

VISIONARY

When someone calls the GSV phone line, and I try to explain what Gay Spirit Visions is about, I usually find myself talking in a rather generic way—about healing spiritual wounds, finding a spiritual path, creating for society a picture of what a spiritual gay man looks like, feeling the healing power of a room full of 120 open-hearted gay men, etc., etc. Now those are all true. But those things are not what I personally got from GSV that changed my life. As usual, the specific thing that a specific person gets is so, well, *specific* that it takes a lot of explanation.

The truth is, the most important thing I got from GSV was a knowledge of the existence of Body Electric massage workshops. And the most important thing I got from Body Electric was a direct experience of how energy works in the world, which GSV then helped me nurture and develop.

Let me explain. I moved to Atlanta in 1983, and came out a year later. It was obvious at that time that the United Methodist Church held nothing for me, caring more about its doctrinal "truth" than about the anguish I grew up with in the wilds of north Alabama. I spent about 5 years in the Gay Mecca of the South trying to figure out how to "be" "gay" in the world, wandered into my first disastrous, abusive relationship, and spent 1990 recovering from it.

There I was, in 1991—a stubbornly concrete Taurus who thought all that New Age stuff was a bunch of hooley. If I couldn't see it, hear it, taste it, smell it or touch it, then what good was it to me? Always in my head, emotionally brittle, it had taken physical abuse at the hands of the man that I thought I loved to burn my world down and send me looking for a way to rebuild it. I had started writing a column for *Southern Voice*, and my esteemed editor, Gary Kaupman, reminded me again about this "gay spirit thing" up in the North Carolina mountains that I had skipped the year before. Gary had always done a good job of bringing interesting things into my life, so I decided to attend.

And when I got there, there were over 100 men, sitting in a circle, some dressed quite weirdly, hugging each other. The theme that year was "Celebrating the Erotic Godbody," and the Good, Gay, Gray Poet, James Broughton, may he rest in peace, was our keynote speaker. He spoke directly to my heart about sexuality, and how it must kindle our lives into flame. I was in his thrall.

And a lot of people were talking about "Body Electric." At that time, John Ballew was the Body Electric coordinator in Atlanta,

and conducted a "clandestine" introduction to Body Electric's amazing workshops opposite the Talent Show on Saturday night. When those happened, they would usually siphon off about 20 or 30 men who were so taken with what they did in the afternoon introduction, that they had to experience more. And when they did, they usually went on to do the workshop the next time it happened in Atlanta.

That's what I did, though I was disappointed that the workshop, which came around about a month later, was not to be taught by the famous Joe Kramer (who had been in my small group up at *the mountain* that year, though Oblivious Me had no idea who he was), but an interesting, California Valley-Guy type named John Pasqualetti. John started the workshop off with the usual "double circle" exercises, and as guys started relaxing and opening up and becoming more energetically charged, John said, "Now, let me show you how to see auras."

And I said, almost aloud, "Yeah—RIGHT! That would be neat trick, since they don't exist!"

Which he then proceeded to do, rather easily. Take a somewhat energetically charged person, look at him, soften your gaze, sorta focus in front of and behind him at the same time, and voila, there were the little energetic ripples and a bit of a halo around the head, not much different from the energy you can see radiating from a fire. At that exact moment, a little door opened in my mind. "Whoa—maybe I'm gonna have to reconsider some of this stuff that I thought couldn't *possibly* be true..." Talk about famous last words!

The rest of that weekend was phenomenal, but it was the ten-minute aura exercise that opened my door. The turning of its little squeaky hinges represented the sound of a paradigm shifting for my life.

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MY ENERGETIC HISTORY



BY AL COTTON

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consists of The Council of Trusted Elders, plus Steven Band, John Brock, Jim Fason, Matt Huff, Tony James, Ramon Noya and Kim Pittman

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1999 Conference Co-Chairs: Dandelion, Steven Band

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Visionary

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Decatur, GA 30031-0339.



Planner's perch

by Al Cotton

Hi guys... Since we've pretty much sketched out the future of *Visionary* for the next 18 months, I thought I'd take this opportunity to let y'all know what's going on, where we plan to take *Visionary*, and how.

The end of 1999 will mark the end of five years of *Visionary*. During that time, *Visionary* went from a small four-page newsletter to its current incarnation: between 10 and 16 pages, five regular columnists, pictures and artwork, and plus a wonderful re-design at the end of year 4. We're really proud of how *Visionary* has evolved over that time, and most remarkably, that we've been able to publish it for all five years without charging its readers a cent.

That's because of you. Everything we've ever done with GSV, we've done because you, the men who attend our conference, are incredibly generous. We have been able to create *Visionary* from money left over from previous conferences, generous gifts from some of you, and fundraisers that friends of ours have held on our behalf. For many years, we never even bothered to do a formal budgeting process at GSV, assuming that Spirit would provide when we needed it, and all of our proper and logical expenses would be covered. Amazingly, from our perspective—or perhaps not, if you look at how Spirit works—it has always worked out that way. Over the years, we've invested money (\$5,000) with *the mountain*, which at last year's conference we donated to their program of cabin refurbishment. We have also provided *Visionary* as a service of the organization—to communicate with other gay men about our mission and to inform them of our activities. And it has gratified us enormously to see how many of you voluntarily sent in contributions toward *Visionary's* expenses.

It was at the beginning of this year, when the Planning Committee decided to take on the expense of a part-time administrator (at the rate of \$400 a month

week for a 24-week trial period), that we sat down and actually did a full-fledged budget. During 1998, we spent almost \$5000 more than we took in. We also looked at the cost of producing one year of *Visionary*, which turned out to be right around \$4800. (See page 3 in this issue for our financial statement for 1998.) We had the money that year, and this, to continue to produce *Visionary*, but it became very clear to us that all GSV projects must try to cover more of their costs. It is now time for *Visionary* to start doing that, as well.

The November 1999 issue of *Visionary* will be the last one that we will send out for free to our entire mailing list. That issue will also contain a subscription form that you can return if you'd like to subscribe. Also, if you would like to make a contribution to *Visionary* some time between now and the end of 1999, the amount of that contribution, minus our subscription price, will be tax-deductible. For those of you who don't want to subscribe but still want to know about GSV events, we are planning to produce a one-page calendar that we will mail to non-subscribers.

We're also going to use this transition time to try to improve *Visionary*. We plan to increase its size to around 20 pages per issue, as well as add more features, like reviews, artwork and other graphics, and a monthly interview with someone who's doing work we would find important in the world. We're also looking for appropriate advertisers, with our first goal to always make sure that what you see advertised in *Visionary* are products and services that you, our Gay Spirit community, would find useful, stimulating and rewarding to purchase or participate in.

To help us through this transition, we have received a grant from the Lifebridge Foundation in the amount of \$5,000. We intend to use the money to relieve GSV of the burden of a portion of my salary as editor and administrative support staff, to pay for layout and design, as well as our writers, and to use some of the money to create new ways to network with similar organizations. Our goal is to use 2000 as a transitional period, and to be paying at least 1/2 to 2/3 of

our expenses for salary and production out of *Visionary's* income by the end of next year.

And honestly, we have no idea how many of you would be interested in paying for *Visionary*. We hope we've produced a newsletter that serves as more than just a calendar of GSV events. By reprinting keynote speeches and other transcripts, by making space where people can write about what GSV has meant to them or what they've learned from us, by reviewing books, CDs, and other things of interest to our community, we hope we've managed to become essential enough to your life that you might be interested in paying a small amount to subscribe to *Visionary*. Both *R.F.D.* and *White Crane* started as newsletters, and grew into larger publications. There are many possibilities, many different kinds of roles we could perhaps play in the world of Gay Spirit.

And however this turns out, let me tell you what a privilege it has been, for the

last five years, to edit this publication for this amazing community of men. I've been to many cities around the country, and I don't see anything like what we've created. I think it's a testament to the integrity of our process, the open-heartedness of the men involved, and the wonderful legacy of gatherings that was gifted to Atlanta Planners by Ron, Peter and Raven. I want to thank the Planners for the level of trust they've given me, and the standard of integrity they've held me to over all these years. Thanks to Joe Chancey for four years of service in layout and design, and to Mike Goettee, for one year of the same. Thanks to the men who've written for our publication, offered their art for it, helped proof it, helped mail it, and thanks to those of you who give us a few minutes of your time every so often to see if we have anything interesting, or touching, or pertinent to say.

Take care, be well, hope to see you soon... ▼

GSV 1998 ANNUAL FINANCIAL REPORT

	Expenses	Income	Net
Potlucks	\$ 317.87	\$ 0.00	-\$ 317.87
Spring Retreat	340.00	780.00	440.00
Fall Conference	7,149.08	8,742.75	1,593.67
Office	1784.00	0.00	1,784.00
Pride Celebration	50.00	0.00	-50.00
Newsletter (4 issues)	4,928.00	0.00	-4,928.00
Ethnicity Workshop	???	???	-650.00
Fundraisers	1,181.50	4,035.00	2,853.50
Yearly Net			725.30
Assets	CD on deposit at <i>the mountain</i>		3,000.00
Commitments	cabin renovation at <i>the mountain</i>		3,000.00

September 18—GSV Planning Meeting

10AM, Atlanta Friends Meeting House

September 23-26—The 10th Annual

Celebrating Gay Spirit Visions Conference

October 9—GSV Planning Meeting,

10AM, Atlanta Friends Meeting House

—GSV Potluck, Ramon Noya's house, 1385 Lively Ridge Rd. NE in Atlanta
404/634-2221,
RamonANoya@aol.com

November 13—GSV Planning Meeting,

10AM, Atlanta Friends Meeting House

—GSV Potluck, Gary Kaupman's house, 218 Lansdowne Dr. in Decatur
404/373-0426,
GKaupman@aol.com

December 11—GSV Planning Meeting,

10AM, Atlanta Friends Meeting House

—GSV Potluck, Steven Band's house, 2943 Appling Way in Atlanta
770/977-0610,
SBMassuer@aol.com

Thanks to Jim Fason for volunteering as a last-minute host for the August potluck.

THE HOLINESS OF SEXUALITY

BY JAMES BROUGHTON
1913-1999

James Broughton's presence at our GSV in 1991 was magical. James and his partner Joel Singer brought some of their films from the '50s and '60s and gave us a little Auteur Film Festival, right there in the Lodge on Friday night. James spoke the next morning, gave a workshop the following afternoon, and blessed us all with kisses and autographs and his own special brand of seriously fabulous whimsy.

James's death earlier this year reminds us that our time will come, no matter how fabulous we are. And so all of you will know how fabulous he was, here's a condensed version of the keynote speech James delivered on September 26, 1991 at the second annual Celebrating Gay Spirit Visions Conference, which had as its theme "Celebrating the Erotic Godbody."
—Ed.

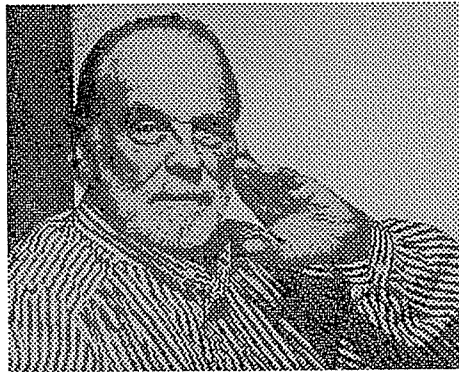
I am here as a spokesman for gaiety of spirit and glory of the flesh. My text for this happy sermon is a statement from Novalis: There is only *one* temple in the world, and that is the human body.

Persuade yourself of this truth and let it radiate through you. Dissuade yourself of any notion that Spirit is something that only hangs around churches or is something fuzzy flitting over your head. Recognize that your body is a divinity you inhabit....

I ask you now to experience your body as a sacred place. A temple is a place to sing hymns of praise. From your tiptoe to your topknot, you are throbbingly alive. Feel your glow. Feel it sing. Know that you partake of the divine, that you are lived by the divine, that you *are* divine. You embody the mystery of life.

For a moment placé both hands over your genitals. Not to conceal them, but to cherish, and to praise. This is the creative core of your Godbody, the place of instinct, impulse and transformation. Concentrate on your phallic glory. The penis is the exposed tip of the heart. The penis is a wand of the soul. Whatever its shape, size or shame, it is your holy birthright. Praise it. Give thanks for its awesome powers. Its energies permeate

every corner of your temple, connect all the chakras, the highest to the lowest. Phallus, perineum and anus form the trinity at the root of your torso's experience. I use the Latin terms to dignify these centers, to make them sound like Roman gods.



James Broughton

In the holy balls in your scrotum the treasure of your semen is kept. This is the monstrance for the consecrated Host of your temple. Did you know that the one part of you that never grows old is your semen? An anatomist told me. You can lose your mind, have heart failure, suffer intestinal collapse: your semen will remain forever young. Doesn't that suggest that you will possess plenty of spirit to the end of your days?...

Now place your left hand on your phallus and your right hand over your left breast. You are touching the Opposites in your Body: your masculine phallus and your feminine breast which holds your heart inside it. This is a way to affirm the wholeness of your being. Inner unity is the wedding of these opposites, creating the Divine Androgyne, the hermaphro-deity you were born with. Your birthright was double-sexed: half from the mother, half from the father. Don't create other divisions, this one is sufficient.

And from this vantage point you can open your temple to love. If you love your Godbody well, you are better able to love others. To paraphrase a great poet and lover of men who was born in Bethlehem: "All that you need to know in life

is to love yourself so that you can love those around you. Love the Godbody in them with all your heart and soul and mind. On these two principles hang all the meanings of religion." So, share your holiness. Reach out to your neighbor and go together into the kingdom....

Clasp, kiss and connect. Relish differences and similarities. Rub against fellow creatures of all stripes, shapes, scents and sweats, all textures, tints and tastes. How else will we end the civil wars of the world?

You must love even if it hurts. It will hurt more if you don't love. Can you make a holy habit of sexual love? Can you make a sexual habit of holy love? Can you dump your qualms and excuses, your taboos and allergies? Think of it: if you devoted to the practice of love as much energy as you expend on trivialities and cruel schemes, you might change the world....

Could I persuade you to become passionate missionaries? Would you take on the mission of spreading love? I do not see you as an isolated, self-centered clan. I behold you as propagators of the Faith, faith in the loving aspects of man's nature....

Could you become a secret order, devoted to spreading the love of mankind, like Jesus and his band of camarados? They were "outside the mainstream" of society, because they were *in* the mainstream of wisdom. They were thought of as lunatic fringe, an annoying minority. But they were actually at the heart of the matter. They believed in the eros that could be aroused in every man.

Stop thinking of yourselves as outcasts. You are meridian persons at the core of truth. You are not slaves to the breeding machinery. You are not swallowed by the consumer collective. You are raising consciousness, not babies. You are advocates of divine merriment. You could be innovators of a new way of life. Buddha said, "The world is on fire, and every solution short of liberation is like trying to whitewash a burning house."

Let yourself be believed by your angels. Open your orifices to dominions and powers. Pledge your valor and irradiate your temple. The holiness of sexuality gives every man his chance to be a genius. ▼

GATHERING REFLECTIONS

I attended my first Gay Spirit Visions fall conference in 1992. All by myself, I drove to a conference and retreat center outside Highlands, North Carolina known as *the mountain*. Traveling the last ten miles to *the mountain* entrance, I began to have a panic attack... not from navigating the winding, steep, mountain road with its zigzag twists and turns, but rather from the unsettling realization that I had no idea what was waiting for me on that mountaintop.

How did I ever get myself into this situation in the first place? My recollection is that an ex-boyfriend (whom I'll call Tom, because that's his name), simply handed me the GSV fall conference brochure and said, "This would be good for you." Design-wise, the 1992 brochure was a beautiful piece of work, conceptualized by King Thackston, that could actually be folded into a box. The conference theme was Celebrate, Dream, Weave and Experience Our Touch, Our Shadow, Our Power and Our Gifts.

I trusted Tom, so I read the brochure. Now first, understand that I'm coming at this from the perspective of someone who was raised Southern Baptist and converted to Catholicism as a teenager. I was completely unprepared for phrases like "cleansing fire," "drumming circle," or "we will create rituals for uniting, healing and asserting ourselves." There was a certain New Age, woo-woo quality to some of this stuff that made me wonder if we'd also be sacrificing animals, dancing naked with flowers in our hair or worshipping false gods. Eventually I scanned the names of the planning committee members and recognized three men—Al Cotton, Franklin Abbott and Gary Kaupman. Worked with one, dated two, slept with one. "At least I'll know someone else there," I thought, "and they seem normal." So I registered.

I arrived Friday morning with some trepidation. I checked in at the main office and was handed a packet containing a map, a conference schedule and list of workshops. I was cheerfully directed to my cabin by the office staff and told that lunch would be served shortly in the dining hall. After dragging my bags to the cabin, I tentatively walked to the dining

hall. Standing outside I heard commotion, laughter and convivial chatter. And I froze, unable to enter. Too many men. Too soon. I sat alone in my cabin for about an hour planning the Great Escape. Finally, close to one o'clock, I glanced at the list of workshops. The first one listed was called Coming In, led by John Stowe. I made myself leave that cabin and attend that workshop.

John led us through a series of visualizations, breathing and movement exercises designed to help us get present and centered at the mountain. At one point, in the midst of an exercise, John put his hands on my shoulders and said, "You're too tight; relax and mess up your hair." That was exactly what I needed to hear.

I attended another workshop that same afternoon, also a bit of a challenge. I have a vivid imagination, but I never imagined sitting in a circle of twenty men, passing around a phallic-shaped piece of wood and being asked to speak to the entire group as though I was channeling my own penis. And yet somehow there was a really sweet quality to this workshop that transcended what a lot of folks might consider a lurid premise.

Later, I processed through my dining hall fear and ate dinner with everybody else. Between the main course and dessert, I was struck by the daunting realization that I had dated and/or slept with seven out of a hundred men present. And four of them fell into the "Guys I Never Called Back" category. Nowhere to run. Nowhere to hide. Busted.

Dinner was followed by a heart circle in the Great Room of the Lodge. Heart circles are cool. Everyone gets an opportunity to speak or not speak (if he chooses) as we pass a talisman among us. You get to say something about yourself or why you came to the conference or what you're looking for... or how freaked out you are because you just realized almost everyone you've ever dated is sitting in the room.

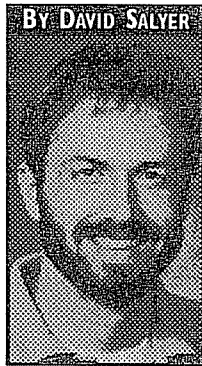
As I reminisce about my first fall conference in 1992, I recall my fears, my discomfort, and my initial inability to be present with those other gay men. I could have easily packed up my things, gotten back into my car, abandoned this group of men

and slipped away quietly. Had I done that then, I now know that I would have been bailing out of more than just a Gay Spirit Visions conference; I would have been forsaking one of the most unique opportunities to undergo personal growth that the Universe has ever offered me.

By staying at *the mountain*, I really did (as the brochure proposed) do some uniting, healing and asserting. For the first time in my life I was united with a hundred gay men outside of a bar setting, in broad daylight, under brilliant stars, surrounded by nature, in an environment that gently induced heart-centered work. This in turn, facilitated a healing process, allowing me to begin identifying and mitigating personal disguises, fears, shame, doubt and what I like to call my middle-class-tight-ass-white-boy tendencies.

Uniting, healing... asserting. What about asserting myself? Remember The Guys I Never Called Back, who seemed omnipresent at the conference? Spirit did me a grand, albeit mischievous, favor by arranging for all of us to be in the same place at the same time. I was given an opportunity to say to each of these men, "I could have handled what happened between us very differently; I could have done a much better job of communicating with you, and I'm sorry." Those men taught me something about asserting myself and accessing my individual power. I could have denied their presence, avoided them and continued to restrict my own self expression. But I chose to step out of the shadow, shedding light on a rather unflattering aspect of my character at that time in my life. Awkward? Potentially humiliating? You bet. Regrets? None at all. I learned a little something about admitting your mistakes, apologizing sincerely and moving on.

For me, the winding road to that mountaintop outside Highlands, North Carolina, has been a metaphorical reminder of my own personal spiritual path, full of colorful twists and intimidating curves. Each year I return to weave new connections between sexuality and spirit. I go to share my gifts and discover new ones. I touch. I dream. I listen. And I celebrate me. ▼



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GAY SPIRIT VISIONS

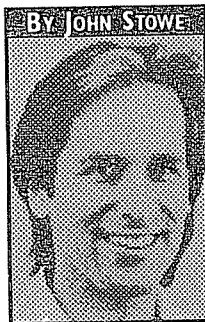
THE VIEW FROM OUTSIDE

Over the summer solstice, I had a chance to participate in a retreat for grantees of the Lifebridge Foundation. In the cedar-scented beauty of the eastern Catskills, 29 men and women came together to share our work, our visions, and our selves. Join me there....

Sitting in the circle during our initial introductions, I find myself asking what these people could possibly have in common. Several are scientists who describe their struggles to expand the boundaries of acceptable research. One man has walked 8,000 miles for peace. Another raises funds to support Tibetan refugees. One after another, actors, artists, writers, therapists and educators speak of various ways they were working to encourage inclusive, holistic shifts in global thinking. Several people talk of successfully introducing spiritual principles to businesses, groups at the UN, and (do you believe it!) politicians in DC. As far as I can tell, only three of us are gay.

By our second day together, I'm feeling the warm sense of connection so familiar from our circles at GSV. And despite the apparent diversity, our words echo themes that touch us all. Every person here is deeply concerned about the state of the world and strongly committed to making a difference. Most have faced major struggles to follow their personal visions in the face of societal indifference or hostility. Many speak of trying to create community that joins inner vision with outer reality. Beneath the words, I hear the strength of individuals who have had to "go it alone" and who now share a heartfelt desire for connection and support.

When the talking stick comes to me, one thing I speak of is Gay Spirit Visions. Sharing in this circle where almost no one else is gay, I am excited to share our mission and proud of what we've accomplished. My words are well received.



Later, on a walk through woods much like those at *the mountain*, I reflect on just how far we've come in our time together. Ten years ago—thanks to Ron, Raven, and Peter—we began to weave something precious that continues to grow and deepen. Shall I call it a discussion? A dance? A tapestry? Maybe an organism in its own right, with many hands and bodies, hearts and souls.

Over the years, our focus has evolved. Initially, our explorations were fairly introspective. We spent a great deal of time defining who we were—trying to convince ourselves, it seemed, that being gay and spiritual was even possible. We took great care to name the wounds caused by growing up different, and figuring out the best ways to start healing them. With the guidance of a few wise elders, we began the process of reconnecting with our heritage as a tribe of men-loving men—and embarked with increasing confidence on a journey of self-discovery and celebration.

Ten years later, the same issues are still important, yet the discussion has deepened. Instead of focusing on ourselves only as individuals, we're talking about how to share what we've learned with others. We speak not only of reclaiming our sexuality, but also of achieving fulfillment at all levels—body, heart, mind, and spirit. No longer content to just identify our inborn gifts, we're starting to figure out the best ways to share them within this society that needs them badly.

For myself and many others, this has been a journey of tremendous healing and empowerment. Our extended GSV circle continues to support me deeply. And so, it seems a paradox that I have to come all the way to this lodge in the Catskills to see GSV in a whole new light.

Listening to the others here share their personal journeys, it's clear that although the specifics of our path as gay men are unique and personal, the lessons we learn on it are quite universal. Over and over, I hear words similar to our own—"I always felt alone and different, like an outsider... only when I stopped trying to be what others expected did I begin to truly live... it wasn't me that was the

problem, it was society... what I'd tried to suppress turned out to be my greatest gifts... I'm convinced that the world can change if we each do our part...."

This circle tells me something else, perhaps even more important. We are not alone. People in every part of society are working to change the paradigm of competitive domination that has oppressed gay men—and almost everyone else on the planet. What we're doing at GSV is one piece of something much larger. What that means for us—and for gay men everywhere—is that we can take heart. Although the struggle is far from over, the world is changing. There's a lot more support out there than we may have thought. And it means we can stop seeing ourselves as isolated and alone—and begin to view our journey as part of a larger impulse toward human evolution. The world is changing—and we're part of making the next steps happen.

Through this time at GSV, we've matured into a deeper awareness of ourselves and our place in the world. We've learned vital lessons—like the value (and challenges) of operating by consensus, the importance of listening to each man with respect, and the power of bringing heart into all our interactions. Now, around us, a similar awakening is starting to occur in "mainstream" consciousness—both gay and other. More and more people are searching for spiritual paths that bring meaning and fulfillment. These people can benefit from what we have to share.

For most of GSV's first decade, we have talked about the role of the gay tribe as consciousness scouts, as healers, as keepers of vision, and as builders of bridges. Our focus has been on empowering each man to do his own part—and that is good. As we look forward to our next ten years, though, I'd encourage us to expand our vision. It is time to stand even taller, to envision not only our own healing, but that of the world as a whole. It's time to align with other groups who are working for the common good and take our full place as world healers—not just in theory but in actuality.

How does it look? I'm not sure exactly. Perhaps we'll build our initial bridges with other organizations of gay men—and lesbians—and spiritual seekers like those at *the mountain*. Some of it we've done already. Beyond that, we'll

have to see where Spirit and our visions lead us. It will take strength and courage to grow beyond the safe structures we've created. Surely, we'll feel some resistance. Can we succeed? I know we can. For ten years, we've pushed the envelope to challenge whatever tried to limit us. Now, the call of the world is stronger—and with it comes the possibility of greater support. Let us take what we've learned, heed the call, and continue our journey of heart. ▼

John can be reached at
jrstowe@mindspring.com

Incantation

Mountain's strength.
 White oak's wisdom.
 Horizon's beauty.
 Fire's passion.
 Men's love.
 Blessings.

—Bob Strain

MY ENERGETIC HISTORY

Continued from page 1

Because Body Electric workshops cost (at that time) \$195, and I could join the newly formed GSV planning committee in Atlanta for free, I signed up for GSV, and started coming to the monthly planning meetings, which put me in the company of the most amazing group of men I have ever been privileged to be in the presence of. And there, my energetic education continued. I went from January of 1992 to May of 1996 before I missed a meeting, and in between, every month, we sat in a circle and held hands, and the subtle energy that we generate when we hold hands and create a Sacred Space kept seeping in through the cracks in the door, and tingling my spine. I don't remember the first time I felt "the Shiver," as palpable as a cat claw on my bare back, but now I hardly ever fail to feel it, and I use it as a sign that I have, once again, found the right place to be.

From study and intuition, from meditation and breath work, I now know that that tingle comes from a self-existing bank of energy that is always there, always available to tap into, to bring me back, to clear

my mind, to open my heart, to make me present on the spot, and often, to smack me silly when I've done something stupid or unconscious. I've learned to tap into that energy at any moment (thank you, Atlanta Shambhala Center), and when I feel it spontaneously arise, I know to look around and see what message I ought to have noticed already.

The knowledge of it is the greatest gift I've been given, and I trace it back to the fact that I had the courage to walk in the door of a GSV Heart Circle, and not run away. But if an angel had been posted at that door eight years ago to tell me, "If you go in there, the most important thing you'll end up with is the gift of energetic consciousness," I'd have probably have gotten in my car and driven back down *the mountain*.

I guess it just goes to show—the difference between the gift I wanted and the gift I got is the difference between the life I would have led and the life I'm now leading. And that's a life I wouldn't swap for anything. ▼

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IMAGINE THAT

Common Boundary, the nation's foremost magazine on spirituality and psychology, said this about Cliff Bostock's soulwork, a modality of personal growth that is an alternative to psychotherapy:

"Bostock, who trained as a psychotherapist, says he now practices soulwork — helping clients 'live soulfully, from a place of deep imagination.' This process calls for...a restoration of the soul's aesthetic function and a rediscovery of the heart as an organ of perception. The purpose of doing soulwork is not to be 'cured,' but to deepen experience and to discover one's destiny...Most participants report changes beyond what one would experience from therapy."

Are you ready to undertake a radical path in service to soul and creativity, rather than to your ego?

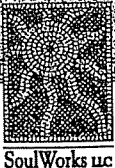


Cliff Bostock, M.A.

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 email cliff@soulworks.net

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Cliff Bostock, M.A., offers soulwork in individual sessions and limited-term group workshops, including *Greeting the Muse* and *Theater of Dreams*. A small 11-week group on *Gay Soul* is forming later in the summer. Call for a brochure or to schedule an initial consultation.

THE Spirit OF COMING OUT

BY AL COTTON

A person's entire vision of the gay rights movement turns on the answer to one question—Are we born gay, or do we choose to be gay? Answer that, and the next step you take will be radically different from the one before it.

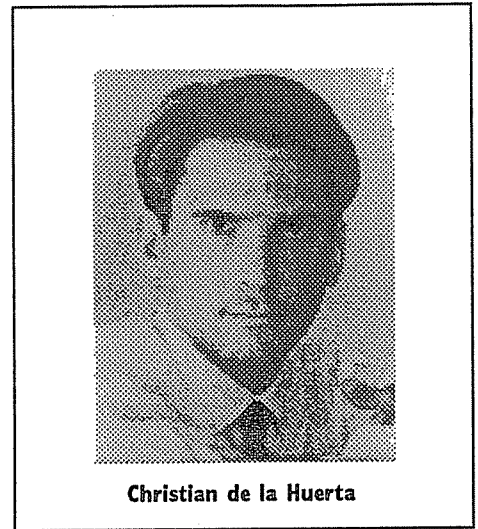
If you think we choose to be gay, then your activism will focus on abolishing irrational distinctions between gay and straight, and assimilating gay people into society as a whole. If you think we're born gay, that your gayness is a gift to be cultivated so that you can do something for society that straight people can't, then you'll move in the direction of challenging and reforming dysfunctional institutions like marriage and the Church, not participating in them.

That's where the Gay Spirituality movement begins, by asking the same questions that Harry Hay used to begin the Gay Rights movement in 1948—"Who are we, and what are we here for?" If this idea is intriguing to you, a great place to start exploring is Christian de la Huerta's new book, *Coming Out Spiritually: The Next Step* (\$14.95, paper, Tarcher/Putnam). De la Huerta is the executive director for Q-Spirit, a San Francisco-based group that looks at gay spirituality from an ecumenical standpoint. De la Huerta has made a name for himself with his work with the United Religions Initiative, a religious organization designed to parallel the United Nations. His book is both a copious compendium of leads, hints and directions for people who want to set out on a Gay Spirit Quest of their own, as well as some interesting original work on archetypes and sexuality.

types and sexuality.

"Coming Out Spiritually" is divided into four sections—Section 1, "Walking between Worlds," outlines the specific roles de la Huerta believes gay people have played in human societies over the years. Section 2, "Coming In," talks about the importance of a personal spiritual practice, and describes the most common New Age avenues. Section 3, "The Face of Passion," specifically looks at sexuality from a gay spiritual context, and Section 4, "Coming Out," tells the stories of a dozen gay people who've heeded the call of spirit. There's also a huge amount of valuable resource material in three appendices, including a description of how each spiritual movement or Christian denomination has dealt with gay people, plus a bibliography and other resources.

The archetypes themselves of Section 1 are a thoughtful contribution to gay archetypal psychology. What roles are we supposed to perform for this society that remains ambivalent about our contribu-



Christian de la Huerta

tions to it? De la Huerta suggests Outsider, Consciousness Scout, Mediator, Caregiver, Divine Androgyne, Keeper of Beauty, Shaman/Priest, among others. I was surprised that section was written from a co-sexual perspective, without distinguishing between which archetypes might be more suited to men or women. It seems commonsensical to me that the roles gay men and lesbians would play at this level would be very different.

The section on sexuality is again primarily male focused, which de la Huerta himself admits. It is at its best when dealing with specific practices, like Taoism, Tantra and Leathersex, and least successful in trying to reconstruct and critique the recent "sex wars" between the likes of Gabriel Rotello, Eric Rofes, Michelangelo Signorile, et al. I admire de la Huerta for wading into this contentious debate, but he doesn't offer much in the lines of reconciliation. I was hungry, however, for more about Clint Seiter's idea that sex with a "type"—i.e., a "Daddy"—should be considered Archetypal Sex (more about sex with what that person represents than about being with him) and is unlikely to be personally fulfilling.

One of the most enjoyable aspect of this book is how jam-packed it is with insights about New Age spiritual concepts and how they specifically relate to

Christian de la Huerta is founder and executive director of Q-Spirit, an international network of gays and lesbians in spirituality. He is also the host of "Spirit Wave," an online radio program promoting personal growth and spiritual development in the GLBT community, heard weekly at www.gaybc.com. In addition, he is the spirituality columnist for *Hero Magazine* and lives in San Francisco. Christian is touring the South this September and will be speaking at:

- Tu 9/14—Atlanta: Chapter One Books, 7PM
- We 9/15—Atlanta: Outwrite, 8PM
- Su 9/19—Atlanta: First MCC, 7:30PM
- Mo 9/20—Birmingham: Lodestar Books, 7PM
- Tu 9/21—New Orleans: Faubourg Marigny Books, 6PM
- We 9/22—Memphis: Holy Trinity Church, 8PM
- Th 9/23—Nashville: Davis-Kidd Books, 6PM
- Fr 9/24—Asheville: Malaprops, 6PM
- Su 9/26—Nashville: Holy Trinity Church, 11:45AM
- Mo 9/27—Charlotte: White Rabbit, 7:30PM

Catch him when he's in your city, if you get the chance.

gay men and lesbians. My favorite nugget is in the short section "Coming Out Is Letting Go." Just the title itself underscored for me that one of my most basic spiritual practices—relinquishing my imagined control over events in my life—is embedded in the process of Coming Out.

Overall, "Coming Out Spiritually" is simultaneously original and encyclopedic, wide-ranging, erudite, heart-centered, and extremely useful. It reminds me to continue every day of my life in the spirit that caused me to let go of an existence in Alabama that undoubtedly would have killed me, in many different

ways, and to rejoice in the ways my life now dances with the world. ▼

*Al can be reached at
acotton@mindspring.com.*

*This review first appeared in a different
version in Southern Voice.*

COMING OUT, THANKS TO GSV

BY ANDY MOLLER
(Part One of Two Parts)

In our last issue, we asked people to send in their reminiscences from the last nine years of GSV gatherings. The following response to that request came from Andy Moller, in the form of a letter he wrote to another GSV attendee, Harold Cole, describing his coming out process to his son and then his wife. Part One will run in this issue; part two will appear in our November newsletter.

I found out about Running Water gatherings from an unlikely chance meeting with Crazy Owl [an herbologist and long time GSV attendee who now lives at the Short Mountain Faerie Sanctuary in Tennessee] in Atlanta over twelve years ago on my way home to North Carolina. I was heading to Rt. 85 north on 285 but took the wrong turn and headed south on 85. At the next exit, while waiting for a light, there he was trying to hitch a ride north. In spite of my reluctance to pick up hitch hikers, especially this older guy with a long gray beard, I stopped for him. In the car he felt comfortable enough to tell me where he was going. I was shocked to hear that there was a gathering of gays in North Carolina, not more than 2 hours from my home. He was on his way to Running Water [a North Carolina Faerie sanctuary whose gatherings were the predecessor to GSV] and invited me along.

Although I could only take him half way, he accepted the ride and thus began my journey with GSV. I visited Running Water the next week. I was in the area on

business (never before that time nor after had I ever had any business in that area) and decided to see what it was all about.

As each year passed, especially after the fall GSV conferences, my determination to come out grew stronger and stronger. At the same time my love for myself grew. This was a necessary ingredient for me to survive the coming out experience. I began to get ready for the event.

Below is a recent letter I sent to Harold Cole describing my coming out experience. I had been visiting Harold at his Monticello, Kentucky home. A decision was made there that I would have to come out at this time. The only problem was when and how. We agreed to let Spirit decide.

March 14, 1999

Dear Harold,

Well, now. My son knows. What a young man I have. He had suspicions all the time and said that he did not want "the moment" to arrive. Well, it did. Here's how it went:

Got home from your place at about noon on Friday. A note from my wife said that Keith, our twenty-five year old son, is now looking at a house to purchase and she suggested that I make plans to go to Knoxville on Saturday. "Yes!"—the opportunity I needed. Spirit is working, and wasting no time. Then, after a few hours, Keith called to tell me that he is coming home on Friday evening from his trip to Atlanta. He planned that we would drive to Knoxville Saturday morning in separate cars so I can see the house he was planning to purchase. After that, I planned to return home.

It is now Saturday morning and we are on our way to Knoxville, me in my van, and Keith in his

car. As I drive I think about how I am going to tell him. I do not want to place this burden on him as he is in the middle of making a most important decision of buying a house, so I conclude that it may be best not to make any revelations to him at this time. Ah, but Spirit has other plans.

My decision made, more or less, we approach Knoxville and it starts to snow, something that was not predicted until late evening. Why now? I ask. Immediately the thought enters my mind: Spirit is working full time, knowing that I hate to drive in snow and will probably have to spend the night in Knoxville with my son in his friend's small apartment. There will be an opportunity to talk to him.

The snow increased with a fury, so much so that I lost track of my son for awhile, and was lost in Knoxville, until I found my map. I found him, we looked over the house and then decided to go to his friend's apartment. Intending to spend the night, I returned to the van and gathered my gym bag and other stuff.

The apartment was small for the three of us, so I knew I would have a difficult stay. His friend was not at home but Keith knew he always had brunch at a coffee house called "JPG". We walked the mile to the old town in the slush and snow and met his friends there.

On our walk to the cafe for our meeting and lunch, we passed a theater where it was announced that Ani DiFranco was going to perform. "Who is she?" I asked. "Oh, she is a folk singer from New York who is not afraid of her sexuality. She sings about topics no other singers would dare to approach. Like singing about another woman and how she might just take her to bed if she had not been involved with a man."

"So, Keith. Her sexuality does not get in the way of your liking her?" *Continued on next page*

"No, I admire her," he answered as the snow and rain hit his face.

"Man, I certainly brought you up right," I exclaimed. "I'm really proud of you."

Is this the opportunity that Spirit wants? I ask myself. No, I decide. Not now. So we continue on, to the cafe. We had lunch and by that time the snow turned to rain. I saw that as an opportunity to try to make it back home, a 2-1/2 hour trip through the mountains. But first we had to call home to see how the weather was there.

We walked back to the apartment, where the yellow-eyed cat greeted us this time, made the calls and decided that it would be ok for me to go back. Alone in the apartment, we talked about his house-buying decision. Then he got up to go to the bathroom. The cat jumped on my lap, pawed and made itself comfortable. It faced me and looked at me. As I stared into its deep yellow eyes, I knew it was time. I said, "Help me cat, help me do this right."

When my son returned, I said, "Sit down, Keith." He looked at me, his brown eyes wide. He knows what I am going to say, I think to myself. One side of my mind becomes distressed. It tells me to think of something else to say. Anything else, but not "that." Then the other side says, Carry on, big boy, this is the track you must take.

"Keith, I have to talk to you about something that is very difficult for me to say. I do it out of love and not to distress you. You have been so honest with me and I have not been that way with you. Now I want to be honest with you and I know that you will see that I am taking a big chance. I love you so much and it is difficult for me to put myself in a position where that, perhaps, I might lose that love."

He looks straight into my eyes, a small smile on his lips.

"Do you have an idea where I am heading?" I ask, as I caress the cat.

"Yeah, I think so," he answers and waits. So he is going to let me do all the work, and rightly so.

"Son, this is so difficult for me. But I started and now I must continue." And then I begin, "Have you ever wondered why your dad was so different from your friend's dads?"

"Yes, I did."

"Then you have thought about it?"

"Yes," he says, his smile growing bigger.

OK, here goes. Then one side of my mind yells, NO, STOP. DON'T DO IT! The other, gentler side says, Go on, keep it up Andy. You are doing fine.

"Then you probably know that your dad is gay." God, I said it. The world did not shake, my son did not recoil, and the cat just continued to purr on my lap.

"Yeah, I thought about it. Many times. I was always hoping we would never have this discus-

sion. You know, Dad, I wanted it swept under the rug."

"Well, we are having the discussion, son. How are you feeling?"

"Fine, Dad. This discussion is OK with me," he said as the cat jumped from my lap to his. With the cat enjoying his touch, we talked for over an hour. My son had not changed his opinion of his dad. We talked openly and honestly, something so new for me. It was exhilarating.

And so it went. What a son! Somebody brought him up right!

On the way home I thanked Spirit and realized the great amount of work that it did just so my task could be accomplished. Imagine creating a snow storm just for my use! I also gave a bit of thanks for those who suffered in the storm. ▼

Part 2 of this letter continues in the next issue of Visionary

1991

(IN MEMORY OF RICKY LEE FLIPPEN)

It was the equinox. There was a full moon. It was my first time. I hoped you'd be gentle, men I'd known only in dreams and glimpsed at the mirror's edge.

Frightened of the dark, drawn by a poem I'd loved, I put on my best mask and brought a friend and trepidation to hear Big Joy. I hoped he'd be gentle.

Ascending *the mountain*, softening, leaving denseness below we disappeared into the quiet clouds and everything became the first time.

Rainy among our old white-oak brothers: flashes of color, faraway laughter, a flow of polka dots and pearls (Did I see that?), stout leather boots on gravel (Yes.). Suddenly we feared an insufficiency of accessories.

The first dinner gathering, courage came from smiling strangers I had always known. An energy like fine silk thrilled my spine. In the laughter's subtext I thought I sensed a chant. Aum. Or was it the word "home"?

So this affair of tender souls began. A crane soars, glaciers crawl, seasons turn and soon we shall circle again in the year's twilight looking forward and remembering, making magic, music, birthing the next cycle.

As there was a first time, a last must come, I know, but not an end, never an end. My friend sleeps now among the oaks in quiet clouds on a mountainside nearby.

And each year, at the equinox, the full moon, I return unmasked to dance. Since my first time: gentle men, much wonder, big joy. I'm not afraid of the dark any more.

Bob Strain

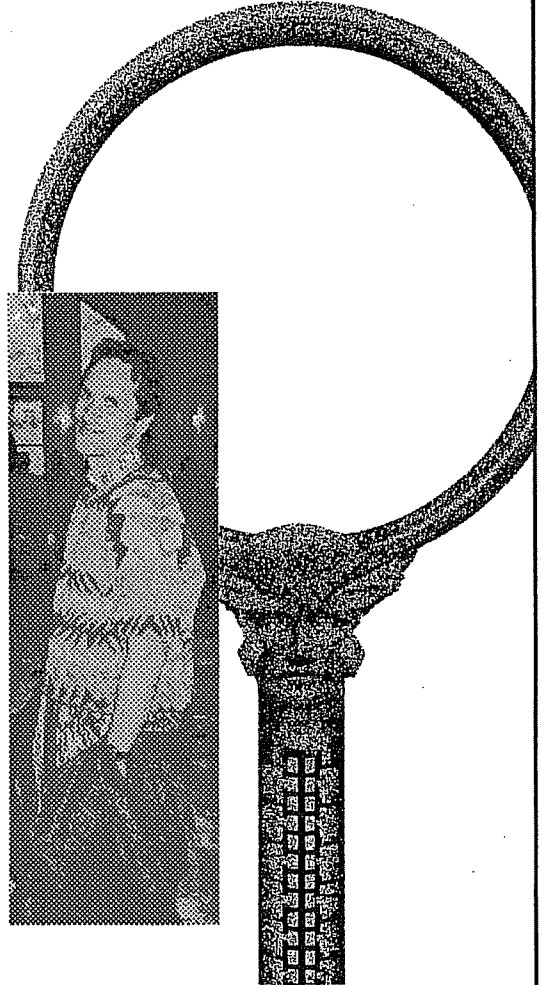
Bob can be reached at damndawg@ix.netcom.com

THE 10TH ANNUAL GAY SPIRIT VISIONS CONFERENCE

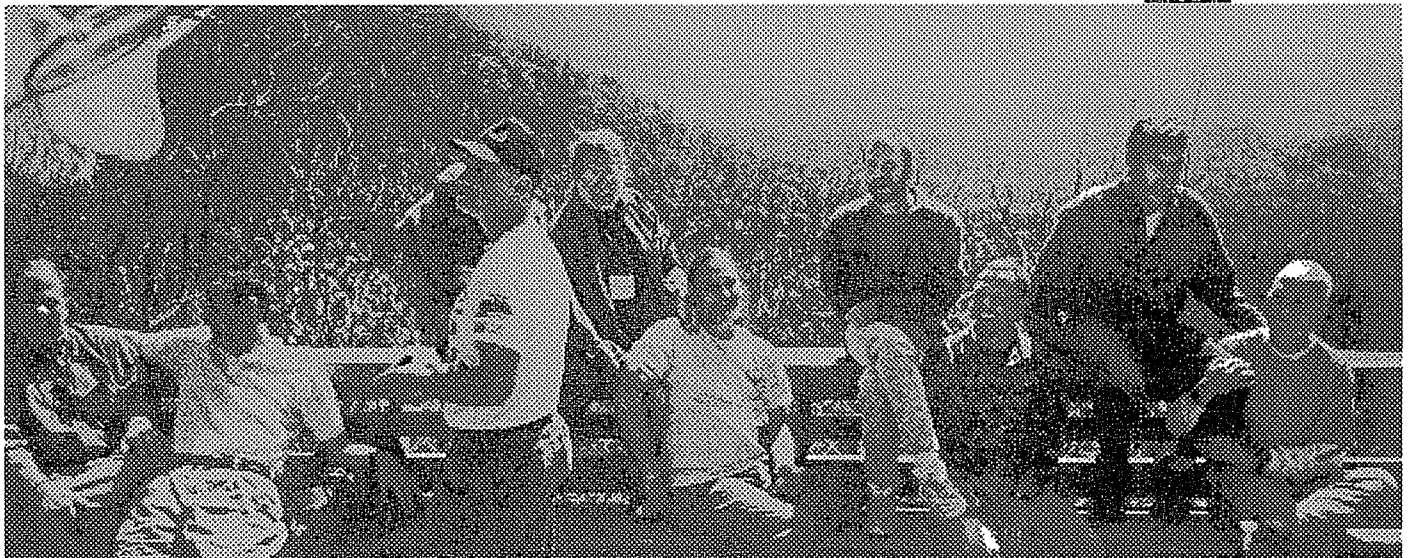
The Mask and Mirror Through the Eyes of Janus



*Celebrating 10
Fabulous Trips
Around the Sun*



September 23-26, 1999



An unidentified great being (upper left with glasses) paid a visit to the attendees of the recent GSV Spring Retreat.

Photo by Robert Kelly

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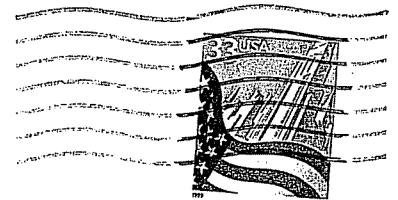
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