more fabulous than ever... GSV.

Dan Dewberry lives in Baltimore, MD with his partner of 34 years and two fabulous dogs named Samson and Mr. Phoebe. He has for many years served as GSV's Honorary Elder of Drag.



FROM ANDREW RAMER

I had no idea, when I arrived on the Mountain for the very first GSV, that I would come back for every year through Conference XX, and only break my perfect attendance record (which I was never close to doing as a student) and miss year XXI, so that I could officiate at a memorial service for my best friend so far in this life.

GSV helped me move from being a shy reclusive New Yorker to become a less shy and less reclusive Californian. Coming year after year gave me a forum to deepen into my own work as a writer and a teacher, and provided me with the perfect opportunity to be both mentor and mentee to the men of our tribe. I've been to other gay gatherings, but never found anything else quite like GSV, which is why I have become involved in the planning of Conference XXII.

If you are thinking about spiritual service, GSV is a perfect forum. If you are thinking about how to grow and deepen your own spiritual life and spiritual practice, please join us. If you have no interest in spirituality but are good with a hammer, a needle and thread, with time management, workshop leading, creative organizing, or any of a host of other needed skills, please contact us and volunteer your time, energy, and insights. I've met several of my dearest friends at GSV, and so will you. I did drag for the first (and last) time at GSV and met the young man who became my adopted son at GSV. Who knows what you will find, when you say YES to our community.

Andrew Ramer is an internationally respected author and a recognized leader in gay spirituality circles. His books are available via White Crane Press (see page 2.)

"So many MEN, SO many PRACTICES..."

GSV XXII

Deepening our connections, sharing our many paths and spiritual practices

Save the dates: September 22-25, 2011

Gay Archetypes

Many years ago Andrew Ramer

received (a word he prefers to channeled) these four glyphs, each representing another clan in the gay tribe.



Aligned with the compass points, the glyphs represent Scout in the East, Flute Player in the South, Shaman in the West, and



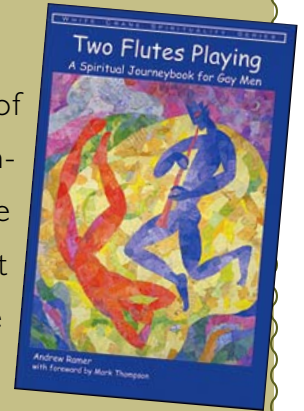
Hunter in the North. The images, and more information about them, can be found in Andrew's book *Two Flutes*



Playing: A Spiritual Journeybook for Gay Men, which is available from Lethe Press/



White Crane Books, one of the treasures of the gay community. They are also the publishers of Andrew's most recent book, *Queering the Text: Biblical, Medieval, and Modern Jewish Stories*, in which he grounds LGBT lives in sacred stories. For more information on these two and the other wonderful books available in the White Crane Wisdom Series, follow this link: whitecranebooks.org/catalog.html#ramer



In the EAST

**Scouts in consciousness you are,
Offering your knowledge of gender
and loving,
Of suffering and fulfillment, to the
world.
Step out, come out into a new day.
When you step out, come out,
You make a change for everyone.**

My first GSV fall conference was in 1993. I flew from San Antonio, Texas, met a friend



By Chaer Rue

in Atlanta and we drove up to Highlands together. We had no idea about GSV other than a vague recommendation from another friend a few months prior.

In the parking lot at The Mountain we saw men in skirts and combat boots, and considered driving away without getting out of the car.

Unaware that we were scouts at heart ourselves, we stayed.

The weekend was a blur for me. (At that time the fall conference was just a weekend, beginning Friday evening and ending Sunday afternoon.) I was terrified. I was moved. I was profoundly touched. The keynote in 1993 was Tom Spanbauer, author of the outrageous classic *The Man Who Fell in Love with the Moon*.

Unaware that we were scouts at heart, we stayed.

I remember meeting Andrew Ramer for the first time. My initial impression was that this man was not taking his medication. I bought his book; *Two Flutes Playing* and asked Andrew to autograph it for me. Unaware that what I was, was a scout.

The conference ended all too quickly. My friend and I left The Mountain and drove to his cabin in Blairsville, and sat down to a lovely meal of homemade soup and bread. With the Conference directory in hand we proceeded to dish all the guys we met at the conference. We talked about the small groups, the amaz-

ing talent show, the workshops... everything. Finally to bed in the wee hours of the morning, I was too excited to sleep. I started reading *Two Flutes Playing*. Unaware that I was, indeed, a scout.

I was inspired by the idea of a gay history going back to the Ice Age, the tears flowing when I read that gay people are needed by the planet, that our tribe serves a vital and necessary role, that the survival of the human tribe during the Ice Age was in part our doing. And that our vital role waits for us, here, today. I was introduced to the four clans, invoked in the opening rituals of many of the fall conferences I have since attended. The Scout clan in the East. The Flute Player in the South. The Shaman in the West. The Hunter in the North.

A new part of my life was beginning.

The following is an excerpt from the opening ritual of the fall conference in 1996. It was crafted by Bernhard Zinkgraf using words from *Two Flutes Playing*:



The clan of Consciousness Scouts teaches us the mysteries of the East: the mystery of the oneness of all that is, the mystery of coming out.

Many of us remember a time when we thought we were the only one. The only one in the world. Love was all but impossible. Do you remember what this felt like?

And then we mustered the courage to begin to crawl out of our unconsciousness, to begin to accept ourselves, to begin to be ourselves, to begin to love ourselves, to Come Out!

Coming Out is one of the most powerful spiritual acts. It is one of the most sacred political acts. It is a lifetime process.

My coming to GSV that first time was a coming out, and my scout nature has kept me coming back.

How have I witnessed Scout Clan energy among my brothers? Here are seven examples, important in my own experience.

My first Scout was Andrew Ramer and his amazing presence at that first fall conference. *Two Flutes Playing* gave me hope, confidence, and was empowering. It was my first awakening to Scout Clan energy. It was a coming out. I never wanted to miss another gathering of my tribe.

The second Scout was the wise and compassionate Raphael Sabatini. He showed me the importance of honoring and discovering the talents of our tribe through the talent show. The talent show was one of Raphael's passions. He would

spend the entire weekend in various forms of drag planning the talent show. He would sit in a rocking chair on the deck and start taking notes. He would talk to the quiet, shy men and find out their interests and their passions and encourage them to share them with the community. Then as Mistress of Ceremonies she would create a completely safe atmosphere for us to get up in front of our brothers and shine! The fact that Raphael had on a flawless outfit reminiscent of Jackie Onassis took my mind off of my racing heart. I awakened to my gift as a reader of poetry and my tribe honored me. Another coming out.

King Thackston was my third Scout. He demonstrated the gift of play as Miss Manners and as the magickal Green Man who would appear from nowhere. I came out as a sacred clown who loves to dress up. I also came out as a leader that likes to work behind the scenes and connect people. Thank you King!

My fourth Scout was John Stowe. He would move his hands in a dynamic mudra that would end at his heart chakra and... wham! I was present! I learned that I can either be in my body or not. John also awakened me to the magic of small group leadership. I came out as a passionate supporter of the small group process at our conferences and the amazing things that always seem to happen in these safe, sacred containers.

Two men are my fifth example of Scouts. John Ballew and George Miller are Scouts of the Erotic. As Erotic Pleasure Activists they have pointed me to paths and portals to come out to my erotic self. This awakening has probably been one of the most challenging for me but it has also given me remarkable glimpses of the healing power of this erotic energy. I am coming out to a new relationship with sex and erotic energy.

Martin "Treewalker" Isganitis is my sixth Scout. He introduced me to leadership roles within GSV on the GSV council. I learned about 'holding space', listening and speaking from my heart, passion, consensus, and showing up. I came out as a leader on GSV council.

Finally, my seventh Scout has been the men of Evergreen. Watching these young men jump off the cliff and attend their first fall conference... and then come back for more... has been an amazing demonstration of courage for me. It inspires me to continue coming out as an elder in our tribe, to give the gifts of my scout in honor of those who gave to me. It inspires me to see that I have wisdom to pass on to "our children" and the next generation.

How are you a Scout? See if you can list 7 ways that you embody Scout clan. Then look at the other clans: Flute Player, Shaman, and Hunter and do the same for them. This will be your coming out. Who knows, you may discover a passion that was hidden just beneath the surface.

Chaser Rue brings to GSV gatherings the richness of his explorations of many spiritual traditions, a scout indeed.

In the SOUTH

*...we sing for ourselves
when we do
we sing for each other...*
—"Tequendama",
by Franklin Abbott

A young man stands before the assembled Gay Spirit Visions conference. It is Saturday night, the talent show, and he is visibly nervous. In a shaking voice he explains that the previous year, he was so moved by the talent presentation that he went home and started piano lessons, with the goal of playing for the next conference. He begins the

Beatles' "Here, There, and Everywhere." He stalls, and begins again. And again. The audience is utterly silent; no one seems to be breathing. On the fourth try, he completes the piece, stands, and bursts into tears as the entire room rises and applauds. His are not the only wet eyes.

That is the most enduring memory I have from 20 years from GSV tal-

ent shows, and I think it fairly illustrates the role of the flute players clan of our tribe. In his book *Two Flutes Playing*, Andrew Ramer described four primary clans in which men who



By Bob Strain

love men express our consciousness in the world: scouts, flute players, shamans, and hunters. The flute player clan, to which I belong, is the clan of creative expression and performance – music, dance, theater, poetry and prose, and such other modalities as express the amazing experience of being a man who loves men. On the gay tribal circle, flute players hold space in the South and deal with the energies of water, the emotions, noon and summer. We heal with music and other expressions; we make love to each other in our singing and playing, dancing, acting, and reciting. This is because we are fully willing to be naked, to expose our souls and our passions.

This exposure is inherently risky business. Gay Spirit Visions gives its artists a great gift, that of a safe container in which to explore and share their creativity. This safety occurs both in the individual relationships we develop through GSV, and notably at the annual conferences, particularly the fall gathering.

The fall talent show is the penultimate gathering of all the conferees, and it is where the flute players can share their particular gifts with the assembled tribe. It is not just about entertainment, though it certainly can be entertaining. It is an opportunity to walk through fear and share our stories in particular ways. It is often magical. In *Visionary*, Vol. 4, No. 4, from December 1998, Al Cotton presented a wonderful account of the potentials and pitfalls of the talent show (“What’s So Spiritual about a

Talent Show?”)

I have been privileged to accompany some or all of the show each year since 1991. It is always amazing how men will approach me with a comment along the lines of “I’ve been thinking about doing a number in the show, but...”. In almost every case, they work through their fears and misgivings and decide to perform. Once this hurdle is passed, they leap into the process, often adding costuming, accessories, backup singers, dance moves, or other elaborations. They often still have fear, but it becomes clear they WANT to give their gift to the conference.

So there is a sacred aspect to the show. It involves courage and I have seen it many times over: two close friends taking the stage for the first time to sing the duet “I Must Have Done

Something Good” to each other, and allowing us to witness their shared love; a man with laryngitis overcoming the physical challenge to sing “Can You Feel the Love Tonight”; a dancer with flags and black light enchanting the audience with “Dido’s Lament.” Moving poetry and readings, humor aplenty, soulful dance, full-on ABBA production numbers – it is a feast for the senses and tonic for the spirit.

Because of the safe space GSV affords, flute-player creativity and sharing can flourish outside the show as well. I am thinking now of a dear friend who allows his harp meditations to bless us in ceremonies and casual situations throughout the conference, of the group of men who sailed into the dining hall to serenade a brother with a very fae (and risqué) birthday composition, of watching a dance improvisation unfold in the lodge great room.

The point of all this, I think, is that it prepares us to take our gifts out into the wider world. It also helps us deepen into our own gifts. I know I have become a better, bolder, and more creative mu-

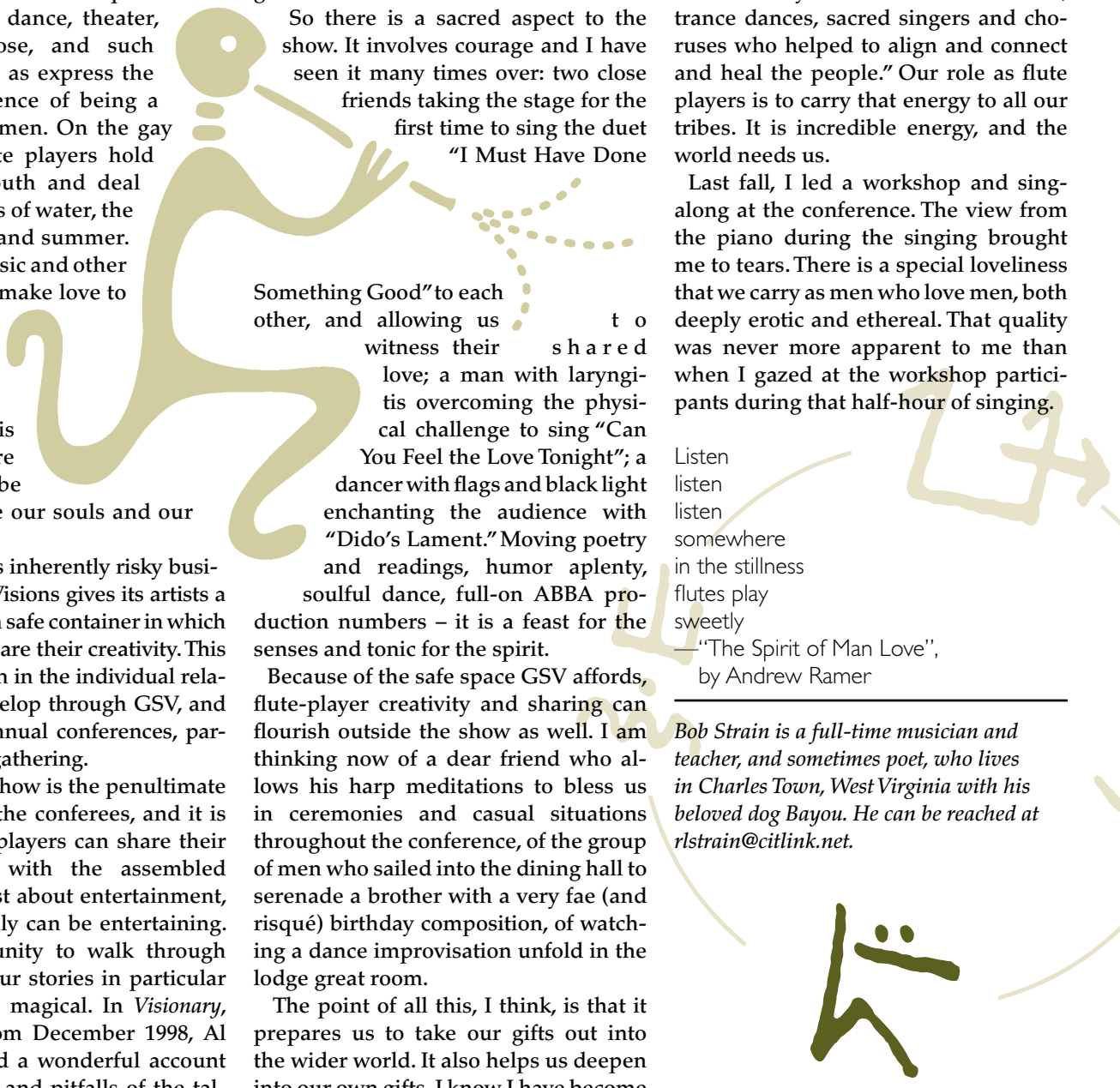
sician because of my GSV experiences. I see similar results in others who have taken the risk to reveal themselves. Men leave the conference and join choruses, theater groups, dance programs. Often the means of bringing these gifts to the world involves continuing our own performance and teaching – the young actor-brother who now also teaches theater; the opera singer who mentors young performers; the poet-writer-singer who has assembled a performance group that examines the experience of gay African-American men.

As Andrew Ramer describes, there have “always been sacred dances, trance dances, sacred singers and choruses who helped to align and connect and heal the people.” Our role as flute players is to carry that energy to all our tribes. It is incredible energy, and the world needs us.

Last fall, I led a workshop and sing-along at the conference. The view from the piano during the singing brought me to tears. There is a special loveliness that we carry as men who love men, both deeply erotic and ethereal. That quality was never more apparent to me than when I gazed at the workshop participants during that half-hour of singing.

Listen
listen
listen
somewhere
in the stillness
flutes play
sweetly
—“The Spirit of Man Love”,
by Andrew Ramer

Bob Strain is a full-time musician and teacher, and sometimes poet, who lives in Charles Town, West Virginia with his beloved dog Bayou. He can be reached at rlstrain@citlink.net.



In the WEST

Sacred Hunt. Sacred Hunter.

I am not alone. The gift, the magic of the first Gay Spirit Visions conference, to the man I was in November of 1990 was that I was not the only gay man who longed to understand himself



By TreeWalker
Martin Isganitis

as a Spiritual Being. I had heard of Radical Faeries as early as 1982 but did not follow up on the reference to RFD magazine and promptly forgot about it. My agenda then was not about my place in the Cosmos as much as it was about my place in the arms (or bed) of another man. I did not know then that internalized homophobia would be nearly fatal for me. I wasn't ready to grasp the notion of hetero-sexism and the suggestion that 'history' had been written with a victor's bias and the intention of erasing us from existence. All of that began to change in November of 1990 when

ity – or gayness – is not a choice but rather one of the ways in which humans are created or come to be. And for those of us for whom creation as a whole and for whom our individual coming into being is sacred or spiritual, there are consequences that impact how we understand ourselves and our place in the world. The Christian Churches and the dominant hetero-sexist culture in which we live would have us believe that our homosexuality is a sinful choice we make by which we turn away from the Creator/God. We now understand the lie upon which this belief is based and its purpose to maintain a power structure. Rejected by organized religions and often by our families, and left to our own consciences, we can discover that what we do have a choice about is not our sexuality as such, but the sanctity with which we come to view ourselves. Instead of believing the damning admonishments of sinfulness we have come to believe that we can and must accept the fact of our sexual identities and take responsibility for treating this and all other aspects of our humanity with dignity and respect.

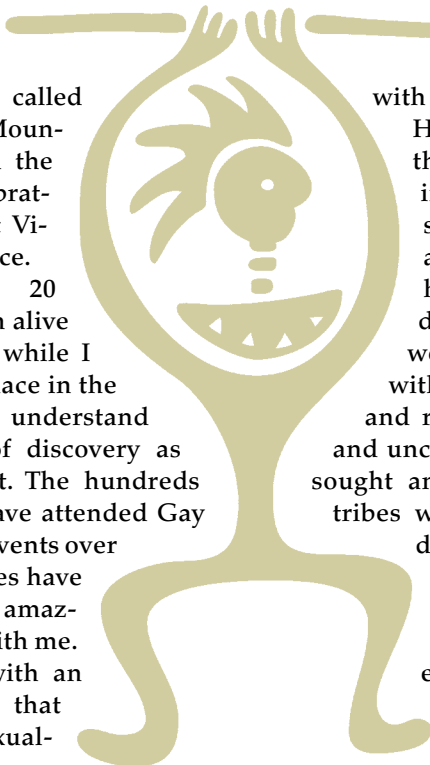
How have we accomplished this task? We have gathered in circle in Sacred Spaces, spoken our heart's desires and listened to each other's hearts, laughed and cried, danced, drummed, sang, and woven our energies together with intention. We have written and read fiction and non-fiction, and uncovered our history. We have sought and found communities and tribes who support our journey of discovery. They include the Radical Faeries and all the communities represented by our GSV keynote speakers over 20 years: artists, singers, song writers, dancers, drummers, novelists, aca-

demics, shaman, priests, healers, and each other. Together we have hunted for meaning.

Our first conference began with Harry Hay asking us three questions: Who are we? Where have we come from? What are we for? As I listened to 90 men answer those questions over the course of that first weekend I was amazed. Some men simply said their names, cities, and why they had come to that gathering. Others spoke at length about their struggles to accept themselves, their suicide attempts, their histories of abuses, and their desires to be heard until they had nothing left to say. There is an amazing power in being loved like that; and in loving a man, listening to him until his heart is both empty and full. It was in that first Heart Circle that I began to experience my first glimmer of the sanctity of our gay lives.

Through the decades since that first Conference on The Mountain we as a tribe have hunted for meaning in our gay existence. We have developed a way of being with each other based on acceptance and respect. The Sacred Hunter practices his skills by using them with discipline and consistency. We hunt so that our skills stay sharp as much as we hunt for what we may discover about our place in the world. Our recent reorganization gives us the opportunity to practice our skills while opening us up to new discoveries. It allows us to maintain our practice of acceptance and respect while making room for Spirit to guide us in new directions.

In 1990 AIDS was beginning to decimate our community and the struggle for equality was the domain of a relatively few men and women who would risk being "out." Today we see gay characters on television portray openly gay adolescent characters struggling to accept themselves guided by parent characters that encourage them to respect themselves. We see the 'No H8' and 'It Gets Better' campaigns and anti-



bullying programs in schools as international responses to gay suicides and the bullying of gay students.

Harvey Milk told us to come out politically. Christian de la Huerta and Bishop Eugene Robinson encouraged us to come out spiritually. Andrew Ramer

enlightens us to come into our tribe as Sacred Hunters to practice acceptance and respect in the sacred spaces we create for ourselves and each other. In these sacred spaces we find meaning: we come to know who we are, where we have come from, and what we are for.

TreeWalker Martin Isganitis served for many years as the Presiding Elder of GSV, and although he may laugh at this, he has long been one of our better angels. Contact him at watchingtreeswalk@yahoo.com

In the **NORTH**

Dear Shaman, Queer Shaman

Shaman. Bridge-builder. Shapeshifter. The person who dwells in-between. Half matter, half spirit, male and female and neither and both. We embody the archetype of shaman when we set aside our stories of who we



By Hunter Flournoy

are—our tidy identities and comfortable roles— and go outside ourselves into the numinous, imaginal spaces of mystery, to recover and discover unimagined possibilities, and bring those

back to the community. We can never be a shaman—the word always points to the space left behind when someone has gone outside of themselves (ekstatis), emptied themselves (kenosis), to be filled (plerosis) with the sacred life of the world. A shaman is a no-thing, a hole in the fabric between the worlds, opening a way for good things to cross over in both directions. The archetype of shaman is very different from the archetypes of warrior, scout, or flute-player; they are roles, or identities, while the shaman is all of them and none of them, weaving the worlds together with courage and vision and beauty.

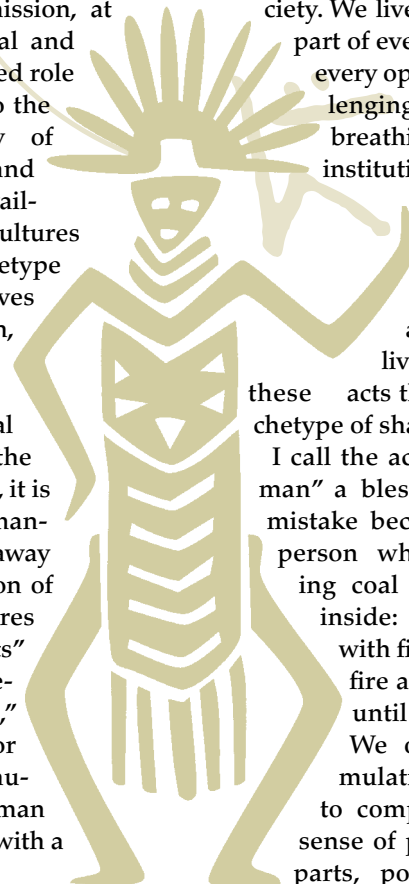
So often, we queer folk turn to this archetype to boost our sense of self-worth. We know we are not quite male or female in the traditional sense; we know in our own bodies what it feels like to penetrate and be penetrated. We hear stories of other cultures that honor two-

spirits— winktes, mexogas, and berdaches— people who mirror our own sense of being between the sexes—as people with a sacred gift to share, as holy people. Our own culture offers us little solid ground to build a sense of self-worth on, and so we sometimes build upon this foundation, the archetype of the two-spirit, the queer shaman.

This is, in many ways, a blessed error and a sacred mistake—one I know very well from my own experience. On the positive side, the story of the queer shaman gives us permission, at last, to be both spiritual and sexual; it gives us a sacred role to play, and opens us to the extraordinary diversity of spiritual viewpoints and ecstatic technologies available in the indigenous cultures of the world. The archetype of the queer shaman gives us a sense of self-worth, a story to build our lives upon, and, even more importantly, a crucial sense of belonging in the world. At the same time, it is truly a mistake; the shamanic path is a stripping away of self, not an affirmation of self. Indigenous cultures that value “two-spirits” do not honor them because they are “special,” in some way; they honor them because they are human beings, and all human beings are holy people, with a sacred gift to share.

Our gift as two-spirits is not special—it is simply ours, and like every other person’s gift, it is absolutely necessary to the community of life. What is unique about our gift, is that it does not come from being “something.” Our gift comes from the very fact that we are no-thing. Our community crosses every line of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and class; we shatter the easy categories, shimmering at the edges of things, appearing in a flourish of creative extravagance, and then vanishing back into the grey monotony of society. We live at the fringes; we are part of every ruling minority and every oppressed majority, challenging social structures and breathing life back into dead institutions. We know what it is to be nothing, to shapeshift from one thing to another, to speak truth to power at the risk of our own lives. And it is exactly in these acts that we embody the archetype of shaman.

I call the act of “becoming a shaman” a blessed error and sacred mistake because it is a bit like a person who swallows a burning coal to fill the emptiness inside: it fills the emptiness with fire, but if you keep that fire alive, it will devour you until everything is flame. We often begin by accumulating objects of power, to compensate for our deep sense of powerlessness: animal parts, pouches, herbs, rattles



and drums— adding them to our faltering sense of self. But if we spend a long time with those who serve their people as shamans, if we learn to see the world through indigenous eyes, deepening our relationships with the living world and listening to the voices of spirit, we begin to lose the need to be special—in fact, to be anything at all. We become hollow. We learn to listen, to see, to touch the world again. We experience ourselves, each other, and our world as profoundly alive and devastatingly beautiful. We become, at last, that very rare and precious thing— a true human being. And maybe, just maybe, if spirit calls us, we can begin to serve the world as shamans— helping others reclaim the wholeness we have begun to discover in ourselves.

It is a journey I can only claim to have begun, in the last twenty years of walking in these ways; but on the best days, I can at least remember to feed the fire inside and spread it around a little. Fortunately, I am surrounded with amazing reminders. I am inspired as I

see my queer sisterbrothers embodying the archetype of shaman all the time— not in the moments you might think, though— awash in lovely robes and ceremonial regalia— but in the little moments of crossing boundaries and opening breathing spaces for each other. A beautiful queen helping another man try on lipstick, mascara, and false lashes for the first time, stepping outside a safe sense of self. Our brother Bear challenging our sense of sexual orientation and gender. One man touching another by the fire, awakening a thrill of pleasure in his body that shakes him free of shame and fear and catapults him into a radical, trembling, gasping, new aliveness. A shy queer boy who connects us all by daring to speak the shame he thought was his alone. Our firetenders, who kindle and guard the sacred fire that burns in the heart of our community. Our sisterbrothers who tend the sick and dying and lost, our brothersisters who dance naked in front of the whole community, trembling and shaking with love and fear, our brothers

who challenge us with their truth and our sisters who reach out to us when we feel alone in a crowded room. We are shamans for each other every time we reach across the walls that divide us, every time we allow the fiery spirit of life to burn through us and let the wind speak through us, every time we leave ourselves behind and discover ourselves again in each other. We can never embody the archetype of shaman as “individuals”— it dances between us as the breath we all share, weaving all of us into a single living being, fiercely alive and utterly beyond description.

Which is, in the end, more true of us than any archetype can possibly hope to express.

Hunter Flournoy guides a diverse clientele via many settings including traditional psychotherapy, coaching, workshops, healing sweatlodges, poetry, storytelling, and sacred journeys around the world. He has served as keynote for several GSV conferences and can be reached at (828) 450-8800, or Hunter@NewDestinies.com





GSV's spring gathering is known for its relaxed schedule, the renewing spirit of springtime at The Mountain in Highlands, NC, and this year adds the heart expanding exploration of...

the Universal Dances of Peace



About the Universal Dances: From the beginning of time, sacred movement, song and story have brought people together – at times of seasonal ceremony and celebration, as part of everyday life and life passages, and in daily renewal and meditation.



Perry Pike will lead the Universal Dances for us, as he did in 2003. An initiate in both the Sufi Ruhaniat International and the Mevlevi Order of America, he has for many years taught a variety of groups to chant, sing, breathe and move together as prayer.

*Dance when you're broken open. Dance if you've torn the bandage off.
Dance in the middle of the fighting. Dance in your blood.
Dance when you're perfectly free.*

-Rumi

Arrive at The Mountain Friday May 6 for dinner and opening circle, depart after lunch Sunday May 8.
All inclusive weekend, \$195



Reflections on a Winter's Gathering, on "Coming Back"

Since 1993, I used to proudly recall the number of times I'd attended a GSV conference. "This is the fifth time..." "This is the tenth time..." With this last gathering, I realized that I had no idea how many. I haven't contemplated the number, but what I realize is that I've attended enough to know without question that I am part of that circle and that the circle is a shifting and beautiful tribe. I do not expect at any given



conference to experience epiphany. I do expect to share stories and affection. I do expect to drive away with my heart a bit more open than it is when I first arrive.

Sitting at my desk with GSV floating through my head, I have a stream of images that soften my mood: John Stowe, Andrew Ramer, Bill Meneeley, Tom Spanbauer, Raven Wolfdancer, sweat lodge, heart circle, small circle, naked yoga, Body Electric, talent show, trance dance, the tower, Moe singing from the tower, sacred fire, puppy piles, labyrinth, fabulous drag and awful drag, costumes costumes costumes, flagging, keynote speakers, oatmeal and ice cream for breakfast

The first time I went to a gathering of Gay Spirit Visions was an intense experience that had me blubbering for days beyond its closing. I suppose my heart had never been so open, neither had I ever felt so connected to a group of people who were so willing to be vulnerable, willing to love me without judgment. With that experience as a

foundation, it's clear to me that I return for very selfish reasons. I return with the expectation that I will be touched, that I will learn to be more willing to share myself and if I'm very good, to deepen one friendship...at least one.

For several years, I was hooked on the Fall gathering. Missing a single event was unacceptable to me until the Spring gathering was initiated. At that point, every other year and alternating seasons became my standard. Each season offers such a different set of circumstances. And now we have three possible opportunities for being together at the Mountain. I am feeling the pendulum swinging back and a desire to physically be in the circle more often. Maybe it's time to host a potluck.

At the last gathering (Winter 2011), there was a break in which a group of us took a short hike down the icy road to the lower parking area. The question was asked about favorite things at GSV, or at men's conferences in general. Guys talked about experiences that had been impactful, and workshops that had been marvelous. We have some gifted teachers in our circle, who show up to share their lives. No doubt I've learned many valuable lessons in workshops, but even the best of them are forgettable. A slow learner with a short term memory, here. Anyway, for me, the sweetest part of a gathering is when I have the pleasure of sharing in small groups. That's the time the masks come off and we see each other best.

Also at the Winter Meditation weekend, I had the lovely experience of meeting some members of a northern clan. They had come to us after one of our own had attended their gathering and extended an invitation to The Moun-

tain. They came from Ohio, Connecticut and Massachusetts!! And they brought their loving spirits with them. It's pretty glorious to find familiar spirits attached to new faces, and just that quickly, my family is extended yet again. I imagine I'll be heading north when it comes time for their summer gathering.

With all of the good that comes out of the experience, it's a wonder that I still feel a nervous energy every time I come to GSV. If I had to make up a reason, it's that I'm still not comfortable in my skin. I still have lots of lessons to learn and lessons to teach. My life's work is not done and I must attend many more conferences. So there's my new intention for this year: to become more comfortable in my own skin. Some folks learn it early in life. Oh, well...slow learner.

We used to say that one of our big objectives was to create a positive role model for young members of the gay community. There's a lot to be said for being socially responsible, but I have a long way to go in that department. As my life unfolds and I become more connected, I come to the understanding that "the single most important purpose for living is to know people, to engage people, and to uplift people."*

GSV is such a great platform from which we can remember and share our stories, which are all about connection.

*Letters to Ethan: A Grandfather's Legacy of Life & Love by Tom McQueen

Miguel Molina is a Media Specialist for Cobb County Schools in Atlanta, has been associated with GSV since the early 90's, has been partnered with a sweetheart for 6+ years... and loves the outdoors, gardening and travel. ("Where shall we go next?")





The 10th Annual GSV Winter Meditation

January 14-16 2011



Photos by
Lem Arnold