

VISIONARY



Volume 2, number 3

November, 1996

ELDER'S PERCH

by Al Cotton

We Planners are back in Atlanta, and more our less back in our bodies and back in the world after a wonderfully successful Celebrating Gay Spirit Visions Conference. Multitudinous thanks to all who attended this year and helped to make our seventh annual conference such an affirm-

the conference -- "Don't you love us any more?" we almost said aloud. But once we got over our "abandonment" issues, we realized that making this space available to our 30 "Virgins," as we called them, is only possible if some of us stay home. We hope, wherever you were, you had a *fabulous* time and that circumstances will spin you back in our direction soon.

One opportunity for spinning is

ABOUT THE NOVEMBER 9 MEETING

The "Dates to Remember" box lists this as an open meeting. We hope you know that *all* of our meetings are open, but we especially hope **any of you who passionately wants GSV to thrive** will come and provide your input on our future path.

That evening our annual post-conference potluck will be at Miguel Molina's house at 7:30PM. Over 60 men showed up last year — it's a great way to reconnect to conference energy, and say "Hi" to old and new friends. Anyone reading this paragraph is welcome to attend and bring a guest, as long as you show up with festive food!

ing experience of each of us.

The specifics: 110 men attended, with approximately 30 men new to the Fall Conference, 25% or so of the total. Over 20 men attended on some form of scholarship, and again, no one was turned away for lack of funds. Our profit this year is approximately \$6,700, \$5,000 of which we will reinvest at *the mountain* on a short-term basis. This money will be used to fund local programs for 1997 (including **VISIONARY** and our upcoming office expenses) and to provide seed money for the Spring Thing, our Pride presence, and the 8th Celebrating Gay Spirit Visions Conference, which is already set for the weekend of Sept. 19-21, 1997 at *the mountain*.

And a special note to those who **didn't attend** this year, some absent for the first time: Thanks for your support in the past. We Planners got a little weird about your absence during the run-up to

coming up in November. At Sunday's closing Heart Circle, the Council of Trusted Elders announced that the **November 9 Planning Meeting** will be an open meeting to discuss GSV's transition to the next level of organizational activity. That meeting will be at 10AM at the Atlanta Friends Meeting House, 704 W. Howard Street in Decatur, Georgia. Just as the meeting back in January of 1992 helped create the current GSV planning committee, we hope **any of you who passionately wants GSV to thrive** will come and provide your input on our future path. Anyone who wants to find out about the Planning process, volunteer for a committee, create a niche for yourself to do something that's not being done, or simply say the most important thing you think about what we do, should come and pay us a visit that morning — Atlanta is beautiful in late autumn.

Dates to Remember

[Note: AFMH = Atlanta Friends Meeting House, 701 W. Howard Ave., Decatur]

Nov. 9, 10:00am: GSV Open Meeting, @ AFMH

Nov. 9, 7:30pm: GSV Potluck, Miguel Molina's house, 1452 Funston. From I-20 take Boulevard exit. Go south approx 1.5 mi. Left on Custer Ave. (Traffic light at intersection; Texaco on left.) Go two blocks; Right on Funston; Park on street. Lost? Call Miguel at 404/627-3903 (Miguel's house)

Dec 13, 10:00am: -GSV Meeting (AFMH)

Dec 22, 1st Anniv. of the creation of The Council of Trusted Elders (Plans TBA)

Jan 10, 10:00am: GSV Meeting @ AFMH (tentative)

A personal reflection. Back in January of 1992, I came to a meeting similar in intention to this one. My only experience with GSV had been attending the fall conference four months earlier. But such amazing things happened to me — both at the conference and in its aftermath — that it seemed important to me for it to continue to exist. As Woody Allen says, "90% of life consists of just showing up," so I showed up, found a voice to express myself, and discovered a place where I could do a lot of good work, and hang out with some of the neatest men in Atlanta. Five years later, I can say that I don't know where I would be today if I'd stayed home that Saturday morning, but I do know it wouldn't be as nice a place as where I am right now. Come to our table, find a seat — use your elbows if you must — and enrich your own life, and ours.

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And one thing seems certain from our post-conference rumblings and mumblings — in some way, shape or form, GSV will be dealing with the topic of **Mentoring** a lot during the next year. (Indeed, Andrew Ramer has nominated it to be next year's theme.) If you have any input on this topic, any people in your re-

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gion working with youth whom we should network with, or any alternative issues you'd like to see us consider, let us know. Send e-mails to gsvgsv@aol.com, or for specific networking issues, to Jonathan Lerner at jonathanlerner@worldnet.att.net, or use any of the other, more traditional methods of communication.

Works in progress for the winter in-

clude a **GSV website** and a book that would serve both as a **conference organizing manual** and a collection of conference keynote presentations and other related materials. And by the time you read this, we hope to have executed our lease for office space at the Atlanta Friends Meeting House. We'll need furnishings for our new office, so if you have any office thing you'd like to get out of your house, let us know how to pick it up.

A reminder — The Council of Trusted Elders is now a **tax-exempt non-profit corporation** of the State of Georgia. As of July 30, 1996, your contributions to our process are tax deductible, so keep us in mind when you're engaged in tax preparation or estate planning.

Thanks again to each of you for giving us something to do during the year. 1997 looks enormously exciting for Gay Spirit Visions as we start figuring out where this organization is going to grow and where it's going to grow *fast*. Whether you come to our November 9th meeting or send us e-mail or a letter, please let us know where you think this organization ought to go. You have just as much claim to GSV as we do, so don't hesitate to invoke it. Δ

RITUAL EXCERPTS

by Bernhard Zinkgraf and Andrew Ramer

[This excerpt contains the introduction and conclusion to this year's opening ritual. Quoted material is from *Two Flutes Playing* © by Andrew Ramer]

"In searching for gay history one must turn inward to the depths of self or turn outward to those who carry the memories. It is not enough to look back to ancient Greece, or to samurai Japan, or to look at the cross-dressing shaman/healers in the tribal nations of the world. The fullness of gay history lies beyond the term of what we call history...."

The sign over the door of the temple at Delphi reads: *Know Yourself*. Our elder Harry Hay echoed this with his questions for the men of Mattachine: Who are we? Where do we come from? What are we here for?

So let us enter into this world of history and legend, a world that is both ancient and new, as we begin to create

the magic of our conference. Come and journey with me around the medicine wheel again as we delve deeper into the mysteries it holds for us. And let us hold our hands over our heart chakras; as we listen to the beat of the heartbeat drum, for this is a journey of the heart, a journey of love.

[After describing the individual mysteries of each direction, East (Coming Out), South (Balance/Play), West (The Holocaust), and North (Coming In), the Ritual concludes:]

"Gay people have a function in this time of transition.... To be gay is to have a different relationship to male and female. To be gay is to have a different relationship to young and old. To be gay is to transcend other groups — political, social, ethnic, religious. And the experiences gained from all these differences are useful to the whole of the human community.

"Together, in this time, we are birthing the Gay Tribe of the future. Let us be rooted in our spiritual history, in community, and in a global vision of transformation and peace for we are a people who come from all the other tribes. Our capacity to connect and be peacemakers is part of why we are here.

"Let us take the gifts of our gayness out into the world and share them joyfully. For what is ancient in us begins to be remembered. And what is future in us casts its light into our hearts. Together we can help to change the world...." Δ

WHAT IS WORK?

by Andrew Ramer

[The following excerpts are from Andrew's Friday night keynote.]

The... question I want to explore is: "What is work?" The nature and purpose of a human being is to be a non-material, immortal soul — embodied in form. The primary job of parents, families, and cultures is to recognize that and to nurture each immortal soul when it comes into the world, as it is, and not as they might have it be. Clearly, given our culture, few if any of us were seen and welcomed as we are. And this is the primary wound we all carry, those of us who are gay with our own particular flavor of woundedness. And most of us spend all of our lives trying to heal and recover from that wound, creating strategies in our minds to heal it — if only I had more food, more love, more mind-altering, it would be okay, if only I were better looking or smarter, I would have been loved. But how could we

have been loved when our parents weren't?

No, the beginning of healing is to recognize the real wound and begin to substitute soul healing for the strategies of our minds. Otherwise, they become our life's work — to fill holes where the soul should be. And you can tell how deep the wound is by how much someone is driven toward or away from what our society calls fulfillment.

A community has a soul of its own. Clearly, ours was not recognized, and we've expended a lot of energy trying to heal that. That looks like work, but it isn't. The only work there is is embodying soul, fully. Then, what we do flowers out of that easily.

For the past six years, what we've been working toward in this conference is to heal those wounds. And it's a lifetime job. As new people come in, others go. But we've worked to craft a healing place where our tribal soul can be seen and celebrated and where each one of our individual souls can be seen and celebrated too. It's out of that — soul embodied and celebrated — not mind-filling, heart-filling, gut-filling, time-filling, sex-filling, but from soul — that our work begins.

Sit and feel and hear that you are an immortal soul, utterly unique, embodied here. That we *all* are. And let your work flow out of that. The excesses of the 60's came from our thinking our personal and collective hole-filling strategies were real work, soul work. But we're in a new era. We have different tools. We can see the real wound and nurture ourselves and others without the rage that's fueled past revolutions, without the reliance on substances and rhetoric to define us.

When we are seen or see ourselves as homosexual, we are defined by one part of who we are. But as we reclaim our peoplehood, our sexuality will no longer be our leading edge, the place where we craft our identification from. It will be a part of the fullness of who we are.

Each of us, no matter what we do, has a different piece of our tribal work to carry. And none of us can do our work without the others. All of us do many different kinds of work. But we all have a heart-calling. Some of us are visionaries, some symbol makers, some educators, some weavers, some builders, some caregivers, some householders, some dismantlers. And some of us work through being unaligned, in un-formed and ever-

pregnant ways. In our time together, we will explore, alone, in small groups, in this large group what it means when we say "Taking action in the world. Our work begins...."

As the 2nd century Rabbi Tarfon said, "It is not your duty to complete the work. Nor are you free to desist from it."

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PEACE PILGRIM'S MESSAGE

From Andrew's keynote:

"... And we also have many different teachers from other tribes to be inspired by in our own work. I want to share with you the words of a woman who went by the name Peace Pilgrim, whose work has been deeply important to me. A solitary teacher, I brought her words with me, a copy for each of you. This is my tiny backpack, back pocket Bible. The testimony of another one who walks. Another peace maker."

From *Steps Toward Inner Peace* by Peace Pilgrim

Four Preparations:

1. *Assume right attitudes toward life.* Stop being an escapist or a surface-liver as these attitudes can only cause inharmony in your life.... Solve the problems that life sets before you, and you will find that solving them contributes to your inner growth....

2. *Live good beliefs.* The laws governing human conduct apply as rigidly as the law of gravity.... No lie can be in harmony unless belief and practice are in harmony.

3. *Find your place in the Life Pattern.* You have a part in the scheme of things.... You can seek it in receptive silence. You can begin to live in accordance with it by doing all the good things you are motivated toward and giving these things priority in your life over the superficial things that customarily occupy human lives.

4. *Simplify life to bring inner and outer well-being into harmony.* Unnecessary possessions are unnecessary burdens.... Cluttered lives are out-of-harmony lives and require simplification....

Some thoughts:

•There is a criterion by which you can judge whether the thoughts you are thinking and the things you are doing

are right for you. That criterion is, *Have they brought you inner peace?* If they have not, there is something wrong with them — so keep trying.

•From all the things you read and from all the people you meet, take what is good — what your own 'Inner Teacher' tells you is for you — and leave the rest.... Books and people can merely inspire you. Unless they awaken something within you, nothing worthwhile has been accomplished.

•The spiritual life is the real life — all else is illusion and deception.... Only those who are attached to God alone are truly free.

•Concentrate on giving so that you may open yourself to receiving. Concentrate on living according to the light you have so that you may open yourself to more light.

•Never think of any right effort as being fruitless — *all* right effort bears good fruit, whether we see results or not....

For a free copy of Peace Pilgrim's pamphlet, write to:

Friends of Peace Pilgrim
43480 Cedar Avenue
Hemet, CA 92544 △

MAIL FROM GERRY LOWERY

10/9/96

Brothers,

Take a breath — Breathe!! Now that I am back in the city, I still feel a warm glow of remembrance and love. From my perspective as a conference "virgin," GSV was truly an empowering and enlivening experience. I was simply amazed by the courage, honesty, and self-affirmation expressed by so many of my brothers. Feeling emboldened by this courage, I decided to throw caution to the wind and "come out" in my professional life! Last week in letters to Emory and Georgia Tech in which I applied for positions as Dean of Students, I included a sentence as follows: "As an openly gay man, I know first hand the value of creating an inclusive, pluralistic campus climate in which every individual can thrive and feel appreciated." This new openness may or may not prove to be a boon to my professional life; however, it most certainly is a major step forward for me in gaining a renewed sense of honesty, power, and self-respect in my real life!!! The courage and resolve were provided by the GSV brotherhood — all I

did was to take a breath, trust myself, and step out into the unknown. Thank you and may your life go well. (Don't forget to vote — Four more years!!!)

Happy Trails,
Gerry Δ

TAKING IMMEDIATE ACTION IN THE WORLD

In the closing Heart Circle I told you that upon leaving the mountain I was going to visit my Father, who had come home from the hospital with lung cancer. I thanked the conference for “giving me the courage and strength to go home as the adult that I truly am, and not the adult that my parents are still waiting for me to be.” Little did I know the truth that I was speaking from my heart and how I was preparing for Work In The World.

As I was about to turn into my parents' driveway, my resolve weakening (I took off my biggest earring), I spotted a Rainbow bumper sticker next to a D.A.R.E. sticker on the car in front of me — a rare sight in Greenville, SC! Fortified, I breathed back into the fearless love that feels so comfortable. Mother met me at the door with news that it had not been a good day, even though the day before, he had gotten up, talked like his old self and even eaten a little steak and baked potato. Mom thought it weird that he could be so well one day and so out-of-it the next; I knew he was walking between worlds.

Talking with me, my Mother suddenly looked up at me as if she had never seen me before and said, “You look wonderful!” I have always wished that my parents could see me at my very best. Glowing and enraptured by the love and intention of the Conference. Being my best by being myself. We went into the bedroom to help with a contraption that would lift him from bed to wheelchair because it was better for him to sit up, and once I got my hands on him I never let go. I sat next to him and held his hand, my Mother was holding his head from behind the chair, one nurse to his left and another on our right. His breathing was so labored so I tried to breathe with him — breathing at a slower and more restful pace. I was practicing a breathing exer-

cise taught to us at the fourth conference, Planetary Acupuncture, breathing the Earth energy/light up into your heart and then out to the universe and then in reverse. My Mother asked if I was praying for him. I even told a joke I heard at the Conference — thanks Aubrey.

The phone rang, Mother got up and I moved to support his head with my arms around him and my hand on his heart. I told him I loved him, thanked him for all the opportunities he worked to give me, that I would take care of Mom, and that it was all right to go on to the next world without fear — a place where only love exists. All past discord and animosity between us dissolved. I was able to kiss and caress him as he would never have allowed. Mother returned and began to rub his legs and feet and looked up at me and said, “You look just like an angel.” I lifted him back into bed, the phone rang, distracting her, and then the nurse said that he had stopped breathing.

Now, as I think back about it, I see that my Mother had taken my Father as far as she could on his journey. Fifty-seven years of being his protector and caregiver did not prepare her to release him. He was a warrior and military man, and it seemed that he was going to fight and struggle to hold onto Life, although he had often discussed not wanting to live as an invalid. He required the blessing of his son. I was lifting him up from the heart (and going part way with him) as his wife was releasing his feet from the Earth. Legions of discarnate military personnel paraded through to escort him to paradise. I don't know how I knew what to do — it seemed automatic and generic. It was perfect.

It feels now like a part of my Father is in me and that he can experience the world through me (all the things he didn't or couldn't experience as himself). I am only sad that he doesn't get to be alive anymore because he loved being alive so very much, and so do I.

King Thackston
October 1996

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AN ARGUMENT IN FAVOR OF ARGUMENT

by Jonathan Lerner

A marvelous — a nearly miraculous — thing about our evolving community and our annual conference is the openness. Everybody is welcomed, everybody is listened to, everybody's journey — no matter how distinctive or idiosyncratic — is supported. Anyone can participate in the planning process, where we go to (sometimes excruciating) lengths to hear all sides and to make decisions by consensus. We should be proud of this culture of equality and mutual respect. It says a lot about who we are and what we're trying to build, and about how we need and rely on each other in the process.

But respecting one another does not require us to abandon our individual critical abilities. Not everything that's said or done is clear, or sensible, or creative. Sometimes a contribution expresses a personal agenda without accounting for its potential effect on the group. Some contributions would push the group in directions that make others uncomfortable. Some ideas people offer might even be improved — if the listeners only took the time to react thoroughly and thoughtfully. We need to hear from everybody, but we also need to honestly consider what everybody is saying when they open their mouths. The work we're doing is too important to treat what we say superficially.

I learned about argument in the New Left of the 1960's — though the lessons are most useful now as cautions. What was genuinely new about the New Left didn't stick around long. As alternatives emerged, women left in droves for the women's liberation movement, queers for the gay liberation movement, and others for environmentalism, New Age spirituality, to found communes and co-ops, and so on.

When the exodus was over, the New Left consisted largely of straight white intellectual boys, and their girlfriends. Despite the name, it was awfully reminiscent of the Stalinist Old Left. The underlying assumption was that it is actually possible to develop a systematic “world view” which rationally explains every big and little thing, from what to do next

Tuesday afternoon to how to reorganize the world economy following a seizure of power by the international proletariat. Arriving at "political agreement" was paramount. If some offhand utterance of yours revealed that you maybe had a slightly different take on an issue, everything was liable to screech to a halt until the "difference" was thrashed out. Your abject confessions of remorse and assertions of new understanding were demanded before the meeting could adjourn and everybody could get some sleep. Or maybe you still honestly disagreed, in which case you were forced out. ("Offed," some groups called it, or "iced" — street terms meaning "killed.") It was not an environment in which the individual was valued.

Happily, there's no danger of our acting that way. We're grounded in appreciation for each other. Having survived long enough to come out — and then having kept on surviving — we each know well what "struggle" really means. And we understand two important things: that not everything is knowable in a verbal sense; and that many valid paths lead where we need to go.

We don't need to be afraid of dialogue, or even of argument. In fact, we need to challenge each other. We need to articulate misgivings and differences. We need to stimulate one another's thinking, not to reach some illusory fixed system of belief, but to make ourselves — individually and collectively — as strong and clear-headed and flexible as we can be. Issues I know of about which there are a variety of opinions, largely unexpressed, among us at the moment include: the role of ritual in our work, and what it ought to be like; the tension between keeping the conference as an Atlanta-based "congregation" and the impulse to network nationally with other similar groups; our recent structural changes; the role of celebrity speakers at the conference. You can probably name other points we ought to be talking about, too.

So listen. Respond. Challenge people. Shoot off an item about what's on your mind for **VISIONARY**, and take issue with what you read here. We can do it in a spirit of love. As Chairman Mao said

(but never genuinely meant), "Let a thousand flowers bloom." Make mine a gardenia, which I'll pin into my hair — unless you want to argue that I'd look better with a rose — in which case, we can discuss it. Δ

DANDELION'S THOUGHTS

This Year has become a year of evaluation for GSV. Part of this seems natural since we reached several milestones this year. We became an official nonprofit organization, we made our first high profile public appearance (at Atlanta's Gay Pride Festival), we got our news letter up and running, and expanded our activities further than ever before. From a numerological standpoint seven is a number of introspection and thought, so this is a natural time to turn in that direction.

When I look back over the past seven years, my reaction is one of amazement. The group of men who began Gay Spirit Vision, as well as those who have joined in to keep it going, had little experience in events planning. And while there is certainly much wisdom and some enlightenment among us and we have been inspired by an impressive list of guest speakers, we have no star guru to rally around. By all logic it should have been impossible to create GSV and make it last — but we did it. I turn and look to the next seven years completely without fear. What ever is coming in our future, and I know some of it will be challenging, is nothing that we can't handle as long as we continue to act from the highest place in our own natures and trust in the spirits that stand by, guarding our circle.

Each year, through our wonderfully unique combination of individual inspiration and group process we create our conference, and other smaller events, and each time we seem to find ourselves wondering, "Is it good, is it enough, will people come, will they like it, will it work?" This humility is probably a good thing and we probably shouldn't try to overcome it. Still, it's an equally good thing to look back and say

"Yes! It does work!" Each year in the heart circle, men stand and tell stories of growth and enlightenment, and others I have watched change and grow over the years, and I am filled with a joy that I can hardly hold inside. At those moments it is almost hard to believe that I have helped bring so much goodness and light into the world.

I think back seven years ago and remember Raven telling me about the conference he and some friends were putting together to see what would happen. He never let on that he ever dreamed it would become what it has. I look seven years into the future and choose not to dream because in my heart I feel any fantasy I could create would only be a pale intimation of the shining light we can become.

THE LAVENDER HEALING NETWORK

This past July, an attendee at our 1995 conference, Jason Serinus, sent out an e-mail to the GSV, Radical Faerie, and west coast-based Billy Club mailing lists asking if people wished to create an online healing network. Response was immediate, and the Lavender Healing Network was up and beaming within a few weeks' time. Currently consisting of approximately 28 lesbian, gay, and bi-online healers who come from diverse spiritual backgrounds and employ a wide variety of healing modalities, the LHN responds to requests by sending healing energy for a three-day period to subscribers (and their extended families and friends) of the GSV, Faerie and Billy mailing lists.

Although communication with the all-volunteer Lavender Healing Network is accomplished solely by e-mail, it is possible for anyone who receives this newsletter to request healing via someone who either subscribes to the GSV e-mail list or has e-mail capabilities. Simply send a message with the Subject: Request for LHN info.

To: jserinus@out.org

Cc: w-cox@portal.ca

After Dec. 10, also send your query Cc: HEALTOUCH@aol.com. Jason or one of the two LHN co-coordinators, Warren Cox and GSVer Gerry Mitchell

(a/k/a Dancing Dolphin) will send your friend complete information on how to make a request for healing. Once your request is received, a LHN coordinator will get back to you with the dates during which healing energy will be sent.

The LHN makes no judgment as to the nature of requests. Whether someone is experiencing a life-threatening illness, sitting at their ailing lover's bedside, leading a workshop, preparing for a job interview or an HIV-antibody test, about to visit family, or having a difficult time with a lover or pet, LHN members will send loving healing energy. Energy can also be sent to an entire group, e.g., attendees at a workshop or the family of someone in crisis, as well as to animals and to the planet. If you or someone you love needs support, please contact the LHN. Δ

TWO-SPIRIT WARRIOR

by John R. Stowe

Each year at Gay Spirit Visions, I'm amazed to see the tremendous healing, creativity, passion, and vitality carried by Gay men. These gifts seem to be inherent, something in our natures we were born to share. They also seem to be pieces of healing sorely needed by the world right now.

Listening to the stories, watching the faces, I'm also amazed at the depth of wounding most of us sustained. Even those of us who have been out for many years find places in which old fears and doubt still have a hold. Though subtle, these wounds tempt us to dim our light, or settle for less than our full potential. Year after year, I'm inspired by the men who break those chains, one step at a time, and claim their birthright to live with passion.

This year, I've written a book dedicated to all of us. I call it *TWO-SPIRIT WARRIOR: An Empowerment Journey for Gay Men*. It outlines a shamanic journey intended to help each one of us answer *for himself* the questions: "Who Am I? What does loving other men mean to me? What are *my* gifts and *my* Vision? How can I live with the greatest fulfillment?" The journey offers a broad range of exercises designed to integrate body, heart, mind, and spirit. We focus on practical, tangible results. Since each man's path is unique, your own responses create a personalized path to self-realization. That means:

- Developing a healthy relationship with body,

- Creating a supportive belief system
- Exploring and healing old wounds
- Reclaiming your power to act with integrity

- Finding where your gifts can bring you the most satisfaction and most help the world

Your power comes from learning to embody the strengths and wisdom of seven Gay-related archetypes — Magic Boy, Lover, Divine Androgyne, Elder, Shaman/Healer, Warrior, and Explorer/Scout. With their support, you'll create your own goals and commit to a life of passion, health, and vitality.

This book has been almost entirely inspired by the men I've met at Gay Spirit Visions. I'm proud to share with you what you've helped me create. At this point I'm also turning to you as "family," because I need your help. I've almost finished the initial manuscript revisions. In order to make sure the process meets my goals, I need comments, feedback, and stories from men who complete it. If you like, there are two ways to participate.

First, I'm facilitating a group in Atlanta, to meet weekly (Wed. evenings, Nov 6–Jan 29). We'll explore the process together, a week at a time. If there is interest, I plan to offer similar workshops (over several weekends) in other cities. Second, I'm looking for men interested in following the process on your own and sharing your experiences, comments, suggestions, and stories with me. At this point, I'm compiling a list of those who would be interested once the manuscript is complete.

I can promise that this process is unique, unusual, transformative, and fun. If you are interested, let me know: John Stowe, 232 Lansdowne Ave, Decatur, GA 30030. For the Atlanta group, call me at (404) 373-0111. Δ

FEEDING GAY SPIRIT IN THE "REAL WORLD"

by Al Cotton

[first printed in *Southern Voice*, Oct. 20, 1994]

I have talked in this space a lot (some readers might say ad nauseam) about my work with the Gay Spirit Visions Conference. It's especially present in my mind at this time of year, as I re-

turn from our conference and try to re-enter society. Going from an absolutely accepting gay environment back to what we call the "Real World" is jarring, to say the least.

But that's the ultimate test of "Mountaintop experiences" — whether they be conferences, Marches on Washington, music festivals, party weekends, whatever. It's magnificent while you're there, but how do you hold onto that clear, strong, powerful energy once you leave the Mountaintop?

My own example: I stayed at the conference center an extra night to become better acquainted with someone I met there. And before the evening was out, I found myself wondering if it was OK to neck in the all-but-empty Lodge, now that the other 127 of us Gay Spiriteers had gone. The mountain was still alive with our energy, buzzing and humming with Glad to be Gay-ness, but part of my mind had already trudged back to Shame-ville, USA.

The task of holding onto Gay Spirit is made harder still by how society feels threatened by it. Whether it's 100 men breathing together in a rebirthing workshop, 500 women going topless in the woods, or two people quietly celebrating behind closed doors, society would prefer that we not nurture anything that would distinguish us from them. And the assimilationist energy is so strong that we often just surrender, return to our dark little corner of the mainstream, take off our pumps, and put those sensible shoes back on again.

How do you hold Gay Spirit in the "Real World?" Well, since many of us use our conference to mark our New Year, let me describe a few resolutions I've chosen to help me tap back into that energy.

1. **Finding some daily time for myself:** This for me is a tough discipline, since I'm lazy about regularly doing things that are good for me, tending not to have the patience for meditation or going to a gym. The tool I hope to use to enforce that discipline is a daily meditation book called *A Few Tricks Along the Way: Daily Reflections for Gay Men, Queer Boys, Magnificent Queens & the People Who Love Them* by Gary J. Stern.

What I like from this book is its sense of nurturing all things gay men have chosen as spiritual paths, and not just the assimilationistically acceptable. Many of our

things that society finds unseemly are discussed here non-judgmentally. Titles for the first eight days of August, for example, are Addiction, Recovery, Sensuality, Akhenaten, The Peter Pan Syndrome, Body Hair, Radical Faeries and Rushing. For the day I began this column, October 7, the topic was "Learning." Let me quote:

Seeing the world anew is the important thing because the vision we've had pounded into our heads isn't just cloudy, it's crap. The heterosexist details are so deeply imbedded that we have to shake ourselves but good to be rid of them, and even then we find corners and crevices of our minds that haven't been turned inside out quite enough.

It isn't just the notion of being sexually straight that has to go. With that part of the lesson so badly bungled, why feel assured anything we were taught was right?... Our gayness offers entrance to a fresh world... finding our way somewhere open and big, a fascinating place rich with possibility and an infinite number of things to learn.

It's interesting to see how many of these little books have sprouted over the last year. It's as though a new 12-step group — Internalized Homophobes Anonymous — sprang up while no one was looking. And perhaps it should. Check one of them out at your favorite local bookstore.

2. **Elders:** Others have crossed these paths before us, and with the explosion of gay publishing, finding them is not only possible, but an important way to "encourage" us to challenge conformity. I've always looked up to Armistead Maupin, Cleve Jones, and the late Michael Callen as models of people with the courage of their inclusive convictions. But never have I seen such a fine roster of such men as in Mark Thompson's book, *Gay Soul*, sixteen interviews with gay men who have done pioneering gay male heart work (*now in paperback!*).

The interviews are astonishingly full of information that feeds the soul. From poet James Broughton (who calls the penis "the exposed tip of the heart"), to Harry Hay's musing about gay men composing a third gender, to Ram Dass's magnificently trenchant comparison of public sex to Hollywood's public celebration of celebrity ("... if somebody gets fisted in a club, is that different from somebody getting an Oscar?"), to the amazing Paul Monette, to astrologer Ed Steinbrecher, to Native

American Clyde Hall, to mystic Andrew Harvey, to Jungian Robert Hoepke, this book is full of candidates for Spiritual Herohood.

Other Mountaintops. There are more and more things like our conference, created by and for our community with the intention of connecting us to the "Real World" inside us. From the late Rob Eichberg and Honey Ward's "Experience" workshop, to women's music festivals, to leather runs (usually without the motorcycles), to the Gay Games, we have built many spaces where we gather to see the other faces of our Tribe.

The one that changed my life was the Body Erotic, a two-day workshop from the Body Electric School of Massage. The goal is to use the breathing techniques of Taoist massage to distract the mind sufficiently to raise the body's sexual energy high enough to do amazing things. Going in, I was a true New Age skeptic; before noon, I had learned how to see auras, just by changing my energy and looking a different way at someone. It certainly brought home another of James Broughton's lines, "You are a godbody, avoiding holiness." There was where I discovered how thirty naked men breathing together could be one of the cleanest and clearest expressions of spiritual brotherhood that it is possible to experience.

I close with what Shelly of the *mountain* staff reminded us in our closing heart circle: "not to forget that *this* [state of spiritual awareness on the mountain] is the 'real' world." Our true task it to make our homes, families, workplaces, and everyday life that much more *real*. Δ

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

•Special thanks to Jenny King, owner of the Whole Life Natural Foods for her culinary contributions to Friday night's meal. Jenny and her faithful assistant Karen were *mountain* staff at several previous conferences. Visit their shop in Highlands the next time you're at the *mountain*.

•Al Cotton reminds you to look for his review of Will Roscoe's collection of Harry Hay's writings, *Radically Gay*, in the Autumn 1996 issue of *The Harvard Gay & Lesbian Review*. He will also be

speaking at the Atlanta Whole Life Expo on Friday, November 22, on the topic of Gay Male Spirituality. Call him at 404/292-8567 for details.

•The exhibit of art and sacred objects from the Dalai Lama's personal collection will be at the Oglethorpe Univ. Museum through the end of the year. Call 770/364-8555 for details on how to attend the December 14 closing ceremony for the Kalachakra Sand Mandala.

•Don't forget about the Rainbow Spirit Convergence — Nov. 8-10 at the *mountain*. GSV co-founder Peter Kendrick is one of the organizers of this g/l/b/t event that seeks to "transcend queer identities to create sacred space for discovery, empowerment, & celebration." Call Kindred Spirits, 704/253-9882 for last minute info.

•There may still time to register for a few of the late dates for the Inka Prophecy Keepers' Journey to North America tour, as mentioned in Tom Whatley's Inka Shamanism workshop. Call 610/294-1036 for remaining dates, times, and registration.

•Next time you're near Taos, check out the newest Faerie gathering site, the Zuni Mountain Sanctuary at Ramah, New Mexico. Write to P.O. Box 636, Ramah, NM 87321-0636, leave a message at 505/783-4002, or send e-mail to dbal-sam@prodigy.com.

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VISIONARY

Volume 2, Number 3
November, 1996

©The Council of Trusted Elders of
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Opinions expressed in this publication are those of the individual writers and not necessarily those of The Council of Trusted Elders of Gay Spirit Visions, Inc.

Please send all correspondence to the above address. Readers are invited to submit articles and letters for publication.

HERE'S TO THE 'HO'S

by John R. Stowe

One of the greatest gifts of Gay Spirit Visions is the cross-fertilization that happens when men from many places come together. The weaving of new perspectives, ideas, and insights is grist for a whole year's work. This year, among the bits I bring back to ponder, are several statements made by Keith Hennessy.

Keith offers a perspective that comes from traveling widely within our Tribe. Some of his observations struck a chord in me, and I think bear reflection. Among them:

- a caution to stay flexible, to avoid the trap of mimicking religion through over-codification or empty repetition of our practices,
- the challenge to refer to spiritual energies using nongendered language, and
- the remark that "Where I come from, 'Ho' has an entirely different meaning." Did he mean "Ho," the Native American affirmation taken out of context? Or did he mean "'Ho," the inner where we all know and love to play?

In gratitude for Keith's participation, and in all due respect to him, our Circle, and to our working Sisters everywhere, I offer the following tongue-in-cheeks irreverence.

INVOQUATION

We invoke the Sacred 'Ho of the East,
Lover of Youth, whose exquisite firm flesh and still-slim frame
looks fabulous in a cheap, short mini, whose greatest charity is to
give poor college boys a break from time to time ...
To You, Sacred 'Ho of the East,
We offer our youthful Lust!
Everybody say, "YO!"

We invoke the Sacred 'Ho of the South,
Love-handled Siren, whose ripening body and full-blown thighs
offer enticements through yards of bright, floral print, whose arms
clutch tight for passionate days, at no extra charge ...
To You, Sacred 'Ho of the South,
We offer American Express!
Everybody say, "YO!"

We invoke the Sacred 'Ho of the West,
Dark Transformer, whose bearlike skin is pierced, tattooed, and
draped in blackened hide, predator and prey, dancing as one,
pushing the limits way, way beyond vanilla ...
To you, Sacred 'Ho of the West,
We offer our dark night fantasies!
Everybody say, "YO! Sir!"

We invoke the Sacred 'Ho of the North,
Snow-capped Queen, whose softening skin and arch expressions
play best 'neath pounds of makeup, whose time-sharp tongue
shreds the pretense of Ego, and still brings pleasure ...
To you, Sacred 'Ho of the North,
We offer all the men we've ever had.
Everybody say, "YO!"

We invoke from below the Sacred Earth,
Giver of Life, great non-gendered Womb, from whence spring
forth all the world's 'Ho's, whose back we pound in search of life,
love, glory, and ... men,
To You, Great He-She-It Below,
We offer ourselves, virgins once more!
Everybody say, "YO!"

We invoke from above the Sacred Sky,
Broad-winged Spirit, who lifts and confounds, guardian of that
great 'HoHouse on High, where departed 'Ho's reign on us forever,
with glitter, and sequins, and pearls ...
To you, Great He-She-It Above,
We offer our phalli in passionate worship!
Everybody say, "YO!"

And now, Brothers, open your hearts,
and arms, and legs, and every orifice, to welcome the Sacred Ho's
within. Stand forth in all your 'Ho-some glory.
Just say "YO!"

TOTALLY TITILLATING TALENT

[From Saturday night's talent show, we present excerpts from host David Salyer's "stand-up" routine and Cassandra's reverie on the childhood of Jesse Helms.]

You Might Be a Homosexual If...

If, as a child, you demanded to watch *The Wizard of Oz* on TV every year... you might be a homosexual.

If you cried every time you watched *The Wizard of Oz* on TV because you thought this might be the year Dorothy wouldn't make it out of the witch's castle alive... you might be a homosexual.

If you can name 5 Joan Crawford movies, 3 Judy Garland songs, and Tippi Hedren's daughter... you might be a homosexual.
If you have ever given your own mother hair, fashion, or beauty tips... you might be a homosexual.

If you wanted to be an altar boy just so you could wear those cute little robes... you might be a homosexual.

If you ever embarrassed a department store Santa Claus by climbing up on his lap and asking for a Malibu Barbie... you might be a homosexual.

If your G.I. Joe action figure ever married your sister's Barbie doll... you might be a homosexual.

If your G.I. Joe action figure ever went on maneuvers with your sister's Ken doll... you might be a homosexual.

If you were the only boy in 5th grade to raise your hand when the teacher called for volunteers to learn square dancing for the PTA talent show... you might be a homosexual.

If you instinctively understand why Mrs. Howell took all those clothes on a 3 hour cruise... you might be a homosexual.

If you'd rather buy a new VCR than learn how to clean the heads on your old one... you might be a homosexual.

If you have ever had anything besides a colon & rectal specialist's finger up your butt... you might be a homosexual.

THE SENIOR SENATOR

AS A BOY:

a speculative autobiography

i sat in the third row, in the old wooden chair
bound to the desk by black wrought iron,
the desk nailed to the floor
like a good boy to his lessons,
like a Jesus to his cross.
i pulled a notebook from the desk,
ignored the inkwell and the empty groove for pencils
and the names of long-forgotten Jims heart Karens and the teacher.
droned on and on...

(if the Indians sold the beads and trinkets,
took their twenty-three dollars and invested the sum).

i gazed at Robert,
soft, sweet, beautiful Robert.
my heart beat faster, like a Cherokee drummer
pounding a portal from chalkboard enscratchment
to the bugling elk and the eagles above,
crackling with bolt after bolt of blue-white lightning
aflake with wild gouts of auroral ecstasy
forking the craggy summits of my chair;
and within my loins, there grew a swelling
(at six percent compound interest)
bulging forth like the purple-headed stalk
of a Carolina pokeweed, not to be denied in the mild April sun,
and now i was in the garden of Eden, ripping
the stalk out of the ground, but it grew back
from its hairy root, branched out, unfurled
broad, green leaves from its purple-studded stem
until the swelling was so profane that how could anyone
in the class not see it...

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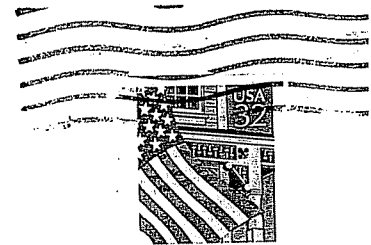
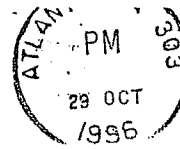
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Vo. 2, # 3, November, 1996
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