

VISIONARY

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September, 1997

ELDERS' PERCH

The theme of this year's conference is mentoring. I have to admit when this was first suggested I didn't feel particularly enthusiastic about it. When I think of mentoring I think of adults counseling teenagers. Certainly, with the suicide rate for Gay teens as high as it is, there is a great need for some one to do this. But it isn't something that I have any great interest in, and I wondered how many other men in our group were seriously involved or interested in this topic. However, through the discussions we have had in the Planning Committee, my definition of mentoring has broadened considerably.

Age is irrelevant to the act of mentoring. Several days ago I watched an excellent TV movie called "Any Mother's Son," the true story of the murder of a Gay sailor beaten to death by two of his shipmates. His family didn't even know he was Gay until after he was killed. Like too many sheltered middle American families, they were very ignorant about homosexuality, more than a little prejudiced, and completely unequipped to deal with this tragedy in their lives. It was the youngest daughter who was open minded and worldly enough to take on educating her family and leading them out of their bigotry and helping them find the courage to stand up and fight against the injustice

that had been done. This example also points out the fact that mentoring is not always a formal process. Mentoring is, often, simply a matter of offering guidance and leadership. Neither party necessarily has to label the exchange of knowledge between them as mentoring.

In some cases mentoring may not even be a conscious process. We have profound influences on those around us every day without even being aware that it is happening. Some people might say that this is more of a "role model" role than a "mentor" role. I don't think there is a clear division between the two. At the furthest ends of the spectrum a mentor is deeply and personally involved in offering guidance and advice while role model is a distant, almost abstract, example of inspiration. Between these two, however, there is a complete range of relationships and influence. It is the quality of that influence that is important, not the label we put on the relationship.

Almost everyone has a story about a small child that naively adds a bit of profanity to its vocabulary and then puts it to use in the worst possible circumstance. This should serve as a reminder that we have negative as well as positive influences on those around us. Small children are not the only ones open to learning bad habits. Almost all the knowledge we have about being human was learned from other humans. Even when we arrive at a personal experience, we primarily understand it in the context of what we have been taught before-hand by others. We must be aware, especially in entering into mentoring relationships, that we can teach our bad habits as easily as our virtues.

As I said at the beginning of this column, I thought that I had little to do with mentoring. Partly this was because I felt badly prepared to offer advice on anything more than a few narrow sub-

DATES TO REMEMBER

- Sept 13, 1997, 10:00am: GSV Monthly Planning Meeting*
- September 19-21: Eighth Annual Celebrating Gay Spirit Visions Conference "Spiritual Mentoring" at the mountain, Highlands, NC
- October 18, 1997, 10:00am: GSV Monthly Planning Meeting*
- October 20, 1997, 7:30pm: GSV Coming In Circle (see below)*
- November 8, 1997, 10:00am: GSV Monthly Planning Meeting*
- November 8, 1997: Post-Conference Pot Luck (tentative)
- December 13, 1997, 10:00am: GSV Monthly Planning Meeting*

*At Atlanta Friends Meeting House, 701 W. Howard St, Decatur, GA

jects. The process of creating this conference has caused me to look at my relationships with others and acknowledge the amount of mentoring I actually do. Even if this conference doesn't inspire us to greater involvement in sharing whatever knowledge we have, I hope it will make us more conscious of the influence that we have on each other, for better or worse, and the responsibility that we each have to offer those around us the very best of what we know.

Dandelion

COMING IN MEETING

On Monday, Oct. 20 Randy Taylor and Jeff Glauser will be reconvening the Coming In meeting. We will be at the GSV office in the Quaker House from 7:30 to 9:00 P.M. Everyone is welcome and we will be talking about the Sept. Gathering. This is a chance for men who were there to talk about the experience with those who couldn't make it this year. For those unfamiliar with the Coming In meeting this is our way of having an introduction to GSV.

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STARS, GATORS, AND GAY SPIRIT

by John R. Stowe

This past March, I escaped city and appointment book to canoe the Okefenokee Swamp. For three days, my friends and I pushed 31 miles through one of the most interesting landscapes in the world.

Springtime brings the weird beauty of the swamp to life. Tall, moss-draped cypresses explode with a haze of tiny green needles. Emerald yellow frogs less than an inch long yell amorously at each other from lily pads a thousand times bigger. Around them, the prairies deck themselves outrageously— patches of tall blue flag iris vie for attention with screaming yellow pitchers and floating orchids the color of valentines. At night, the bellows of gators in heat make a person shiver.

Canoeing here is no Cleopatra float down the Nile. You earn every foot of the way, one stroke of the paddle at a time, pulling a canoe that seems impossibly loaded with food and gear. By the time we reach our first campsite on a wooden platform beside a lily-choked lake, we've stroked twelve long miles. Our city-bred bodies are tired, sore, and hungry.

Life looks better over dinner. Rob's smoked salmon quesadillas (cooked on a single burner stove) and Lanny's chocolate-dipped strawberries — miraculously still crunchy after the day's heat — go a long way to raise our spirits. The fabulous food goes down with a round of enthusiastic camping and I thank the heavens I'm out here with a bunch of queens.

Afterward, some of us coax our canoes back to the lake and gaze in amazement at the Hale-Bopp comet. This far from civilization's light, the long tail sparkles clearly — not only in the velvet sky, but also below us in the still black water. The sight is unexpected and unsettling. We appear to hang suspended in space — which of course we are — one small speck in the midst of galaxies. Solid reality slips away.

At such moments, I tend to wax philosophical. Back on the platform, our being Gay had seemed important. Who else cooks like this? Who else creates such outrageous humor? Out here, though, personal identity seems irrelevant. When the splash of something big and unknown breaks behind us, I'm not thinking "Gay." And when a shooting star streaks across

half the sky, I'm not Gay, straight, or maybe even human -- just a nameless observer of this awesome wholeness. So just what is "Gay" spirituality anyway? Does being Gay make this experience different for me than for my straight friends in the next canoe?

Musing, I see our swamp trip as metaphor for all our spiritual journeys through life. I remember the weeks of preparation, all the painstaking planning, buying, packing, and hauling of stuff. As Gay men, our preparations for conscious spiritual questing are also elaborate. To even begin, we must overcome self-doubt and negative societal expectations. We must claim the right to love as we will and, in the face of still-widespread religious homophobia, the right to seek Spirit at all. These first steps may take years and yet they are only the beginning.

Many paths lead through this swamp. Some are broad and still. Others are narrow and choked with vines. Likewise the paths to Spirit. Some of us follow the quiet practices of meditation and retreat. Others choose the boisterous rapids of social activism. Some of us face the briar-choked paths that lead through disease. Some prefer to travel alone. Others find solace on the well-trod roads of traditional religions. Each path offers its own challenges. Each offers its own rewards. I suspect that most paths lead ultimately to the (cont. p. 3)

FIRE VISION

Since Conference IV, I have had the privilege of keeping fire on the mountain during our time together. In this year of mentoring, Spirit tells me that it is time now to make way for others to contribute their talents. So, this year's spirit vision for the fire on the mountain is extra special for me — it will be my last. Don't think that I won't be at the conference after this; that's not my intention. Rather, I see it as time for someone else to contribute the fire — holding that sacred space for us on the mountain and connecting in spirit to others keeping fire during that time.

This is what I see: At 4:00 PM eastern time on Thursday, September 18th, I would like to gather a group of fire keepers. Some may have had training in this, others may be seeking this

experience. From among these sacred brothers will come next year's fire keeper. When we gather we will ritually open the space for the fire and prepare ourselves and the area. There is much to be learned about keeping ritual fire. I hardly claim to know it all. I do keep the ashes of our previous fires, and hold the memory of them. I see our fire as one end of a bridge to others keeping fire on the planet, and to Spirit. I know there are other sacred brothers among you who have something to give and to gain from being part of a fire-keeping clan. I want to share this sacred place with you.

At sunset, we will light the fire. I would like to know and remember those who will be attending the conference in spirit across our fire bridge. I would like us all to offer the following prayer as we begin.

*Father Earth, Mother Sky, the one source
of all that we are and can ever hope
to be,*

*We honor you and your abundant blessings
which come to us through each
other.*

*We blend these elements of earth and air
in this sacred way to honor your presence
in our lives.*

*Great Spirit, we open our hearts and
minds to you.*

*Touch these elements with the flame of
your love.*

*May this light draw together all who seek
to know you in their daily lives,
to heal their wounds,
to nurture their spirits,
and to guide them along their
path of knowing and honoring
their contributions to this
world.*

*Strengthen and protect us on our journey
of soul.*

Blessed Be!

Please write to me if you are interested in joining this fire-keeping clan on the mountain on Thursday, September 18. Also write to me if you plan to join us in spirit across the fire bridge. I would also like to hear from you after the conference. Share anything that you experienced on your end of the fire bridge. We customarily allow the fire to burn out on Sunday. Then we gather the ashes to blend with those of our previous fires. Bless you on your journey.

TreeWalker

(cont. from p. 2) same place. What matters is to choose one and follow it, stroke by stroke, the best you can.

In the swamp, the fact of our being Gay comes up mostly when we're together — when we tie the canoes into an impromptu raft for lunch or pause at breaks for rest and companionship. "Did you see the eagle?" "Try paddling like this." "You go, Girl!" Gay is part of who we are, how we relate, how we joke and smile and share support. Yet, between breaks, our canoes drift farther apart and identity becomes less of an issue. Our attention focuses more on the mantra of the paddles and on direct experience of the life around us. "There ... (stroke) ... gator in the lilies ... (stroke) ... breeze on face ... (stroke) ... cool ... (stroke) ... sunlight through gray moss ... (stroke) ... the whistle of air through feathers, white ibises overhead ... (stroke) ... look! ... (stroke) ... cranes! a family! exotic red-crowned royalty ... (stroke) ... (stroke)...."

This night, drifting among the stars, everything falls into place. My path, the path of Gay spirit, is one of a million paths. The rewards, like this moment, are sweet and touch places that are universal. But even now, lifted beyond myself, I know the feeling will pass quickly. Moments of transcendence are like gravy. The real meat lies in the journey itself, the step by step, stroke by stroke movement along the path. I offer two more quick prayers of thanks — first, to Creator, that I can be here within this beauty and second, more mundane, to whoever it was that came here before us to show the way, one white tipped pole at a time, through the tangled turnings to reach this lake.

Watching the comet, I hold the answers to the universe for an instant more. Then, at the insistent whine of a mosquito, I reclaim my humanity with a loud, sharp slap. Time to go. Pick up the paddle. Stroke. This journey continues.

MEMOIRS OF AN ALTAR BOY

by Don Shewey

(When we asked Don Shewey for "some stuff lying around" that he might want to share with us in the newsletter, this is what we got back.)

"I was tickled by your request to publish something of mine in the newsletter. The first thing that came to my mind was

this chunk of a book I'm working on called *DADDY LOVER GOD: Diary of an Erotic Masseur*. I have a feeling a few other mountaineers might relate to this little excerpt. Hope you enjoy it."

I.

Church was my first theater, a show I was always rehearsing for.¹ In school the teachers taught us how to act Catholic. We learned how to dress for Mass and special occasions like first communion. We learned our lines by heart, and the songs, and the choreography — when to sit and when to stand and when to kneel. The teachers taught us what sins were and how to confess.

From the moment I first saw them, I envied the altar boys who got to be part of the theater of church. They had roles to play, a few lines, they got to carry things for the priest, they got to dress up in special robes. I very much wanted to be one. I was in third grade when it started, this craving not unrelated to my later craving to act, to go onstage, to get attention, to participate in a larger more colorful world that existed partly in the visible and partly in the invisible.

I actively wanted to be an altar boy, to be in the show every Sunday morning rather than sitting in the audience. I don't remember ever craving to be a Boy Scout or to play Little League baseball, though I ended up doing both. Those were executive decisions made without my consultation. I did like the uniforms. That was what all three of my ten-year-old hobbies had in common. As an altar boy, a baseball player, and a Boy Scout I got to wear three different costumes.

Altar boy was the raciest costume, of course. It meant wearing some version of a skirt. I couldn't wait to get into a cassock and surplice. The surplice I wasn't so crazy about, a gauzy, see-through white polyester pullover. But I liked the long black cassocks with snaps down the front. All the priests and altar boys wore them over their street clothes, but I fantasized about wearing nothing underneath my cassock. Partly what enflamed me was the idea of being a monk full-time and never removing the costume, taking a vow of poverty and not having another set of clothes to change into. The thought of being naked under a long

loose-fitting garment made the blood rush warm up my neck and behind my ears.

Being in church was really different from living in the trailer with my family. In church things were maintained with reverence and wonder and mystery. People wore special clothes and used a different language. Incense and candle wax dressed the air. I learned that behind the solemn ceremony there was humor and humanity. Kindness was available to a boy like me. All the priests looked at me and remembered when they too were sensitive homosexual children who didn't belong to their families. They took me in and accepted me without question.

II.

When I started being an altar boy I gained a new mobility and a new excuse for travelling around the base by myself. The chapel where I first served Mass was in the hospital, and the hospital also had its own small store with a magazine rack. It was here that I devised my own scheme for looking at *Playboy*. I would move a copy from the stack of *Playboys* to a lower rack and hide it behind the top copy of a movie magazine. I would pretend to be looking at *Modern Screen* and when I was sure no one was looking I would leaf through *Playboy*. I had trouble breathing as I did this. My heart pounded so hard it would block the breath from my throat. I could only scan the thick glossy pages for a minute or two before I'd have to turn back to the black and white pictures of Ava Gardner getting out of limousines until my pulse slowed down.

After a while I became familiar and more comfortable with the dangerous thrill of looking at *Playboy*. Though it never stopped being exciting and naughty to see women with their big pink tits exposed, I discovered an even more terrifying thrill: seeing naked men. It was rare in *Playboy*, which made each one all the more tantalizing. The first socially acceptable skin magazine was so overwhelmingly hetero that the only nude men on display were glimpsed in a regular section called "Sex in the Cinema" featuring color stills from the raciest movies of the day, usually made in Europe. I was always thrilled to see these pictures because the only other source of information about sexy movies available to me as a child was the newsletter of the Catholic League of Decency, which was always posted at church — backstage, as it were. (cont. p. 4)

ISAAC VERITAS 11 JULY 97 1 AUG 97

[or: The Faith of Abraham? Abraham
Veritas?]

Poetry from Cassandra

What a work is youth, say Thee
of old, abiding Faith.

Like balsa and mahogany
Jointed, on a lathe

With clamshell gears to rock the piece
Against the blade so keen.

So soft, so hard, without a seam;
So smooth, so fall, so lean

With fist of steel, with heart of gold,
With hand of eider down;
With diamond mind and opal soul;
Perfection, sought and found.

His form pays tribute to the Lord;
He is thy Maker's pride.

The old men staged a holy war.
He went. He fought. He died.

YOUNG ONES

Poetry from Bob Strain

Don't walk away, walk toward.
Don't go alone, come together.
Why mope, when laughter's its own re-
ward?

Your love disarms the hate forever.

Don't skulk in shadow. Pirouette
And face each other full in sun.
How sorely might your hearts regret
Those acts of love they leave undone?

To love, relinquish all your plans.
Commence the dance, dismiss the
doubt.

No starfield in its splendor spans
More grandeur than a soul who's out.

What is the point of hidden light?
The flame of love dispels the night.

(Altar Boy cont.) The League of De-
cency rated all new films according to
whether they were suitable to be viewed
by practicing Catholics. The ones that en-
flamed my curiosity the most were those
rated "C." The C stood for "Condemned."

Somehow I knew that the movies I
wanted to see, the ones that could tell me
what I wanted to know about sex and love
and bodies (titties and pee-pees), fell in
that category. Certainly, any of the movies
spotlighted by *Playboy's* "Sex in the Cin-
ema" department must have been
"Condemned." Even there, though, the

most I could hope for was a peek at the
hairy chest of some actor ravishing a
buxom pink blond. A rear view of
naked man was considered outrageous
and the outer limits of daring. "Full
frontal nudity" was so taboo that even
the expression seemed enough to
frighten the horses. You would no more
expect to see such a thing in a national
magazine than you would expect to see
a statue of the Virgin Mary dripping
tears of blood.

Such miracles did occur, however.
One day at the magazine rack I laid my
sweaty palms on an issue of *Playboy*
that devoted several pages to color stills
from a new movie called *Can Hierony-
mous Merkin Ever Forget Mercy
Humppe and Find True Happiness?*
The film starred Anthony Newley, who
seemed to spend at least part of the
movie running around bare-assed be-
cause there he was, letting it all hang
out on the pages of *Playboy*. The pic-
tures were tiny, and they were mostly
taken from behind, but in one or two of
them I could discern a dangly piece of
flesh framed by a ruff of pubic hair. Be-
sides my daddy in the shower at Battle
Lake, Anthony Newley was the first
grown-up man I saw naked. For years
he danced through my dreams, a curly-
haired Fred Astaire with no top hat, no
white tie, and no tails.

BOOK CORNER

by Al Cotton

The book to let y'all know about
this month is Cassells *Encyclopedia of
Queer Myth, Symbol and Spirit*
(\$29.95) by Randall P. Lundschen Con-
nor, David Hatfield Sparks and Mariya
Sparks. Conner is the author of *Blos-
som of Bone*, an out-of-print cross-
cultural study of the connections be-
tween the homoerotic and the sacred
(though amazon.com says they might
be able to find you a copy if you give
them six months. FYI, Conner and
David Sparks are partners, and Mariya
Sparks is their daughter.

What Conner and the Sparks have
done is pull this enormous body of re-
search together and arrange it alphanu-
merically. It begins with excellent thumb-
nail sketches of how each spiritual tra-
dition deals with gender variance is-
sues, from Buddhism to Goddess Rev-

erence, Judaism to African/American Di-
asporic. As a Shambhala (Tibetan Bud-
dhist) practitioner, I was pleased to find a
concise summary of Buddhism's tradi-
tional position with my sexuality. There
are also informative descriptions of
Yoruba traditions, of the similarities
among all Western European pre-
Christian religions (from Celtic to Greek),
and on and on, ending with Shamanism,
Shinto, Sufism, and Wicca. In a word,
"encyclopedic."

The tone is consistent with a politi-
cally correct Queer Theory class, which I
must admit I've found irritating ever since
I rid myself of the academic virus in 1980.
The introduction, for instance, apologizes
for not finding enough lesbian entries,
which seems unnecessary — you can't
make information up that hasn't been pre-
served. The book's stated position among
the Theory Wars is to bring together the
four strands of gender variance — gay,
lesbian, bisexual and transgendered —
under the banner of Queer Spirit. It rejects
the Queer Theory/lesbian-feminism posi-
tion that "male homoeroticism and les-
bian share no common history." It also
critiques academia's current pet theory
(Social Construction) by approaching the
project from the Essentialist position —
first articulated by Harry Hay — that there
is something inherently spiritual in the
gender variance that GLBT people mani-
fest. And it pointedly tells us that it does
not exclude entries that deal with inter-
generational love or S/M sexual expres-
sion, though some had encouraged them
to omit such references.

Choice is everything in a book like
this — what do you put in, who do you
leave out, how current, or timeless, does it
feel? To acquire a taste of the accumulated
choices and commentary I picked a letter
and read all of its entries. A selective list
of entries from "B" contains Baal, Ba-
balouaye, James Baldwin, bananas and
plantains, Tallulah Bankhead, Saint Bar-
bara, Clive Barker, bear, beard, Aubrey
Beardsley, the Beat Movement, Beowulf,
Sandra Bernhard, Bilitis, black, Black-
berri, Madame Blavatsky, blue, the blues,
Robert Bly, bodhisattva, Bonfire of the
Vanities (Savanarola, not Tom Wolfe),
Boudicca, Boy George, Malcolm Boyd,
Benjamin Britten, James Broughton,
Anita Bryant, bull, bulldagger, William
Burroughs, bushido, butter, butterfly and
bythos. (I love these dictionary juxtaposi-
tions — Beowulf and Sandra Bernhard?)

Boy George and Malcolm Boyd? I'd love to see that dinner party, with alphabetical placecards....)

And while these choices, especially for living people, might seem a bit eccentric, they reflect pretty well the patchwork that we've sewn together under the name of gay spirituality. There's also a good bibliography and an excellent thematic index, which allows you to find all the references to a particular tradition. Other random nuggets I found — the transgendered nature of Kwan Yin (who started as Avolokiteshvara, but worshippers in India insisted on seeing the figure as a woman); the spiritual aspects of opera; entries for every keynote speaker who's attended GSV except Tom Spanbauer (though nothing about conferences like ours); the I Ching hexagram with gay overtones (#13 — Fellowship with Men); the idea of Lazarus as Jesus' "Beloved Disciple." There's clearly great treasure hidden in these pages.

What we expect from an encyclopedia — sober, authoritatively exhaustive information — is all here. It's easy to quibble with choices someone else has made, much harder fashion something of this scope and magnitude. At \$30, the price is right for a book that will be a reference source I will actually use. And according to an e-mail I got from David Sparks, the publisher cut their information by almost 30% — let's hope we get a second volume with "the rest of the story" real soon.

GAY SPIRITUAL OUTREACH

(Here's an e-mail from Christian de la Huerta)

I am the founder of Q-Spirit, the group that is planning a conference on personal growth and spirituality in the fall of '98. We're presently in the process of determining the exact date, which probably looks like the end of September or beginning of October.

I'm attaching copy of my statement and a news release which I recently posted to your e-mail reflector. We would welcome your ideas and input and connections for the conference. If you'll provide a snail mail address I'll be glad to add your name to our monthly newsletter and send some other info. Although one of our goals is to have a web site by the end of

the year, at this point we're not equipped to send the newsletter by e-mail.

Christian de la Huerta

STATEMENT ON GAY AND LESBIAN RIGHTS AT THE GLOBAL SUMMIT OF THE UNITED RELIGIONS INITIATIVE CONFERENCE

Stanford University, Palo Alto,
California, June 26, 1997

First of all, let me be very clear in stating that I am aware that the most important priority of this conference is — and should be — the creation of a United Religions working together towards world peace. That is why I'm here. However, there is another reason I'm here, and I would not be true to myself if I didn't take this time to address an issue which I feel needs to be acknowledged in this conversation.

Just a couple of days ago, I was told a story about the Buenos Aires Regional Conference which preceded this Global Summit. In one of the small group processes striving to design the mission and values of a United Religions charter, a discussion ensued about tolerance — about who should or should not be included in a United Religions. As the participants came back together for the large group reports, the elected speaker, a minister from the Metropolitan Community Church in Buenos Aires, reported that his group had reached consensus that no one should be excluded because of their faith, their ethnicity, their national origin, their gender, their age, their political beliefs, etc. In fact, there was only one area where they had been unable to reach agreement — and that was sexual orientation. He then handed the microphone to another representative from their group, who stood up and said that his religion did not allow him to entertain that possibility, but that in discussing it, his mind had been expanded and now had new material to consider. I think that's great, even hopeful, but from my perspective, it's just not good enough.

I am here as an unofficial ambassador from a tribe of people belonging to every culture and faith in the world — people who share a love for others of

the same sex — those who in the West call ourselves, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or simply, queer. There isn't another group of people in this world which has been, and continues to be, as universally maligned, as universally repudiated, as universally excluded, as universally condemned, as universally excommunicated, and yes, even eliminated by some of the religions of the world.

The ironic, and tragic, thing is that before patriarchal times, back when women and the Divine Feminine were honored, before we entered this present period of our history several thousand years ago when, somehow, we got this mistaken idea that there was only one name for the Creator, one way to speak with and worship the Divine — and that we were entitled to use violence and military power to impose our beliefs on the rest of the world, that we were entitled to kill each other in the name of God — before these times gay and sexually ambiguous people were often spiritual leaders.

We were the shamans, the healers, the visionaries, the mediators, the peacekeepers, the "people who walk between the worlds," the keepers of beauty. The berdache or Two-spirit people of the Native American tribes — the wintke of the Lakota, the nadle of the Navaho, the minquga of the Omaha, the hwame of the Mohave — as well as the isangoma of the Zulu and the "gatekeepers" of the Dagora in Africa, the hijras in India, the galli priests of the goddess Cybelle in ancient Europe and the Middle East, and many others, were honored, respected, and even revered for the spiritual roles they fulfilled.

I am here today to remember the tens of thousands and probably millions of women loving women and men loving men who have been killed throughout history because of who they were. I come here, though, not from a place of victimization, but rather, one of empowerment. I am here to announce to you, as representatives of the world's cultures and religions, that we are reclaiming our natural, our sacred, our archetypal, and yes, our God-given role of spiritual leadership.

Today at lunch a group of us will sit together in the dining room. We would like to invite anyone — regardless of faith, ethnicity, national origin, gender, age, or sexual orientation — to share a meal with us.

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reprint, contact Christian de la Huerta, Executive Director, Q-Spirit, 3739 Balboa Street, Suite 211, San Francisco, CA 94121. Voice Mail: (415) 281-9377; Fax: (415) 386-3187; E-Mail: QSpirit1@aol.com.]

NEWS RELEASE

Gay Voice Heard at United Religions Conference

21 July 1997 – SAN FRANCISCO: At the recent United Religions Initiative (URI) Conference in Stanford University (June 23-27), a single voice was heard advocating gay and lesbian rights. Christian de la Huerta, Executive Director of Q-Spirit, a nonprofit organization promoting personal growth and spiritual development in the queer community, made a controversial statement advocating the inclusion of gays and lesbians in the effort to create a United Religions.

"Overall, I was overwhelmed by the support and positive response which my comments elicited," said de la Huerta, whose book, *Coming Out Spiritually* is being published by Tarcher/Putnam in 1998. "The statement received the first and most intense standing ovation of the entire week," he noted, adding that according to some estimates, about 80% of the participants stood in support, while the rest remained sitting and one person actually walked out and left the conference.

The United Religions Initiative (URI) was conceived by William E. Swing, presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of California, whose vision is an organization parallel to the United Nations for the purpose of creating dialogue and peace among the world's religions. One of the URI's goals is to produce a charter delineating the organization's mission, values, agenda, and organizational structure, to be signed in the year 2000 by all the world's religious faiths. "Given that most of the areas of war or strife in the world are presently caused by religious differences, this will be a challenging task," acknowledged de la Huerta. Bishop Swing said of the conference that "Our job is to wage peace among the religions of the world. URI – if successful – will be a spiritual United Nations. And what better place to give it birth than the Bay Area, which gave birth to the present political UN."

Asserting that most of homophobia's roots are grounded in religion, de la Huerta reported that he felt compelled to

deviate from the week's agenda and take a personal risk by coming out to an international religious audience because "the whole issue of gay and lesbian inclusion became unbearably conspicuous by its absence." His statement made reference to an earlier URI regional conference in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in which consensus was reached that no one should be excluded from a United Religions because of a variety of attributes including faith, ethnicity, national origin, and gender. "The only area where agreement could not be reached was sexual orientation," said de la Huerta, adding that although he realized that world peace is the obvious priority of the URI, and that homosexuality is a controversial and deeply divisive issue, he feels that it is one that cannot be ignored. "I left this conference even more convicted about the innate goodness and sense of justice of most people. With openness and communication, the fears stemming from each other's differences can be dissolved, and great progress can be made in the world."

SURFING GSV

Wonder what goes on on the GSV e-mail reflector? This recent exchange in response to a question shows how Gay Spirit and Cyberspace can combine in an open-hearted way to illuminate an issue. Since not only does this show how the reflector works at its best but it also addresses the Conference's theme of Spiritual Mentoring, we decided to reprint it here, in an edited and anonymized format.

Original Post:

Hello all:

I have a bit of a dilemma, and thought I would try this group as a sounding board.

I have met a 19 year old on line, and we have been chatting. (I am 35). He is very sincere and yet very naive. My first inclination is to run as fast as my legs will take me away from this kid. However, I know I wanted mentoring when I was his age, and think I could be a good role model for him. He says he is out to his parents, and they are OK with it. When I was 19, I also wanted sex a lot, and I have great reser-

vations about going there.

So, to make this readable, what is an appropriate relationship for a 35 year old man and a 19 year old man/boy?

Your comments are welcome

Response #1:

All but one of the 5 real relationships I've had were with guys at least 1/2 my age. I am currently dating a guy who is 31 and I am 52. Its a fun and exciting association. The greatest separation was 27 yrs. Ages is not a stumbling block....it depends on the interaction of needs/goals and commonalties.

I think that most men my own age would have a hard time keeping up with my libido.

Response #2:

It's late and I must be off to bed so I promise to write more but for now let me say it is a beautiful dilemma. There is as much light as shadow in spiritual/sexual mentoring. If we are doing our own work and are clear we are not in a place of exploitation, I think it has a place; yes, even between a 35 and a 19 year old. I will certainly look forward to hearing the feedback you get and I hope you will consider keeping the dialogue out in the open for many to partake.. I foremost want to support you in this relationship, but I think many of us could benefit from the discussion.

Response #3:

My generalized sense about relationships with people with that big an age difference is that the differences are so big that he won't be able to be a reciprocal partner. It would be different, I think, if he were 30 and you 46, or 44 and 60. But for someone that young, to use a flip line that has some truth: Relationship-wise, I'm not interested in raising other people's children. And chances are, if a relationship started at this age, when he grows into more of an adult, he will have outgrown what you have to offer him.

I would make it clear to him that sex is out of the realm of possibility, and ask him if he wants to have coffee. That way, if he's trying to use you (using people does cut both ways, you know), it will be clear. And then trust your heart for what develops after that.

Response #4:

I was but a lad of 21 when I met my mate 19 years ago and he was then 45, we

are still together. It's a path of much growth, give and take on both parties. I am much older than my age, while my lover can be younger than me at times. There is no way any relationship can be generalized in biological age difference categories, it is only about the relationship at any time, nothing else. Just keep your eyes open, your head up, and share "yourselves" to each other.

Response #5: A 59-year-old replies:

Show respect. Don't try to swallow/hide your true feelings and intuitions. Be open to what is mutually beneficial. Trust yourself. Trust him. Pay attention to your fears; they show your own pain points and potential growth focus.

Blessings. Have lots of fun. Learn more about yourself, about life, about love. Hugs, and thanks for asking....

Here in the Midwest, often attracted by younger men; having also wanted mentoring when I was younger; finding that often there's a mutual attraction that leads to great spiritual depth as well as some fun sex/intimacy at times.

#2 (con't): For me personally I agree with [#3] with respect to not personally wanting to be in a relationship whereas I am primarily parenting. When I am ready for that I will adopt, although I think we take turns doing this in relationships at no matter what age. I think most of my relationships have been with "daddy" types, some older and some younger. I like to be the young spirited one, although am also able to wear my daddy hat. I do believe a closer range of age allows for a more even play of child, adult, and parent. With a much younger partner the balance would I think likely shift to having to spend more time being parent and adult. That's a guess. Maybe the younger partner would give you more opportunities to be child-like. I don't know.

What I want to be OK out there in the world is that we may by our own choosing enter into any of these relationships. Certainly we saw a beautiful example of an intergenerational relationship with Mark Thompson and Malcolm Boyd.

What I don't agree with [#3] about is making sex out of the question. This is where I am likely to get myself in trouble. I generally believe I have a different take on sex with young people. I believe it is also an aspect of mentoring. It is not my work; I don't feel called to sexually mentor young people but I feel it is the job of

some. I am grateful for those who where there for me in my youth. We as a community have become homophobic, fearful that we might be perceived to be recruiting or even sexually abusing troubled youth. So not only do I see the possibilities for sexual relations between a 35 and 19 year old but...well let's let it suffice to say much younger and much older.

Most of my therapists over the years have tried to help me see that I was sexually abused as a child. Some of it might have been abuse but from a very young age I was creating even manipulating situations for sexual relations. [here I will support #3's comments about protecting yourself in these situations...as it can be the youth manipulating and exploiting the elder.] Yes I may have been out there looking for the love of an absent father. Perhaps vulnerable, but I was the one looking. I don't think our society likes to perceive children as being sexual, that we are born sexual beings.

I also understand there are people out there most assuredly, unquestionably have been abused, sexually, emotionally, spiritually. So I do not speak of actions imposed on us against our will. Me personally, I came into this lifetime as a very powerful sexual/spiritual being and I take responsibility for my encounters in my youth. They did not all feel good, but just the same I believe I was a co creator of the experience.

Response #6:

You say you've been chatting online ... Do you two live in the same city, or close enough for easy travel? Have you talked on the phone?

So far, everyone's answers have seemed to presume that you two have the potential of meeting in the all too solid flesh ... So, do you? Have you two *met* ?

If you're in Alaska, and he's in Florida, I think you don't have to worry too much about the sexual implications ... heh heh, unless you're *really* good at astral travel! (GRIN) If you're across town from one another ... well, I'm not at all sure that I'd trust his appraisal of his parents' degree of cool

Like many others have been saying, when I was young, I sought out older guys to be both father/mentor figures and sex partners. I learned the

hard way — as it were — that those two roles don't mix at all well, for either party. But, [#4] are a testament to the miracles of individual differences, and to the ever-vigilant care of the Powers.

And, I too encourage you to decide what *you* want ... And, please, think about it in this light as well — are you ready to be a father/mentor, who will inevitably be left behind when this man/boy comes into his own — just as surely as his biological father will be?

That's the agonizing beauty of mentoring ... nurturing and watching the young ones grow, and suffering the anxiety of their separation, for they *must* separate if they are to be free, and whole...

Response #7:

After reading several of these posts I was thinking that this situation had little to do with me. At 40, I know I wouldn't date someone under 28-or-so unless he was unbelievably gorgeous and had an endless crush on me!! Even then, I know the risks of attempting to communicate across generations: different needs cause different listening. Dating someone across an "age gap" is not impossible... just challenging!

I pondered, and surprisingly remembered my most intense "dating relationship": I was 21 and he was 40. Yes, "Father Figure" did have something to do with it, and yes, *I* pursued HIM! It's amazing how LITTLE his resistance could stop my "hormones gone wild"!! We'd spend a weekend at his place. Aside from eating, sleeping, sex, or taking a walk, I would be burrowing through my school books getting ready for Monday's exam, and he would watch TV or listen to opera. "What a life," I thought. "No studying, no exams, plenty of money in the checking account, and he actually UNDERSTANDS what they're singing about!"

The biggest thing on my mind was all the new BEGINNINGS before me. He was always keeping an eye open for COMPLETING things. I couldn't wait to finish school and get my first "real job", and he was contemplating how to climb a bit higher in the endless, upward, corporate ladder. He knew who he was, and I was just 3 years "out of the closet" with myself but not with anyone else from my past.

It made for some interesting situations, but now I know that the thing I lacked the most was the ability to commu-

nicate.... If I could have quelled some of my fears I would have played the game better, but at 21 I'd never experienced this, so stumbling seemed to come naturally! How do we go about living a life PURPOSEFULLY without taking it way-too seriously? The beauty of an "age gap" relationship is that it offers lots of CONTRAST. The challenge is in responding to that contrast without inflicting or internalizing DAMAGE when confronted with WHAT I/WE DON'T KNOW.

The gift I would give to a young friend, from what I have learned in 40 years, is the appreciation of peace. Peace, as part of my everyday experience. Peace, instead of the rage and insanity spewing all over radio, tv, magazines, and every other communication about who we are as a species. Peace, in trusting that EVERY thing has a meaning, time, and place. Including me. "To thine own self be true."

Enjoy your journey. It will be what it is supposed to be. It may have sex, or it may only be communicating ideas, but it has a purpose. Can you discover what the purpose of this "relationship" is? WILL you?

Response #8:

I just loved your reply (#7). Well done! Differences in age are merely opportunities not crises. Peace for me is the tranquillity of order which gives sense and meaning to time and place and relationships. I look forward to reading you again on E-mail.

Response #9:

Ask yourself what about this guy wants to make you run away from this kid... I remember when I was 19 and was pretty clear as to what I was doing, and playin with older guys was erotic and nice, if I NOW dated someone much younger than I there's that issue of being 'wiser' so I could manipulate this guy, then again it takes two...Honesty in self-observing my wants is tricky, but very rewarding. I have felt threatened by my fears many times, but when I acted in spite of them, the rewards/illuminations have been blessings.

Give it a try and keep an eye on YOUR feelings, sounds like a gold mine to me.

This is where the dialogue stopped

as we went to press. Visionary Vol. 2, #1 has information about how to subscribe to the reflector if you're not a member, or send an e-mail to:

dbrodeur@mindspring.com.

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Gay Spirit Visions, Inc.
P.O. Box 339
Decatur, Georgia 30031-0339

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

To submit articles by e-mail contact Al Cotton:
Bearsokr@aol.com
or Joe Chancey
A1Madrigal@aol.com

Editor's Note: Since we have some space left over (and I didn't have the time or energy to manipulate the text to fill it) I thought I would put in an editor's note, except I'm not the editor, I'm the typesetter, or perhaps more accurately, the desktop publisher.

We would like to publish pictures of GSV events and original black and white art work, cartoons, etc.. **Photographs need to be black and white and need to have very high contrast.** So, if you read this before going to the mountain, and you're taking a camera you might consider including a roll of black and white film.

And as always, we welcome your submissions of written work.

Thanks,

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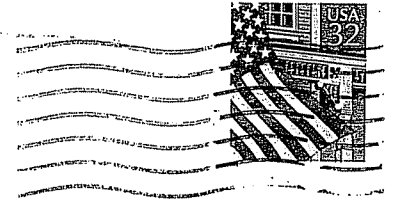
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VISIONARY
GSV
P.O. BOX 339
DECATUR, GA 30031-0339**



FIRST CLASS MAIL

Jim D. Jones
45 Tanglewood Rd.
Newnan
GA 30263