

# VISIONARY



## TRUTH WITHOUT MALICE

BY DON CLARK

(excerpted from a talk at the GSV Conference, September 1998)

**T**oday I want to talk with you about why I think it is so important for us to learn about our gay nature, why I think it's so important for us to rid ourselves of shame and become shameless, why I think it is urgent that we honor our sexual attractions, and why I think it is necessary that we build healing communities in which all of this can happen. I think that one of the things that's *fabulous* about being a gay man is that we get to use words like "fabulous" and "hideous" and we know what it means! Other people toss the words around but they don't know what they mean.

I think we have a *bequest*. I used to say it was a gift. Now I say it's a bequest because it comes from God, nature, the gay men who have gone before us for generations. It is something that is handed down to us through those generations, through hundreds and thousands of years. We have it. We own it. We have a responsibility to treat it well and to do something with it.

I have some assumptions which I should get out of the way. I used to say, back 30 years ago (and it was important propagandistically), "We're just the same as everyone else. We're men who are sexually attracted to men, women who are sexually attracted to women, but we really are just the same as everyone else." I don't believe that now. I really do not believe that we are the same as everyone else. I really do believe we are different. The whole fact, the fact that we are men who love other men and who can love other men in *all* ways, including sexually, is no small difference. It is *the* difference that makes all the difference in the world. That's assumption Number 1.

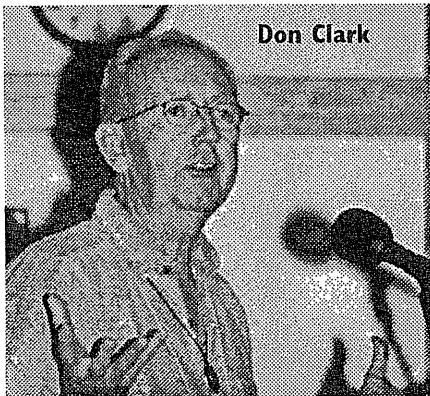
Number 2: I have a heuristic assumption (that's a fancy word I learned in graduate school, which means an assumption that if you assume that, it permits you to gather more information about something) that we gay men have a vital role to play in evolution. I don't think it's an accident that nature has pro-

duced us in such generous quantities, generation after generation, forever. I think we have a role in evolution and I even have some ideas, as do you probably, about what that role might be.

Third assumption: I think also within that fact of our difference, if we look into it carefully (and maybe, for whatever reasons, we have been not looking at it as carefully as we might)—within that difference is hidden the directive of what we are supposed to do with it that will make *the* difference in the world.

And let's get procreation out of the way. I'm a father. My kids are grown now—they have their own children. Fabulous. Ants also do it, cockroaches do it. I mean it's a fabulous experience being a parent—and it can wear you out like nothing else. It is an excellent experience but that's not really what *we're* about. We are not procreators, we are creators. Y'all remember that film "Airplane", where they had this obviously gay guy in it and the emergency was happening and they handed him the weather map and they said "What can *you* make of this?" and he said, "Well, I can make a bow or a ..." We are creators. At the drop of a bead we can make something. So I don't think procreation's the reason for us being here. While some of us do the procreating, I don't believe that's the reason for our being here—I think it has more to do with our creativity.

**H**ow does this *bequest* get covered up? If this bequest, this gift that has been given down the generations to us is so vital to the evolution of mankind, how did it get covered up? I think you all know the answer to that. The answer is that the nations, states, and religions learned that the *Continued on page 6*



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**VISIONARY**

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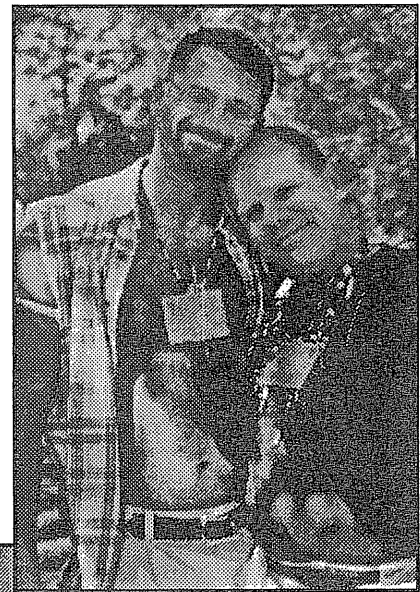
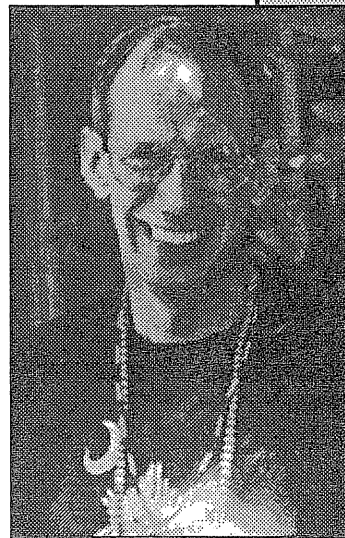
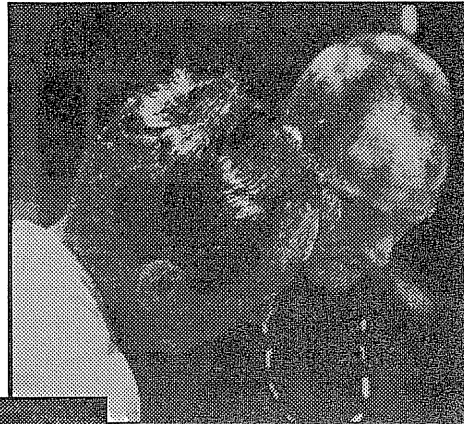
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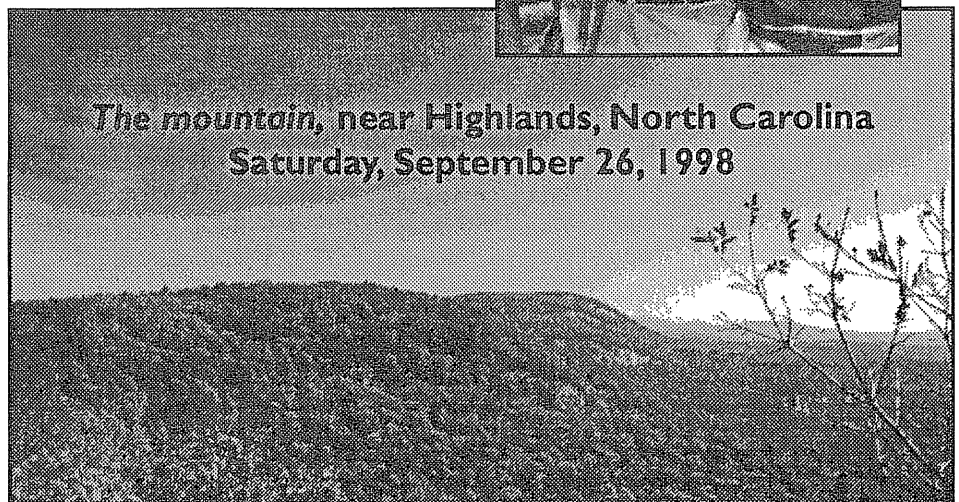


# AT THE 9<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL GAY SPIRIT VISIONS



Photos: Karl Boggs

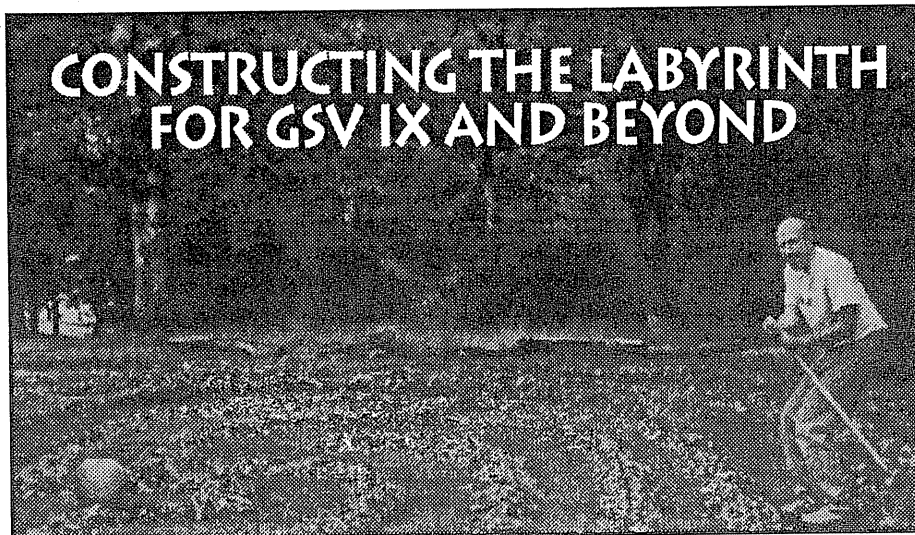
The mountain, near Highlands, North Carolina  
Saturday, September 26, 1998



# CONFERENCE



## CONSTRUCTING THE LABYRINTH FOR GSV IX AND BEYOND



Ramon Noya

For months before the Fall Conference, I imagined and visualized the Labyrinth, hopefully made from existing materials, in the space occupied by the volleyball court. With the intention of creating a sacred space, I tackled what I thought would perhaps take more than a day. But with the help of the Spirits that always join us at *the mountain*, it was realized in just over a couple of hours. The lights were laid out as best I could figure out, always being confused by that male/female electrical plug thing. I awaited the arrival of Ramon Noya, who had it all up and running with a snap of his wrist.

Conference attendees, *the mountain* staff

and cat, and many Spirits of our brothers experienced walking the Labyrinth as the energy gathered in the center pumpkin. On the way to *the mountain* office to ask if they would like us to leave the Labyrinth for WomenSpirit, I was met by a staff person on her way to ask me the same thing.

As our Conference was ending, a bisexual woman friend of Treewalker's arrived and was drawn into the Labyrinth as she followed the sounds of singing coming from the Treehouse. A bisexual woman—the perfect transition to WomenSpirit. As I left *the mountain* at dusk, my headlights caught the figures of the staff and other visitors walking the Labyrinth.

### Following is a message from WomenSpirit:

“On behalf of WomenSpirit, I wish to extend our sincere gratitude for the beautiful labyrinth you provided for our event.

“Those of us familiar with labyrinths were thrilled to see it when we arrived, and we urged those to whom this was a new experience to walk it with us as often as they chose.

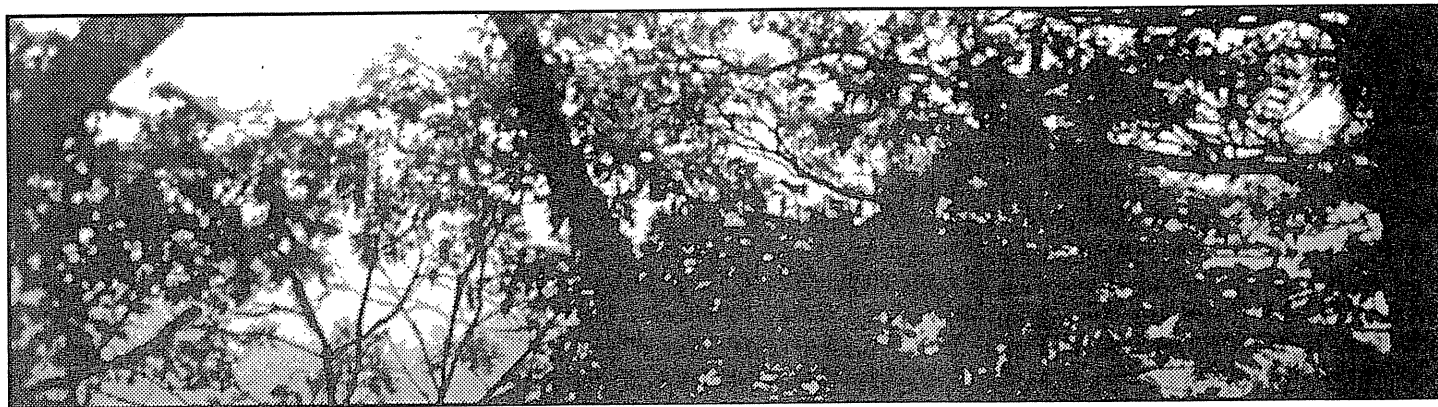
“And I can vouch for the fact that it was used and very often during the five days of our event.

“I'd like to share one experience with you. Saturday evening, around 12:00, I and several others were leaving the Treehouse to go to our cabins. *the mountain* was shrouded in an incredible mist and as we came to the labyrinth, we saw several women walking it in their long dresses or robes. The sight was awesome! Seeing the lights and the women through the mist was breathtaking and we paused, unable to leave the scene. It was ethereal!

“Wouldn't it be great if *the mountain* would build a permanent labyrinth, or perhaps building another next fall? Perhaps it is something our two groups would be interested in working on. What do you think?”

Interest in this proposal should be directed toward Toni Stephenson, 423/457-3171, [ste@esper.com](mailto:ste@esper.com).

King can be reached at 404/688-8234.



Karl Boggs



FALL CONFERENCE

There's no part of the Gay Spirit Visions conference that is more beloved — nor less spiritually understood, I think — than the Saturday Night Talent Show. I'm sure lots of people, especially our "virgins," don't see it as spiritual at all. For them, it's a chance to make an impression, to show off that fabulous new outfit or that slinky black dress with the spaghetti straps, or to "wow" us with that number that *always* works at home.



# WHAT'S SO *Spiritual* ABOUT A TALENT SHOW?

BY AL COTTON

And while these are all things that the Talent Show is, this list only hints at the spiritual aspects that underlie its purpose in the scheme of our conference. Starting with the general supposition that everything in life is inherently spiritual, carrying within itself both the opportunities for spiritual pitfall and spiritual fruition, I want to explore our Talent Show as it exists, what its spiritual dangers are, and how it teaches by example.

And I want to begin by banishing forever the title "No-Talent Show." This terminology is one of the few things I hear at GSV that truly offends me, since it denigrates the people who have the courage to get in front of the entire conference and offer a gift of themselves. Other organizations may call their shows "No-Talent" if they wish; ours is more accurately called a "Find and Share Your Talent Show."

So what exactly is the spiritual content our show? For the performer, the Talent Show serves as a place where he can give a gift of himself to the conference at large, where someone can be "seen," the spiritual opposite of being "disappeared". Take the cliché, "90 percent of life is just show-

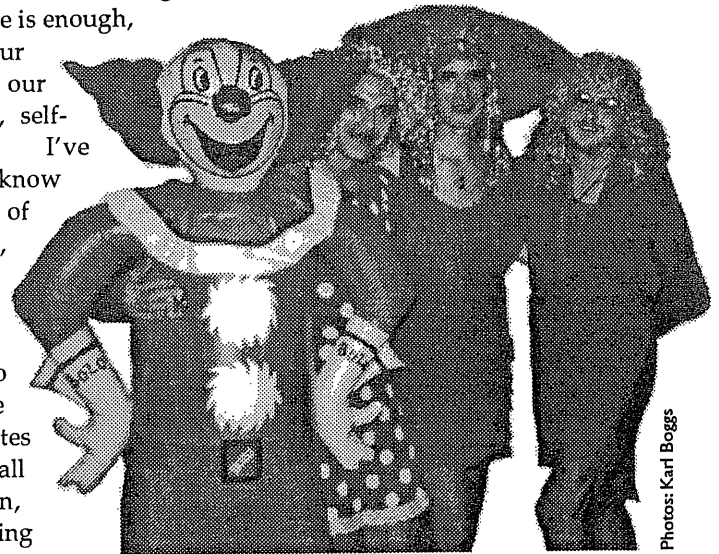
ing up"—the truth inherent in it is that the more you show up for life, the more you live your life fully. The Talent Show gives us practice in how to show up.

The pitfall that follows from this opportunity to be seen, is the desire to be adored—calculating your performance so that you're guaranteed a standing ovation, or enjoying the spotlight so much that you end up feeding your ego by hogging it. Now please note—I offer this next part lovingly, as someone who, on more than one occasion has read two pieces in a Talent Show himself. I hereby vow never to do that again, because in writing this column, I have come to realize a profound truth—I have never seen something in someone's second piece at the Talent Show that made a bigger impression on me than what he did in his first piece. Never. With the exception of poetry, and other small pieces of writing and performing, one piece is enough, and for us performers, our refusal to choose among our pieces is an ego-based, self-aggrandizing decision. I've thought it myself, so I know whereof I speak—"Both of these things are so good, everyone will truly love them, and since I have such wonderful stuff, surely there will be no problem if I am the one who takes up 15 minutes instead of 7." And then all of a sudden, yet again, we're sitting there listening

to someone sing at 11:45PM.

There are many stories from over the years that I could remind you old-timers of — the nationally known performer who started off the show with a beautiful piece, ended perfectly to standing "O," and then instead of sitting down, proceeded to offer two more pieces. The superb singer who asked to end the show with a four-song set. The endearingly nervous guy who turned into the maddeningly tedious on-stage chatterbox. The person who promised only to read a poem, and then decided to tell 5 jokes before he got around to his "talent." (These are all stories from three years or more ago, so don't think I'm talking about anyone this year—some things, especially those rooted in human nature, NEVER change.)

The breathtaking pieces, the ones I'll



Photos: Karl Boggs

take to my grave, are not the brilliantly executed, talent—fraught performances, but instead the incredibly courageous ones. Like the man who had the entire room on the edge of its seat as he recited the piece he botched in grade school and was shamed about as a child. Or the deaf man who came to GSV not knowing whether there'd be any signing at the conference at all, and ended up teaching us to sing Holly Near's song of solidarity, "We are hearing and deaf together, and we are singing, singing, for our lives." Or the man who frantically called all over Atlanta for an hour on Saturday afternoon to get piano music faxed up to *the mountain* so he could play a song he hadn't felt like playing since he got sick. When he died two months after the conference, in spite of some rusty-ness and sloppy technique and missed notes, I knew I had truly seen the performance of a lifetime that evening.

The reason these priceless moments continue to exist is because of the focus provided by the show's hosts. In our nine years, we've only had two—the Duchess, Raphael Sabatini, and the Wanton Cub himself, David Salyer. And the "talent" they have that makes them appropriate for this job is that they can see past the talent, into the heart and soul of the person performing. When they remind us of the humanity behind the performance, the gift we receive when the person on stage takes the risk of offering something from his heart, they help us to focus on what's most important in this process.

The performance of my own that I most remember didn't have a thing to do with the "talent" I offered—I got up there simply as an excuse to be front of 100 men on the first night that I ever wore a skirt in public. That was the first time I was ever willing to be "seen" in that way, and it still stands out in my mind as one of my ten most courageous acts.

These, in my mind, are the true reason for having a performance section at our conference. Not to be "entertained," so to speak, but to be moved and touched and awed by the gay hearts I've been sitting next to all weekend. ▼

*Al can be reached at barsekr@aol.com*

Fall Conference report

## WELCOME TO THE LAST VISIONARY OF 1998.

BY AL COTTON

An abbreviated Planners' Perch column this month, to update you on the 9th Annual Celebrating Gay Spirit Visions conference—116 men, from 18 states and provinces, attended our first four-day conference, making it a great financial success. Our check from *the mountain* was in excess of \$6,800, almost exactly in line with the last several GSV conferences. A detailed financial report for 1998 will be available early next year. Over 20 men attended the first gay male Elderhostel at *the mountain*, meaning a second such event will likely be on *the mountain's* schedule for 1999.



Most of this issue, and much of the next issue, of *Visionary* will be devoted to reports

from GSV IX. In this issue, excerpts from the keynote addresses of Don Clark and John Stowe are presented; next issue, look for excerpts from Andrew Ramer's keynote, and from the Saturday morning panel of healers. Also, the first *Visionary* of 1999 will have a full report from our November GSV Planners' Retreat, which was well attended, and had a lot of brainstorming that will need to be sorted out over the next few months. Plans are moving forward for a GSV Spring retreat in April, and a new workshop/fundraiser for GSV from Don Clark and John Ballew in June. Also, there seems to be a lot of energy available for more local events in Atlanta, like potlucks, heart circles, salons and other local gatherings. These kinds of community-building events are the core of GSV's base in Atlanta, and will be a prime focus for 1999. ▼

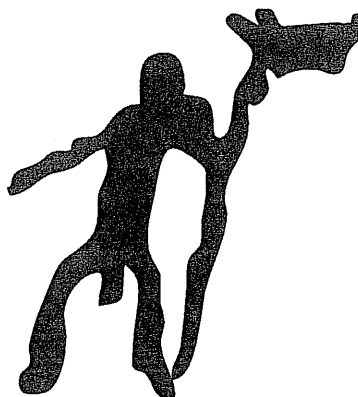
*Al can be reached at barsekr@aol.com*

### MORTAL LOVE Selected Poems, 1973-1998

by Franklin Abbott

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### CALENDAR

**January 9** —Planning Committee meeting, 10AM, Atlanta Friends Meeting House

—potluck, 7PM, David Thurston's house, 907 Piedmont Ave NE Condo 15, 404/873-0527, DThurs6404@aol.com

**February 13**—Planning Committee meeting, 10AM, Atlanta Friends Meeting House

—potluck, 7PM, Steven Band's house, 2943 Appling Way, Atlanta/Chamblee, 770/936-0045, sbmassuer@aol.com

**March 13** —Planning Committee meeting, 10AM, Atlanta Friends Meeting House

—potluck, to be announced.

*Other meetings and events may be added on short notice after our December 12 meeting. Check the GSV website for more information.*

## FALL CONFERENCE

TRUTH WITHOUT MALICE  
DON CLARK

Continued from page 1

very best way to control the population is to be the office in charge of handing out permits for sex. If you're in charge of saying who can and can't have sex, and when they can and can't have sex, you're in business because everybody wants it. And if you're in charge of that, you're in charge. Then, unfortunately, about 100 years ago, the physicians joined in—well intentioned, no doubt—with the idea that making someone well, or healing someone, meant making someone normal, or average—since normal actually just means average. So if you could make someone average, that'd be good. Well, then you have a tight lock. If you can say to someone, "Well, if you're going to be different—if you're deviant, then you are illegal, sinful and sick." Well, that's attractive! That's nice for us all! That's enough to throw some cold water on the fires right away. It has been the most important part of obscuring our bequest for us.

The tool used is shame. It's the way human beings are wired. Parents do it with children right away at the beginning. "You should be ashamed of yourself. Did you do that? Did you spill that? Shame on you." Then you get big-time shame, like when the state says, "You go to jail," and you're ashamed. Everyone is shamed. It's a very good way of controlling people. It's no small matter. It's a very, very big matter and all of us have been subjected to this shaming.

Shame, I think, is the ingredient that causes us to have a culture of scarcity as gay men. Look at the resources we have for sex—and yet, probably more than half of the gay men that I know don't have sex the way they want to, when they want to, with the frequency, duration, kind, etc.—something is wrong with that because we have the resources. We could provide for one another. There's something wrong about the way the phenomenon unfolds. It's a Culture of Scarcity that doesn't have to be there—like the world of hunger we have on the planet now that doesn't have to be there,

because we haven't figured out how to do the distribution properly. But that's another talk for some time in the future, but I want to plant that idea here.

If shame is the veil hiding the bequest, how do we uncover it? (Psychologists like to write "how-to" books.) So how do we uncover it? I think what we need to do is look for that which is unique in our nature. The thing that we have been separated off from the rest of the world by is the fact that we are different. That's the thing we've shied away from looking at because that's been the most punishing, the most shameful. I'm saying let's turn it around entirely. Let's go right into that. Let's look exactly at the ways in which we are different. Let's study it, put it under the microscope—find out how you're different, how I'm different—let's compare notes.

How to investigate these questions about our sexual desires? I think if we could just get this basic idea that your sexual desires and interests are the best thing you own, that there's something wonderful about all of those desires that you have during the day—and you'll be having here this weekend (which you'll be tempted to edit out 80% of) ... Maybe there's some real pay-dirt in those desires - just because they happen to be happening in your mind.

If you're giving a keynote, you always have to quote somebody else, so I thought I'd quote two people. One is Rumi—good old Rumi back in the 13<sup>th</sup> century was saying that "It's important to live your wantings as they come and not get stuck somewhere, stagnant." I think that's true. If you don't live your wantings, if you don't live that which you want, not only in general but moment by moment, you get stagnant. Another quote is from Rilke, the German poet, writing in "Letters to a Young Poet" (which I can't be the only person in the world who has thought, "There's something in those letters—something was going on between those guys ...") This was in the first decade of the current century and he was advising his young poet friend, "Have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books

written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually—without even noticing it, live your way into the answers." Wise words, I think.

So I have this little tool to suggest to you, which I am calling "Truth without Malice." I've been trying out variations of it in workshops and it turns out that it's very simple, *and* it's hard to understand it, *and* it's hard not to distort it....

The basics. First thing you do, you have to distinguish between what you really desire and what you have learned to desire. What you've *learned* to desire can be really nifty, but try to get down to brass tacks—scrape right down to the bone first. What is it in your heart and soul—the essence of your being, that you really want, that you really desire, that is not something you just learned to desire? I was taught to desire heterosexuality and I learned it and I did a good job and everybody thought we were the neatest couple in town—but I learned it, it was *learned* desire and behavior, it didn't come naturally....

Scrape right down to the bone. Find the REAL desire. I always get into trouble with people who are into S/M or bondage and dominance or submission and heaven knows whatever else it all is, because one of the things I'm suspicious of is that if it's an equipment-intensive sport, like skiing, and you have to go to the store and buy lots of stuff for it, I have suspicion that it's not a core desire we're talking about—that it may be acquired desire. Now acquired desire can be nice, but try to distinguish at the start between what's acquired or learned and what's the real you, because you may be doing it because your coolest friend does it instead of it being the essence of who you are.

So the way you do this truth-telling is—preferable in a safe container, an environment which I suspect this weekend represents, and I know that they can be created because I've created those containers—you muster up all of your courage and you go up to someone and you tell that someone exactly what you are feeling that

seems to have to do with him. And you tell it to him in as much detail as you can possibly do without fainting dead on the spot. Truth is truth. If it's aroma, it's aroma. Whatever it is. Sometimes he's way over there on the other side of the room, but you know exactly what your desire is with him, you know exactly what you wish would be happening between you and him. Tell him.

Now here we get into the more complicated territory, because once you have told him and you're still breathing—once you have revealed this, you're going to get a little flood of shame. So keep breathing and stand there if you possibly can. *His* job, at that point, is to be your Witness.

His job—or your job if you're on the other side of the interchange - the listener's job is to be the Witness. It's a very sacred responsibility, truly to witness what this person is telling you and to understand how probably very difficult it was for him to come to you and tell you that. It is not your job to rearrange the territory for him, to say "Oh, well, you know ... I can't do that today, but maybe tomorrow ..." That is *not* what it's about. What it *is* about is him showing you his insides. He's showing you the interior landscape and you have been honored with that. Your job is simply to receive the information. You know something about *him* that you did not know until he told you that. You have been entrusted with this information.

This is the kind of information that we're all going to exchange in the next ten years and find out who we are! There's something in those desires that's important. That's the thing that sets us apart from everyone else and it's the thing we're not paying attention to. It's the thing we get shy about and rearrange and dress up and try to make it sound socially respectable. Don't do that!

Just listen. And if he tells you that you're the hottest thing that's come down the street in the last ten years, sorry—that's not about you, it's about him. He's telling you something that's going on inside of him. You don't need to interpret it for him. You don't need to give him an instant psychoanalysis. All you need to do is *hear* it. Listen! Honor it. And say two simple words—"Thank you." He's given you a gift. He's shown you something inside of him. You have information that you didn't have

before. If we could magically, within the next five minutes, empty out everything that's going on in your minds right now to one another, we'd have enough to work on for the next five years in terms of exchanging information and growing from it.

Whether or not this will work in a safe container like this one depends on whether you're willing to assume that the only truth that you have to offer to another person is the truth about what's going on inside of you. The only thing you have to offer to me is what you think, you feel, you believe, what your experience has been—and that's a lot. If I could get some of that from each one of you, I would be very much enriched....

This truth of desire is a first step. After that, there are many other truths that we can tell one another. What I don't want you to do is skip the first step. That's what we've been doing for a long time. We skip the first step and go on to the others. We have to do the first step first. But if you're feeling inundated because you're the most desirable, prettiest person in the place and everybody is going to come up to you and tell you the various and sundry things they'd like to do with you, it would probably be a good idea for you to find someone and say, "I need to tell you how I'm feeling," and get it out. And that person only need say, "Thank you" and listen. He does not need to become your spiritual advisor.

Let me tell you about the first perversion that usually appears in this—people assume this is the psychological phenomenon of "projection." "Oh, I get it! So if you tell me that you think I'm mean, then *you're* mean." That's not it. If someone comes up to you and says, "I think you're really mean."—this is a Step Two, after doing a lot of the desire stuff, he's telling you something that's going on inside of him that's been ignited by you but it's still about *him*. But that doesn't mean he's mean, it just means whatever ... Maybe he's frightened, maybe you remind him of his first grade school teacher. I don't know and you don't know either. All you know is what he just told you. Take it in. Accept it. Honor it. Receive it. Store it away as information to be exchanged - you know how the ants do when they're going to and from their nest—they sort of

stop and talk to each other with their antennae—that's what we need to do to figure out who we really are.

One last headline that I want to make sure I get said—to make sure that we are promoting a Society of Abundance—and, yes, I am talking about sex in addition to other things. Do not shy away from sex. We need a community of abundance wherein everyone is sufficiently nourished sexually, and we can do it. We have the raw resources. There's enough here for everybody. We just have to learn *how* to do it and we're not quite there yet. But that doesn't mean forget about it. That means let's learn how to do it. Let's distribute the resources in ways that are not harmful to anyone and are very helpful to everyone....

I hope that we will leave this mountaintop at the end of the weekend with less shame. I hope that you really will go up to people and tell them exactly what your desires are. It's not about them, it's about you. I hope you can leave this mountaintop with less shame than you brought to it—even though you may have thought you were bringing none. I hope we can leave with greater generosity toward one another—that doesn't mean being a tramp but it does mean being generous—a fine distinction.

I hope that we can leave with a genuine determination to embrace the bequest that has been given to us by God, nature and all of the previous generations of gay men through thousands of years. We have it easier in many ways than they ever, ever could have imagined and we should use that opportunity. And with a clearer vision for each of us, individually, of what is Pride. I believe that gay pride is not a given, it is something that you earn. It's a nice catchy little phrase for advertising, but I don't think you're entitled to gay pride until you've done something to earn it. So I hope that each of us will be paying attention to how we are earning it, what our contribution is.

I'd like to leave you with some words, better than mine, by one of our elders—

*Continued on next page*

FALL CONFERENCE

**DON CLARK** *Continued from page 7*

Walt Whitman. A poem called "As I Lay My Head in your Lap, Camerado".

As I lay my head in your lap camerado,  
The confession I made I resume, what I said  
to you and the open air I resume,  
I know I am restless and make others so,  
I know my words are weapons full of dan-

ger, full of death,  
For I confront peace, security, and all the set-  
tled laws, to unsettle them,  
I am more resolute because all have denied  
me than I could ever have been had all  
accepted me,  
I heed not and have never heeded either  
experience, cautions, majorities, nor ridicule,  
And the threat of what is call'd hell is little or  
nothing to me,

And the lure of what is call'd heaven is little  
or nothing to me;  
Dear camerado! I confess I have urged you  
onward with me, and still urge you, without  
the least idea what is our destination,  
Or whether we shall be victorious, or utter-  
ly quell'd and defeated. ▼

*Don can be reached at  
DHClark1@aol.com*

*Don Clark and John Ballew will be leading a workshop in Atlanta June 11-13, 1999, called TRUTH AND DESIRE. In describing the workshop, Don stated, "Intimacy requires an ability to speak one's truth and to listen with an open mind. For too many of us, knowledge and communication of desires and other true feelings are clouded by shame and fear of rejection. In a safe, nurturing environment, we will join together as a community of gay men exploring the ways in which truth-telling can illuminate our individual and*

*collective natures. Using guided exercises, we will quiet fears of shame and rejection, opening the emotional heart and the physical body through touch and talk. Clarity of communication will be practiced as a pathway to heart's desire, self-knowing, spiritual freedom and greater self-esteem. Participants will gain greater ability to speak and hear truth with an open and grateful heart."*

*A portion of the proceeds of the workshop will go to the work of GSV.*

# HEALING OUR MYTHS

BY JOHN R. STOWE

*(excerpted from a talk at the GSV Conference, September 1998)*

## ... Myth

is a word with many meanings. For our purposes, I define it as "a core belief" or "underlying belief system" held by an individual or group. You might think of



myths as the stories we tell ourselves about how the world is. I don't mean fairy tales — which do contain wisdom, but which tend to be dismissed in our culture — and I don't mean the mythical stories passed down by any specific people. These are related but not really what I mean here.

Myths are the filters through which we view reality. Because they tell us what can and can't exist, they determine how we interpret every experience. Think about it — if you've got a belief that says that only round holes exist in the world, in order to make reality fit that belief you're going to have to discount anything else — like a

square peg. In fact, you'd probably have a hard time even seeing the square peg, because your belief system says it can't exist. We all know a hundred things that our cultural system says can't exist — like psychic ability, spontaneous healing, happy gay relationships. Even when we see them right in front of us, we tend to downplay them as coincidence, superstition, or exceptions to the rule. They just don't fit the accepted cultural myths.

If you change the myths, you change your experiences. Here's an example. When I was just coming out, I really had no idea what it meant to be gay — other than the sex part. So I looked around at the men around me to see what it was all about. There was a song that was very popular — "All the Sad Young Men" sung by Shirley Bassey — and all these guys I knew would get teary-eyed and melodramatic every time it came on — and they all had a copy, so it came on a lot! "That's us," we'd all sigh, hand pressed dramatically to forehead. One day, my friend Larry was with me when the song came on. Right on cue, I started to go weepy. He looked at me and laughed. "Fuck that shit!" he said.

"I'm not sad and I don't intend to be. I'm really happy!" It rocked my world. I woke up and realized that I wasn't sad either. In fact, I was having the best time of my whole life. It took someone's saying it, though, before I realized. That's the power of myth....

Our strongest global myths are mostly packaged as religions, as political systems, or as science — which is popularly treated as a religion anyway. They tell us, mostly, that we humans are above nature, created with a special imperative to dominate and control the entire planet. They usually tell us that whichever group happens to be speaking is the one chosen by God to tell everyone else what to do....

Clearly, we've outgrown the old myths. Bottom line, if they worked, we wouldn't be in the state we are. But we are and they don't. At their core, they all reinforce separation. They tell us we're separate from the Divine — unless we follow a set of impossibly difficult rules. They tell us we're separate from the rest of creation — worse, that Nature is hostile and needs to be controlled. They tell us we're separate from each other and they tell us we're separate



from our bodies. We can't trust anyone or anything.

All this separation makes every one of us feel like an outsider — and this isn't just gay people, it's everyone. We live in a wilderness of our own making, cut off and alone. At our core, I think most of us feel this incredible terrifying loneliness. God's not there — and neither is anyone else. And for the most part we go to great lengths to avoid feeling the pain of that. We throw ourselves into consumerism, into addictions, into one spiritual trip after another. And none of it really works.

Over the years, I've had to examine a lot of my own myths. Lots haven't held up too well under the scrutiny. Looking back, I wasted a lot of time not knowing that myths even existed, much less that they could be changed. I wish someone had told me about it all years ago! Let's take a brief survey of some myths that you might like to consider changing....

**Old Myth:** The body can be treated as some sort of machine. Though we can treat physical symptoms with physical means, any true healing has to address the whole, multifaceted, interconnected organism. In the same way, no individual can be truly healthy as long as the system it belongs to is sick.

**Old Myth:** Reality is fixed and inflexible. Not true, either. Reality is always influenced by underlying beliefs. It changes when we change. There's a Jungian psychologist named Arnold Mindel who treats all of reality as if it were a dream — the "dream body" he calls it. He approaches physical symptoms or situations as meaningful communication from the body/soul. When we learn the lessons contained therein, we're free to move on, and symptoms often change. Most of the time, we come up with all sorts of rationalizations — "it was coincidence," "the test results must have been wrong" — yet anyone who's into healing has surely seen spontaneous physical shifts more than once.

**Old Myth:** Spirituality is separate from the rest of life. "I'm spiritual when I'm up here at the mountain, or at church on Sunday." Wrong. Your spiritual path is the whole thing — from meditating on a mountain to brushing your teeth, from

singing in the choir to making love with your partner. It's all part of the journey.

**Old Myth:** There is one absolute truth, somewhere out there, and all we have to do is search until we find it. How could that be? There are many truths — all of them relative, constantly changing, and totally dependent on our interpretations for their meaning. If there were one single Truth that stood above all others, don't you think that at least one person of all the billions who have lived on the planet would have found it by now and told the rest of us? But we're still here, still arguing about a million different versions. It's not there, that's all.

A deeper myth underlies what I call "the breakthrough school of spirituality." This myth says that one day, you'll make it. You'll take one more workshop or finally meet that guru who makes everything click. Suddenly you'll be rich, have that curly hair you've always wanted, and get laid 6 or 8 times a day. According to this myth, you'll reach paradise — your wounds will go away, suffering will end, and the Void inside will disappear. It's not gonna happen, no matter how much you meditate, sing hallelujah, or follow some old tradition to the rigid letter. There's always another step to the journey.

The last two myths are even deeper than the others.... The first is that God exists on some higher plane, apart, sitting in judgment, micromanaging the universe and holding all the answers. The second is that we're all flawed or broken, original sinners with no way out of our sorry state but to rise above our humanity by transcending our bodies and the whole material realm. Even though God is perfect and created every other thing in the entire universe perfectly, somehow there was a mistake when S/He got to us....

I want to propose an alternate mythology.... What if God doesn't have all the answers — or at least doesn't plan to give them to us fully formed? What if God, instead of staying separate up in Heaven or wherever, decides to incarnate inside all of Creation — inside the Earth, the stars, trees, whales, humans, cockroaches and everything else? Inside of you. What if we're all aspects of the Divine choosing to experience the challenges of living, to come up with new understanding as we

respond to ever-changing situations? What if not only humanity but all of creation is evolving together? What if God grows in the process?

If we believe this myth, even for a moment, it takes away the loneliness. We're supported by every part of Creation. I know from my own work with flower essences that it is possible to work with the consciousness of "Nature" for healing and inspiration. There's much more going on here than is allowed by our old, narrow view of the world! We're not separate from the rest of Creation — we're right here, in the center of the whole messy wonder of it.

This myth also destroys the idea that humanity and divinity are mutually exclusive. In fact, if God has incarnated right here, the only way to reach God is to embrace ourselves. We can get over the idea that something's inherently wrong with us and get on with being human. Remember Tom Spanbauer's character, Ida? A million times she exclaimed, "Oh, the humanity!" In our humanity lies our salvation. We have to acknowledge the body and its wisdom (of all people, we Gay men should know this one!), honor our urges, our mistakes, the ups and downs of living. We have to honor our human impulses. It's all God having an experience of being us!

It also means we have to acknowledge that pain and suffering are inherent in all of life. The Buddha taught that they're universal, and I have yet to see any evidence that what he said isn't true. Pain and fear and grief and all the rest come with the turf. Maybe the pain is physical, or emotional, or spiritual or all of them, that doesn't matter. It's there and it's supposed to be. Trying to deny it or rise above it or numb ourselves out is like trying to drive a car after cutting all the wires to the gauges on the dash. There's no feedback, so we don't have a clue what's going on. Not that we should seek out pain or not deal with it when it comes up. It's just that we need to treat it as another part of living, not as something wrong or evil.

Let's bring it closer to home, to something we all talk about here at GSV. Gay people as a group have been scorned, oppressed, and wounded by mainstream

society for a long time. There's great pain in that. It's a big and complicated issue with many levels — and I'm not going to say that it's right. But it is a fact of life and all our railing against the injustice doesn't change that. For a moment, let's see how our myth might give us a way to look at the pain more constructively.

What if all of Creation, evolving together as a single, interconnected organism, senses that things aren't working out too well — that the old ways will lead to extinction if they don't change. Any organism, when stressed, mobilizes the cells that are its first line defense — you know, like T-cells. What if our hypothetical system/organism needs to get some of its cells really motivated to seek new ways? How would it do so?

Organisms tend to be highly conservative — we tend to repeat whatever worked well in the past. That's why human embryos still have gill slits, though we have absolutely no need for them. At one

time, they worked. Deep inside, each of us has a strong resonance with the archetype of Couch Potato — we stay where we are as long as things are comfortable. If our organism wants to mobilize part of itself to seek new ways, it's gonna have to light a fire under that part. When things get uncomfortable enough, the cells that are more sensitive reach a point where they can't stand it any more — and finally, they start acting. Gay people are one of those groups — though we're certainly not alone. When the pain gets too strong, the motivation to move and find new ways of thinking and acting becomes stronger than the urge to stay put.

We're clearly outside the mainstream. And I don't mean to condone any of the oppression or pain or dying that has put us here. But if we embrace it, what does it give us? Can it help us become the Explorers and Trailblazers needed to seek new paths for humanity? Can we turn the pain around into the strength and perspectives needed

by the greater Being? Can we see that we've learned — the hard way, of course — stamina, self-reliance, and how to dig deep within ourselves to find the hidden resources we need for survival? Can we honor our differences as the precious gifts they are? We need to. All of humanity needs to.

Our job is to create new myths. It is to embrace what we've always considered our "weirdness" and turn it into strength and eccentricity instead. It is to stop trying to fix ourselves, because at our core we're not broken. Sure there's work to do — each one of us faces challenges, doubts, fears. But the question is not to deny who we are — it's more a matter of finding new techniques, better ways to act and interact with each other and all Creation. No single one of us has all the answers — we've got to do it together, one step at a time, right here where we are. ▼

*John Stowe can be reached at  
jrstowe@mindspring.com*

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"Do you remember where you were when Kennedy was shot?"—the defining question of the late twentieth century. I was six months old, so I suppose I was lying in a crib, or perhaps a playpen. I do remember being awakened one night and carried to the den to sit on the floor in my pajamas and watch Neil Armstrong take his "one great step for mankind" flickering on the screen of a small black and white TV. I was watching TV, again, when the news of Princess Di's auto accident was flashed around the world by special report, though I doubt I'll remember that ten years from now. I don't remember where I was when I heard the Supreme Court ruling on the Hardwick case, though I think I read it in the newspaper. I remember very clearly, though, the horrible sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach.

Like most Americans, I was raised to believe that our country was the ultimate land of Liberty and the U.S. Supreme Court was the highest bastion of Freedom and Justice in the western world. Like most American adults, I had grown into more than a little cynicism about my homeland but I still believed in the Court, after all one must have some touchstone of certainty and trust. The nine "most honorable men and women of the United States" let me down that day. I was a felon, unconvicted perhaps, but a felon nonetheless. The highest court in the land said it was right and appropriate for certain citizens to be condemned for the repugnant act of falling in love. I thought the war was lost that day but, in spite of that sinking feeling, I took a deep breath, and just went on with life; that's what one must do.

After that defeat I didn't expect I would see the sodomy law overturned in my lifetime, not in Georgia. I was wrong but this battle ended, not with bang, but with a whisper. I always thought there would be loads of publicity and weeks, if not months, of anxious waiting, as the courts moved with their usual slow and ponderous deliberation. I imagined if we ever won there would be a near riot of celebration in Midtown. Instead, there was just an unexpected e-mail on AOL that set me searching around the internet for a confirmation of this unbelievably

## FREE AT LAST, FREE AT LAST.

sudden turn of events. I found it on the local newspapers web page, the same paper that told me about the Hardwick case twelve years ago, before I even knew what e-mail was, or web pages existed. Still, there wasn't even a banner headline, just a small sidebar. Later, one of the TV news broadcasts didn't even mention it, the one that did just gave it a minute half way into the broadcast. I thought about going down to Midtown, but I figured most people probably hadn't even heard about it yet.

As the days have passed I've realized what a whisper it really is, and yet, I think I will remember that day. It is a watershed, like Stonewall. The young men who come out in the future without that stigma of criminality may be just a little more free as a result, just as I can see that my view of life in the post Stonewall world is subtly different from those who were living Gay lives before liberation. Still, I think all Americans give "the Law" more power than it actually has. As I look at my life, the criminality of my love hasn't made that much of a difference. Perhaps, the passions of those moral fascists who mourn the passing of the sodomy law are fueled by the knowledge that laws, however much some people wish they did, don't really have that much power in the every day tumult of human life. The courts can punish but ultimately they can't control.

It was appropriate that such a fortuitous turn of events should happen the week before Thanksgiving and I'm thankful for it. I'm more thankful, though, for the neighbors who have befriended and accepted my lover and I. We are as much a part of the neighborhood as any other couple on the cul-de-sac. I'm thankful for my family who made a place for my lover at their dinner table on Thursday, and for my lover's family who would actually be hurt if I didn't go to their house for Christmas

Eve. Felons or not, church wedding or not, my lover and I couldn't be more married in the eyes of our family and community. No one has mentioned the end of the sodomy law. Perhaps they didn't notice it was gone and that may be because they never cared that it was there.

Not every one is as lucky as I am and being thankful is incomplete with out feeling compassion and sympathy for those less blessed. I wonder, though, if anyone's estranged family called last week to say "Now that you're love is not illegal, why don't you join us for dinner." I don't know if Wyoming has a sodomy law and I don't think Mathew Shepard's murderers cared. I doubt legalized sodomy will turn homosexuality into a high school fad. Yes, a lot has been accomplished: the next Robin Shahar won't lose her job, fewer Sharon Bottoms will lose their children, and Gay men can cavort in the privacy of their bedrooms safe from police raids. However, the fact remains bigotry can no more be successfully outlawed than sodomy could. Respect, for self as well as others, is a law of the heart, not of the land. Those who choose to hate now have one less validation for their hatred but, doubtless, most of them will choose to hate regardless. Gay men have one less burden to bear on the road toward self worth and personal empowerment, and yet they must win respect, and a place in the world, the same way every one else does it— one heart at a time. There is one less sodomy law in America and that's a good reason to smile, say a prayer of thanks, even dance around your living room, but then you need to take a deep breath and go on with your life, it's what one must do. ▼

*[And one useful way to celebrate would be to contribute to the two organizations who, against all odds, fought this battle for all of us gay Georgians—The American Civil Liberties Union and the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund. Consider, as a tangible way of giving thanks, a generous contribution to either of these organizations that fought so successfully on our behalf. Ed.]*

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# CULTIVATING EROTIC ENERGY

## JOY AND A SENSE OF THE SACRED WITH A PARTNER

BY JOHN BALLEW

[Ed. This is a companion column to John Ballew's column in our last issue of *Visionary*, where he talked about cultivating our own erotic energy individually.]

Intimacy requires us to let go of our barriers so we become present to our partner as he truly is and to ourselves as we truly are. We are required to lay down our defenses. This is not easy. Boys are not taught the same emotional vocabulary as girls. Boys are too often taught to ignore their feelings, especially vulnerable feelings. A boy crying after a physical or emotional hurt is often the subject of ridicule by other little boys. Small wonder that little boys who have learned to stifle their feelings grow into men who aren't certain *what* they are feeling.

To cultivate true joy in our relationships, we must allow ourselves to be open. You can't be defended against potential pain without also being defended against potential joy. This is even more of a challenge because most of us have been wounded by other men. These wounds weren't necessarily inflicted by someone who intended harm, but disappointments, embarrassments and so forth have a cumulative effect. These wounds are inevitable, and they can color our relationships with men in subtle or not-so-subtle ways years after the original event.

One of the first challenges of cultivating joy and a sense of the sacred, then, is choosing someone with whom we feel safe in being ourselves. For good reason, most of us need to feel safe before we can allow ourselves to be open. In matters of intimacy it is critical to feel that our partner has concern for our well-being as well as his own. If that sense of safety is lacking, no amount of erotic passion will be enough to allow us to open our deepest selves to our partner.

In practical terms, this means that while it is possible to have deeply meaningful sex with someone whom you've just met, in most cases casual sex isn't going to provide us with the sense of

safety that allows us to be completely present with another.

Since our culture has no tradition of sexuality or love as a spiritual practice, talking about this with a partner requires us to become vulnerable from the outset of the conversation. So the first step after finding a person with whom you feel safe allowing yourself to become vulnerable is to **initiate a conversation about deeper intimacy and spirituality**. Recognize such matters are "core places" for most of us. It's rarely useful to come off as some sort of authority who has all the answers — although many men may be grateful when their partner takes the lead. Create a relaxed environment that invites conversation. Avoid nervous laughter, which can be misunderstood. Take the initiative in opening up. Speak about your desires and your love for your partner. You may feel vulnerable; that's fine. In lowering your defenses with a partner who loves you, you become *safer*. Don't become defensive. Remember: you are offering an invitation, not issuing a command.

Some couples find that **creating sacred space** helps these conversations to happen more easily. When candles are lit and soft music is playing, they signal one another that conversation is going to take place that comes from the heart, not from a place of argument or judgment. Consider what ground rules may help the process. Useful steps include making "I statements" (for example, "I want to find new ways to be more passionate together"). Avoid arguments. Listen deeply. Speak softly. Hold hands when in sacred space; physical connection is important. These are conversations beyond right and wrong; they are conversations about nourishing one another and the relationship you share. Speak from your heart. Name your desire for your partner. Agree not to laugh or ridicule your partner — especially in any matter where he is expressing his love for you.

After building a common commitment, **relax, breathe and become truly present to one another**. Consider massaging each other's hands — 5 minutes per hand — 20 minutes total. Sink into the sensation. Let go of criticism or expectations. Allow your hands to wake up. Sit facing one another,

lightly holding each other's hands. Gaze into the other's eyes. Allow your partner to look inside you. Let your face relax, maybe smiling a bit. Welcome "the look." Be aware that our culture has a taboo against looking too directly at another. Notice feelings of discomfort and let them pass. Notice feelings of heat, energy and passion that may emerge. Enjoy them!

**Notice your breathing.** Is your breathing shallow? You may be cutting yourself off from sensation. Take easy, gentle, deep breaths. Allow your shoulders to droop. Sigh as you exhale. If it feels like fun, make sexy little sounds. Continue looking into your lover's eyes. Breathing helps the body to relax and to awaken at the same time.

**Touch your partner's face.** Take your hand and lightly touch his cheek. Trace the outline of his jaw. Trace the outline of his lips. When his fingers pass your lips, lightly lick them. There is no goal here except to be with your partner and savor this touch — *this* touch, neither discounting it nor rushing into genital touch.

Let go of any goal other than being with this man and sharing touch. Let go of any need to do anything else. Can you let go of thinking about erections and sex acts and simply focus on pleasuring one another? There is no need to "do" anything. It is enough simply to *be* with this man. Sink into it.

**A simple but powerful ritual is to undress one another while honoring each other's body.** Western spiritual tradition teaches that this being with whom you share space is created in the image of God. That's not the way we often treat one another. Can you slow down and feel a sense of awe in his presence? Can you recall what it was first like to have permission to touch another man whom you desired?

Allow your passion to increase slowly. What's the hurry? Take your time. In this space, with this man, time need not exist.

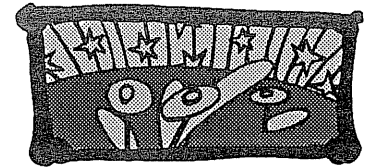
Can you relax into orgasm rather than holding your body more and more tensely? Doing so will enhance the sensations of ecstasy. Enjoy the sensations that come after orgasm. Don't do anything; practice simply *being* with your partner. Doing so allows this highly energized state to continue vibrating within each man. Slow your touching — but remain awake! Notice



what is happening in your heart. There is much wisdom available to us in this post-orgasmic state. Allow it to wash over you.

This is your birthright as a man who loves men. ▼

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## THE COSMIC TRIBE TAROT DECK

STEEVE POSTMAN,

TEXT BY ERIC GANTHER

(\$32.00, book & deck of 80 cards, Destiny Books)

REVIEW BY AL COTTON

I've heard it said that when you find the Tarot Deck that is right for you, you'll know it. That didn't stop me from buying one of my own ten years ago—the Aquarian Tarot, a mod deco 1960s/70s deck that never felt right in my hands. I never used it, and over the years looked at several others—feminist decks, Native American decks, etc. — and never got the right vibe.

Then this year, I became Body Electric coordinator in Atlanta, and was taken by the beautiful image on their brochures—a silhouette of a man, with a tree in a meadow superimposed over his body, holding a lantern. I tracked it down, and found out that it was the "Hermit" card from a Tarot deck that a man named Steve Postman was preparing for publication.

And then I started discovering all the other places I'd seen Steve's work—front and back covers of *R.F.D.*, the cover of a book called *Queer Dharma* that I'd bought a few months ago, several other places. It's



The Hermit

© Steve Postman

amazing how much clutter we have to cut through to make the connection between disparate images we've seen for years.

So I ordered *The Cosmic Tribe Tarot Deck* on amazon.com before it was even published (since they'll gladly take your money and mail the book as soon as it comes out). And when I got it, what I found is a remarkable labor of love—80 images (many sexually explicit) that cross between human models, Tarot archetypes and amazing computer-generated images, and work on many different levels of clarity and complexity. The overall effect is dazzling, each card filled with a dizzying array of images that both conform to Tarot traditions and push into new archetypal realms.

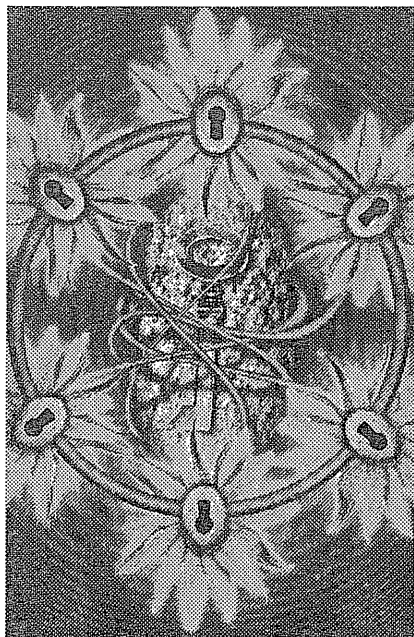
There are a few quirks for Tarot purists to note—two of the major arcana have been renamed (Justice and Temperance are now Emergence and Balance), and I believe, reordered in the deck. Among the face cards, Kings, Queens, Knights, and Pages are now Queens, Knights, Princesses and Princes. Taurus that I am, I'd like to hear the reasons for significant changes from tradition like this—it makes cross-referencing with other decks difficult, and feels like a nod toward

political correctness that minimizes the male influence in our lives. In a wonderfully inclusive gesture, there are three cards for the Lovers—one hetero, one gay and one lesbian — so that you can choose the Lovers that matches or suits your orientation (or you can do as I do, and leave them all in, giving yourself two extra chances of drawing the Lovers card). Eric Ganther's text is good, though primarily in service to the images, instead of the vice versa that I'm used to with other decks.

This is the first Tarot deck to speak to me directly, with the vibrant energies of spirit and soul working together beautifully through Steve's amazing computer-rooted artistry. I've already given away my Aquarian Tarot deck—this deck is the one that sits near my altar now. ▼

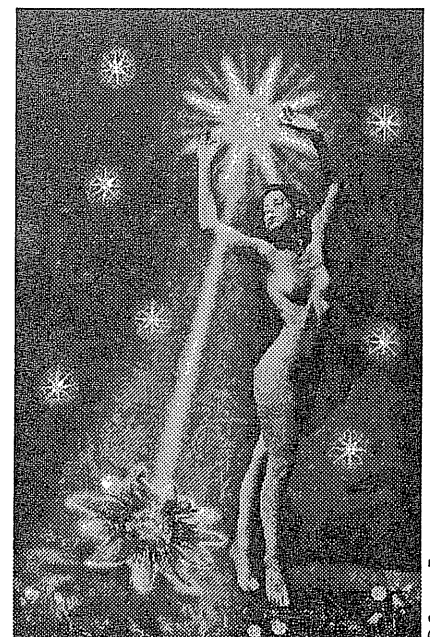
Steve Postman's website is [www.stevee.com](http://www.stevee.com); he can be reached at [stevee23@stevee.com](mailto:stevee23@stevee.com). Images from the deck can be bought in high quality color prints and frame-able size directly from Stevee.

Al can be reached at [bearsekr@aol.com](mailto:bearsekr@aol.com)



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The Star

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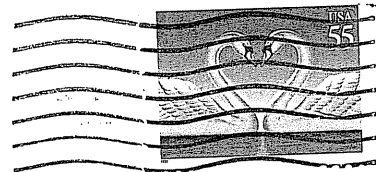
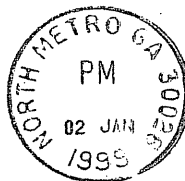
For info: call John Stowe (404) 373-0111  
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### VISIONARY

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