



Elder's Perch

A WORD FROM THE TRUSTED ELDERS

By John R. Stowe

We're beginning 1998 with a new Council of Trusted Elders. In accordance with our bylaws and the non-profit requirements, the Council handles GSV's legal and financial affairs and advises the larger planning committee on matters of direction and focus. At January's planning committee meeting, the following men were chosen by lottery to serve on the five-man Council:

- Presiding Elder - John Stowe
- Recording Elder - Martin Isganitis
- Bursar - Joe Chancey
- Elders at Large - David Salyer, Gerry Mitchell.

Joe is serving on the Council for his second year; David and Martin are each starting their third year of Council service, giving us the benefit of continuity and their ongoing experience. Leaving the Council are Dandelion and Bernhard Zinkgraf, and we thank them for their service.

At our first meeting on Jan. 25, we set into motion two projects. The first, focal-

ized by Joe and Martin, is an overall financial evaluation of GSV to determine our present status and financial needs. If necessary, this might include setting up a financial committee as part of our ongoing planning process.

The second project — focalized by me — is to redraft a mission statement for Gay Spirit Visions. Our intent is to develop a clear, concise expression of our purpose and goals as an organization. We'll discuss this at the February planning committee meeting, head back to the drawing board if necessary, then let you know what we come up with via the website and the next Visionary.

This isn't the first time we've looked at our mission. In fact, we've worked with several very good mission statements over the years. Why bring it up again? First, since our planning process at GSV is based on consensus, our discussion of the mission statement will help us refine our collective vision. As we come into agreement on purpose and goals, the mission statement will help us establish priorities in the coming year. It will give us a standard against which to measure how the new projects we're considering fit in with our overall purpose and a guide for how to allocate our time and resources most effectively.

Reaffirming our mission is quite timely. Gay Spirit Visions is in a phase of rapid expansion. The planning committee has nearly doubled in size since last year. This very welcome influx of energy and inspiration gives us the opportunity to tackle more ambitious projects than we have in the past — and a look at the calendar will tell you the list is impressive! Already, planning is in full swing for next September's Conference at *the mountain*. We're working on the spring program, socializing each month at potlucks, looking forward to excellent fundraising workshops by Bernie Morin and John Ballew in March, and talking about what kind of presence to make at Atlanta's Pride fes-

Dates to Remember

- AFMH= Atlanta Friends Meeting House
701 W. Howard Ave., Decatur, GA
- March 7, 11.00am: Conference 1998 Committee Meeting, call King Thackston (404.688.8234)
- March 14, 10.00am: GSV Planning Meeting, AFMH
- 7.00pm: Potluck @ Gary Kaupman's (404.373.0111)
- March 15: Bernie Morin Shamanism fundraiser (see info. on page 2) (This was mistakenly identified as a Reiki fundraiser in the last newsletter.)
- March 20, 7.30pm: Body Electric/GSV heart circle. Fairfield Inn, 1470 Spring St. FREE.
- March 21-22: Body Electric fundraiser (see info. on page 2).
- April 4: Spring thing: Canceled, may be rescheduled for July or August
- April 11, 10.00am: GSV Planning Meeting, AFMH.
- 7.00pm: Potluck @ David Lender's house (404.892.6970).
- May 9, 10.00am: GSV Planning Meeting, AFMH
- 7.00pm: GSV Volunteer Recruiting Potluck @ Gerry Mitchell's house, call 404.303.8978.
- May 29-31: GSV Spring Weekend, *the mountain*, call Dandelion for info 770.972.8028.
- June 13, 10.00am: GSV Planning Meeting, AFMH.
- 7.00pm: Potluck @ TBA
- June 26-28: Atlanta Gay Pride Festival. Watch for info. on GSV's plans.
- September 24-27 (Thursday thru Sunday): the 8th Annual Celebrating Gay Spirit Visions Conference, *Invoking Vital Spirit: Envisioning Your Path to Wholeness, @ the mountain*, Highlands, NC.

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tival in June. We've moved quite actively into cyberspace with our website and e-mail reflector, along with figuring out how to accomplish educational outreach both here in the Southeast and elsewhere.

All this activity is exciting! It also presents challenges as we find that some of our methods for getting things done are stretched to the limit. In that light, we've been reviewing our committee structure — with a lot of help from Reid Moody — to see where we need to make changes in order to meet new needs. We've discussed the possibility of hiring part-time office help. We're hoping to create a "volunteer corps" to give more men a way to become involved in supporting our increasing number of events — Gerry Mitchell's the man to call if you're interested in helping out. If you've got input or want to be more involved, let someone on the planning committee know and come join us.

Here in the South, Springtime is already starting to burst forth with new life. Here at GSV, we're doing the same thing. You're invited to get in here and enjoy all of it!Δ

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Got anything you'd like to say? A book you want us to know about? An issue to get off your chest? A poem you'd like to share? Send your submissions to *Visionary*, and we'll put you in our newsletter. Call 404.292.8567, e-mail to bearsekr@aol.com, or mail to P.O. Box 339, Decatur, GA 30031-0339. Δ

FALL CONFERENCE DATE CORRECTION

The dates for the Fall Conference were announced incorrectly in the last newsletter. The conference is scheduled for September 24-27, 1998, the week following the Equinox. Note that in your calendars, and excuse us all the detail demons that seem to be having fun with us lately. Δ

FUNDRAISER UPDATES

GSV finds itself in the wonderful position of having two amazing teachers offering their work to benefit our organization.

FIRST:

SHAMANISM WORKSHOP

With Bernie Morin

From workshop coordinator, Gerry Mitchell

Dolphin Splashes of Joy to you,

I have the honor and privilege to share with you a special workshop. "Personal Shamanism," presented by Bernie Morin, is an introductory course in

Shamanic journeying techniques for healing and personal growth. It is designed to inspire you on your spiritual path. Bernie has graciously offered to share this workshop with Gay Spirit Vi-sions to use as a fund-raiser.

Bernie Morin shared with me about this work, "It is my belief that we all have shamanic capabilities. I wish to be clear in stating that I do not teach North American Indian Shamanism. Shamanism is a global practice and is cross-cultural. However, I do rely on native animals and use drums and rattles that are often of native Indian origin, simply because that is what is available."

MARK YOUR CALENDARS AND SEND REGISTRATION TODAY!!!

Space will be limited. Early registration for this workshop if received by March 7th will be only \$85, otherwise the workshop will cost \$110, with limited scholarship and work study options available. Please mail registration to GSV Personal Shamanism Fund-raiser in care of Joe Chancey, 341 Oakland Ave. SE, Atlanta, GA 30312-2232. Make checks payable to GSV, note: "Personal Shamanism Workshop." For more information please contact Gerry Mitchell, 311-D Lakemoore Drive NE Atlanta, GA 30342. Phone 404/303-8978 or E-mail: Healtouch@aol.com

This workshop will be held on Sunday, March 15, 1998, from 9:30am to 5:30pm. Dress casual and comfortable, layers recommended.

You should also bring:

(1) something to lie on (sleeping bag or blanket), (2) a small pillow, a scarf or handkerchief to cover your eyes to shade the light, (3) a drum or rattle (or a home-made rattle constructed from a yogurt container with a few beans inside), (4) a personal talisman (necklace, crystal, stones, etc.), (5) a journal and a pen. We will take a break for lunch, so plan on running out to one of the nearby restaurants, or bring your own lunch.

The workshop will be held at the Lakemoore Colony Clubhouse on Nancy Creek associated with the Lakemoore Colony Condominiums on Lakemoore Drive. Traveling north on Roswell Road, turn right onto Lakemoore Drive (across from Pike's Nursery), approximately one mile north of Piedmont. The Clubhouse is on the right, a short block in on Lakemoore Drive from Roswell Road.

I'M SO EXCITED!!! Hope to see you there!

Agape,

Gerry Mitchell

AKA Dancing DolphinΔ

SECOND:

BODY ELECTRIC WORKSHOP

From local coordinator, Al Cotton

The weekend following Bernie Morin's Shamanism workshop, March 20-22 (on the Equinox), John Ballew and Al Cotton will host a Body Electric weekend fundraiser in Atlanta to reconnect men who have attended both the Body Electric and GSV. Friday night will be a "no charge" Heart Circle open to all men who have attended either weekend. The workshop starts on Saturday, March 21, with a cost of \$195, the same price Body Electric charges its alumni to retake the Level I workshop. We have already sent letters to those men who qualify to attend; if you didn't receive a letter, or would like to be considered for attendance, get in touch with Al Cotton at 638 Stratford Green, Avondale Estates, GA 30002, phone, 404.292.8567, or e-mail, bearsekr@aol.com. Al is the new Atlanta coordinator for Body Electric, and wants you to know that workshops are scheduled for May 2-3 and Nov. 14-15. Call him for more information.

The proceeds from both March workshops, after expenses, will be donated to GSV's general fund. Attendance is limited at both, and limited scholarships are available for those want to assist in putting on the workshop. We feel extremely gratified at the synergy these teachers have helped GSV create, and hope you all take advantage of the opportunities these workshops provide. Δ

LUST

By Al Cotton

Lust is a charged word for gay men, or at least for this gay man. Upon coming out, I deleted the concept from my vocabulary as something I couldn't translate into gay culture. The only gay men who used the word were "straight-identified assimilationists" whose opinion I did not want to hear.

I ran across an old e-mail last week, reminding me that as recently as eighteen months ago I used my dislike of the judgment I felt behind the word to start one of the early flame wars on the GSV e-mail

reflector. One subscriber, an especially vocal gay Christian who had no prior history with us, was wearing his faith rather smugly on his sleeve, I thought. I got fed

the national "themed" rooms (HairyChest M4M, Dungeon M4M, Construction M4M, Latino M4M) and look for someone local. Three hours

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up with his attitude when he used the word "lust" to demonize sex, and I fired back. In my book, his feedback was automatically discounted — even if he happened to be right.

A recent experience on America On-Line has caused me to rethink my position. Sitting in one of the Atlanta chat rooms one Friday night last month, I got an instant message (IM) from a guy named HotStud4Me (name changed to protect the obnoxious). We swapped pictures, and he was immediately interested, wanting me to come on over that night. I told him I usually prefer to meet guys for coffee first, and we typed small talk for a few more minutes. All next week, he kept pestering me, putting me on his Buddy List and sending me an IM as soon as he saw that I was online. I finally convinced him I was serious about having coffee first, and we set up a time to meet.

When we got to the coffeehouse two things were almost immediately apparent: he was absolutely gorgeous, and there was absolutely *no* chemistry between us. We were polite, and wandered off separately about 30 minutes later, unlikely to reconnect, I thought.

About a week later (another Friday night as a matter of fact), he IM'ed me again, wanting me to come over for sex. I told him I had to get up early, and in a revealing drop of the veil of Southern politeness, he typed back, "I've got to get this taken care of!" Hmmm, I said, as I quickly deleted him off *my* Buddy list, and wondered at the experience of being treated like a penis-support system for horny and rude 27-year-olds. (HotStud4Me — a handle so clearly focused on self-gratification should have tipped me off earlier that generosity might not be his strong suit.)

Looking back, I thank him now for showing me how AOL helps gay men to objectify each other. My typical AOL pattern last year: I'd go into an Atlanta M4M chat room (inaptly named, since almost no one is ever caught "chatting" in them) and look at the various handles — Atl69 4u NOW, StudTopAtl, HotelHorny, and on and on, 23 at a time, each cruising each other's profiles, trying to guess whether they should ask for pictures. I'd check out one room, then try for 5 minutes to get into another room, then go to one of

later, in a dazed and zombified yet still horny mode, I'd crawl off to bed. How on *earth* did people do that when AOL charged by the hour?

Ultimately, my HotStud friend showed me a sharp glimpse of his out-of-control lust, enabling me to recognize it as a reflection of my own. Lust, I realize now, is an appetite, just like eating and drinking. Gay men understand gluttony or drunkenness as appetites that need to be controlled; but the blind spot with regard to lust is easier for us to excuse. We all came out into an environment where we knew we could not trust one word that straight society had to say about gay men having sex. We had been lied to about that topic our entire lives. We know that, even in the enlightened '90s, a gay male kiss is undisplayable on network television. It is no wonder that we've chosen to listen only to gay feedback in deciding how we define and evaluate lustful thoughts.

For me, the type of lust that justi-

The fear at the base of this compulsive sexual projection turns out to be loneliness.

fies the title of "deadly sin" is a sort of free-floating appetite for any attractive man who I might see — walking down the street, in the grocery store, in the elevator at work, waiting on me at a restaurant. To use Caroline Myss's invaluable terminology for discussing energy, it's like having free-floating energy circuits coming out of my second chakra, scanning the horizon to find men to attach themselves to. It feels predatory — I'm staring a hole through this guy, as though we could just climb on top of the apples in the produce section, or ask the people at the next table to move, and then "do it."

But what do I really want to come from an encounter like this? The few times someone seems likely to reciprocate my interest I usually disconnect very quickly. Only on vacation, in a strange land with no claims on my time or responsibilities to pull me away, do I generally follow up on these sorts of immediate attractions. Myss' suggestion — not to send my spirit on such

acquisitional missions, and to call it back when I notice its departure — is good medicine for me.

One of my Shambhala meditation instructors had some advice on a way of looking at lust that I've also found useful. George, a gay man, suggests that if you take the feeling of horniness and sit with it instead of acting on it, you can unpeel it like an onion. When I tried, I saw that I was fixating on the idea that somehow this specific person might be the one who can fill this hole in my life, and that I didn't want him to get away without finding out. The fear at the base of this compulsive sexual projection turns out to be loneliness. As soon as I talk with the object of desire, however, the fear of losing him gives way to my experience of dealing with him as an actual man with his actual personality, issues and flaws, and I'm outta there.

This sort of lustful objectification of other men is exactly the opposite of the subject-*subject* consciousness that Harry Hay suggests is at the root of gay male existence. For the lustful, the point of having sex is not about connecting to another individual at all, it's all about your physical needs and finding a person who can satisfy them right now. Alas, when we behave this way, there is little difference between the objectification that a man projects upon a woman and that of a gay man single-mindedly prowling around for

someone to "get this taken care of" for him.

The discussion we need to initiate in the gay community is about the difference between sexual desire and lust. So I'll start. Lust, in my experience, is sexual desire that overruns my basic humanity in an uncontrollable rush to satisfy itself, that objectifies the person I'm having sex with, that rules my existence until it is satisfied.

We can neither give ourselves over to it, nor can we adopt mainstream society's rules wholesale for dealing with it — i.e., no sex before marriage, followed by no marriage for gay men. Contrary to Dr. Laura's polemics, there are differences between procreative and non-procreative sex, and they should be considered and discussed. But our community needs to watch out for our own knee-jerk, pro-sexuality reactions just as much as straight society needs to notice its own, anti-sexuality reflexes. Lust is neither a figment of our erotophobic society's imagination nor a patriarchal creation to keep

us in line. It's a behavior that can be damaging to one's health and well-being, and needs to be taken seriously.

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WHAT'S IN A NAME?

By Dandelion

There is only one Divine Consciousness in the universe but it has an almost infinite number of faces and answers to an infinite number of names. Stop and consider the number of roles you play in a week, a month, or a year. If you think long enough you can identify dozens — each a part of you but each manifesting certain parts of yourself to certain ends. Your relationships to your lover, your mother, your boss, or your secretary are not at all the same. On a recent afternoon I ran into an acquaintance who commented "It's strange to see you not dressed in leather." While it was still me, in a certain way I'm not the same person in corporate drag, on a weekday afternoon, that I am dressed in leather, at the bar on Saturday night. You

outnumber women in my world and are the exclusive object of my physical interest. Therefore my heart resonates much more to the image of walking on the breast of God than to walking on the bosom of the Goddess. My relationship to my own female nature is abstract and emotional where as my relationship to other women is predominantly intellectual. These qualities seem to resonate with the ephemeral nature of the sky. Further, in the Celtic tradition that dominates the mythology of my path, the God is forever being reborn in the womb of the Goddess, just as the earth finds life in the womb of the atmosphere. Each spring trees, like giant phalloi, pour their pollen into the air, impregnating the biosphere and bringing the earth back to life.

Greco-Roman and Native American mythologies are two traditions that many readers might have at least a passing familiarity with. If you have studied these at all, then you are aware of how rich and complex traditional mythology can be. I don't think it is

them Deities were an important and necessary part of everyday life. I fear science has left our Deities with increasingly little to do. As we grow more distant from the Deities we worship, we grow more distant from our own souls as well.

As individuals, and as a community, it is important to find ways of creating myths that we can believe in. Even though our myths may seem more conscious poetic metaphor than superstitious fact, if we want to fully express our spiritual nature we must weave Deity and Spirit as tightly as possible into our everyday world. Try sometimes to look at life with more mystical eyes and create stories for yourself that resonate deep in your soul. Just for a moment, set aside *National Geographic* and *Scientific American* and dream a dream for your world.

The Ritual Committee for the Fall Conference would welcome any thoughts or mythologies you would like to share. You could send them by post to our P.O. Box or e-mail them to me at DadsBad-Boy@aol.comΔ

ON JESUS

By David Salyer

When I was seven years old my mother sent me to Vacation Bible School at the Baptist church several blocks away from our home in Huntsville, Alabama. This is where I learned to make a Bible out of a bar of Ivory soap, a napkin, glue and some glitter. How? You put glue on the soap and fold the napkin over it. Then you write "Holy Bible" in glitter. This was my first formal religious training.

One day we put away the construction paper and crayons long enough to meet with Brother Armstrong. He wanted to show us the baptistery (a scary part of the church with steps leading down into water). Then he made a proclamation about accepting Jesus Christ as our personal

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can invoke Spirit by any name you choose but some will get a different response than others.

Traditionally, Communities invoke an image of deity that reflects their own lives. Though, there are exceptions, I would say that tribal people who are more vulnerable to natural elements seem most likely to see Spirit as a force of nature, while urban societies that have some immunity to the elements are more likely to imagine Spirit as a human image. Matriarchal societies focus on Goddesses and patriarchal societies tend to focus on Gods. Monotheism is rare; probably because most communities see life and the world as too complex to be contained within one Deity. The Earth Mother is a widespread image of a Goddess. Ancient people viewed the earth as feminine because they did not fully understand the processes of procreation. Babies seemed to magically form in the mother's womb and plants magically grew from the ground. The sky, being the opposite of earth, was given a male identity.

In my own spiritual practice I think of the earth as male and the sky as female. This reflects the reality and balance of my personal life. If the earth represents a divine body it seems appropriate that, for me, that body should be male. Men largely

possible for modern people to completely grasp the relationship that ancient people had with their myths. Today there are few things of any great importance that can't be explained in minute scientific detail. I don't think it is fair to assume that ancient people were too ignorant to see the inconsistencies presented by taking their myths to the furthest literal extreme. While in some cases limits of knowledge and technology made exploration of more convincing explanations impossible, in

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other cases the myth was satisfying enough to make pursuit of physical explanations irrelevant. In that sense our almost obsessive desire for scientific answers is a kind of religion itself. For them knowledge held little intrinsic value beyond that which was practically useful. As long as a myth served its purpose it was truth enough. What ancient people lacked in practical knowledge was, in some ways, made up for in the richness of their spiritual lives. For

savior. He beckoned us to come forward and be saved from the fire. I had no idea what this guy was talking about. I knew I had only one brother named Harry, not Armstrong. I couldn't figure out why he wanted to save us from burning since the building clearly wasn't on fire. And whoever this Jesus kid was, he sure hadn't made much effort to show up and speak for himself.

Some of my Bible School classmates were compelled to join Brother Arm-

strong. One little girl was crying. I didn't follow the other kids when called. One of the teachers said, "Don't you want to go up there with Brother Armstrong?" "No, thank you," I replied. My mother had already taught me not to accept candy from strangers; this sounded suspiciously similar to me. I wanted to leave. I just wanted to play with glitter and glue.

I must have been curious though because I eventually asked my mother if I could attend Sunday School at the same church that fall. My mother was delighted to have a child she didn't have to coerce into religious training. My brother had steadfastly refused to go to church. And my sister, eleven years older than me, had been a churchgoer as a child but abandoned it altogether in her teenage years, choosing instead to worship at the altar of John, Paul, George and Ringo.

I spent my prepubescent years having no idea what my family's religious affiliation was. I was aware of religion, of course. Our neighbors were Presbyterian, Baptist, and Catholic. A Jewish family lived two blocks away. The Chinese family next door was Buddhist. I remember that the Jews weren't exactly welcomed with open arms. As for the Chinese family, the other neighbors simply *expected* them to be different. After the father embezzled a substantial amount of money from his restaurant, abandoned his wife and three kids and disappeared from town, some of our more fundamentalist neighbors tried to convince the rest of them that Jesus was the answer to all their problems. Jesus again.

Finally, I asked my mother, "What religion are we?" "I'm a member of the Baptist church," she responded. "Your father doesn't belong to a church." At seven I realized that I was the only person in our family attending church regularly. I had never seen my parents go to church together. We thanked God for our daily bread in my house, but Jesus had never been explained to me, even though I had occasionally heard an aunt or uncle exclaim "Jesus Christ!" or "Christ Almighty!" I was also seven when my brother and sister decided it was time to dismantle the Santa Claus myth and tell me we were *really* supposed to be celebrating Christ's birthday. "Do I still get presents?" I asked tearfully.

Thank God for the Charlie Brown Christmas special on TV. Believe it or not, this was the first time the whole Jesus thing made any sense to me. Ironically, it took an animated cartoon with a cast of ageless children to explain the role of Jesus and the significance of Christmas, something the flesh and blood adults in my life were unable to do. Is it possible

adults invented benevolent old Santa Claus as a way to avoid telling children about the virgin birth of a so-called savior who would ultimately be betrayed and suffer a grisly death while tied to a huge cross? Hmm. I can see how a parent might be more comfortable with the Santa/elves/toys/reindeer thing.

I attended Sunday School for three years. I don't remember learning much about Jesus or spirituality, but we talked a lot about football and the boys were always separated from the girls. Eventually I decided to stop going because I didn't like football and I preferred the company of little girls. Years later, as a college freshman, I converted to Catholicism and flirted with the idea of becoming a Franciscan monk.

I was never forced to go to church as a child. Nor did my parents ever verbalize any negative sentiments about a particular denomination. For a family living in the Bible Belt we were a curiously secular lot. Small wonder I've had such problems finding a spiritual path; I had no directions. But one road rule was pretty clear: Accept Jesus Christ as your personal savior or spend eternity in a fiery lake. Some choice.

I believe in Jesus Christ in spite of the fact that his name is exploited daily for money by droves of garish TV evangelists. I don't believe he's a superstar either, as certain boorish theatre types would have us believe. I'm not impressed by the miracles he's said to have performed or by his celebrated death scene. What makes Jesus Christ relevant to me is that he traverses the entire New Testament without even once disparaging or condemning a single homosexual. That's an astonishing fact, but it somehow makes Jesus real for me personally in a way Brother Armstrong never could.

David can be reached at cubscout@mindspring.com Δ

BOOK CORNER

BEYOND THE GHETTO: SAFE SPACE VS. ISOLATION

By John Stowe

[Rather than writing his usual column this month, John has excerpted and adapted a section from his workbook, *Two-Spirit Warrior: An Empowerment Journey for Gay Men* (self-published, \$20.00. plus \$3.00 postage). If you're interested in purchasing the book, contact John at 404.373.0111, or e-mail him at jrstowe@mindspring.com.]

One vital part of our work at Gay Spirit Visions is to foster a positive, inclusive Gay identity. Empowering ourselves to be all we can is crucial to realizing our full human and spiritual potential. Positive self-identity, though, is only part of the picture. To be fully realized, we need to put our own sense of identity in the context where it belongs — right smack in the middle of the world.

When you're just coming out, one of the most important pieces of healing you can accomplish is to end the isolation you felt growing up. Coming into a group of Gay men where you can be yourself without editing, hedging, or lying about your identity feels wonderful. It's like stepping from a black and white movie into color or from a street war into Disneyland. At first, it's hard to get enough. Often, being around other Gay men feels so safe that it's tempting to hang out there as much as possible, to the point of letting go of any old friends who aren't in on the secret. In a big city, where you have that luxury, your network can extend until almost everyone in your life is Gay. You go to your Gay dentist, your Gay doctor, your Gay mechanic, eat at Gay restaurants, shop in Gay stores, and even take your (Gay) dog to a Gay groomer.

Developing a Gay network is vital. Not only does it help you heal old wounds, it also provides an ongoing source of validation and support. Few of us outgrow the need for positive Gay space, and maintaining it needs to be one of our priorities. At the same time, though, there's a danger in becoming too exclusively identified with being Gay. After the initial period of healing, your connections must support you in moving back into full participation in society. Otherwise, your all-Gay network becomes a confining ghetto that perpetuates separation and keeps you in hiding.

Like it or not, Gay men exist in every part of society. Like it or not, that is also right where we belong — everywhere. Living in a Gay ghetto — whether physically or by choosing not to deal with anyone else — is only a single step from the closet. It just makes the closet bigger. It's got windows now, skylights maybe, and a *marvelous* view, but it's still just a closet. It is safer for a while, and definitely a step toward healing. It is not, though, the final answer. The closet/ghetto, however comfortable, ultimately limits your participation in the world, keeping you in a sort of twilight of half-citizenship. Only by moving beyond it — when you're ready — are you able to claim your full health and power.

The first time I encountered this idea, I was furious. "What do you mean

'Ghetto'?! What's wrong with living to- tally separate? Why the hell would I want to help *them* anyway, all they ever did was hurt me? Screw em!" It took a while for me to calm down and look at things more objectively. When I did, I recognized the very vehemence of my reaction as a sign that I still had some wounding to deal with. Staying in a safe, all-Gay space was a pretty effective way *not* to deal with any of the issues — like homophobia, stereo-

the whole. To heal the problem, fight the diseases, not the people.

Think about it. The world is changing quickly and dramatically. Issues that were inconceivable twenty years ago — Gay marriages, Gay parenting, openly Gay priests, soldiers, and Congressmen — are now front page news. We're changing old models. The Gay ghetto is rapidly becoming outdated as we integrate more openly

ers it shifts back. This is a very natural process. Just observe where you are. Δ

QUE(E)RYING RELIGION: A CRITICAL ANTHOLOGY

Reviewed by Ron Suresha

In *Que(e)rying Religion: A Critical Anthology* (Continuum, 1997), editors Gary Comstock and Susan Henking have assembled an impressive array of scholarly writing. Their introduction states clearly their intention, which is to include — but move beyond — previous "tradition-based experiential writing by turning to the academic study of religion." The volume divides its 39 articles, most of them previously published, into four categories: "History," "Tradition," "Culture and Society," and "Scripture and Myth." Included are contributions from theologians, historians, anthropologists, social theorists, clergy, and monastics; lesbians, gay men, and straight people; and indigenous people and people of color. The roster reads like a who's who of religious scholars and gay academics: John Boswell, George Chauncey, Eli Coleman, Micaela di Leonardo, Christine Downing, Jeffrey Hopkins, I.C. Jarvie, E. Ann Matter, Joan Nestle, Will Roscoe, and Everett Rowson, to name a few, with a few gay religious writers such as Catholic Andrew Sullivan and Lev Raphael. The careful inclusion of lesbian and transgendered voices alongside those of gay men makes this new volume especially rewarding.

A few contributions are particularly noteworthy: In "The Sacrality of Male Beauty and Homosex," Ronald Long advances an "indigenous gay theology" in which political (gender/sexual) as well as religious (spiritual/cultural) differences are eliminated through the process of extending compassion to others, not because their political struggles are the same as one's own or because one shares an "identity" with them, but because the other's self is the same as one's own self. Also of note is Mary McClintock Fulker- son's adroit critique of feminist and post- structuralist theory of gender identity in relation to mainstream Protestant denomina- tions' positions on homosexuality. *Que(e)rying Religion*, although obtuse and pedantic at times, contains many inter- esting points of entry. Even when tend- ing toward the experiential, as in Michael Warner's "Tongues Untied: Memoirs of a Pentecostal Boyhood" and Beth Brant's "A Gathering of Spirit," the writing com- pares favorably with most material of this genre.

Reading across this worthwhile col-

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typing, and a society that rejects love be- tween men — that had hurt me in the first place. It kept me disempowered and com- fortable in my role as "you-done-me- wrong" victim.

Staying in a space of "*Us vs. Them*" is simpler than seeing other people as in- dividuals, yet it really doesn't work. For years, I got a lot of comfort from casting other groups as adversaries. I had no trouble making statements like "all funda- mentalists are hate-filled Nazis," or "everyone in the government is unfeeling and greedy." Somewhere along the line, I had to admit that I was stereotyping others as blatantly as anyone had ever done to me. It's too easy to project negative traits onto groups we view as separate. Staying isolated is a trap that opens us to the same kind of projection from others. As long as people can say they don't know any Gay men, they can believe whatever lies about us they hear.

Finally, holding ourselves separate robs us of any opportunity to change the conditions that hurt us in the first place. If you don't vote because neither political party supports Gay marriage, you've

and fully into the whole of society. Changing times call for changing defi- nitions. Where we used to see ourselves as "Gay" first, with whatever else we were or did as secondary, we need a broader view. Of course, being Gay is integral to who we are, and always will be, yet it's only one facet of our total identity. It is time to embrace a fuller definition of ourselves by opening to all the other facets. By expanding our hori- zons beyond the safety of our Gay fami- lies, by acting fully and openly every- where in the world, we define ourselves on our own terms at last.

Exercise: Gay and Beyond

It's natural to share yourself within many different contexts. No single group or individual could possibly meet all your diverse needs, interests, and ways of being. Take a few minutes to review the different groups you spend time with — family, co-workers, neigh- borhood, clubs, and so forth. How many of these groups are exclusively Gay. How open can you be about your life in these different contexts. How much are

To heal the problem, fight the diseases, not the people.

given up your voice in the decision mak- ing process. If you skip the condo meeting because "they're just a bunch of hetero jerks," the hetero jerks will be the ones who make the rules you have to live with. To change the world, you have to be part of it. Yes, people did hurt us, but the hurt is a symptom of a greater pattern of dis- ease. Homophobia is a disease that affects everyone. Like racism, greed, poverty, and environmental misuse, it is a disease of humanity. Think of these issues as auto-immune problems affecting society. Just as HIV, lupus, and other conditions make some cells in a body attack others, societal diseases place groups of people at odds with each other to the detriment of

you able or willing to honor your own spiritual journey there?

Think about areas of life that you might like to explore but haven't be- cause "Gay people aren't welcome there," or "They'd not accept me." Look deep, because this sort of reason- ing often lurks beneath the surface of other rationalizations. Think about it, and then ask yourself how you might begin to take steps into the broader world.

This exercise is intended as food for thought, not as fodder for judgment. Each of us has to find his own balance of Gay and non-Gay interactions. At times the balance shifts one way, at oth-

lection, the sheer volume and force of this multitude of voices is weighty enough to collapse many time-worn concepts of religion and sexuality. The ancient ball-and-chain is well worth casting off: reclaiming our queer mysticism, our archetypes, and our own unique sensibility, we can then rise above individual perspectives.

Merely by witnessing such a panoply of intelligent and creative sources, we can discover our place at the center of what the brilliant psychologist Ken Wilber called the "spectrum of consciousness." This centrality consciousness, which Wilber terms *Homo universalis* (no pun intended on his part), affirms the validity of all gender and sexual orientations and all spiritual identifications, not because they are included in some vague all-accepting understanding but because the locus of *Homo universalis* consciousness is the "center of social organizing forces": for the universe and not the individual is the true source of identity.

[Ron Suresha lived in Atlanta many years ago; he now lives in Boston. He works as a freelance editor for Shambhala Publications, and is on the Board of Directors of *The Harvard Gay and Lesbian Review*. His work has most recently appeared in *The Bear Book*, ed. Les Wright, from Haworth Press. Ron can be reached at rsuresha@spdcc.com] Δ

EXCERPT FROM GAY BODY

[Mark Thompson has graciously agreed to let us print an excerpt from his new book, *Gay Body: A Journey through Shadow to Self* (1997, St. Martins Press, \$24.95). His introduction tells the moving story of witnessing his brother's AIDS-related suicide. The excerpt picks up with Mark's leave-taking the following day, and follows with a description of why he wrote this amazing self-analytic memoir.]

As I made my way home through the Salinas Valley the following day, I noticed that the snow on the surrounding hills had already melted. Turbulent clouds were blown elsewhere, and a good, even light blessed the abundant croplands. I felt some clearing inside, too.

My brother and I acted fearlessly, yet had also been tremblingly afraid. Still, in helping him to die some line was finally crossed within myself. Whatever it represented, I knew I would never be able to return to the other side. Keeping watch over Kirk's departure perhaps marked my final act of accommodation. I've always been ready and willing in assisting others, even when it meant doing so at my own expense. My *modus operandi* of survival had meant becoming an accommodationist: taking care of, being responsible for,

asking nothing in return but approval and acceptance.

I knew in my heart that I had done the right thing in facilitating Kirk's passage toward death. And, for the very first time, I wanted nothing in return. Kirk sacrificed his own life that terrible night and I had learned to sacrifice my fear. It no longer matters what others think.

Being wounded is not enough. Having faced and gone through the wound of death itself means that I have died before I've died. Take back what you think, I want to tell the world, for now it means nothing.

This is the story of one crazy family and how a disembodied soul, hurtling through time and space, came crashing into its nucleus. All the rest has been about the recovery from that. This is the story, too, of others like me: How a mangled tissue of deceit and lies, stretching over generations, has impacted upon our selves. But, ultimately, this is my tale: one who survived the wreckage of splintered lives, who in tending to his wounded body — his gay body — saw what had happened to his soul.

Somewhere inside every gay man there's a wounded boy who stopped growing. Who simply gave up and shut down. He was not seen for who he really was, as pernicious an abuse as any devised. If ever he did reveal his shining inner self, it was humiliated, mocked, and scorned. And so the boy took whatever of himself he could save and hid it, burying it in that twilight zone between knowing and not knowing.

This book is an attempt to name this place, in both a personal and collective way — a phenomenon I call the Gay Shadow. "The shadow is that which has not entered adequately into consciousness," explains psychologist Robert A. Johnson. "It is the despised quarter of our being.... The shadow gone autonomous is a terrible monster in our psychic house."

The point is, gay men like myself have much tending of our psychic houses to do. One hundred years after the invention of the term homosexuality in the modern west, and a quarter century past rebelling against its stupefying effects, we're either dazed from sorting out fact from too much fiction or are lost in the woods with no moral compass. Some live in denial, a kind of willful deep sleep induced by sex, drugs, or lack of reflection, while others have abdicated caring altogether, riding along on the wrong bus.

As deeply feeling men who have been robbed of feelings, we have no choice now but to know ourselves completely. Where is our joy? Our rage? Where are the stories and myths that will lead us back to where our true self lies? Asking these questions is the better act of survival.

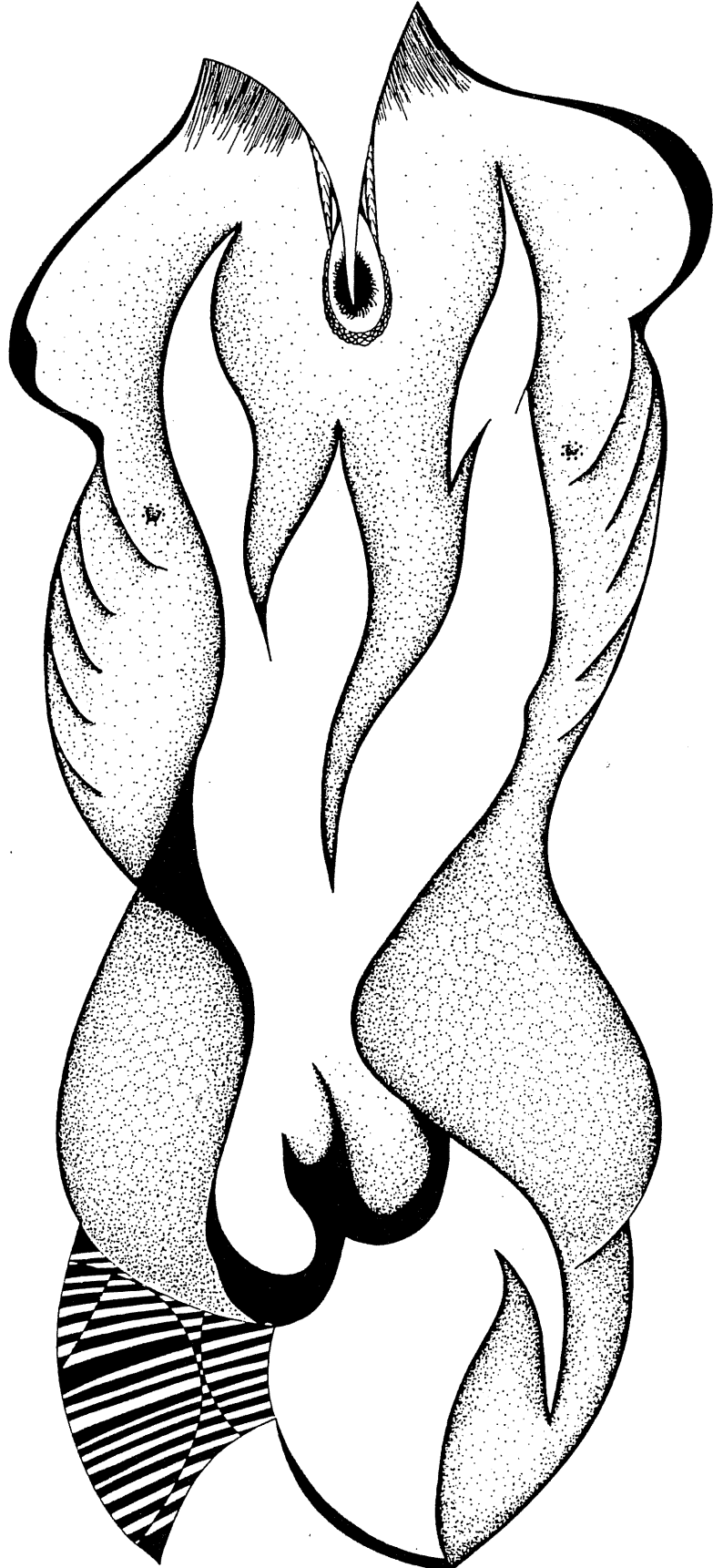
Answers lie coiled in our bodies beneath the skin of what we think we know, and in that repository of all we don't: shadow. The shadow contains the inferior parts of ourself we wish to deny, the shameful and neglected aspects of personality. Every person has a shadow, for it is an integral part of one's psyche. But when left unclaimed, it becomes a dangerous thing: the repression, primitiveness, and hostility it contains invariably seep out to contaminate others and our own being. Much of what escapes and confounds us in waking life, or disturbs us in our sleep, can be found in shadow. It is slippery, buried, frightening, and thus difficult to own.

This is a book about one gay man's quest for his lost power, his true selfhood, what I refer to here as my "queer masculinity." And how I've come to believe there is no other way to claim this elusive power than through a passionate and empathetic relationship to that hidden place called shadow.

Before there is queer masculinity, there is a lie. Named or not, we know it well. When I was a boy, people would sometimes step away and gaze nervously into my eyes, as if to retrieve me. I seemed to be no longer there, having fled the moment to a private refuge where solitude was kept, like secret wisdom, as an answer to living. My distance from others was revealed only by these incidents of accidental confession. I had learned to hide myself well. And because of this I could detect others who were hiding like me.

No matter what tactic we use to protect ourselves — covering up, acting out, or fitting in — to be gay is strange. How could it be otherwise? Our lives are portioned by the very terms of estrangement. We are strangers to those who should know us best, and thus are kept strangers from ourselves. The boy inside remains unknown to the man — the priest, the letter carrier, the lover — he becomes. And so each, in his way, continues to suffer a separate hell.

In the twenty-five years since my coming out, I've roamed and prowled, documented and assessed, nearly every stage the gay and lesbian liberation movement has demonstrated itself on. I've been peripatetic, to say the least, in my eagerness to grasp as much of the story as possible while at the same time having my own say in it. Yet I've remained distanced



Raven

enough to know that the drama itself — this sprawling saga of queer uprising, resistance, and cultural entrenchment — is the most important thing. In fact, I believe there has never been any story quite like it.

We've rightly demanded that our history be told to the world, but it is acceptance from others that has mostly defined the struggle. That is why what the world thinks of us is only half the story, and perhaps the lesser half. For in whatever ways we've grown resilient against the tyranny of crude laws and moral sanctions, we remain hostage to a crueler enemy: our own self-doubt and destructive urges.

Now it's time for a new way to claim gay reality, to re-envision and heal it from within. As always, we need to deconstruct and expunge the negating myth of homosexuality, a myth largely created by what the novelist Christopher Isherwood called "the heterosexual dictatorship." More important, we must invent new myths — an ontology generated from the depths of our own being rather than adapted from the values of those who oppress us.

In so doing, we must ask: Who are we? Where have we come from? What are we for? As both professional journalist and spiritual seeker, I've kept these fundamental questions in mind as my search for meaning has led me ever inward to where my own truth resides.

In this book, I weave two stories — the outer and inner — like intertwining threads. Archetypal images, historical reportage, and personal memories connect the two and show how — if one goes deep enough — the contents of one's unconscious find revelation through universal forms. Δ

Artwork by GSV founder
Raven Wolf dancer,
May he rest in peace.
From the cover of his book,
Coyote Lust.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

RACISM WORKSHOP

Gay Spirit Visions is proud to assist Black and White Men Together/Atlanta in presenting an eight week series of workshops called "Resisting Racism." Starting at 7PM on March 2, and running for eight consecutive Mondays, Dorothy Paige, M.S. and Scott LaSalle, LCSW, will focus on racism issues affecting the gay community. Meetings will occur at the First Existentialist Congrega-

tion of Atlanta, 470 Candler Park Drive. For more information, contact Carl Owens 404/522-8020.

I. March 2: RACISM IN THE GAY COMMUNITY: Has Dr. King's Dream become a nightmare?

II. March 9: BLACK POWER: Is it Black Pride or White Hate?

III. March 16: INTERRACIAL RELATIONSHIPS: Can They Really Work?

IV. March 23: SEX, RACE, AND INTIMACY: What Really Goes on Behind Closed Doors?

V. March 30: RACIAL IDENTITY: Am I Black or am I White? And What Does It Mean?

VI. April 6: CONFRONTING YOUR OWN PREJUDICES: The First Step to Becoming Antiracist.

VII. April 13: DEALING WITH DISCRIMINATION: Doing Your Part to Become Part of the Solution.

VIII. April 20: BREAKING DOWN RACIAL BARRIERS: Why are the Walls Still So High? Δ

HEALING TOUCH LEARNING GROUP

Planner Roger Weinstein, in connection with the AIDS Survival Project, is working with a Healing Touch Learning Group on the 4th Saturday of each month. Anyone who is interested in hands-on healing or wants to know about various energy-based techniques that are used to balance the human energy field is welcome to show up at noon each month at 828 W. Peachtree St.; Suite 206. Call Roger at 404/303-7466 for more info. Δ

DRUM MAKING WORKSHOP

Two Spirit Promotions presents "Building the Sacred Instrument," a drum-making and drumming experience for men who love men, facilitated by Stan Secrest. 5pm Friday March 27, thru 3pm Sunday, March 29 at U/U in the Pines, Brooksville Florida. For registration information contact Rob Kahle, 813.832.5050, and leave a detailed message including name, phone number, address and registration information. Δ

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