



Planner's Perch

**REPORT ON A
DIALOGUE ON
DIVERSITY**

By Jonathan Lerner

A few months ago, a member of the GSV planning committee who also participates in Black and White Men Together proposed that we help to fund an eight-part racism awareness workshop which BWMT was sponsoring. After a brief discussion (mostly about how GSV's help might be publicly acknowledged), we agreed to donate \$100.

Since I first came to the conference in 1993, I've been concerned about the overwhelmingly white composition of GSV. While the planning committee has made some attempts to grapple with this, I never felt that these discussions were especially deep or introspective. The inevitable tensions this difficult topic generates always seemed to end up defused by the taking of some concrete action, like advertising in a black queer publication, or inviting black presenters to some events - well-meant actions, but then, once we had acted, we would let the discussion go.

Our donation to BWMT troubled me.

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It seemed an example of what in the context of anti-racist work is known as white liberal guilt: throwing money at the issue without considering our own relationship to it. (Excessive concern for having one's help recognized is another common symptom.) I proposed that we place a discussion of the racial make-up of GSV on the agenda.

To prod people to focus their thoughts in advance of the next monthly meeting, I wrote a post to the GSV e-mail reflector recounting our history of seeking racial diversity, and noting that it mostly still eludes us. I observed that none of us can help being imprinted and affected by the racism of the larger culture. I wondered if the generally segregated social lives most of us live didn't determine who found out about and turned up in GSV. "There's nothing inherent in the creation of safe spiritual space for gay men (what we're about) that should exclude men of color," I wrote. "So there must be obstacles — within GSV? within men of color? — that hinder their participation." Essentially, I argued that this community has a moral obligation to reflect and act about racism. I'm not sure that I quite fully articulated my underlying conviction that being who we are — gay people with both a personal experience of oppression and a commitment to healing and bridging — we are blessed with a special ability to do that hard work.

Whereupon erupted a debate that was alternately scary, thrilling, profound, moving, delightful, ridiculous, and enraging. And did I say scary? Over a few weeks it included about 30 voices — GSV veterans and cyberstrangers alike — out of the 160-some people who receive messages posted to the reflector. (For comparison, almost 700 people receive Visionary, the majority — but not all — of whom have attended a conference at the mountain or one of our Atlanta events.) This dialogue had some of the bruising quality typical of on-line debates. Actually, compared to other

Dates to Remember

- July 11, 10am: GSV Planning Committee Meeting @ AFMH
7PM: Potluck — call King Thackston @ 404/688-8234
- August 1: GSV Summerthing @ AFMH
- August 8, 10am: GSV Planning Committee Meeting
7.00pm: Potluck -- call Al Cotton @ 404/292-8567
- September 12, 10am: GSV Planning Committee Meeting, @ AFMH
7PM: Potluck — TBA
- September 24-27: 9th Annual Celebrating Gay Spirit Visions Conference @ the mountain: Highlands Retreat & Learning Center (beginning Thursday evening, after dinner)

cyberdebates (even previous ones on our own reflector) the discourtesy was relatively tame, but race is such an emotionally charged and potentially divisive issue that it's easy to get defensive, and hurt, talking about it.

Having provoked the dialogue, I realized — once I got over my surprise at how energetically and volatily it was unfolding — that I had an obligation to periodically summarize and keep it on track. On one hand, that's not hard for me. I've had lots of practice chairing discussions. But this was something about which I have especially strong beliefs, and it wasn't always easy for me to restrain myself in the interest of keeping the exchange productive.

Meanwhile, I was attending most sessions of the BWMT racism awareness workshop, which was conducted in the now-well-established tradition of diversity training. Simply described, this involves agreeing to some ground rules, like committing to listening without judging, and to saying what you really believe. Then a skilled facilitator leads the group through exercises designed to elicit stereotypes and attitudes about race, to challenge participants to speak out even when they feel in a minority, and to come up with ideas for how to deal with racism

as it is encountered every day. Essentially, the workshop is a container for confrontation with one's own thinking and with the attitudes of others. The confrontation was not hostile. The structure of the sessions and the guidance of the facilitator made sure of that. This does not mean it was easy.

A somewhat fluid group of about two dozen people attended, roughly half black and half white, nearly all men, and all (apparently) queer. The first session depressed me badly, because it seemed that the polarization on even agreeing to a

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simple definition of racism was enormous, even among this self-selecting group who had come, presumably with good will, to deal with it. But after several weeks, trust began to develop and the group began to cohere. (The moment I felt it was working was when my partner King and I, out to dinner, ran into one of the workshop participants. I was explaining that Darryl was attending the workshops, when he said to King, laughing, "No, we're in therapy together on Monday nights.")

The wide variety of opinions and preconceptions — some coincident with, but many irrespective of, their holders' skin colors — was impressive. The chance to hear them expressed, and challenge them, and consider where they came from was a tremendous relief: people really wanted to talk about this stuff, in detail, once they felt safe to do so. By the end of the series, it seemed that everyone was genuinely glad to have attended, and most voiced regret only at how pressed for time we had felt throughout.

One thing came clear to me as I participated in these two simultaneous dialogues: awareness and change on something as charged as race happens best — or maybe in a really meaningful way happens *only* — when it develops within individuals, on an emotional level. I've always understood racism as a mainly political and economic problem, subject to those sorts of solutions — and it is, to the extent that it is reflected in political and economic structures. But we have ample evidence that fixing those doesn't necessarily change consciousness in a deep way: while the civil rights legislation of the 1960s, the growth of an educated black middle class, and so on, are real achievements, racist stereotypes, mistrust and social segregation still thrive. When it

was time for me to offer a final summary of the GSV — reflector dialogue on race, I realized that I should change the very terms with which I had framed the discussion. I had started out by asking what was wrong that kept GSV overwhelmingly white. Now I wrote,

"We should relax the concern about involving more men of color in our activities, and instead focus on the questions of how each of our own ethnicities and cultural origins intersects with our queerness and our

spirituality. The goal is for each participant to deepen his self-awareness; let's trust that our collective understanding will be deepened if that happens, and that appropriate collective action will eventually follow.

"We should do this with a one-day conference in Atlanta this summer... Maybe it could be titled something like *Ethnicity and Gay Spirituality: A Personal Journey Home*. We should figure out creative ways to approach this theme, in the tradition of our previous conferences, including ways that are non-verbal and non-intellectual. We should publicize this event widely, making a reasonable effort to alert groups of gay men of color that it's happening. We should gratefully welcome whoever attends and stop obsessing about their skin color."

At the next planning meeting, we took this up. Despite — or more likely because of — the difficult discussion that had already taken place on-line, we had a harmonious and productive talk. The proposal was accepted. We affirmed that what we want to do is deepen each participant's awareness of his own origins — culturally, ethnically, religiously — so that we can see how those affect us individually as gay men on a spiritual path, and so that we can begin to recognize and appreciate the differences between our experiences. We also enhanced the proposal in several ways. We agreed that this event will be distinct from the kind of racism awareness workshop I described above, recognizing that those very useful techniques require more time, and a particular sort of structure. We agreed to seek participation and contributions of ideas, from the early

stages of planning for the event, from organizations of gay men of color.

The event will take place on August 1; for details, see the announcement elsewhere in this newsletter.

If you want to participate in planning it, contact me at 404/892-4964 or jonathanlerner@worldnet.att.net. An edited version of the on-line discussion can be found on our web site.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Conference Keynote

We are happy to announce that the keynote at this year's conference will be Don Clark.

Don Clark, Ph.D., is a writer, teacher, consultant and clinical psychologist who has specialized in group and individual work with gay people since 1968. His writing includes fiction, textbooks, and articles for both professional journals and popular magazines. He is the author of *Loving Someone Gay*, *Living Gay* and *As We Are*, and a member of the faculty of the Body Electric School of Massage.

We're planning on mailing brochures some time around the 4th of July, so watch your mailboxes during that time.

Potluck Dinners

The next potluck will be in July at King Thackston's house, followed by the September potluck at Al Cotton's house.

Our New Mission Statement

At Gay Spirit Visions, we are committed:

- to create safe, sacred space for Gay men to explore our spiritual identity, open to but not aligned with any specific denomination or spiritual path;

- to facilitate the same exploration for others by recording our experiences, by sharing our insights, and by encouraging other groups as they begin their own explorations;

- to create spiritual community and networking with the intent to heal spiritual wounds and to explore our gifts, power, and ability to live with spiritual integrity.

To these ends we:

- facilitate the annual Celebrating Gay Spirit Visions Conference near Highlands, NC;

- create educational and social programs for men wishing to explore these issues;

- create an archive of related information, which we disseminate through traditional and cyberspace outlets;

- are established as a nonprofit

corporation under the laws of the State of Georgia and have 501(c)(3) status with the Internal Revenue Service of the United States as a nonprofit tax exempt organization.

JUST HOW FAR DOES "GAY" SPIRIT TAKE US?

by John R. Stowe

As someone who has considered GSV my spiritual family for over 8 years, I want to get something off my chest. It's something I'd have never even thought a few years ago. In fact, if someone else had said it, I'd have been offended. But here I am and here it is ... Something's missing for me here.

I am discovering that GSV, which has pushed my growing edge for years, doesn't push me the way it used to. It's

We need this space. And yet, I feel a subtle trap.

certainly not the people — this is a group of men I'm honored to be part of. And it's not that GSV is doing something wrong. There's just this feeling that won't go away — part restless, part bored, part seeking something I can't quite put a finger on. Sitting in council at GSV has taught me to listen to feelings. Usually, when one man is feeling something, others are as well and the shared questions lead to answers. So I bring these thoughts in honor of our sacred space, wondering if I'm the only one, and hoping to stimulate discussion about our identity and vision. So let's talk!

First, I believe that GSV is one of the best things I've found in the Gay community for a long time. The Conference is powerful, the group of men is wonderful, and the ongoing, heart-centered support we share has allowed me, and many others, to be stronger in the world. What more could there be?

When I read our new mission statement, I see three main areas of focus: (1) create safe, sacred space for men-loving men, (2) create community in order to heal spiritual wounding, and (3) explore how we can live with power and integrity.

We've had absolute success in meeting the first two goals. Through years of hard work, we've created a form that, although not perfect, works very well. We've cultivated attitudes and techniques that allow us to sit together with mutual respect, honor, and support. This is no mean feat; indeed, it is powerful healing. Anyone who has witnessed 130 men in a heart circle knows that the amount of

caring and patience involved are rare in the rest of the world. We've created a space that welcomes all Gay men and encourages us to be fully ourselves. This is good. Maybe it is enough.

In our safe space, we take time and care to acknowledge where we've been wounded and to share the loving energy that lets those wounds heal into strength. We recognize that most of us have felt spiritually alienated from mainstream society and do our best to honor the unique healing journey of each man. We share stories, advice, hugs. This too is powerful and good. Maybe it, also, is enough. I know it's been enough for me for years. In fact, I don't see us ever outgrowing this part of our mission, for every man who joins our circle will benefit from the healing and support we offer.

My question, though, is "What

now?" We've created safe, sacred space. What shall we do here? We're learning to heal the old wounds and to live with power. What shall we do with this power? Is the entire mission of GSV to create a space to help Gay men through the wounding? If we decide that it is, then I support us wholeheartedly. I wonder, though, what happens for those who actually heal. Is it time, then, to leave GSV and move on?

Providing safe Gay space for spiritual healing is vital. As a group, though, our focus at this point is less on creating something new than on maintaining and fine tuning what we have — making sure that we continue to meet the needs of participants, reaching out to as many Gay men as possible, and so forth. If we want to continue growing, I suggest we consider focusing on the third area of our mission: exploring how to live with

When people are faced with the need to take a step into the unknown, almost universally we balk.

power and integrity in the world.

In order to do this, it may be necessary to consider an entirely new paradigm. To date, we've explored our identity in *separation* from the world. The model we use, which roughly reflects current psychotherapy, is based on wounding. In practice, most of what brings us together and holds us together is the fact that we were hurt or rejected — by our parents, by mainstream

religion, by society. In response, we've created separate space for Gay men in order to heal the wounding. Every one of us benefits from this space. Indeed, it gives me something my soul was starving for when I first found it, a place where my wrists, hips, and spirit were safe to go wherever they wanted! The acceptance, mirroring, and heartfelt validation we share are vitally empowering. We need this space. And yet, I feel a subtle trap.

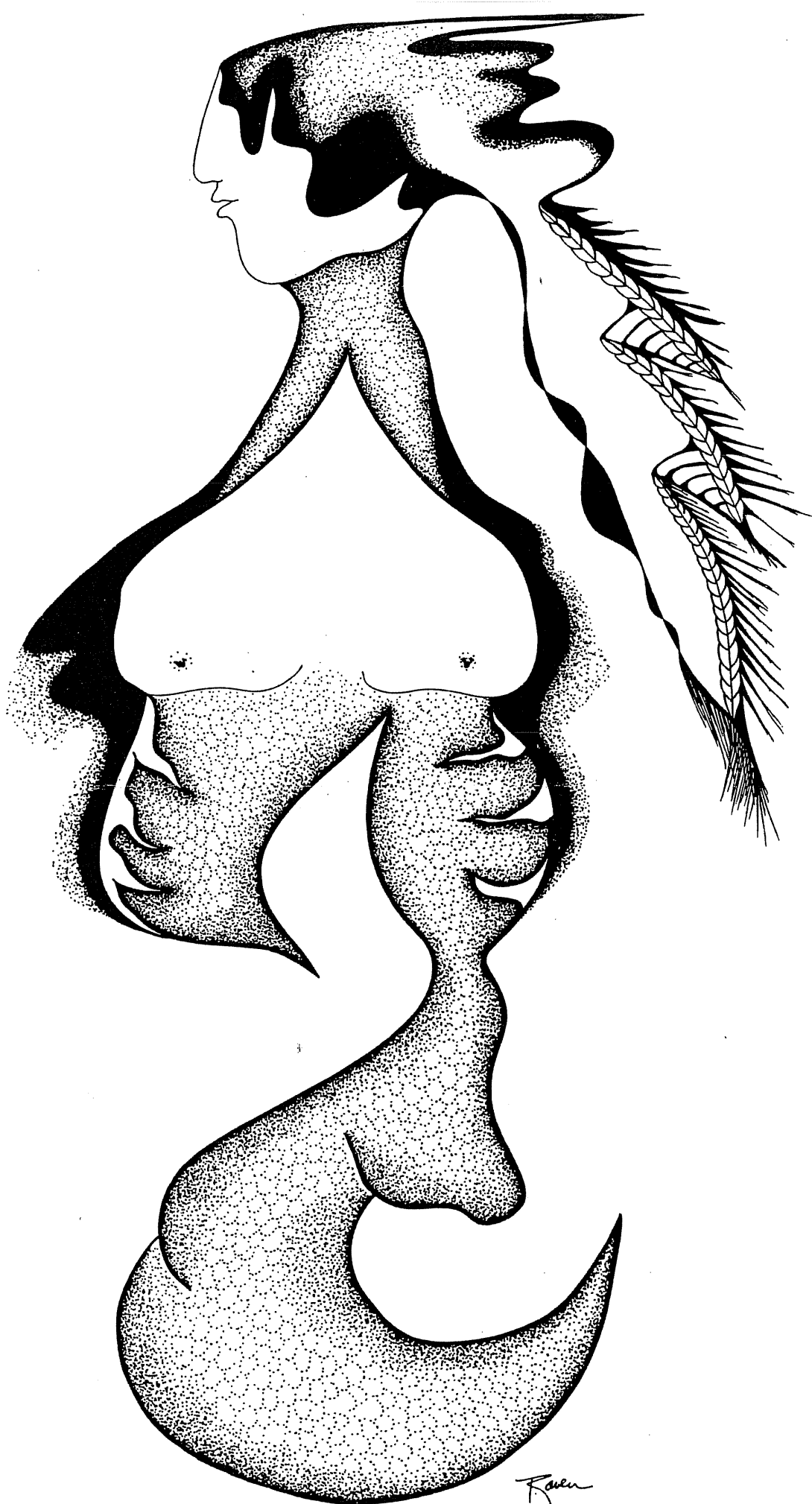
The rub is this. When identity and mission are based on wounding, there is little incentive to move beyond it. If the discourse is based primarily on where we've been hurt, on where we're different from the rest of society, and on what we're doing to support ourselves through the pain of that separation, there is an implied need to stay hurt in order to participate. Where is our model for moving beyond the hurt and stepping fully empowered into the world?

In her excellent book, *Why People Don't Heal*, Carolyn Myss likens the process of healing to a "boat across a river." The problem with most of us, she says, is that once healing is accomplished, the nurturing and support we've been receiving are so compelling that we don't get off on the other side. The wounding, whatever it is, becomes a handy crutch, an excuse to not take total responsibility. "Oh, you know, I'd try to change the world, but I was wounded (abused/rejected/neglected/whatever) as a child." Of course, it's vital to achieve healing, but to hang out there after it's accomplished is a waste. It becomes empty talk, sort of masturbatory — it feels good but doesn't go anywhere.

For me, she hit a nerve. For years, I've worked almost exclusively with Gay men, both at GSV and in my private practice, and it's been quite fulfilling. For some time, though, I've felt a call to share my work with a broader audience. Instead of leaping to answer that call, I've found myself dragging my feet. The safety and

acceptance I've enjoyed in this all-Gay setting are hard to leave. Looking deep, I recognize a fear — not so much of rejection by the "straight" world as a deeper one — fear of losing personal identity. If I'm not dealing with Gay issues, who am I?

It's a recognizable pattern. Look around. When people are faced with the need to take a step into the unknown, almost universally we balk. We tend to do



Rosen

whatever we can to avoid the real issue. We create emergencies or personal crises that take all our energy, get into disagreements, manufacture mountains of busywork — anything to ruffle the surface of the waters and avoid the deeper questions beneath. We do it as individuals. We do it in organizations as well. It's important to watch for the symptoms.

I want a model for making the safe space we've created a permanent part of my inner being, to be as empowered in the world as I feel at GSV. I want a mentor to show me how to show up fully in every area of my life, with every person I encounter, in every arena. It feels like coming out again — the feelings are just as urgent, the territory on the other side just as scary and unknown. I'd like a model for coming out not just as Gay, or Anglo, or male, or middle aged, but beyond it all. I'd like a model for coming out as human. Is this something we can explore at GSV?

To me, spirituality is about deepening awareness. By cultivating mindfulness and intention, we use the events of our lives to take us to deeper understanding. In this light, every experience — regardless of whether we see it as "positive" or "negative" — offers an opportunity for spiritual growth. Living Gay in a homophobic society can be a powerful path to spiritual empowerment if we choose to use it that way. So can living with HIV, or cancer, or polio. So can losing a partner, or raising a child, or staying committed to a relationship. Are the lessons provided by these paths exclusively Gay? Do they not touch places reached by individuals on other paths? I

Artwork by GSV founder
Raven Wolfdancer,
May he rest in peace.
From the cover of his book,
Talisman Talk.

suspect that any path we follow with heart eventually takes us beyond the details of its content into territory that is universal. At what point does "Gay spirituality" transcend its borders to become, purely, "spirituality"?

What we've learned can be of great benefit. Every single person on this planet has been wounded. Every single person needs to address that wounding in order to become spiritually empowered. We need to show others what we've learned — not just for them, but for us. We aren't separate. No individual, cell or person,

can be wholly healthy when the rest of the organism remains out of balance. We do our part by healing and empowering ourselves first — and that is good work. Yet we, like cells in the body, must then fulfill our birthright by addressing the bigger problems. What are they? You already know. Healing Gay oppression is part of it, of course. There is more. Environment. Hunger. War. Ignorance. Violence. Poverty. Spiritual disempowerment. The list is long. Our gifts are sorely needed.

This is new territory — not only for us but for Gay consciousness altogether. We know very well how to be separate from the mainstream, to survive wounding, to exist in reaction to negativity from outside. We have almost no model, though, for being integrated in society as fully empowered human beings, where sexuality ceases to be the defining characteristic. Society won't change its attitudes until we change ours. While claiming the label "Gay" is empowering early in our journey of healing, at some point, it becomes confining. As long as I think of myself as a Gay teacher, a Gay healer, a Gay writer, a Gay voter as opposed to a teacher, healer, writer, voter who is also Gay, I continue to experience a degree of self-imposed separation and limitation. I don't mean to stop being Gay — that's hardly likely, in any case — but I'd like to move beyond using it as the primary defining criterion of my being. Maybe the distinction is subtle, but I think it's very real and very important.

What does that mean for GSV? I'd like to see us discuss our vision for the future. Is our entire mission based on maintaining safe, *separate* space? Is it possible to maintain safe space and begin to integrate more fully with the rest of the world? Can we maintain separate space at times — which does seem necessary — and open up at others? Can we brainstorm on the question, "What does it mean to be a fully empowered Gay man in our society?" This last is surely the most difficult, because we have very few actual models. We can look at comparable men in other societies — the Native American *berdache*, for example — but what it means in our present society is really an ongoing, ever-changing issue. We have to come up with our own answers.

If we decide that expanding our focus outward is important — without negating a single bit of what we do at

present — how would we begin? Maybe we sponsor workshops or a retreat dedicated to envisioning our place in the world ("After the Healing, What?"), or a speaker's bureau to work with churches and schools. Maybe we interface with youth outreach groups, connect more fully with other spiritual groups, work to promote understanding between different groups within the Gay community. Maybe we bring more speakers to town, expand our educational efforts, expand *Visionary* to bring in Gay writers from all over the world, explore environmental or other pure service-oriented projects, and so forth. Does any of this fit in with our organizational Vision? What else might?

At an individual level, these are questions each man must answer on his own. Some will be called to continue their personal healing. Some will feel called to continue creating safe, healing space for other Gay men. Some, though, will be called to take their Gay-empowered selves further into the world. These men may face a paradox. Does sharing the gifts we've discovered here mean stepping beyond the safe space of GSV to live in a broader world? Can Gay men stay separate and still contribute to solving the greater challenges facing humanity? Is there a middle ground?

Each man whose deeper voice urges him onward will have to answer for himself, "What does it look like *for me* to be Gay and powerful in the world." Each will have to find his own path, and create his own ways to live it with integrity. Then, we can sit together, share what we've discovered, and help other men on the same path. That, in fact, is how GSV started in the first place, as a group of men who felt that a next step was needed dared to take it.

What do you think?

John Stowe can be reached at jrstowe@mindspring.com

FUNDRAISERS UPDATE

Shamanism Workshop

Fundraiser

by Dancing Dolphin

Bernie Morin, after teaching workshops across the South, graced our fair city of Atlanta with a fund raiser workshop on Shamanism. With Bernie and an absentee participant in Hospice, we were twenty-five in attendance. The gathering was a beautiful collective of folks, including men and women, young and old, gay and straight and of various ethnic backgrounds. It was an incredible day of love, light, laughter and some tears.

We created sacred space for each participant to feel both protected and challenged. Spirit helped those gathered to move safely outside of their comfort zone, finding inner knowing to their personal questions. Then, after an introduction to rattles and drums, the balance of the day was spent journeying to places most had only known in their dreams. Guided by spirit, we journeyed far and wide, gaining not only insights into our own lives but the lives of each other and the greater community. The profits of the day were much greater than the \$1,400+ GSV was able to deposit in its general fund. Sincere thanks to Bernie Morin for his gracious gift that has enriched the lives of many.

Body Electric Workshop/Fundraiser by Al Cotton

Our Body Electric/GSV fundraiser on March 20-22 was, for 17 men, a great way to bring in the season of Spring, as well as a fabulous opportunity for me to begin my tenure as Atlanta's new Body Electric coordinator. Many of the men present hadn't done Body Electric work in many years, which means John Ballew got to introduce many of us to the sensual joys of cornstarch massage, as well as remind us of the more typical Taoist and Tantric techniques that have been a part of Body Electric's program since its inception. The Friday evening Heart Circle was a chance for some old friends of GSV to revisit our circle, as well as for some new men to meet both organizations for the first time. The rest of the weekend was a Body Electric weekend among men who began with a common base of experience with the work. It reminded me of the weekend I spent in January in Los Angeles, with other Body Electric coordinators — a quickly established energetic connection among men who were ready and eager to soar beyond the baseline.

We raised just over \$1,400 for GSV's general fund, but more important, we raised the energy in Atlanta for a rechristening of ongoing local Body Electric work. In the next year, we intend to offer a Level II workshop (external anal massage), and hope to find enough men to hold in Atlanta the ongoing, multi-weekend intensive called Living Eros (one or more weekend days a month over several months). If you're a B.E. graduate and want to be informed of future events, call me at 404/292-8567 or e-mail me at bearsker@aol.com, and I'll add you to our list.

WIRED: MEETING THE ANGEL

by Cliff Bostock

(Originally published in the "Paradigms" column of Creative Loafing, Atlanta, Feb. 21, 1998)

One of those stories of modern life, now mythologized, is the airplane confession. You get on an airplane, you meet a stranger and you tell one another intimate details of your life that you've never shared with another person. You get off the plane feeling lighter, never to see your confessor again.

I spend an awful lot of time on airplanes and I have never had that experience. In fact, I began writing this column on a flight between Dallas and Los Angeles, on my way to Santa Barbara. My intention was to write some psychological thoughts in lieu of confession to the person sitting beside me. Here is what happened:

I am wired.

To be wired means to be anxious, in a state of alarm. It also means to be "plugged into" current technology. On an airplane, you see the two meanings completely coalesce. Obviously, I, working on a laptop, am wired. A

I am suddenly visited by an image of transcendence, an angel.

young man two seats away from me is wired into a portable CD player. He appears to be sleeping despite listening to a band whose CD cover features illustrations of violence and death. Judging from the noise I'm picking up, shrieking can be a lullaby.

Across the aisle is a woman who is in a hyperactive state. Between calls on the cell phone embedded in the back of the seat in front of her, she rifles compulsively through a brief case stuffed with color-coded file folders. She peers in each folder, slams open a three-ring binder full of notes, makes more notes, applies post-it notes, makes stars, highlights things in two or three colors, summarizes everything on note cards, wolfs low-fat and salt-free pretzels, gurgles gallons of water and (twice) sorts vitamin pills kept in a huge baggie.

These are a few conspicuous examples of many similarly wired onboard. In a way, though, everyone on the plane is wired, just for the fact that each of us is inhabiting a space created by high technology. Now, as Marshall

McLuhan wrote more than 30 years ago, technology accelerates thinking, amputating consciousness from the body. The mind loses consciousness of the body, which in turn produces a symptomatic condition.

I notice, for example, that the woman in her mad fit of organizing and telephoning is bouncing her legs like someone running in place — or, as I would metaphorize it, she is "getting nowhere fast." I am even guessing that she suffers an eating disorder, given her strange bingeing on pretzels and her painfully thin condition.

The boy next to me, I think, is not so much sleeping as "playing dead." Just as the woman's body reveals her actual psychic experience, his reacts to the music he hears. Thus, all about me is a heightened example of how the body can indicate psychic reality even when it is not mentally articulated.

I turn my consciousness toward my own body. As always — and as I also do at movies and any other public event — I am sitting on an aisle. Although my laptop is directly in front of me, my knees are in the aisle, as if I am prepared to leave my seat. This is precisely how I've led most of my life — feeling crowded, as if there wasn't enough room for me and

that I must always be ready to get the hell out of Dodge at the drop of a hat.

I take a deep breath and align myself in front of the laptop, feeling suddenly more present. Looking around, though, I'm keenly aware how in this space — where the air pressure and the noise make hearing difficult, where the ground is literally out of sight — everyone is in a relatively disassociated space. I drift off ...

An amazing thing happens.

A young man stands up toward the front of the airplane. He is almost female in his beauty — Italian with a face as innocent-looking as a kitten's, with long eyelashes he closes slowly over eyes that seem wet. Everyone stares at him as he walks down the aisle. He is wearing a green suit. His lapel has some kind of name badge on it and he is carrying a book in his hand.

He stops in the aisle, between me and the maniacally organizing woman. He grins at her. The woman is dazed. He squats and I focus to hear their conversation. His voice is soft as a child's.

"Would you like to pray?" he murmurs to the woman, whose chewed

fingernails fly to her mouth.

"No," she says sharply and he turns toward me.

"Would you like to pray?" he says. I notice that his name badge identifies him as "Elder ... " The book is a Bible. He places it on the arm rest.

"Sure," I say, lost in the boy's eyes. I feel a little ashamed. There is nothing erotic in this experience — at least not that I'm aware of — but he looks into my eyes with such complete vulnerability that I fall into his gaze. To me, looking into another person's eyes so deeply is like penetrating heaven. My breathing eases as he recites a Bible verse in his musical voice. He smiles radiantly. He never closes his eyes completely. He maintains his gaze with me, just lowering his eyelids slowly now and then, almost in humility. It doesn't even cross my mind to shut my eyes.

I try to focus on what he is saying. The usual phrases — "the Kingdom of God," "salvation" — float through the air. For some reason, I recall those medieval paintings in which the angelic voices are depicted as writing that appears on banners that unfurl in the air.

"Though I speak with tongues of men and angels, but have not love, I have become as sounding brass ..." He recites Corinthians I:13. I am suddenly recalling how as a child at Bryn Athyn Academy, I had to learn that passage from the Bible. My lips begin moving. "For we know in part and we prophesy in part." That phrase makes sense to me for the first time, I remark. The boy smiles. "For now," he says, opening his eyes wide, "we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known." We are silent.

Then, it occurs to me, in a flash, that I have evoked an angel. Here, thinking of how wired I am, disconnected from my experience and finally bringing awareness to my situation, I am suddenly visited by an image of transcendence, an angel. What he actually has to say doesn't matter so much, but his presence — beautiful and full of solace — is a great balm

So it is every day when we pay attention.

The boy touches me on the arm and moves away, returns to his seat. Of course, I don't see him again.

Cliff Bostock writes for Atlanta publications Creative Loafing and Etc., and is the creator of "Greeting the Muse," an 11-week class that helps writers and artists with creative blocks. Information about the next preview day for those interested in the process is available by calling 404/873-2645. Cliff can be reached at 404/525-4774 or grazer@mindspring.com; the address for his Soulworks website with more information about these

workshops is <http://www.soulworks.net>.

GIVING THANKS

by Dandelion

There are times when life is so bountiful, beautiful, and full of wonder that words are not enough to describe it. At times like those I find myself struggling to thank Spirit for all of the goodness I have been given. We have to come to terms with the fact that we can never "repay" God for our lives. In fact there is nothing of any real substance that we can do for God at all. Recently

We can never understand how much pleasure Deities get from filling our lives with miracles.... How different life might be if we considered joy a sacred obligation and laughter our highest sacrament.

I was at an S/M play party where a man attached several electrical contacts to points on my body. He turned on his magic box and for the next hour I squirmed and writhed in total ecstasy. After it was over, I told him that I usually feel guilty after an electrical scene because I have so much fun and he just stands there watching and punching buttons. He smiled and said "You shouldn't feel guilty, because you don't know how much pleasure it gives me to make you feel so good." Perhaps Gods and Goddesses might say the same thing.

We can never understand how much pleasure Deities get from filling our lives with miracles. If there is any doubt about this just ask any father what makes parenthood worthwhile: teaching his son to fly a kite, or having him come, with tears in his eyes to say "I was wrong. I'm so very sorry." There is little joy in saying "I told you so," to a child and yet their smallest triumph makes hours and days of worry and pain worthwhile. My favorite poem, by Mary Oliver, ends with the line "You have only to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves." I think that this is not just all that we have to do, it is what we must do.

I think back to my own childhood and all prayers every night before bed in which I dutifully wasted God's time repenting all the petty sins of a very sheltered young life and later the long melodramatic prayers of contrition recited before communion at church, which seemed to be a bit much, even then. The fact is most people with an ordinary amount of goodness rarely do anything all that terrible. Maybe there

is even a little bit of arrogance in our overestimation of our own evil and a lot of arrogance in taking too much pride in our own repentance. Just imagine having a secretary who, every time she mistyped a word, ran into your office and threw herself at your feet wailing and begging for mercy. If Gods are truly Gods then, surely, they have better things to do; things like making the flowers bloom, the sun set, the clouds race across a full moon, things that we are so often too busy to notice.

How different life might be if we considered joy a sacred obligation and

laughter our highest sacrament. Occasionally ministers might step up to the pulpit and say "There won't be a service this morning because it would be a sin to stay inside on such a beautiful day. Let us go out and play." The greatest sin that most people commit, I think, would be to waste whole days on work and worry without a moment left to fall in love or feel the ecstasy of living. When we find ourselves feeling small and unworthy there is only one thing that we must humbly admit: That we can never know the pleasure God gets from making us so wonderfully alive.

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AN AVATAR PRESENTATION

by Michael Bray

(Michael Bray is an Avatar Master from Australia currently living in Asheville, NC. Michael tells us that "The mission of Avatar in the world is to catalyze the integration of belief systems. When we perceive that the only difference between us is our beliefs and that beliefs can be created and discreated with ease, the right and wrong game will wind down, a co-create game will unfold and world peace will ensue." (from ReSurfacing by Harry Palmer). Avatar has been around for 11 years and courses are available in 58 countries." The following comes from a talk he gave to ManSpirit, an Asheville gay male spirituality group, earlier this year.)

Spirituality is sometimes considered in the same vein as religion. People are more and more realizing that spirituality sees each unique person as source of all their creations, whereas religion claims that another being created the Ail, thus that being is the Source. Harry Palmer in *ReSurfacing* writes: "Both the physical universe and personal consciousness arise from a definitionless, adimensional

presence, which the Avatar materials refer to as awareness, life source or pure beingness."

Everyone experiences continual viewpoint changes — this is evolution. Here is a different slant on the chakras or energy centres in the physical body: where the chakras are arranged differently and the colours are different...

Current thinking suggests that the inflow chakra or 1st chakra is in an area where everyone outflows ~ interesting! ~ Annette Noontil in her book *The Body is the Barometer of the Soul, so Be Your Own Doctor II* on page 51 writes: "People who deny this spiritual energy coming to them, by thinking that their No. 1 chakra is the base chakra, accept from planet earth the base energies of planet earth such as the vibrations of greed, lust, envy and religious domination etc. 'If they would only accept the crown chakra as the energy inflow point, their spiritual sensitivity (Feelings) would be heightened and they would not be dependant on gurus for their direction, which has given them an earthly intellectual spiritual outlook. They are not using their own insights for their own full potential."

Here is her version, briefly: Chakra 1: Pineal, base of the skull — red colour. The concept to keep it healthy is PATIENCE. Represents self-acceptance.

Chakra 2: Coccyx, base of spine - orange colour. The concept to keep it healthy is LOYALTY TO SELF. Represents wants.

Chakra 3: Reproductive area — yellow colour. The concept to keep it healthy is ONE WITH ALL. Represents needs.

Chakra 4: Solar Plexus. (Naval) - green colour. The concept to keep it healthy is POSITIVITY. Represents identity.

Chakra 5: Heart - blue colour. The concept to keep it healthy is DEVOTION TO SELF. Represents drive.

Chakra 6: Thyroid (Throat) - purple colour. The concept to keep it healthy is COMPASSION. Represents relating.

Chakra 7: Pituary (3rd eye) - white colour. The concept to keep it healthy is HUMILITY. Represents OUTFLOW.

(Michael tells us, "I shared this information about the chakras recently at a ManSpirit gathering in Asheville and several men observed that I constantly share about things differently. My reply was that I come from the southern hemisphere, or 'Down Under' — where people view life and beyond from a different angle. You decide what works for you.)

Michael Bray is an Avatar Master

and author of the book *Angels Are Real*. His book and the book by Annette Noontil are published in Australia and are available from him direct — call 828.253.2224 or email: avatarmb@geocities.com

MUSING ABOUT GAY CHILDREN

By John Pan Brock

Ever muse about the origin of gay people? Are we a new form of life produced by evolution? Or are we some kind of genetic mistake? Or are we as the Religious Right contends just weak-willed sinners? About sinning, good thing God will decide not the religious zealots. (The conservatives do get a bit tedious.) Does anyone else remember a

If you believe in a genetic component and you also believe in evolution, then this suggests gay peoples have always been favored to survive.

time when people of color were considered the seed of Cain and not welcome in many conservative churches? Funny how the faces of the oppressed change but not the rhetoric.

Let's focus a little reasoning on the genetic origin theory. Several studies of twins at the National Institutes of Health strongly suggest a genetic etiology to homosexuality. Even arch-conservative William Bennett on a recent news program suggested he believed in this genetic component and that for some individuals sexuality was in fact "hard-wired." And the American Catholic church is heading this same way.

If you believe in a genetic component and you also believe in evolution, then this suggests gay peoples have always been favored to survive. If we were not favored to survive, the people with the genes which lead to homosexual children would have died out long ago. And 3-10% is not an isolated anomaly, it's a race or species.

If we are favored to survive but we usually do not reproduce on our own, then families in which we arise must have had an advantage in survival. Thus families with homosexual children are more successful than families without. More successful even though some of the children did not reproduce.

Finally, following this reasoning to its conclusion, we exist because we

have contributed to the success of our families and thereby our communities. Where are those "family values people" when you need to tell them a thing or two?

Speaking of the family values people, many modern families seem to see their gay children as the spawn of Satan. But make no mistake — there are specific families and cultures where gay people are valued and considered gifted. In several native North American tribes, gay people were considered special because the Great Spirit took more time and energy to bless us with two spirits — male and female. Families with a child of "two spirits" were considered very blessed.

So why have we skipped down this merry path? Our society rarely agrees on anything except when science and logic turn on the lights. Therefore, gay people

must push for scientific research to further investigate our origins. Even to the point, when we will have a test for whether a fetus/child will be born gay. Wouldn't it be powerful to have a mother test her child and find out there is a 99.99% chance that child is gay? A loving parent would then seek access to resources to promote the healthy development of a gay person, in the same way as the parents of a child prodigy might start checking into advanced schooling options or parents of a blind child learn Braille. Yes, many parents would have to confront and resolve their own homophobia. Or maybe they would choose to give the child up for adoption by a family able to truly love a gay child.

"Oh no", you say, "we will be exterminated in the womb." It certainly would be an odd dilemma for the Religious Right given their stands on abortion and homosexuality. But gay children are already dying as suicides or just plain "failure to thrive" children. Let us bring these atrocities into bright focus. Let us shine a light on the fact that 1 in 3 teen suicides involve sexual identity issues. Let us shine a light onto how we grow up isolated in a judgmental, oppressive culture never knowing about others like us.

While the fight for gay rights should be waged on all fronts, we currently focus the battle for equal treatment on the workplace or same-sex marriages. This legislation, while critically important, will only protect the few gay people who have

run the gauntlet and made it out of the closet. The gauntlet here is the test of surviving being raised by predominately anti-gay heterosexuals, surviving while hiding one's individuality, surviving by somehow avoiding self-destructive behaviors (typical of any oppressed minority). Sociological research suggests many of us didn't make it.

We must not forget those wounding times of our youth. We must also remember other gay children are suffering now, and some won't make it through the trials of a heterosexual upbringing. Research should answer questions about our origins and bring into clear focus the most damaging type of homophobia: the homophobia inflicted upon gay children and teens. Of course, the religious right will scream we are simply trying to recruit. We don't have to recruit. Throughout recorded history, we have always been here. We and our families have been selected by millennia of evolution to be here now.

Pan (John Brock) is a research scientist who loves his parents and very unscientifically believes the Earth God/Goddess made faeries as a perfect gift to the world. It's just a matter of getting the wrapping off the present. He can be reached at jwb6@cdc.gov.

Book Corner

GAY BODY: A JOURNEY THROUGH SHADOW TO SELF

by Mark Thompson
St. Martin's Press, 1997

by Al Cotton

This review first appeared in the Spring 1998 issue of The Harvard Gay & Lesbian Review.

At the Eagle the other night, I spotted an attractive guy, late 20's or early 30's, who spent most of the evening hanging out with a friend. When they separated, I went up and started a conversation, which meandered from his home (north Georgia) to his profession (trucker) and around to his plans for the rest of the evening ("depends on my friend"). When I asked him the "right now" question—"What are you looking for?" — he responded, "Same as my friend, a Daddy. I don't expect him to hook up, though, he's too scared. I'm looking for someone to take charge, then anything goes." We chatted awhile longer, then parted for drinks and bathroom breaks, and that was that. But over two months later, his answer continues to resonate in my mind — so succinct, articulating an almost universal gay male ache. It's clear to me that embedded in the gay male psyche there lies a deep yearning for a male authority figure to hold us, teach us,

discipline us, and to love us.

No book I've read has told me more about these ideas than Mark Thompson's remarkable memoir, *Gay Body: A Journey through Shadow to Self*. It is the completion of Thompson's trilogy, which he started in 1986 with *Gay Spirit*, a seminal book in drawing together the nascent gay spirituality movement, and continued with 1995's *Gay Soul*, a collection of sixteen provocative interviews with a veritable roll call of heart-centered gay seekers and thinkers, including Harry Hay, James Broughton, Joseph Kramer, Ram Dass, and Andrew Ramer.

Gay Body is the most personal of Thompson's books, and from my perspective the most generous and risky. Growing from his recent studies in Jungian psychology, Thompson has gone on a sort of self-excavation of his own life in order to give us examples of gay male archetypal patterns and how they function in our day-to-day existence. In his introduction, Thompson articulates the problem in this way:

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.

Thompson goes into his own twilight zone again and again in *Gay Body* to illustrate what he sees as the universal "stuck" patterns that gay men experience. From childhood, we carry the "sissy boy" complex, and overcompensate by first embracing sissy-hood, then rebelling against it by embracing its opposite, the butch clone. We almost universally have to deal with the distant father and over-protective mother, which Thompson suggests are the result of a gay boy in the family, and not the creator. The father, sensing the child's attraction to him, becomes distant, and the mother takes up the slack.

All this and much more is illustrated in the book's early sections, which detail the Thompson family traumas and wars. We see young Mark's crazy parents; his sexual relationship with his brother; his attraction to costumes, make-up, the theater. We watch him leave home,

come out, fall in love. We see how family pathologies are passed down to children, how stereotypes function in the real world, how shame and grief can pervade our existence without our even realizing it, how addictions help us putty up the gaps and keep on smiling. Thompson's prescription for every gay man is to undergo therapy to deal with the inner world created by such dysfunctions.

The gay male attraction to and fascination with Leather has never been dealt with in such a direct, heartfelt and soulful way as here. In the chapter "Shadow Play," clearly the book's best section, Thompson details his transition from Radical Faerie/Great Mother-identified gay man in silk blouse and t'ai chi slippers to the world of Leathersex, and does so with humor, heat, and unflinching honesty. Stories like this don't usually get told — perhaps that's what made Thompson's *cri de couer noir* feel so fresh and original. The lure of radical sex and butch (read "wounded") masculinity continues to operate across gay generations, and anyone wanting to understand their persistence in the gay male psyche should read Thompson's trenchant analysis.

The writing can feel overly precious sometimes, and the juxtapositions of real stories and psychological theories do not always flow smoothly. But to me, that is more than made up for by the heart and compassion that went into the crafting of this book. I see both selfless generosity and fearlessness in the telling of these extremely intimate stories, which the author has put out in the hope of helping other gay men to see and learn about themselves.

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TASTING JOY IN YOUR BODY

by Andrew Ramer

(The following is an excerpt from the revised edition of Andrew's book Two Flutes Playing: A Spiritual Journeybook for Gay Men, published by Alamo Square Press. We offer it here with Andrew's permission.)

There is a primal force, the Creator of all that is. Whether we call it God or Goddess, it is the same Oneness. From the heart of this Oneness, four forces flow that sustain the universe. Physicists call them gravity, electromagnetism, the strong force, and the weak force. I call them love, joy, ecstasy, and bliss. We human beings are a weaving together of these four forces. The work of the past, the work of the spiritual teachers of the past, has been about love. But as we evolve it is time for us to explore who we are as beings of Joy.

Joy is the name for the single energy that we have seen as two distinct ones, as spiritual energy and sexual energy. The sharing of joy will be the major healing tool of the future. Dolphins and whales understand this, that free-flowing joy is the balance to love, the cross-weave in the fabric of life, able to hold all our pain and sorrow in its embrace.

We have been disconnected from joy for so long that it takes time for us to feel it in our bodies. The best technique I know for awakening joy is this. Each morning when you get up, touch yourself all over, massage yourself from head to toe. Joy is everywhere, and we have all been raised in a culture of fear and contraction. As you touch yourself, as you relax, speak softly to your skin, your muscles, your organs, your bones, your

The best technique I know for awakening joy is this. Each morning when you get up, touch yourself all over...

cells. As you massage yourself, say aloud to every part you touch, "This finger is holy. This elbow is sacred. These ribs are blessed. This stomach is sacred. This shin bone is holy. These balls, this cock, this asshole are blessed." Say this out loud to every part of you, inner and outer. Touch every part of you, inside your ears and mouth, up into your armpits and under your balls. In blessing and naming every part of yourself, you will heal the separation between soul and body. Then joy will flow easily, in and out of every cell.

Afterwards, you may want to pleasure yourself, to raise erotic energy. When this energy is strong, breathe it up into your abdomen and your chest, into your heart. Fill your heart with this energy. Feel it pulsing in your arteries and veins. If there is any part of your physical body that is tense, in pain, in need of healing, breathe this energy into that part. Use it to heal yourself. Breathe this energy into your hands. Feel it pouring out of your palms and your fingertips. Touch yourself with this energy, fill yourself with it, heal and bless yourself with it. Let the path grow familiar and strong from cock to heart to hands.

If there are places in your neighborhood or anywhere on the planet that are troubled and in need of healing, beam the energy that fills your body out to them, from your heart, your hands or wherever feels right to you. Fill the airwaves with pleasure. Beam it out everywhere. Pleasure yourself and send this energy out into the heavens and down

into the earth. Make love to everything this way, to clouds and rocks and planets and stars.

Beam this energy into your food before you eat. This will both energize it and tune it to your body so that you can digest it fully and efficiently. If you are taking herbs or medications, beam it into them too, to tune them to your body the same way.

When you connect with someone, remember that he is far more than just a physical body. Even when you are talking on the phone, he is touching you and you are touching him. The moment he walks in the door, even if you are 20 feet away, your subtle body is touching him and his subtle body is touching you. What do you feel? What do you see? Pay attention to all of this

before you touch hands.

When you are with someone, sense all the layers of his body. See how the energy flows in his body. Where does it flow smoothly and where does it get stuck? This is part of what our ancestors knew how to do. Subtle touch, the touch of energy before the touch of hands, is a part of love-making, too. Remember that you can overload someone's circuits, give too much energy, or give it too quickly.

A lover of men must know how to be intimate. Intimacy is a state in which energy flows freely from person to person, in and out of every organ, in and out of every cell. But many people are filled with love and still unhappy, because they do not know how to transmit it to others, or do not know how to receive it. Is your heart open? Can you give and receive love equally well? Can you give and receive love equally well — at the same time?

Go back over your personal history. Explore all your relationships, with family, friends, and lovers. Where was there intimacy and where was there need? Where was there intimacy and where was there fear?

If you are having difficulty being intimate, sit with a beautiful flower. Beam out energy from your heart to the flower, until it is filled with it. Then feel how the flower is beaming energy back to you with no reservations. Breathe in this joyous energy and be filled with it, in every part of you. When you are able to be intimate with

flowers, go on to trees, to animals and then on to humans. To be able to do this, to be heart-centered, is what we came here for. Feel your heart spread out until it fills your entire body. Beam the energy of your heart out to the world, and let the world send it back to you.

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Other recently published books you might want to know about:

Will Roscoe, *Changing Ones: Third and Fourth Genders in Native North America* \$24.95, St. Martin's Press

Will Roscoe's new book on berdache is designed as a textbook on third-gender Native Americans for Queer Studies.

Boyhood, Growing Up Male: A Multicultural Anthology, 2nd edition, ed. Franklin Abbott. \$15.95, paper, Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1998

This reprint of Franklin's anthology has articles from many GSV men, plus a new foreword by Michael Kimmel.

Eric Rofes, *Dry Bones Breathe: Gay Men Creating Post-AIDS Identities and Cultures*, \$24.95 paper, Harrington Park Press

This book is the follow-up to Rofes' provocative *Reviving the Tribe*, and takes on many of the topics and people Rofes has been debating over the last two years, including Gabriel Rotello, Michelangelo Signorile and Larry Kramer. Rofes argues that AIDS has now transcended the crisis-mode of the 1980s, and gay men need to rebuild their erotic lives.

Queer Dharma: Voices of Gay Buddhists, ed. Winston Leyland, \$19.95 paper, Gay Sunshine Press.

Essays by gay buddhists, ranging from Michael C. Hyman's long and heartfelt essay "Practicing Together as a Male Couple" to Jeffrey Hopkins' provocative essay on "The Compatibility of Reason and Orgasm in Tibetan Buddhism."

James Broughton, *Packing Up for Paradise: Selected Poems 1946-1996*. \$16.00, paper, Black Sparrow Press.

The latest dispatches from the Good Gay Gray Poet, who keynoted at GSV's second conference.

WEB STUFF

Web Stuff is a new, occasional column in *Visionary* where we tell you about things we found on the Web that you might want to know about. Send your

links to Al Cotton, bearsekr@aol.com.

<http://www.stevee.com>

Though you probably don't realize it, many of your book and magazine covers may be the creations of Stevee Postman, whose computer-generated graphics grab the eye and hold the mind. (Check out RFD #87, the cover of *Queer Dharma* or the current brochures sent out by Body Electric for recent examples.) You can see Stevee's arresting and breath-taking work at the above address; while you're there, send him a message if you want to know when his Tarot deck is published this fall.

<http://www.the-park.com/barzan/main.htm>

FREE BOOK OFFER!

You can receive a free copy of *Sex and Spirit: Exploring Gay Men's Spirituality*, by Robert Barzan. Send \$3.50 (U.S. funds only) per book for postage and handling within United States and Canada, \$6 all other countries. Maximum four books per request, to White Crane Press, P.O. Box 170152, San Francisco, CA 94117. *Sex and Spirit* was nominated for the American Library Association Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual Book Award for 1995.

http://www.salonmagazine.com/feature/1998/04/cov_10feature.html

Was Jesus gay?

An article that explored the idea of Jesus' homosexuality from a slightly skeptical but interesting angle. (Al)

Poetry

NAKED

by Bob Strain

Look at my body. I
have no secrets now
out of my clothes. Will you
tell me your story?
Under the window the
boy has been crying
but still it is shuttered
against too much light.
Discover your treasures
as I show you mine.
Open your breath with me.
Look. I am risking
letting you see, deeper
than any shadows.
Afraid to close my eyes,
I watch you all night.

--Bob Strain

Bob can be reached at
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HORNETS

i watched all afternoon.
Hornets came and went
From the cardboard castle
Hanging above my door.
A worker flew to the goldenrod,
Scrambled through the blossoms
For a while, then returned.
Another flew out; three returned.
They groomed each other.
Five or six wove intricate loops
Around their dwelling, humming
louder
When i approached.

At last i saw

A larger hornet stuff her abdomen
Into a hexagonal cell.
The small ones danced around, doing
things
i could not follow. Then, they sealed
The top of the cell with wax.
Others arrived, chewing gray fibers.
Another row of hexagons took shape.
The sentries ignored me,
As if i were the broken hoe
By the kitchen stairs.
Evening fell, and the foragers
Returned home, folded their wings,
And slid into the open cells.
The guardians sought shelter last.
i think i saw the large one crawl
Between the central cells,
Where the hexagons stood
Three layers deep.
The moon rose.
The hive cast a faint shadow
Across the top of the door.
i got a can of Raid, and began
spraying.

Cassandra

Cassandra's self-published poetry chap book, Cassandra can be obtained by sending \$6 to Cassandra, 4 Lookout Road, Asheville, NC 28804. You can e-mail Cassandra at cassand169@aol.com.

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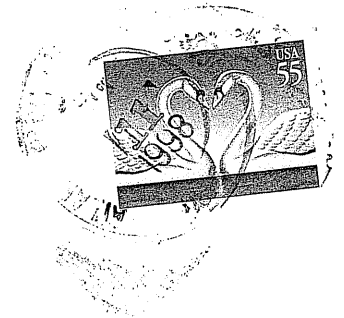
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