

VISIONARY



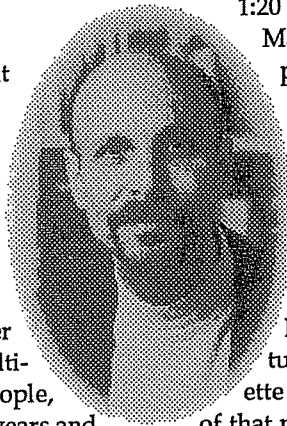
GAY SPIRIT VISIONS CONFERENCE 1999 WORDS, BIRDS, NUMBERS & ROSES

by Andrew Ramer

The following is a transcript of the keynote address delivered by Andrew at our 10th Annual Gay Spirit Visions Conference, this year called "The Mask and The Mirror: Through the Eyes of Janus."

Introduction

Last month my friend Mark reminded me that we would be here during the Jewish holiday Sukkot. Sukkot means "booths" in Hebrew, hence its English name, Tabernacles. Originally a harvest festival, the booths it refers to were the huts farmers lived in in the fields during the harvest. But later they were said to commemorate the temporary dwellings the Hebrews lived in during the 40 years they wandered in the wilderness after the Exodus from Egypt. The Bible says a mixed multitude came out of Egypt, and we too are a mixed people, a people who have wandered for far more than 40 years and lived in a great many temporary dwellings in our time of exile, our years of searching for home.



Our longing is echoed in aspects of popular culture that we have adopted as our own. Like this, from 1939:

Somewhere, over the rainbow

Or this, from 1957, by two of our boys, which rippled out to the dominant culture:

There's a place for us, somewhere a place for us

We were not the only people looking for home. Our oppression has been unlike any others, but all of them are linked and all share common features, as we can see in this poem by Langston Hughes, called "Harlem."

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

Like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore

And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over

Like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags

Like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

The world was exploding in the 1950s and '60s. The Civil Rights movement, women's movement, New Left politics, the movement against the war in Vietnam, and student uprisings all over the planet, paved the way for a different kind of song than the two I just sang. This song hasn't gone down in

history. I couldn't find the melody for it, only the words, which were sung in the very early hours of Saturday June 28, 1969.

Judy Garland's funeral had been held the day before. At 1:20 in the morning a police raid began at the crowded Mafia-owned gay bar The Stonewall Inn. The police pushed in and began to haul out patrons. Nothing unusual about that. But for the first time in our recent history, the men and women in the bar resisted. The police called for support and two dozen helmeted members of the Tactical Patrol Force arrived, with clubs and tear gas. Marching in formation they cleared the street in front of the bar again and again, only to find that the crowd had reassembled behind them. At one point they turned to find a line of drag queens dancing in Rockette fashion, singing this song. To put us all in the spirit of that night, and to honor the people who made our gathering possible, I'd like you to stand in Rockette fashion, and repeat the words to their song after me, like the responsive reading at a religious service.

We are the Stonewall girls

We wear our hair in curls

We wear no underwear

We show our pubic hair

We wear our dungarees

Above our nelly knees.

What a different kind of song. No longing for "Somewhere" in that one, but daring, humor, and a clear message to the authorities that this is our place - and you don't belong here.

But Stonewall didn't happen spontaneously. If you've read my work you might say that its origins

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with this issue*

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Or e-mail them to
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Please put "GSV Visionary"
in the subject line.



GSV Through the Eyes of Janus—

LOOKING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK

BY TREEWALKER
MARTIN ISGANITIS,
PRESIDING ELDER

I write this with great excitement and enthusiasm for our organization as we look back on the past and look forward to the coming year of being together in Spirit. The Planners Retreat in January was a tremendous success. We revised our mission statement, completed the corporate restructuring plan, pro-



posed an expanded slate of Elders, and defined 24 goals for the organization for this year.

First, though, an acknowledgement of the recent past. We experimented this past year with a paid administrator for the organization, Al Cotton. Despite his and our best efforts and intentions that position did not work out for us. So we've admitted our errors and learned from our mistakes. That was the reason we decided to expand the Council of Trusted Elders. We felt we needed to ensure accountability and provide for succession planning. We intend for the expanded Council to allow for enough people to do the work of planning our conferences and operating our business. The list of goals was generated for the same reason

Next, we decided not to offer *Visionary* by subscription. We plan to continue to publish it as a free newsletter for our organization. Quite frankly, we're just not ready to make that step. We felt we needed to have another year under our belts with the revised organizational

structure. On behalf of Gay Spirit Visions I want to express heartfelt appreciation to Al Cotton for his years of service to GSV as *Visionary* editor. Al spent countless hours putting together a fine newsletter for us. We are grateful for his service. David Salyer has taken over as *Visionary* Editor. I have every confidence that David will continue to produce a newsletter we can be proud of.

I regret to inform you that due to a number of communication problems and other errors on the part of the organization we will not be receiving a grant from the Lifebridge Foundation to publish *Visionary* this year. Operational problems, illnesses, and other factors conspired against us. We hope we've addressed these issues and are certain that the new organizational structure will prevent a recurrence of these problems. Looking to the future, I'm very excited about what we have planned. We are in negotiations with *the mountain* to build a permanent labyrinth at the base of *the mountain*. Our Spring Retreat will focus on planning for the construction.

Once we've finalized our plans and *the mountain* has confirmed the appropriateness of the site we can consider a work weekend there to construct the labyrinth. We are also planning a fundraiser in Atlanta to benefit another non-profit organization and ourselves. And work on Conference 11 has already begun.

I also honor your participation in everything we do - from holding us in your thoughts and prayers to planning and participating in our events. We welcome your comments and ideas. This is your organization and we are here to serve Spirit in you. ▼

I've never outraged Nature I've always listened to her advice and followed it wherever it went.

—Joe Orton



Gay Spirit Visions

A Mission Statement for Our Second Decade and A New Millennium

We are committed to creating safe, sacred space for loving gay men to explore and strengthen our spiritual identity that is open to all spiritual paths.

We are committed to creating a spiritual community with the intent to heal, nurture our gifts and potential, and live with integrity in the world.

We are committed to supporting others in their spiritual growth by sharing experiences and insights.

To fulfill these goals we facilitate annual retreats and conferences, sponsor social events, publish a newsletter, and maintain web-based communications for men who love men.

SEVA

So here we are in the new millennium. I will tell you what hasn't changed. The world needs our compassionate care more than ever! For this reason, I have rejoined my brothers at the GSV planning table. For this reason, I made myself available another year as Trusted Elder. For this reason, I have returned to help hold the energy around GSV's work in the world. This year we have brought the work of the Volunteer Corps under the portfolio of Trusted Elder of Service and Human Resources which I am honored to be given the opportunity to again foster. I am proud to be your Seva Elder.

What is Seva? Seva is a sanskrit word meaning deep soulful service. It is generally thought of also as selfless service, or service without ego. It would be a lie if I said my efforts were not without benefit. The main benefit that comes to mind, however, is when I am given the opportunity to sit in a heart circle with a hundred and twenty-some men and hear over and over again how they cherish the ability to come together as we do—heart centered in spiritual community. That is our main piece of work in the world! Yet there are many smaller pieces of work that need to come together to make this happen.

For your consideration may I suggest that you might mark the close of the past century or perhaps the beginning of a new millennium with a gift of service. Mark this time with an expression of deep soulful service. These gifts are often about

servicing others, healing and renewal. Might I suggest that my experience with GSV indicates it is a worthy recipient of our gifts.

What is your gift and is there a way for GSV to help you to share your gift? Gift of Service is a way to match your heartfelt desire to respond to basic human needs in our global community with your need to share gifts with others. There are always opportunities to get involved with GSV. Community involvement is a necessity for our survival as an organization. Attending our planner's meetings and exploring the possibilities for involvement with committees and projects such as conferences and fundraisers is a great start! Those at a distance can remain involved with projects via the web page and e-mail. Certainly contributions to the newsletter and donations to The Raven Wolfdancer Scholarship Fund are always welcome (and tax deductible!). Rideshare to conferences and retreats. Prayers. The list goes on and on.

Please share with me your ideas. Let me know if there is a way to assist you in sharing your gifts and talents through GSV. For more information about our programs or to find out more about how you can be of service too, please be in touch with me.

Namaste! ▼

Gerry Mitchell AKA Dancing Dolphin
Durga Das 404/622-7622
e-mail Healtouch@aol.com

- GSV potlucks move to the fourth Saturday of the month this year.
- GSV Heart Circles, hosted by Matt Huff, will be held the second Sunday of every month. For information about time and location, contact Matt at 404/248-9649 or e-mail him at pretzelulu@aol.com

February 26—GSV Potluck: hosted by Jeff Ford at his new coffeehouse and connectivity lounge, Innovox; 699 Ponce de Leon Ave, Suite 1 (basement level, beneath Ford Factory Square) Atlanta, GA 30308; 404/872-4482
innovox@aol.com
<http://www.innovoxlounge.com>

March 11—GSV Planning Committee Meeting: 10AM, Atlanta Friends Meeting House, 701 Howard Street Decatur, GA

March 25—GSV Potluck: hosted by Gerry Mitchell and his partner Kirk Gonzales, 303 Pavillion Street, SE Atlanta, GA 30315
404/622-7622
e-mail: Healtouch@aol.com

March 31—April 2, GSV 3rd Annual Spring Retreat at The Mountain Retreat & Learning Center, Highlands, North Carolina
Registration form available on website: <http://gayspirit.home.mindspring.com>

April 8—GSV Planning Committee Meeting: 10AM, Atlanta Friends Meeting House, 701 Howard Street Decatur, GA

April 22—GSV Potluck: hosted by Robert Kelly, 645 Ormewood Ave. Atlanta, GA 30312
404/627-9088
e-mail: InaVortex@aol.com

May 13—GSV Planning Committee Meeting: 10AM, Atlanta Friends Meeting House, 701 Howard Street Decatur, GA

May 22—GSV Potluck: hosted by Mike Goettee & Roy Smoot, 1333 S. Ponce de Leon Avenue Atlanta, GA 30306
404/378-8195
e-mail: maxglitz@mindspring.com

June 10—GSV Planning Committee Meeting: Atlanta Friends Meeting House
701 Howard Street
Decatur, GA

June 24—GSV Potluck: To be announced

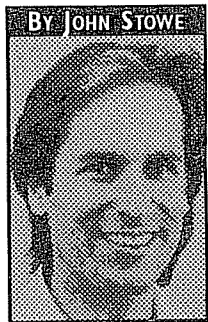
July 22—GSV Potluck: hosted by Bruce "Dandelion" Tidwell, 683 Crespian Court, Lawrenceville, GA 770/972-8028
e-mail: DadsBadBoy@aol.com

Many thanks to John Warner for hosting January's GSV Potluck at his home.

HERBS, WEEDS, AND THE HUMAN SOUL:

What's in a Name?

You know what I learned this week? Crabgrass is a medicinal herb. A species of crabgrass, also called 'couch grass', has a centuries-long history of helping folks heal from urinary problems, skin eruptions, chronic fatigue, and overall immune challenges. Who'd have thought? Crabgrass! Yep,



that's the same plant Americans spend millions of dollars a year to eradicate from our lawns with pre-emergence killers, post-emergence killers, and every-other-time-of-the-year killers. That's big bucks, all to eliminate something we've named "weed." Once, it was honored as a sacred gift of nature.

Crabgrass isn't the only healer we've declared war on. Think of dandelion ... and plantain, red clover, chickweed, goldenrod, burdock, kudzu, passion-flower, mimosa, mullein, and yarrow. All these plants have long histories of being used as foods and medicine. So do many, many more. You'd never know it, though, from the popular culture. Seems that somewhere along the line we made a moral judgement. Apparently, God wants us to live in a world that's homogenized, high maintenance, and totally controlled. Grass is good, along with the occasional tree or shrub to set it off. Weeds are bad — and we're willing to spend a fortune on just the right (patented) seeds, all the proper (poisonous) chemicals, and the latest (polluting) power equipment just to prove the point. Man, have we been duped!

I could go off on a rant, but I'll spare you. I'll just invite you to think about the mindset beneath the surface here. Let's call it "weed mentality." It's not just about plants, you know. Weed mentality seems to be firmly rooted all through our society. Great and powerful institutions do their best to stamp out any sign of nonconformity. I don't have to tell you about the pressures on young boys, for example, to adhere to the majority view of acceptable male behavior. Nor do I

have to explain the vehemence with which the religionists go after anyone who dares follow his own definition of spiritual practice, or to define loving on his own terms. Oh, they don't call us "weeds," usually, but there are plenty of synonyms. Deviant. Pervert. Sinner. Weirdo. Nerd. And now with genetic screening, the term "pre-emergence" takes on a bit more chill ...

Our society does its best to compartmentalize every human being. It thrives on having us be productive little consumers — and if you won't toe the line, you're not welcome in the garden. Anyone who doesn't directly increase the consumption-driven GNP is labeled *misfit*. If you'd rather write poetry than work an assembly line, you're not a success — unless by chance you hit a rare nerve and sell a lot of books. Our overburdened public schools rely more and more on standardized testing. Our corporate medical system reduces even mental health care to a set of quickie, standardized recipes. It's all around us. Even in the gay community, where we pay a lot of lip service to diversity, there's amazing pressure to fit into current ideas of what's acceptable and what's not ...

Oh shit, this is starting to sound like another rant — and that won't get us anywhere. Let's give society a rest for a minute and look closer to home. After all, society's composed of a billion individual units. That's us. In order for weed mentality to flourish in the whole, it has to live in a majority of the individuals. Hmmm. That might be us, too. What do you think? Where might it live in you? How many parts of yourself do you edit out, or judge as nonproductive and unacceptable?

Of course, I can't answer for you. I can only answer for myself. It makes me remember a time when I was about 28 years old. I found myself standing in a circle of radical faeries in the mountains outside Santa Fe. The meadow was filled with flowers. I don't mean just the white asters and purple lupines, either. The men in this circle blossomed in every color. They sported tie-dyed skirts or black leather chaps or nothing but a dreamy smile. You get the picture. We'd declared a naming circle. One man chose

"Wolf," another "Sky," still another "Heartwalker." Diving in earnestly, I declared that from this day forth I would be called "Yarrow."

Looking back, I'd say it worked. Up to that point, "John" had bent over backward to live up to all he thought he was supposed to be. Good student. Good teacher. Productive member of society. Even had a good retirement plan. Well, Yarrow chucked it all and became a weed. Quit teaching and used unemployment to pay for massage school. Cashed in the retirement and went to Mexico. Grew his hair, got a tattoo, traveled the world, nothing to do. Tried to be an artist in Paris. Talked to flowers and actually got answers. In short, Yarrow explored all the parts that John had been too uptight to touch. Somewhere along the line, I learned that Yarrow wasn't just a pretty flower. In fact, I learned that many traditional people value it as a powerful healing ally.

The new identity lasted about six years. Eventually, it seemed to go stale and I went back to calling myself John. Interestingly, "Yarrow" didn't go away. Rather, as I reclaimed my roots — in terms of family and home — the new parts seemed to integrate with the old. I felt fuller and more satisfied, as if the time as self-proclaimed "weed" had made me grow. It certainly showed me how much I'd limited myself before, how much the demands of living up to expectations had kept me from exploring all the parts I'd considered weird or freaky.


It's easy to fall into the old traps. Day to day, I have to remember not to edit out the color in my life. I have to remember not to let my mind censor my heart, or material concerns squelch my spirit. It's hard, though, because all those pressures to conform are still there. Even the weeds, I try to make productive.

When I look around, I see us doing the same as a group. We have so many discussions — some quite heated — about what to call ourselves. Gay? Queer? Men-loving men? As if we all have to use the same name. Or more broadly, we demand recognition of all our nationalities, ethnicities, spiritual traditions, sexual proclivities, even political affiliations. It could be that we need those identities, at

least for a while, in order to explore all the parts of ourselves. And maybe we need to claim our wounds and afflictions as parts of our naming, too, at least for as long as it takes us to come to terms with them.

In the end, though, let's remember where we live. We get to choose, you know, and I lobby for wild and weedy gardens instead of lawns. Inside and outside, there's room for diversity. There's

healing in each of us and each part of our wholes. You want to be a weed? or an herb? or a human being? The only difference lives in the naming. So claim your healing, wherever it lives. Honor your power, however it looks. Learn how to use it, because it's your birthright. And if it feels hard, remember this: for all those billions of dollars pumped into the war, every single lawn still has to deal

with crabgrass. And dandelions. And plantain. And clover. Which side will you be on? 

John R. Stowe is author of Gay Spirit Warrior: An Empowerment Workbook for Men who Love Men (Findhorn Press, 1999). He can be reached at jrstowe@mindspring.com.

MASKS AND MIRRORS

An Interpretation

BY JIM FASON

What meaning do masks and mirrors hold for us? A mask can be a facade, behind which we hide to protect ourselves. In playing the role, we can lose our self-identity if we are not grounded and centered in reality. In the Voyager Tarot cards, the man of wands is pictured as an actor with a mask. He is the shaman of the free spirit of the magician. He possesses 1000 faces and is capable of playing any role. The danger with this persona, however, is that the actor may become lost in the role, losing his sense of self.

This past Spring, my mother sent me a card she made depicting mice wearing pointed shells tied around their heads and pecking at the ground next to a bird. They were pretending to be birds—perhaps so that an owl would not swoop down and capture them or perhaps for play. Mom's inscription in the card reads: To be what you are is a wonderful thing, and to be what you aren't can be fun. To follow another one's path gives insight, but to wear a bird's beak won't make you one.

We each must shed the mask of fear that prevents us from reveling in our true identity. To wear a mask can be fun and entertaining, but we must guard against using a mask as self-protection when doing so impedes our personal growth and free expression. It is a process of becoming self-aware and learning self-love.

Likewise, a mirror can be destructive or constructive as a symbol. A mirror can be a catalyst for narcissism, which can

hinder or prevent the introspection required for personal development. The mirror can also represent the negative, hurtful images that society casts upon us; images we must discard. Conversely, in a positive light, the mirror represents the allegorical soul search and vision quest for one's true identity and destiny. Let us begin to shed our masks of ego, of old defense mechanisms; let us each look beyond the mask of false bravado and into our mirror of truth. Then we will be free to wear a mask of playfulness in which we gaze openly and lovingly into the eyes of our brothers.

Finally, let's turn to the image of JANUS, the Roman god of Time and Transition; the god of Passage and Portals into new dimensions. Janus had two heads, one facing forward to Rome and one facing backward to Greece. The faces represent a new age, and an old age, respectively. We face our own transition into a new age, the New Millennium, the Age of Aquarius, the Age of Brotherly Love, and accompanying us will be the wisdom and insight we've gained from past experiences. Borrowing words from Jeff Johnson and Brian Dunning in their story, "Celtic Legends of the Bard and the Warrior," we find ourselves standing with one foot on the shore and one foot in the waves, and it is the time between times. ▼

Jim Fason
jfason@aol.com

A Faerie Hymn

for Jim & Malcolm

(to be sung to the tune of "Oh Sacred Head, Sore Wounded")

We are a tribe of lovers
Residing on the Earth
A holy race of "others"
Each gifted at our birth.
Oh, brothers gather 'round me
And let our hearts unite
To manifest intentions
With visionary sight.
The Spirit Guides will lead us
To distant inner lands
With energy unbounded
From gentle, loving hands.
In light and love and laughter
We cast a sacred space
Releasing doubt and sorrow
We touch a holy place.
O Sacred Tribe of Lovers
Come dance a silly song.
Our energies will heal us
And those who hum along.
By opening our bodies
To truth, within or above,
We'll change this wounded planet
While singing songs of love.

18 February 1999
Timothy Kocher-Hillmer

Orgasm. Is there any word that gets our attention so quickly, and yet remains somehow beyond explanation? The physiology of ejaculation is pretty well known: In men, physical stimulation of the genitals, whether by sexual contact with another or through self-stimulation, causes semen to flow from the vas deferens to the seminal vesicles within the prostate gland. At the peak of orgasm, a spinal reflex causes

Our day-to-day anxieties no longer seem so important and we let go of our obsession with the self. We let go of our sense that we are separate from those around us; that's one reason why this ecstatic state is especially powerful for those who are in love. In this orgasmic state we are simply present, alone or with a lover, fully alive and connected with everything that is. It is a powerful spiritual experience, a miracle in itself. Small wonder that so many religions seem to fear sexuality and do everything they can to control it!

To be able to let go during sex and to savor this sense of transcendence is one of life's great joys. Let's talk about how to increase your body's capacity for

pleasure and how to open yourself more fully to this experience.

Some basic considerations: Bodies which are full of life are more capable of ecstasy than those which are half asleep. Exercise of at least a mild sort helps. Sex isn't a marathon, but if you spend your life stuck behind a desk and are something of a couch potato at home and have trouble climbing a flight of stairs without getting winded, you're not likely to feel fully awake and at home in your body.

Next, let go of any goal when having sex other than to feel your body, feel pleasure and connect deeply with your partner (if you are having partner sex rather than solo sex). Notice if you find yourself getting distracted by concerns about erections, what your partner is thinking, how you are doing, etc. Let these thoughts go; be in the moment. If you find yourself distracted by thoughts or worries, work on them later.

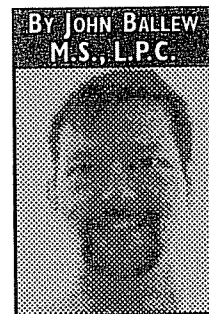
Focus on pleasure rather than orgasm as a goal in itself. Let go of any goal whatsoever. Are you tightening your muscles and holding your body tensely? Let go. Relax. Breathe. Savor sensations and delights for their own sake. There is no hurry. What else could be more important than what you are doing right now?

When you start to cum, see if you can stay relaxed and breathing. Doing so allows the sensations and rhythms of your body to increase and reverberate inside of you, and it greatly prolongs the pleasure. Keep breathing! Some of us tend to hold our breaths or to breathe very shallowly as we approach our climax. Doing so shuts

down sensation. In fact, half the pleasure of some men's orgasms comes from simply relaxing their too-tense bodies. A friend recently shared with me that when he starts to ejaculate, he recites to himself the Buddhist prayer of compassion and loving kindness. In so doing, he shifts his consciousness and expands his vision.

Our culture enshrines the idea of simultaneous orgasm. That can be fun if it happens spontaneously,

but working to that end can turn sex into, well, work. Consider instead what can happen when you cum at different times. You can be your partner's witness — seeing him in this



moment of transcendence, truly being their for him. He can be there for you, free from his own need to do anything other than just be with you; that's magic enough.

The time following orgasm is sacred time, sometimes referred to as "afterglow." Enjoy it, whether you are by yourself or with someone else. Notice what thoughts, even visions, come to you. Notice what you are feeling. Don't be in a big hurry to clean up. Stay where you are. If you have been making love to yourself, this can be a useful time to simply enjoy the feelings of peace and openness. If you are with a partner, this gentle, open time can be a wonderful opportunity to affirm your love for one another. Make the most of it!

A final thought: the openness that many of us feel after orgasm may bring up negative feelings. Perhaps you realize that the person you just shared this experience with was someone with whom this level of intimacy was more awkward than you expected, or perhaps old messages about sex-and-shame made an unwelcome visit. Don't be too quick to try and get rid of these feelings. There may be an opportunity for you to learn something about yourself.

Enjoy!

John R. Ballew, M.S., is a licensed professional counselor in private practice in Atlanta. He specializes in issues related to coming out, sexuality and relationships, spirituality and career. He can be reached via the web at www.bodymindsoul.org

ORGASMS

smooth muscles around the urethra, penis and prostate into rhythmic contraction in throb after throb, pulse after pulse. Semen spurts out the penis. Ejaculation generally lasts a few seconds.

"Orgasm" and "ejaculation" aren't necessarily the same thing. Because they tend to happen simultaneously in men, we often think they are the same thing. Understanding that they are not the same thing is the key to exploring ecstatic states. Orgasm is described by sexologists as the all-of-a-sudden release of the sexual pressure that happens during arousal, followed by an intense relaxation.

Missing from this medical explanation is any understanding of what happens elsewhere in our multidimensional beings — that is, in our hearts, our souls, our minds. Orgasm doesn't happen just in the pelvis. Studies show changes in brain waves, for instance. Muscles tense and relax, emotions arise.

Some orgasms are more powerful than others. Sometimes we are seeking a simple release — we are feeling sexual tension, and we want to get rid of it. The resulting orgasm may be a bit of a thrill, and it is certainly pleasurable, but it is a pelvic sneeze compared with full-tilt, openhearted orgasm.

The French phrase for orgasm means "the little death." When we are in an orgasmic state, time seems to stop. We experience something transcendent and powerful. We may feel a sense of clarity, losing our sense of self-consciousness, living only in this moment.

In this ecstatic state, we let go of the ego.

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COMING OUT THANKS TO GSV

**BY ANDY MOLLER
(Part Two of Two Parts)**

In our last issue, we shared with you the first part of a letter Andy wrote last spring to another GSV conference participant, Harold Cole, describing his coming out process to his son, Keith. Part two details how he explained his sexuality to his wife.

A day after it occurred, Keith called us on the phone. My wife on one extension inside the house, and I on my extension in my workshop/office room. When my wife was done with her questions, she turned him over to me and hung up. I tell him that I have not yet spoken to her about the issue. He suggested that I don't use the word "we" when speaking about gays. And also not to readily admit to being completely gay. He feels that by softening it, the message will get through with the least amount of distress. I thank him for his input and after once again complimenting him on his maturity, hang up.

What to do? My wife is taking a shower now. Do I go into the house and wait? Or do I let Spirit do it? It would be nice if I told her here in my office so that, in the future, she will not asso-

ciate our living room or kitchen with the news I am to tell her. Of course Spirit had that all planned out.

My wife entered my room anxious to discuss Keith's house buying decision. We finish that topic and I realize it is my turn. I started with the statement that I have not been honest with her and that I know that dishonesty has come in the way of me loving her as much as I desire. I tell her that she has been a loving wife always ready to forgive and to love me. She looked at me with her big brown eyes, not giving any indication that she knew where this discussion is headed. I am dishonest, I continue, because I have been hiding something all these years. Taking my son's advice, I say, I have gay tendencies.

She was aware that I did and was not totally surprised. But she did not think that it was as serious as I stated. She had blamed herself all these years for her imagined or exaggerated shortcomings. She even said that it was a relief of sorts to find out that it was not completely her fault that we were not a fully loving couple.

I state that I think we can be much more loving now that I am free to be honest with her. It is a shock to her but she takes it well. She does want to know if many straights in this town know. Only one, I tell her, my friend Chris who is a counselor. She accepts that well since she knows and likes Chris. I tell her about my gay support friends and she agrees that all men

should have loving friends just as she does with her lady friends. I tell her that this is not done in our society but it is something that I cherish with my gay friends.

As we talk, we are interrupted by two phone calls from our daughter concerning sitting for her children next week. The calls are a welcome reprieve and come at the perfect moments in our two-hour discussion.

Many things go through her mind and I answer some of her unanswered questions that have accumulated over the years. She seems like she is going to be able to handle it but it is too soon to tell. She mentions that she will not be able to take it if I have a "relationship" with another guy. I know what she is getting to but misunderstand and tell her that having a lover is not what I am looking for. Then she qualifies it by saying "sexual relationship". The issue is skirted and no conclusion is made. Of course, a sexual relationship is an important part of what I need and do.

She also expresses fear of diseases, radicals who are out to destroy gays, and other negative images. I had expected that response and explain that that sort of occurrence does not happen often.

She also asks, to my expectation, "Has all this been a sham? Have you hidden behind me all these years?" I explain that it was after our marriage that I discovered what I liked. And also, that

COMING OUT

Continued from page 7

I had wanted a family all my life.

I explain that I could not predict how she would react and that I am prepared to vacate without anything if necessary or stay and work this out. I mention that there are many ways to solve the issue and not to go in the direction that society sometimes seems to dictate. I also mention the GSV conferences and that I have met many married gays whose wives deal with the issue well. She understands and says, no, I don't want to break up our marriage. I don't want to be separated.

There are several quiet moments of reflection. I get up from my chair, and asking permission, hold her. She holds me also, head bowed. I mention that Keith knows and she asks about his reactions. Then she asks that we sit on the couch. We sit next to each other, my arm around her shoulder, the other one holding her hand. After discussing our son, we sit in silence watching the large crows steal the cat's nibbles on the deck outside.

It is way past lunch time and we get up to prepare a snack. I can tell she is sad and it hurts me to see her that way, but I am strong. It must be done. I had explained to her that I did not want us to deteriorate to fighting like cats and dogs in our old age. That was not an option. She readily agreed to that.

Well, lunch is finished and I came back to the room to complete this account. There will be lots of healing to be done, so think of us Harold.

I am so glad this is over. It has taken ten years. I had promised myself eight years ago that I would let it out after my daughter was married. And today on her seventh wedding anniversary, it is out. I had not realized that it was her anniversary today until she had called to ask about baby sitting.

Thanks for all the support you have given me.

Love,
Andy

Postscript...

Well, it has been three months since I wrote this letter and things are still going well. The sense of freedom I obtained by coming out is indescribable. Freedom from dishonesty. That type of freedom is so liberating that I felt I should share my experience with you. Many at the GSV conferences had empathy for me and helped me at various times with support in the form of conversation, hugs, and sometimes gifts such as special cards or books. To you who helped me, and especially Harold Cole, I give great thanks. ▼

ANDREW RAMER

Continued from page 1

go back ten thousand years ago, to the end of the last ice age. Poet Judy Grahn links the word gay to the ancient Greek Earth goddess, Gaia. If you've read Will Roscoe, Walter Williams and others, you know that we've appeared in indigenous cultures all over the planet. Many historians suggest that the modern gay movement began in 1897 not 1969, in Germany, when Magnus Hirschfeld founded the first homosexual rights organization in the world, the Scientific Humanitarian Committee.

Sadly, in 1932 the Nazis began their attacks on our people, and in 1933 they destroyed Hirschfeld's Institute. Today few of us know anything about the early history of our movement. We've forgotten about the first American gay group, the short-lived Chicago Society for Human Rights, founded in the 1920s, or the gay soldiers group that briefly existed in New York after the Second World War, the Veterans Benevolent Association. Our movement didn't gain momentum until 1950 when Harry Hay and others created the Mattachine Society in Los Angeles, and 1955 when the lesbian organization The Daughters of Bilitis was founded. Those two organizations were major voices in the largely underground homophile movement of the 1950s and '60s, all of which paved the way for Stonewall.

Hearing about the uprising, Allen Ginsberg wandered by the Stonewall Inn the next day. He described the patrons as "beautiful; they've lost that wounded look all fags had ten years ago."

We've gone through a lot of different looks in the 30 years since Stonewall. We've created communities for ourselves, neighborhoods, organizations, and we have come together in gatherings such as this one, which first met in 1990. It too has a long pre-history, in the annual gay men's retreats at Running Water Farm in North Carolina, which began in 1978 and continued until 1989. When development around Running Water made future gatherings impractical, a new direction was charted, which gave birth to this conference.

And here we all are, ten years later. What a wonderful achievement! I'd like

to pause for a moment to honor the three men who created this conference, Ron Lambe, Peter Kendrick, and Raven Wolf-dancer. And to honor all the men who worked with them, the men who have planned and organized this conference down through the years, too many to name, but cherished, and to honor all the men who have been here since 1990.

And yet, why is 10 years a point of accomplishment? Certainly the power of this number is a reflection of our biology. (*Raising both hands.*) If, for example, we had come from a species with 4 fingers on each hand, like Mickey Mouse, or some of my friends from the Andromeda Galaxy, I would have been saying what I'm saying in our 8th year. But here we are now, 10 fingered and celebrating 10 years.

A year is a remarkable thing. In that time, we, stuck to our spinning planet like refrigerator magnets, travel 600 million miles in our orbit around the sun. Imagine that. In the ten years this conference has been going on we have traveled approximately 5 billion 400 million miles around a single star in a minor spur of an arm in the Milky Way Galaxy, searching for something that Federico Garcia Lorca described so beautifully, that Stonewall has given us the ability to look for, together, in this way.

*The rose
was not looking for the dawn!
almost eternal on its stem
it looked for something else.*

*The rose
was not looking for science or shadow:
confine of flesh and dream
it looked for something else.*

*The rose
was not looking for the rose.
Through the sky, immobile,
it looked for something else.*

A REVIEW OF PAST CONFERENCES

Time is a curious thing. Twenty-six hundred years ago Sappho wrote:

*You may forget,
but let me tell you this:
someone in some future time
will think of us.*

Only fragments of Sappho's work remain, but because of them, we do think of her and her companions. Maybe someone 26-hundred years from now will think of us. Perhaps they'll find the

brochure from our first conference, which was called "Celebrating Gay Spirit Visions." And find these words:

The earth cries out for the active love and participation of all its inhabitants. As gay men our time of exile is over. It is time for us to come out and offer our wisdom. As heirs of a shamanic tradition, we possess the sensitivity and energy for an essential role in the transformation of the planet.

Reading those words in the year 4599, they will know who we were and what we were doing, back in 1999. If the mailing list from that conference still exists they will see that there were 74 men here. However one of the names on the list was that of my best friend, John Fletcher Harris, who never made it to The Mountain. He died two weeks later. So it was 73 men, 7 workshops, and 3 speakers, Harry Hay, Franklin Abbott and me, who gathered here in 1990, from Friday November 2nd until Sunday November 4th.

Harry Hay, one of the founders of the Mattachine Society in 1950, and of the Radical Faerie movement in the 1970s, has been called the grandfather of gay spirituality. I want to read a section from his talk:

We, as a distinct biologically determined human variant, have been developing our own collection of Gay Consciousness (by inventing it as we went along) for a long long time. Maybe for as far back as when Species Homo began to emerge as hominids.

Taking the liberty of citing Sir Julian Huxley, the great biologist of the century, who said, "No negative trait, (and as you know, a negative trait in biology is one which does not reproduce itself) appears in a given species millennia after millennia unless it in some way insures the survival of that species."

In other words, there's a really good reason why we're here, and this conference is a research lab for exploring it. Franklin Abbott spoke the next day. I'd like to read one of my favorite poems, "Self-Help," from his wonderful book *Mortal Love: Selected Poems 1971-1998*.

*review your notes
the ones you took
on your life
ponder
old photographs
read letters
written to you*

*cycles ago
recount your blessings
one by one
two by two
repeat
repent
of any doubt
or shame
that you are not worthy
whole
nothing short
of a miracle*

My talk at that first conference and the heart of my other talks here can be found in my book *Two Flutes Playing* and in the interview Mark Thompson did with me in his book *Gay Soul*, so I won't repeat them. Our talent show was born that first year, under the direction of Raphael Sabbatini. It has been a feature of this conference ever since, now under the direction of David Salyer, and it's one of the treasures of this gathering, where the men of our tribe have the opportunity to share their genius.

Conference two met in September of 1991, and we have been meeting in September ever since. Its theme was "Invoking the Muses to Celebrate the Erotic Godbody." 104 men were at that conference. There were 12 workshops, and our keynote speaker that year was the poet, teacher and filmmaker James Broughton, who died earlier this year. In his memory I'd like to read part of his poem, "Wondrous the Merge," in which he talks about meeting in 1974 the man he would spend the rest of his life with. James was 61, a professor, feeling stuck in his life, when one of his students challenged him to live in a different way. At first he balked at Joel's invitation, being a husband and father, with a house in the suburbs. But Joel persisted, and James went home with him.

*Wondrous Wondrous the merge
Wondrous the merge of soulmates
the surprise of recognition
Wondrous the flowering of renewal
Wondrous the wings of the air
clapping their happy approval!*

*I severed my respectabilities
and bought a yellow mobile home
He moved in his toaster his camera*

*and his eagerness to become
my courier seed-carrier and consort*

*Above all he brought the flying carpet
that upholsters his boundless embrace
Year after year he takes me soaring
out to the ecstasies of the cosmos
that await all beings in love*

One day we shall not bother to return

Conference three was held in 1992. The theme that year was "Touch, Shadow, Power, Gifts." 96 men attended that conference, there were 12 workshops, and each of the four themes had a guardian to help us explore it. Ron Lambe, one of the conference founders, was the guardian of Touch, I was the guardian of Shadow, Franklin Abbott, our poet laureate, was the guardian of Power, and John Stowe, master of embodied movement, was our guardian of gifts. Our folded brochure that year was the first of many designed by King Thackston and others.

Conference four was held in 1993. That year's theme was "Exploring Our Natures." There were 149 men in attendance, but I lost my schedule for that year so I don't know how many workshops we had. If you have one, please send me a copy. That year we explored our silly-sacred nature, a divine attribute few other tribes possess, who prefer that the sacred be serious. Our keynote speaker was Tom Spanbauer. I'm going to read from his book, *The Man Who Fell in Love with the Moon*. Dellwood Barker is telling Shed, his lover, what he learned from the Berdache Indian man named Foolish Woman, who was his teacher.

Taught me: to the extent that I didn't know myself, I didn't know the world. Taught me: the difference between things and the meaning of things. Taught me: I could not understand the meaning of things until I understood who it was that I was who was trying to understand the meaning of things. Taught me: who I was was the story I was telling myself. Taught me: how to scrutinize the story I was telling myself. Taught me: listen to your heart, trust your heart. Taught me: knowledge would become understanding at my death and that Death would have to sit and watch, while I told my human-being story.

With year 4 we completed our first journey around the medicine wheel, starting in the east, going south, west and then north. **Conference five,**

which began our second cycle, was held in 1994. 129 men were in attendance and we had 7 workshops. Our main presenters were the late Hal Carter and his partner Kevin Greene, who were bodyworkers, metaphysical guides, grounded in gay spirituality and their African-American heritage, expressed through Rootworks, the workshop series they founded together. Hal and Kevin's particular genius was movement, and since I've been talking on and on, and I'm not done yet, remembering their gift to us, why don't we all get up and move around a bit. Raise our arms, stretch, turn in circles, shake our bodies out, feel our breath, and then sit down again.

Also with us that year was David Sereda, the Toronto singer and songwriter. But the death of friends and lovers, and the murder the previous December of Raven Wolf dancer, one of the founders of this conference, became the focus of a Ritual of Tears that year.

Our sixth conference in 1995, was called "Awakening the Elder Within: A Journey of Soul." 131 men shared that time. We had 14 workshops, and our keynote speakers were Malcolm Boyd and Mark Thompson, life partners and gay elders. David Sereda returned that year as well.

Malcolm Boyd gave up a career in Hollywood in 1951 to become an Episcopal priest. Deeply involved in the Civil Rights movement, author of the best selling *Are You Running with Me, Jesus?*, he continued his personal journey of liberation when he came out in an interview with the New York Times, in 1976. I'd like to read a passage from Mark's interview with him in *Gay Soul*.

I feel some rage about the fact that a small group of gay people are controlling some of the media representing what is supposed to be gay life and the gay community. Probably seventy percent of gays are honeycombed into the culture or are still in the closet. The prototype of the gay male may really be a flabby, tweedy, gay schoolteacher who lives in a relationship with somebody in a quiet neighborhood. We've projected some very mistaken and distorted images of gay life. What's essential now is to start dealing with gay people as we are. As for the seventy percent or more that are closeted, I'm fascinated. I want

to know who these people are. I want to address them; I want them to address me. These people are living a gay life. These people are grappling with gay soul.

Mark Thompson, was for many years editor of the *Advocate*, and author of *Gay Spirit*, *Gay Body*, and *Gay Soul*. I'd like to read a few excerpts from *Gay Spirit*. They come from Mark's 1981 essay, "The evolution of a faerie: notes toward a new definition of gay."

One morning, in downtown San Francisco, I found scrawled on a wall the most telling epigram about the past 15 years. . . Homosexuality was the Hula-Hoop of the 1970s. A satirist with a spray can had made a vital point: Gay men may have squandered their most profound opportunity for self-discovery in this century. At the core of this statement are the observations that the majority of gay men continue to cling to the culturally endorsed concepts of masculinity and that they have not so much examined the Christian-patriarchal tenets that bind our culture as have tried to appease and buy into them.

Mark offers another way to be gay in this world.

By learning more fully to evoke and to balance the powers of Earth Mother and Sky Father, we can set into motion our own whirling evolution as men beyond definition. We will no longer suffer from the constraints of living only a fraction of a life. We will evidence harmony as men who see clearly within and thus act cleanly without. We can learn to revel in our perspective, as much as our preference, and we don't need a name. Our freedom is our responsibility. We simply need to do our work.

Conference seven was held in 1996. Its theme was "Taking Action in the World: Our Work Begins." That year we were 109 men, with 17 workshops and 5 caucuses on various subjects related to taking action. Among the topics we explored were living with HIV, the relationship between S/M and shamanism, recovering from fundamentalism, Taoist erotic massage, and we had a spirituality networking brainstorming session. That was also the first year the conference met under its new charter as The Council of Trusted Elders of Gay Spirit Visions, Inc, a Georgia non-profit corporation, with tax-exempt status.

Conference eight, marking our second journey through the four directions of the medicine wheel, was called "Spiritual

al Mentoring: Fairy God-Fathering." The year was 1997, 128 men gathered here, for 11 workshops and to hear our keynote speaker, anthropologist, historian, teacher and author Will Roscoe. Will is best known for his books, *The Zuni Man-Woman* and *Queer Spirit: A Gay Men's Myth Book*.

Mentoring is vital to us as a people, for most of us do not have gay parents to pass on directly to us our shared tribal wisdom. It's only since Stonewall that we can mentor, be mentored, mentor each other, freely and in the open, as we have been doing here year after year.

I'd like to read from Will Roscoe, about one of his own mentors, from college.

There was one friend, "Prissy" was his name, who was a real role model for me because he knew how to do everything. He could sew, he could make dresses, he knew how to do drag, he knew how to make a delicious meal with four dollars, and he could fix his truck. And I thought, That's it! That's the way to be! No limits at all. I've never left that image; it's been the core of my message about gays. We ought to be able to do everything, and we do.

Our ninth conference, last year, was called "Invoking Vital Spirit: Envision Your Path to Wholeness." There were 116 of us, with 17 workshops, three speakers from this community, Gerry Mitchell, John Stowe and myself, plus our keynote speaker, psychologist, professor and author Don Clark. Don is best known for his book *Loving Someone Gay*, which was first published in 1977. He was active in getting the American Psychological Association to stop defining homosexuality as a mental illness, which it did in 1975.

What follows is a section from *Loving Someone Gay*, where Don talks about using Gay Pride Day as an opportunity for doing spiritual work, individually and collectively.

Gay pride, the same as any other form of pride, is earned rather than given. Stepping out into the light to face whatever prejudice may come your way and asserting the right to be who you are is certainly a reason for pride. But, for me, there is more. I think that each year we must examine what else we have done to earn pride. Have we stood fast against bigotry and prejudice in all its forms? Have we tried to educate those who know us only by prejudicial reputation? Have we helped to make the world safer for

the gay children who hide in waiting, hoping to join us? Have we done a better job of caring for one another? Have we done our best to eliminate the blight of prejudice that we carried from the outer world to our own community?

And that brings us to the present moment—1999. **Our tenth conference.** It's theme: "The Mask and Mirror: Through the Eyes of Janus." On the surface this theme seems to be a simple one. Being masked is familiar to us. The first American gay novel, *Imre*, was written by Edward Prime Stevenson under the pseudonym Xavier Mayne, and privately published in Italy in 1906, by printers who could not read English. The book is divided into three sections, "Masks," "Masks and Face," and "Faces, Hearts, Souls." It's the story of two men who fall in love and decide to spend their lives together. Of one of them the author says:

He wore his mask each and every instant; resolving to make it his natural face.

I think we all understand that. It was true in 1906, true in 1950 when its founders named the Mattachine Society after a group of unmarried, celibate, medieval minstrels who wore women's clothing and masks when they performed. It was true in 1958 when gay Japanese writer Yukio Mishima titled his semi-autobiographical first novel *Confessions of a Mask*, and it remains true to this day.

So Mask is what we hide behind. And Mirror is that which reveals us honestly, as we are. Virginia Woolf's final novel, *Between the Acts*, is set in June, 1939 in a remote village in the heart of England. Miss LaTrobe, a lesbian, has written a pageant about English history, to raise money to electrify the village church. Looking at the program, the audience wonders what Miss LaTrobe will use to represent the final scene, called "The Present Time: Ourselves." They're startled when the cast comes on-stage carrying mirrors of various shapes and sizes, which they hold up so that the audience can see themselves, fidgeting in their seats.

Mask, hiding. Mirror, revealed. But each of them has another side. Let us remember ancient Greece, evoked in Mary Renault's novels, like *The Mask of Apollo*, where actors wore masks that were considered sacred. When they wore them they weren't hiding, they were allowing a greater truth than simple appearances to shine through. And mir-

rors have another side as well. They're tricky. That man who looks exactly like me, has a mole on his right shoulder. But mine is on my left. And some mirrors are worse, like the demon's mirror in gay Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale, *The Snow Queen*, which made everything seen in it look ugly.

However, the two-sidedness of mask and mirror is very appropriate, for the second part of this conference's title is "Through the Eyes of Janus." Janus was a two-headed Roman god, the guardian of doorways, of war and peace, who looked back to the past with one face and out the future with the other. The month of January is named for him. And his dual nature is very like ours, for we are part female and part male, participating in the dominant culture and yet outsiders, at home in both the physical world and the spirit realms. It is our Janus-like nature that has caused us to be called "Two Spirit People" in many indigenous cultures, and it is this two-sidedness which is our natural unity that our John Stowe so marvelously explores in his new book, *Two Spirit Warriors*.

Paula Gunn Allen speaks about this two-ness from her Native American roots.

*The Hopi say that the twohorn gods
are the wisest and eldest gods
they're so old
that they use both sides to see from.
What they see
is so true that they don't try to say it.
The onehorn people couldn't understand.
The twohorn gods participate in things
the rest do
but they will not be responsible
for the consequences of partial vision.*

Visions of the Future

In the spirit of two-sided vision, for the rest of our time together, in our small groups, in our workshops, in many different ways, we will explore mirrors and masks, past and future, as part of our tenth annual gathering, Janus, our conference guardian, has the ability to look back and ahead in time. But peering into the future is always difficult, as Constantine Cavafy reminds us in his poem "Things Ended."

*Engulfed by fear and suspicion,
mind agitated, eyes alarmed,
we try desperately to invent ways out,*

*plan how to avert
the obvious danger that threatens us so
terribly.*

*Yet we're mistaken, that's not the danger
ahead!*

*The news was wrong
(or we didn't hear it, or didn't get it
right.)*

*Another disaster, one we never imagined,
suddenly, violently descends upon us,
and finding us unprepared,
there's no time now,
sweeps us away.*

Cavafy wrote this poem in 1910. But each time I read it I remember the terror I felt in 1977, when Anita Bryant launched her campaign of hate against us. I was sure we'd all end up in concentration camps. But Ms. Bryant turned out to be a paper tiger. While our real enemy, microscopic, never imagined, was about to descend on us, threatening to sweep us away. So I'm not going to try and make any predictions about human life in general, or even gay life in general. Except to say that even when we gain full entry into this society, it won't be the end of our problems. As a member of a minority that has "made it" in America, I have only to think of the synagogue attacks this summer to remember that "making it" doesn't insure safety. We cannot depend upon others to guarantee our wellbeing. That we must do for ourselves. ▼

Elder, mentor and visionary, Andrew Ramer is author of several books including Two Flutes Playing, Angel Answers and Revelations for a New Millennium.

I took it for a faery
vision
Of some gay creatures
of the element,
That in the colours of
the rainbow live,
And play i' th' plighted
clouds.

—John Milton
1608-1674.

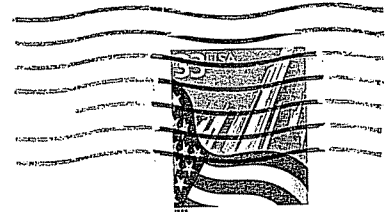
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