

VISIONARY



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YOUR SACRED BODY

BY JOHN BALLEW
M.S., L.P.C.



What do you think of your body?

Many gay men don't like their bodies very much. That might seem surprising, given the amount of time many of us spend at the gym. We probably devote more time and effort to cultivating our physical selves than any other demographic group. Just the same, research indicates that straight men like their bodies most, followed by gay women; straight women like their bodies less than these first two. The group that likes their physical appearance the least is gay men.

Why is this? Gay men spend a lot of time in places that place a premium on physical appearance: bars, gyms, sex clubs. We live in a sexualized subculture that places a premium on physical beauty, and media and advertising bombard us with images that reflect an impossibly high standard of physical beauty. Under circumstances like these, it's easy to confuse who you are with how you look.

We all like to see attractive men, of course. Still, more and more men, even men with bodies that most of us would agree are muscular and very attractive, find themselves very dissatisfied with how they look. At it's most extreme, this situation is called body dysmorphia, a preoccupation with some imagined defect in appearance when the person involved is actually very normal looking. This problem can lead to depression and trouble forming healthy relationships.

Research indicates that eating disorders and body image problems are linked with public self-consciousness, social anxiety and feeling dishonest about who one really is. Men with internalized homophobia who have difficulty accepting themselves as gay are probably especially likely to develop a distorted body image or eating disorder.

Compared with women, who generally only worry that they

are too fat, many gay men worry that they are either too fat or too thin. This misperception can become a genuine distortion disorder that could be called "reverse anorexia" or "bulkorexia." Even when dramatically muscular, men with this misperception feel they are too small or thin.

It's easy to see how men who have grown up with images of limp-wristed, reed-thin gay men form this sort of reaction and seek to show that they don't fit the stereotype. Preoccupation with muscles becomes a way of relieving fears about our masculinity.

Places where gay men socialize especially bars, gyms, and sex clubs, often emphasize physical attributes or make those the first criterion for checking someone out. It's difficult for someone who is older than a certain age or different from the prevailing cultural standards of beauty to catch someone's eye in a bar or club. This is one reason why alternatives like GSV potlucks, retreats and conferences are so important.

Pagan spirituality celebrates the body. Recovery of Goddess imagery over the past generation has helped women to understand their wombs and menstrual flow and other parts as sacred; exploration of both Pan and the Green Man in male spirituality has helped us do the same as gay men. In Judaism, God is considered to have created humankind in God's own image. Christianity celebrates God putting on human flesh as the central event of history.

And yet we often view our bodies with ambivalence or embarrassment. One New Age chant I learned a few years ago goes, "I am not a body; I am free. I am still as God created me." A related tradition sometimes talks about our bodies as "Earth suits." Both of these perspectives make me at least a little uncomfortable. Sure, I am not only my body. But my body is not a suit of clothes. It is sacred: a pathway to the

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MY NAME IS...

BY TREEWALKER, PRESIDING ELDER

My name is TreeWalker, one of the founding Elders of the Council of Trusted Elders of Gay Spirit Visions. My name is Master Jake. My name is Maude.

I've been on the Council of Trusted Elders since its inception in 1995. I'm one of the signers of our articles of incorporation. What drove me to do that was a desire to ensure the continuation of our annual fall conferences. What drives me to



continue is an abiding realization of Spirit in my life whenever I am with you, my fellow travelers on these paths of Spirit. For me, "spiritual enlightenment" is not an end or a goal. Rather, it is a process or a habit of recognizing Spirit in my everyday life and in the lives of all those I encounter. Raven Wolf dancer gave me my name, TreeWalker, when I told him of a vision I'd had. I'd been meditating, gazing at a grove of oak trees on the hillside across a valley. During that meditation, I realized that the grove of oaks had moved. I saw it move down the hillside. It moved by dropping acorns. As the younger trees grew up, and the older ones died away, the grove made its way down the hillside toward the valley. Walking trees. It's something of a metaphor for how Gay Spirit expresses Itself in Gay men. As each generation of gay men grows up, Gay Spirit expresses Itself.

My hope is that with each succeeding generation of Gay Men, there might be fewer suicides, less internalized homophobia, fewer hate crimes, fewer men suffering the ravages of depression and low self esteem. My hope is that because of the work we do to heal ourselves, each succeeding generation of gay men will show up with a stronger sense of personal esteem, pride, greater awareness of the value of one's individual contribution to the larger community. Walking Trees.

As Master Jake, I revel in sensual pleasure. I journey on that most sacred path of Spirit called Sex. I hold the belief that

what is physical is not separate from what is spiritual. That the physical existence can and does mirror what is spiritual. As long as I behave in a way that honors Spirit in me and in the men I love. That's why I made a contract with Spirit to always disclose my HIV status to potential sex partners. If I'm not honest, I dishonor my Spirit and the Spirit of the men with whom I am intimate.

As Maude, I connect to the Feminine me—how I move, how I generate and create, how I receive. Without Maude I am out of balance. Without Maude I lose touch with my cycles and rhythms. Maude helps me stay centered. She keeps me from taking myself too seriously. She also holds much of my wisdom.

I am also an addict and alcoholic in recovery. I need to maintain a careful boundary here as I discuss this. I honor the 12-step way of anonymity, yet I feel compelled to raise a difficult subject with you and ask for your thoughts. The issue is the place of drugs and alcohol in GSV. Historically we have asked the men who come to our conference not to bring drugs and alcohol. We've said in the welcome letter that arrives after registration that drugs and alcohol have no place in our process. So I have to get honest here and confess that I haven't always honored that request.

So what, if I was discreet about it. I didn't hurt anyone, did I?

Well, now that I work the 12-step program I realize that I hurt myself. And I suspect that I did hurt you, if you were there when I was there high. One of the ways I hurt myself was by being dishonest. And I hurt you that way too. I also suspect that I set a poor example by being there high. I might have led you to believe that we weren't serious about that request that we keep our space drug and alcohol free. And maybe some of you didn't feel safe around me. And maybe you didn't even notice. But I knew. And I didn't feel safe around me. And Spirit knew. And there's something not right about being dishonest with Spirit. Not that Spirit got hurt, but that I hurt my relationship with Spirit.

After this year's conference I heard that someone else in *Continued on page 15*



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.

Something disturbing happened to me on my recent vacation in Virginia. I was browsing through an antique shop in the quaint little town of Fredricksburg when I suddenly became aware of a jackal-like voice coming from somewhere in the background. As it turns out, the shop owner had her radio tuned to that "Dr. Laura" show.

Unless you've been in a coma for the past several years, you are probably aware of this person. Dr. Laura Schlessinger dispenses relationship advice on her enormously popular syndicated radio program reaching an estimated 20 million

editor's
eye

listeners around the country. She has a website and is the author of books with names like *Ten Stupid Things Women Do to Mess Up Their Lives* and *Ten Stupid Things Men Do to Mess Up Their Lives*.

I'm pretty sure there are more than ten things we all do to mess up our lives. I can think of at least three dozen examples of my own.

So I had to leave the antique shop promptly because she was berating some perplexed caller for all of America to hear and that, frankly, distressed me. With all the charm of a leafblower, Dr. Laura hammers away at anyone masochistic enough to call her radio program seeking advice or guidance. She's sort of the radio personification of that creature from the *Alien* movies.

My problem with Dr. Laura, aside from the fact that she's a meanspirited, arrogant magpie, is that many people assume she's a licensed physician or psychologist. She is not. This radio "therapist" has a doctorate in physiology. My dictionary defines physiology as "the branch of biology dealing with the functions and activities of living organisms and their parts." I'm not sure what that means, but I don't think it qualifies her to victimize people who don't have the money or common sense to seek professional counseling. I took a course in high school called Human Physiology and we studied the human body and dissected a fetal pig. At least the pig was already dead when I was slashing away at it. She's dissecting live human beings for entertainment purposes right there on the radio.

And guess what? Paramount Television Group decided earlier this year to give her a regular daytime syndicated TV show in September. So stations in 160 television markets covering 90% of the country are scheduled to air this thing, following in the grand tradition of Captain Kangaroo, who wasn't really a captain but had his own show anyway, too.

I want my own TV show. I am every bit as qualified as Dr. Laura to give relationship advice. I can certainly be every bit as nasty (see the preceding five paragraphs for verification). In fact, I want my sister to have her own



BY DAVID SALTER

Continued on page 7

GSV potlucks are held the fourth Saturday of the month at 7:30PM unless otherwise noted.

GSV Heart Circles, hosted by Matt Huff, are held the second Sunday of every month at 7:30PM. For location, contact Matt at 404/248-9649 or e-mail him at pretzelulu@aol.com

June 10—GSV Planning Committee

Meeting; 10AM, Atlanta Friends Meeting House; 701 Howard Street; Decatur, GA

June 24—GSV Potluck, 2PM-7PM; hosted by Ramon Noya; 1385 Lively Ridge Road, NE; Atlanta, GA 30329; 404/634-2221; e-mail: ramonnoya@aol.com

Our potluck coincides with Atlanta's Gay Pride weekend this year, so we'll be decorating our parade float together on Saturday afternoon for Sunday's parade. This year's GSV Pride Float Coordinator is John Warner and he needs volunteers. If you'd like to help build or decorate a fabulous GSV float, let John know. 770/671-8167. e-mail: johnw26@yahoo.com

June 25—Atlanta Gay Pride Parade

March with GSV or drop by our booth at the Pride Market in Piedmont Park!

July 8—GSV Planning Committee

Meeting; 10AM; Atlanta Friends Meeting House; 701 Howard Street; Decatur, GA

July 22 —GSV Potluck

hosted by Dandelion; 683 Crespan Court; Lawrenceville, GA 30044; 770/972-8028; e-mail: DadsBadBoy@aol.com

August 12—GSV Planning Committee

Meeting; 10AM, Atlanta Friends Meeting House; 701 Howard Street; Decatur, GA

August 26 —GSV Potluck;

hosted by Jeff Ford at his 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>

September 9—GSV Planning Committee

Meeting; 10AM, Atlanta Friends Meeting House; 701 Howard Street; Decatur, GA

September 20-24—GSV Fall Conference

2000; The Mountain Retreat & Learning Center, Highlands, NC. Look for brochures in early July; registration form also available on website: <http://gayspirit.home.mindspring.com>

October 14—GSV Planning Committee

Meeting; 10AM, Atlanta Friends Meeting House; 701 Howard Street; Decatur, GA

October 28—GSV Halloween Potluck,

7:30PM; Hosted by Ramon Noya; 1385 Lively Ridge Road, NE; Atlanta, GA 30329; 404/634-2221; e-mail: ramonnoya@aol.com

November 11—GSV Planning Committee

Meeting; 10AM, Atlanta Friends Meeting House; 701 Howard Street; Decatur, GA

November 25—GSV Post-Thanksgiving

Potluck, 7:30PM; Hosted by King Thackston; 370 Loomis Avenue, SE; Atlanta, GA 30312; 404/688-8234; e-mail: wingofmen@mindspring.com

The Moment to Spring

BY JIM FASON/FIREFALL
PRESIDING ELDER-ELECT

Have we really eased into a new age? I have seen signs of it this spring and am feeling its presence within myself. Around us are subtle signs of the age of brotherly love. I have wanted to shout from the mountaintop and proclaim in the streets this recognition of the abundant peace, which we have been hoping would arrive.

I dedicate this article in honor of my dear compadre, Bob Strain, who is grieving



the loss of his partner, Dexter. Bob, wise elder of our tribe, teacher, healer, poet, and musician, taught me the importance of slowing down and attuning to the moment. Each moment holds precious

wisdom, which, if heeded, reveals a path to inner peace. From this place of inner peace we can then commune with our brothers and the rest of the world in graceful love.

If abundance of peace is coming upon us, the initial signs are momentary revelations, and we must pay attention when they appear. We saw glimpses of this passage into peace at the 2000 GSV spring retreat, which we began surrounded by ancient oak trees at the fire pit and with the words of Mary Oliver in her poem "The Forest."

At night
under the trees
the black snake
jellies forward
rubbing
roughly
the stems of the bloodroot,
the yellow leaves,
little boulders of bark,
to take off
the old life.

I don't know
if he knows

what is happening.

I don't know

if he knows

it will work.

In the distance

the moon and the stars

give a little light.

In the distance

the owl cries out.

In the distance

the owl cries out.

The snake knows

these are the owl's woods,

these are the woods of death,

these are the woods of hardship

where you crawl and crawl,

where you live in the husks of trees,

where you lie on the wild twigs

and they cannot bear your weight,

where life has no purpose

and is neither civil nor intelligent.

Where life has no purpose,

and is neither civil nor intelligent,

it begins

to rain,

it begins

to smell like the bodies

of flowers.

At the back of the neck

the old skin splits.

The snake shivers

but does not hesitate.

He inches forward.

He begins to bleed through

like satin.

—Mary Oliver, *New Poems* (1991-1992).

New life springs from death. To move from death to life, we must shed our fears and open ourselves to love of self and love of others.

The 2000 GSV spring retreat, "Labyrinth Creations—Spring Relations," was a microcosm of the new movement of harmony and peace in the world. Everyone with whom I have spoken and from whom I've received correspondence has commented on the powerful bond of brotherhood that united us at the retreat.

Our connection in brotherly, like-minded and spirited love was transcendental, and we entered a new dimension of intimate fellowship. We came together to travel inwardly, each of us, and in communion with each other. Our path was the labyrinth; our purpose was forgiveness of self and others, healing from wounding, spiraling inward to self-awareness, and emerging new creatures with powerful gifts to offer in service.

The experience of spiraling inward and each sharing our truth opened our hearts to a deeper level of trust and acceptance, of self and others. We engaged in experiences that engendered self-forgiveness, forgiveness of each other, and forgiveness of our fathers and mothers. From this place of gratitude, we tackled our mission of collaboration with *The Mountain* staff to explore the history, design, and spiritual meaning of labyrinths; of blessing the proposed site of the permanent labyrinth; and of designing a plan for the permanent labyrinth.

We opened the retreat by invoking Earth, Wind, Fire, and Water and calling in the spirit and power of the North, East, South, and West. Our invocation surrounded a billowing fire that shot sparks of light into the dark mountain shadows. The stars blended with those sparks, shining down and blessing the weekend retreat that lay ahead: our rite of passage to a new dimension of service both within and outside of our community.

The only real change is imperceptible and to thaw is to dream in death's house—

Very cold there, like home, along the pitted road—

and you know, when death sends his able wolves

A spark flares and shivers across the ravine.

Do glaciers flow? Do they deliberate wild love? How do the rivers of their music go?

They gash with raw glares, dance in light, retreat, advance, no stone intact.

Slow breaths whisper their mother's memory, murmur of mysteries, letting you know that in no great rush, they'll be back.

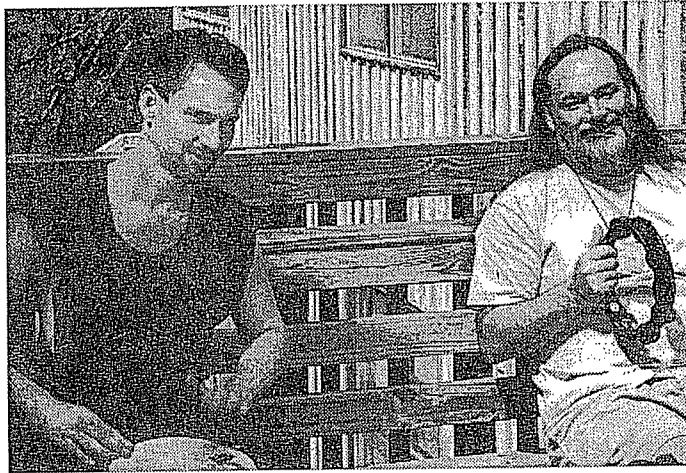
Hardpan and ruthless, a crushing wisdom observes the heave of spring and journey below To death's very old house of dreams, and you know, you and the wolves in the road: The only real change is imperceptible.

Bob Strain, "Glacier" (1997).

From the fire pit, to the rhythm of a tribal drumbeat, we traveled a path to the Lodge Great Room where, amidst a fire and candlelight, we declared our intentions for the weekend. We then danced together free-form to "It's Raining Men," enlivening our spirits for the opening heart circle at which we each shared our intimate thoughts and feelings. We were blessed with many newcomers, so the air was full of excitement and intrigue.

Saturday was full of meditations, art and creative expression, bonding activities, and service to *The Mountain*. Our day began with morning meditation and body cleansing, centering, and erotic charging, led by Roger Weinstein. The rising sun in the east with its blazing shades of coral, pink, and gold, warmed us as we shared this community experience of waking.

We experienced a milestone in GSV: Saturday morning our first woman speaker at a GSV event led a workshop of the art of the spiral. We shared meditation and painting time, during which we each conceptualized and painted our own spiral labyrinth creation. Eileen Ross was our guide as we journeyed within ourselves "to find our hidden treasure and draw it off," as Joseph Campbell would say. In small groups we shared the meaning of our art creations, and a spokesman from each group shared a summary of each piece of art to the larger group. Through this workshop we quickly bonded

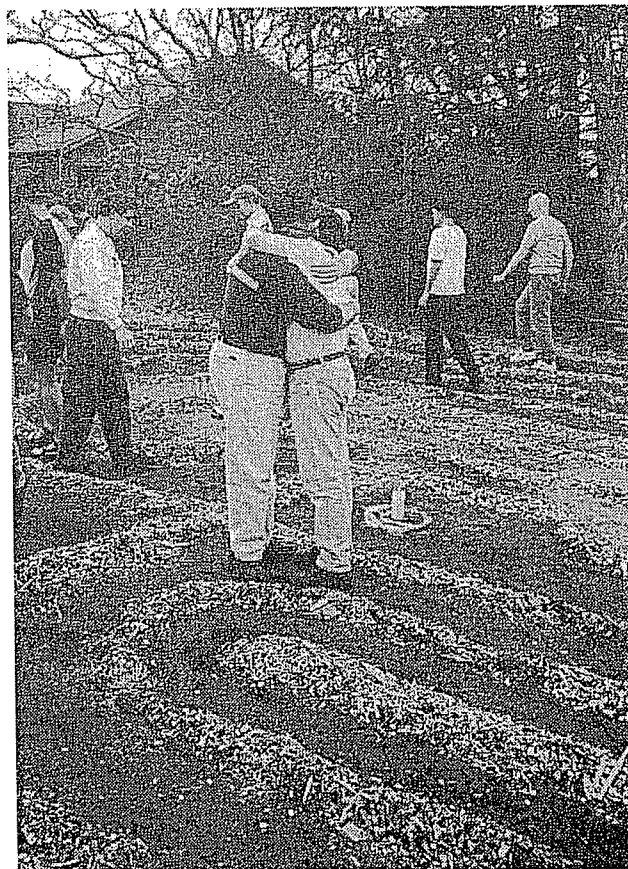


Jim "Firefall" Fason and Donn "Two Crows Talking" Hedden

with each other by sharing our intimate thoughts and feelings, expressed in a creative medium.

We shed tears together and laughed vehemently together, and in the process, shared our vulnerability with Bob MacDicken, Director of *The Mountain Retreat and Learning Center*, and Eileen, artist in residence. At the conclusion of the day, Bob himself shed his own tears as he shared with us that his participation reminded him of the men's group in which he used to participate many years past. He fondly remembered the brotherly

Labyrinth at the Spring retreat



love he shared in that group, which met weekly. We inspired each other through our sharing. How wonderful to have the communal love include people outside our fold! We imprinted a lasting impression of communal grace in this moment.

Eileen sent us a wonderful thank you card, which she hand painted in rich colors, depicting imagery of a labyrinth, sun burst, and little silver flecks that look like tiny angels. We will have it on display at some point in the future.

In the card, she writes:

Dear [GSV],

Thank you so much!

For asking me and having me in to lead a pioneer workshop.

For literally giving me the shirt off your back. [We gave her a tunic she admired.]

For being part of *The Mountain* family and letting us share in your joy and sorrow.

You make me so proud to be a member of the same species.

Shalom, Eileen

Later that morning we hiked through the magical mountain woods, a merry band of fellows with drums, rattles, bells, tambourines, and other tribal sounds, to the site of the labyrinth to be built. Thanks to the foresight and volunteering of Angel Star, we blessed the site in an authentically spiritual ritual. Julia Jamison of *The Mountain* then shared with us the history of the site. It is believed that the site was sacred ground of the Cherokee Indians and the fairies and wood creatures before them. Julia has discovered fairy tears, tear like crystal formations on the quartz rock that is partially subterranean and at the center of the labyrinth site. She has preserved these crystals for later display.

The site is adjacent to the upper pond that feeds the lower lake through a rock dam. To get to it from *The Mountain* summit, you hike down through woods of indigenous mountain laurel

and rhododendron and thick lacy evergreens and towering deciduous trees. You cross over a babbling brook, wandering in and out of trees. The journey to the site was mystical; we imaged ourselves a tribe of Native American Indians on a sacred journey; we could feel the love and support of our ancient ancestors who loved and revered this land.

The labyrinth site is also adjacent to the location where a *Mountain* base fire pit will be located and a fairy trail, hidden like a tunnel under thickly tangled rhododendron and other vegetation. At certain points you can peer out to the upper pond, which will be expanded to include a wet bog that will attract waterfowl and other creatures.

Later in the afternoon a group of us returned to the site to share merriment in song and dance. Led by Terry Allen, we sang communal songs of blessing and danced sufi style as well as more playful styles of dance. A male and female dog joined us from the surrounding woods and came into our circle. After receiving greetings and strokes and sniffing our cocks, the male dog proceeded to bless all the trees around the site by lifting his leg for multiple pees and the female dog guarded us from the west while we continued to frolic.

After lunch we met on the volleyball court at the summit, where King Thackston and his fairy cohorts had miraculously re-created the labyrinth from the Fall 1998 GSV Conference. The man is just amazing! One moment the labyrinth wasn't there; the next moment it was. Not only is he amazing, but rumor has it that he is also magickal, even when he's not sporting his wizard hair! King then relayed wonderful stories and anecdotes about the labyrinth, including the tales about Malachite, the *Mountain* cat, walking the labyrinth with us in 1998, and the spirit women in white robes in the October mist of 1998 walking the labyrinth like Druid priestesses from age old times.

To the beat of the drum, we then moseyed along into the Lodge Great Room again for a documentary and discussion led by Chase Robinson about the resurgence of labyrinths, which began at Grace Cathedral, San Francisco, several years ago. We studied different labyrinth patterns, focusing on the Chartres Cathedral eleven circuit floral design, which has been replicated in many churches, including Grace Cathedral, and the

seven circuit Celtic design, which is the one we selected by consensus as *The Mountain* labyrinth plan.

Gerry Mitchell, with his constant flare for detail and beauty, shared the silk labyrinth that he created in 1998 for the GSV Fall Conference. He led us in a transcendental spirit dance within the labyrinth to captivating new music of Elton John. We shed more tears of thanksgiving and more joyous laughter together as we reminisced about journeys and challenges of the past and reverently released them in the inner sanctum of the labyrinth. We also modeled clay labyrinths, which many men retained as a memento of the retreat. Robert Kelly modeled a three-dimensional labyrinth sphere, and there were many other creative expressions in clay.

At the end of the afternoon, Julia, with deep emotion, shared her thanks for our collaboration with *The Mountain*. She too offered her gift of vulnerability in telling us that she had been feeling a loss of motivation recently, but that our gracious energy and enthusiasm had bolstered her spirits and was helping to renew her commitment and excitement about the labyrinth project. Here again, we appreciated yet another momentary confirmation of the blessing we gayly bestow upon others.

Saturday night's festivities began with a sensational concert presented by the Mountain Quartet, composed of Shelley and Ian Dennem and Jane and Tom Warth. What a delight it was to see Tom Warth hamming it up, singing lead on "Java Jive." We've told Tom that he will

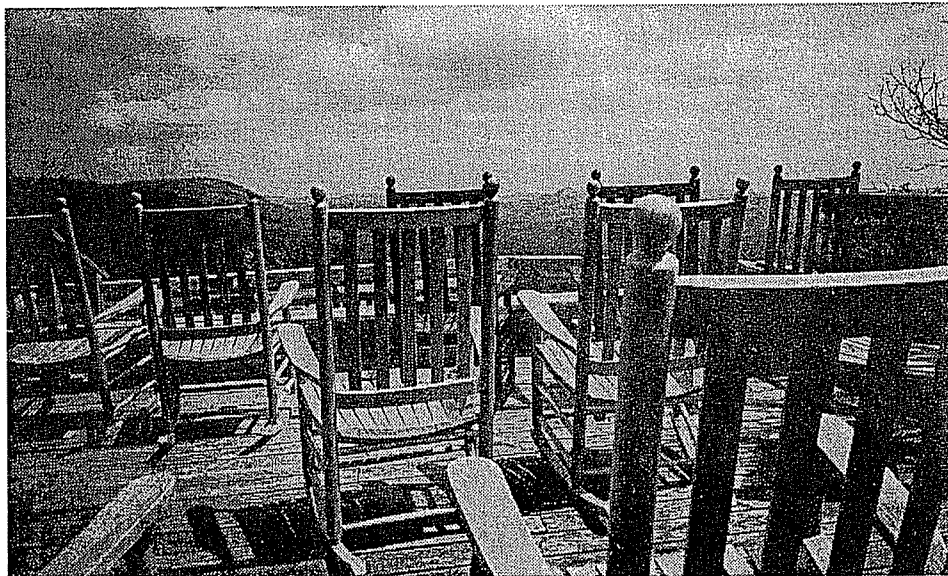
really have arrived when he sings in a sarong! We also admired the sexy body and passionate dancing of Michael DeVeers, who is new to the Program Team of the *Mountain* staff, formerly a world-class ballet dancer. Around another raging fire at the firepit, we shared tribal drumming and dancing. The evening was topped-off with an erotically charged trance dance in the Great Room of the Lodge to candlelight and the music of Jeff Ford. (Thanks to Tom Clephane for bringing Jeff's scintillating CDs!) Men were seen wandering off into the night air, coupled and carousing.

Our closing heart circle was short and sweet, with men sharing tidbits of the special moments they experienced throughout the retreat. Many men talked about the powerful connective energy among us on this retreat. We talked about ways to carry this energy with us into the world, upon leaving the mountaintop.

What about this idea that we have really eased into the age of brotherly love? My reflections on the weekend and other experiences this spring leave me with one central thought. The feeling of expansive love, shed of fear, must start within each of our own hearts. We must each journey into the inner-sanctum of our soul, like the journey into the labyrinth, "to find our hidden treasure and draw it off." This process requires that one look into his shadow side and, instead of hating that part of him that fears open and generous love, accept his weaknesses. Acceptance or self-love will lead to a conver-

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The Mountain rocks!



Mike Goette

LAWRENCE JAMES ELLIOTT

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EDITOR'S EYE

Continued from page 3

show as well. She has a Ph.D. in nursing and has never hesitated to tell me when I'm doing a stupid thing that is going to mess up my life. Maybe we could co-host something, just like Donny and Marie.

I want my own TV show. I can do this. I mean, really, how hard is it to be opinionated and hateful? Dr. Laura treats her callers like those telephone marketing people who dial you up when you're having dinner or expecting a really important phone call. In other words, she's rude to them and hangs up a lot.

Well, okay, maybe I shouldn't have my own show. I'm probably not controversial enough for television. I tend to actually want to help people and that will never sell. The only controversial thing I do is teach safer sex and risk reduction methods to straight, gay and bisexual people. Pretty dull stuff compared to the authoritarian rantings of Dr. Laura. Hell, I don't even have any nude photographs

of myself from my glorious younger days floating around the internet like she does. (Yes, she really does.)

Also, my degree is in journalism and that really only qualifies me to write. My responsibility is to thoroughly research a subject and then compose an article that meets some journalistic standards. Dr. Laura has basically interpreted her doctorate degree as a license to dispense drive-thru therapy. Callers get 3 or 4 minutes of her scientifically ungrounded prattle and that's it. Sorry, no shake or fries with your order. What you get from her is a big, fat helping of attitude. And well, gosh, I was born with that! She apparently had to go to college for a long time to acquire it. Come to think of it, maybe that's why she always sounds so pissed off. She had to pay for something that comes naturally to me. And she must have been absent that day the professor mentioned that you can't build character, life or soul by tearing others down. The two dozen or so real therapists I know get that.

Now, I've said a lot of really harsh

things about Dr. Laura, so I should apologize. Not! See, that's what she does occasionally in her own wildly hypocritical way following repeated statements about how gay and lesbian people are "biological errors" and "HIV-positive people should never have sex." She apologizes if someone was hurt by those statements and then she just keeps repeating them over and over again like some evil parrot from a Stephen King novel.

Note to Dr. Laura: *I'm HIV+ and I still have sex. I know how to protect my partners from HIV. It's all about the fluids, babe. In case you haven't heard, most of us are responsible human beings with common sexual desires who will do whatever it takes to avoid infecting someone else with this virus. And for the record, I would rather be infected with HIV, as horrific as it can be, than to be eaten up with whatever bug got up your ass.* ▼

David Salyer
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JOURNEY OF FAITH, Journey of Acceptance

BY DARRELL GRIZZLE

The chapel service, like many Pentecostal services in the early 1980s, was well orchestrated, modeled after the talk show format of The PTL Club. The shiny blonde worship leader, a grad student in the school of theology, led one praise chorus after another, accompanied by a small ensemble of music students. One praise chorus blended seamlessly into the next. Many of the students in the congregation were raising their hands as they sang along, caught up in the music and the emotion. Others were bored, present only because chapel attendance was required of students at this Christian university.

At the beginning of the service, the dean of the school of theology had asked us to pray for the infant son of one of our professors. The child was being operated on for a brain tumor. The worship leader had led us in a rousing prayer, in which he quoted several Bible verses from memory as we "named and claimed" healing for the professor's child. The TV evangelist for whom the college was named had preached about "the word of faith," likening God to a coin-operated Coke machine where we "drop in faith, and out comes God's healing."

Near the end of the service, the dean came back out on stage and very somberly informed us that the professor's baby had died on the operating table. Anticipating the reaction of many of the students—that obviously the professor did not have enough faith, otherwise his child would have been healed—the dean ended the service by asking that we respond to the professor and his family with Christian love. "And may we let that love bridge the gap between our theology and the reality of what has happened."

The dean's words, while eloquent and

sincere, went unheeded by many. As the students filed out of the chapel, I could already hear many of them whispering about the professor's lack of faith.

Those words haunted me: "...bridge the gap between our theology and the reality..." I began to ask myself why there should be such a gap. And I began to wonder if a theology that didn't square with reality was a theology worth having at all.

These were dangerous questions for me. I was told by those I respected spiritually that such questions and doubts were not to be entertained, that they would only "give room for the devil." Faith was an easily-defined set of beliefs to be accepted, not examined or scrutinized. And so, in addition to the questions themselves, I began to experience feelings of guilt about having the questions at all.

In the midst of this struggle, I attended an interfaith service off campus, where I was introduced to a concept that was radical and new to me: the idea that faith is a journey, not a set of beliefs, and that doubts and questions could be allies in this journey. The minister at this service outlined four stages of the faith journey, taken from a book called *Will Our Children Have Faith?* by John Westerhoff.

In this book, faith is imaged as a pilgrimage which expands through four "styles": the affective "experienced faith" of childhood; "affiliative faith" with its emphasis on community and belonging; "searching faith" with its doubts, critical judgments, and experimentation; and "owned faith," a faith that has been fully examined and is fully lived as part of one's personal identity.

Reading this book helped me realize that, by asking questions, by seeking to find my own "owned faith," I was not

being a bad person or a bad Christian. I was beginning to bridge the gap between reality and my own theology.

Many years later, I left the Pentecostal church and joined St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Atlanta. To my delight, one of the priests at St. Luke's was John Westerhoff, who had written *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, the book that had been so influential on my journey of faith. As I learned from him, and from the rector Spenser Simrill, I realized that St. Luke's was a safe place for me to finally confront the most difficult reality in my life: my bisexuality.

During a small, midweek Advent service at St. Luke's in 1994, Spenser Simrill introduced me to a prayer, and a way of praying, that forever changed the way I saw God and the way I related to God. Instead of preaching a homily, Spenser had us sit in silence for about five minutes and suggested that we coordinate this prayer with our breathing, like a mantra: "Gentle loving God, Mother of my soul, hold me as Your own." Then, he led us on an Ignatian journey into whatever in our lives was causing us pain. For me, that was my bisexuality, which had caused me such conflict and turmoil for so many years. Spenser invited us to experience the pain fully, grounded in the knowledge that we were safe in the arms of our gentle loving God. And then he asked us to consider if there were any way we could accept whatever was causing our pain as a gift.

The idea of my bisexuality as a gift from God was overwhelming. And yet, that cold winter night in the middle of Advent, I realized for the first time in my life that God really did love me, "just as I am" as the old hymn says. And my sexuality was part of the me that God accepted. For the first time I could feel God, the gentle loving God,

Mother of my soul, hold me as Her own. And I began to open my heart to the idea of my sexuality as a gift, not something to be ashamed of.

Soon afterward, I sat in John Westerhoff's office at St. Luke's and spoke the words I had never before said to another human being: "I am bisexual. I am attracted to men as well as to women." The earth did not open and swallow me; thunder did not strike. Instead, this respected theologian, this grey-haired, wizard-like priest told me that my sin

was not experiencing same-sex attraction, my real sin had been not accepting God's love for me as God had created me. My own self-hatred and homophobia had been a perverse form of pride, telling God, "No, you're wrong -- I'm not worth loving."

My penance was this: John directed me to read Isaiah 43:1-7, every morning for however many days it took for me to believe it -- to really believe it:

...thus says the Lord ... I have called you by name, you are mine ...

...because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you ...

It took a little over a month of reading this passage every day for my self-hatred, my homophobic pride, to crumble and for me to finally accept that God does love me, just as I am. I still feel the conflict between having same-sex attractions and a deeper desire to someday marry a woman and have children. But I've accepted that God may continue to let me experience this conflict -- the conflict itself may be what God is using to draw me closer to Him.

And I still have days when my old way of thinking intrudes. I sometimes read Scripture and see it through the eyes of the fundamentalist college student I once was, rather than through the lens of God's love and acceptance. But now I know the truth. And each day as I pray this prayer, "Gentle loving God, Mother of my soul, hold me as Your own," in rhythm with my breathing, I allow the prayer to center me, to ground me in God's grace. And I allow myself to feel God's loving arms around me, holding me secure, never letting go. ▼

Darrell Grizzle is a therapist in Marietta, Ga., who specializes in court-ordered counseling: DUI's, domestic violence, sex offenses. He is a mystical bear who especially loves the trance dances at GSV conferences.

His webpage is WildFaith. <http://wildfaith.homestead.com/home.html>. E-mail: powerbear@mindspring.com

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Fall Conference 2000 "LIVING IN RADIANCE"

BY STEVEN BAND



The Planning committee and I are creating such an amazing event this year to kick off GSV into the new millennium. "Living in Radiance: Inspiring the Gay Mind, Body and Soul" is this year's theme. How do we claim, renew, and continually vitalize our presence in the world? We can start by empowering our individual strength and will to master these principles:

I must own my identity and honor my mind, body, and soul in all of its power; remaining grounded and centered and openly flowing in spirit and truth. I must integrate, support, and balance all facets of my being. I must nurture myself by establishing and maintaining healthy boundaries, thereby assuring that I reach my full potential. I must forgive myself and others and live with compassion and integrity.

Your mission in life is to have a 'Why' to live for; to use your best qualities in the service of the kind of world you want to live in. That is your purpose. That is what life expects from you. And when you live according to your purpose, setting goals that support it, you will find the pieces of your life drawn together into a strong internal whole.

—Victor Frankl, Author

We invite you to join us September 21-24, 2000 at The Mountain Retreat and Learning Center near Highlands, North Carolina. This year we will begin the conference at noon on Thursday, and end after lunch on Sunday. We encourage those who can to arrive Wednesday afternoon, join us for dinner and spend the night. The conference fee will be \$350 for 4 nights, and \$305 for three nights. Brochures with further details will be mailed in July. A registration form can also be found on our website:

<http://gayspirit.home.mindspring.com>

Men in need of financial assistance can submit a letter to the scholarship committee stating their request for support. We ask that you only ask for what you truly need, and we will attempt to assist as many as we can. Unfortunately, we can no longer guarantee scholarships to all who apply, but our brothers' generous donations to the Raven Wolfdancer Scholarship Fund make it possible to offer continued assistance. We are accepting contributions in advance of the conference so please send your tax-deductible checks to:

Gay Spirit Visions
P.O. Box 339
Decatur, GA 30031-0339.

Please note "Raven Wolfdancer Scholarship Fund" on your check. Last year we were able to accommodate all those in need because of many generous benefactors.

Plan on joining us in growth and enlightenment at this 11th Annual GSV Fall Conference where we will bridge together our individual minds, bodies, and souls to create and enhance enduring bonds of friendship and community. Come dance, sing, play, feel and experience the joy of our journey. "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous? Actually, who are you NOT to be?"

(Marianne Williamson)

Please feel free to contact me with anything relating to Fall Conference 2000. It is my pleasure to be in service to our GSV brothers for yet another incredible life enhancing event. ▼

Love,
Steven Band,
Elder of Conferences and Special Events

SBMASSUER@AOL.COM

THE LEADERS AMONG US

BY SKYWALKER

Some of you may be aware of the tremendous amount of work that goes into planning and putting on the Fall Conference. Much of that work begins in the winter and spring months preceding the conference. Theme visioning, planning an opening ritual, selecting a keynote speaker and arranging workshops are a few of the tasks that must be accomplished. Another area is choosing men to lead small groups during the conference.

For the past two years I have had the privilege and honor of working with small group leaders at the GSV Fall Conference. First, a small group leader coordinating team is formed. This usually takes place in the spring before the conference. This team of 2-3 men comes up with a list of some 30 to 40 men who've served as group leaders in the past or who have expressed an interest in being small group leaders. Letters inviting these men to serve as group leaders are mailed out in early June. A blanket invitation to serve as a group leader is mailed to everyone with the conference registration form. From these invitations we usually are able to get 12 men who commit to serve their brothers as a small group leader during the fall conference.

Starting in July these 12 men start receiving regular mailings about the upcoming conference. The mailings include guidelines for being a small group leader, details on the theme of the upcoming conference and a directory listing the names and addresses of the other group leaders. Starting with the first mailing in July; the group leaders are encouraged to use whatever spiritual practice they normally use to pray or meditate for each other, for the men that will be in their small group and for the conference planning committee. Between July and September the small group leaders are making plans for the 10-12 men that will be in their group. This might include making

some token for each of them or purchasing some charm or a tee shirt or bandana for them. They do this all on their own time and at their own expense out of love for their spirit brothers. Upon arrival at *The Mountain* the group leaders have a meeting to go over last minute details. They each receive a list of the men that have been randomly assigned to their groups. The group leaders then receive a blessing from the group leader coordinating team as a symbol of the sacred trust that has been placed in each of them and as a symbol of the power that has been given them to serve their brothers.

Then the real work of being a small group leader begins. The first meeting with the group is usually one of introductions. Getting to know each other. Some groups pass around a sacred object similar to a "talking stick". Others just take turns. The group gets acclimated to each other, their meeting location and *The Mountain*. There usually are about 4 designated small group meetings during the conference. The group begins to come together in trust and openness. Each group meeting becomes a heart circle within the larger heart circle of GSV. This is very powerful and the small group leader is a very important part of this process. He serves as the catalyst for this powerful spiritual reaction. He becomes a facilitator for men undergoing open heart surgery! This delicate work continues until the climax for the small groups on the last day of the conference: The gift exchange. Again, the small group leader plays a key role in leading this sacred GSV ritual. The exchange of tokens of power and remembrance.

If after reading this you sense a call to be a small group leader then write a letter to the GSV planning committee letting them know of your interest. This will insure that you receive an invitation in the summer to

be a small group leader. It is a serious commitment to be a group leader and not to be taken lightly. You are committing to be at each of the small group meetings during the conference weekend. You are agreeing to serve as a facilitator for small group heart circles. You are affirming your desire to be present to your brothers. This commitment may mean that you will not be able to take on other responsibilities such as workshop leader. You may not be able to attend all of the workshops. You will definitely experience the Fall Conference in a different way. You will experience the joy of giving.

I would like to close by offering you a spiritual exercise. A spiritual exercise is kind of like working out at the gym except a spiritual exercise results in a more open heart; it increases the bulk of your spiritual muscle. Here is the spiritual exercise: Sit down right now, today, and write a thank you note to a small group leader you have had. Giving thanks is such a powerful and liberating form of prayer. Peace. ▼

Skywalker, A.K.A. Chase Robinson can be reached at GChaseJr@aol.com

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WORDS, BIRDS, NUMBERS & ROSES

BY ANDREW RAMER

The following is part two of a transcript of the keynote address delivered by Andrew at our 10th Annual Gay Spirit Visions Conference, last year called "The Mask and The Mirror: Through the Eyes of Janus." Part one can be found in the February/March edition of Visionary.

VISIONS OF THE FUTURE

In looking at our own community, what do I see?

BY ANDREW RAMER



I'm much better at envisioning themes than speakers, but there are several people in this room whose gifts would make them excellent presenters, and one person in the world that I would love to have us invite—Tobias Schneebaum, artist, anthropologist, and author of one of my favorite books, *Keep the River on Your Right*.

Our next conference will be held in the year 2000. Visionaries tell us the next thousand years will be a freer time. I hope so. One of the buzzwords for the next millenium is diversity. Diversity is a noble goal. But I also think that talking about it can be a way of obscuring the real issue. If we didn't have racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, lookism, classism, etc, we wouldn't need to talk about diversity. Because, as you know:

You've got to be taught before it's too late
Before you are six, or seven or eight
To hate all the people your relatives hate
You've got to be carefully taught.

And growing up in this society, we were carefully taught, all of us, by the hateful words and deeds we heard and saw, and by the people and things we didn't see, didn't hear about. I was in my twenties before I saw a picture of two men wrapped in each other's arms, kissing. That omission taught me just

as much as my 9th grade math teacher did when he called me a fairy in front of the class.

Remembering Don Clark's words to us last year, I propose for our 11th gathering, in the year 2000, that our theme be "Exploring Bigotry and Diversity in a Spiritual Context." I imagine a conference in which the keynote and all the workshops will be directly focused on aspects of the theme, as you would find at an academic or medical conference. A conference in which we will explore our own judgments and prejudices, external and internalized, learn tools for altering those perceptions, and step into a spiritual space as a community that acknowledges how carefully taught we were, but a community that is sitting together in a circle as one people.

Conference 12 will take place in the year 2001. It will also mark the completion of our third journey around the medicine wheel. Arthur C. Clark and Stanley Kubrick made the year 2001 synonymous with scientific progress and I suggest that our topic be: "Science and Spirituality."

As a community we have created a place for poetry and music, for costumes and theatre, but there are several scientists in our midst, some closeted, and I hope we can create a forum for them to discuss their work. To me scientific curiosity is always a spiritual quest, and I envision a panel of gay scientists, here to discuss their explorations. And a gay fundamentalist who believes in Creationism, to express his opinions. Plus a forum of speakers from the mystery traditions, Buddhist, Kabbalistic, and others, whose writings parallel the findings of contemporary physicists and depth psychologists.

This is part of one of my favorite poems, by Adrienne Rich. It's called "Power."

Today I was reading about Marie Curie:
she must have known she suffered from
radiation sickness
her body bombarded for years by the element
she had purified.

It seems she denied to the end
the source of the cataracts on her eyes
the cracked and suppurating skin of her
finger-ends
till she could no longer hold a test-tube or a
pencil
She died a famous woman
denying
her wounds
denying
her wounds came from the same source as
her power.

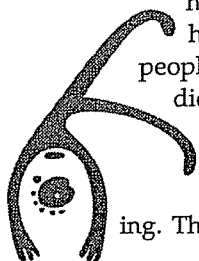
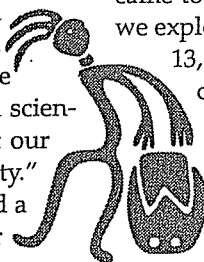
A poem about science, and also a poem that makes me think of a suggested topic for our 13th conference. Thirteen, a number that was once sacred to the Goddess, before Her enemies, and ours, turned it into a sign of bad luck. Each time I read Rich's poem I think about our sex lives, which are the source of our power, our wounds, and were, long before HIV came to live with us. In our second year we explored the erotic godbody. For year

13, I invite us to explore some of the challenges of sexuality. Let's investigate sex addiction, and its less known sibling, sexual anorexia, the fear of and withdrawal from the pleasures of the flesh.

In our polarized and labelizing society, it's difficult to look at the full spectrum of our feelings. I think a discussion of bisexuality would be timely, but that topic is often taboo in gay circles, which cuts us off from men who are bi, and from aspects of ourselves.

Every spiritual tradition I can think of has used celibacy, for a limited time or a lifetime, as a tool for transmuting sexual energy into spiritual energy. I suggest that we use conference 13 to explore being celibate, too.

For the conference in 2003, I would like to offer the following theme, "At Home in the World: Creating our Own Space and Networking with Other Gay Gatherings." I have long imagined us buying this mountain, or a place like it, and creating a library, archive, hostel, hospice, retreat center, plus a theatre, studio space for artists, and a research facil-



ity for our scientists. A grandiose vision, but one I invite us to explore. In addition, there are other gay conferences, here and abroad, and I propose that we invite representatives from each of them to come here and share with us information about what they do, where they meet, and how they have explored the issue of having a space of their own.

Many of the themes I'm proposing are not positive and upbeat the way our themes were in the past. Much of the time what sends us off on spiritual journeys is that our lives are not working. I think focusing on the positive is important, but sometimes when we do that we by-pass our real issues. I know this is true for me. With this in mind, I would like to propose that for our conference in 2004 we explore the following theme: "Disillusionment, Despair, and Defeat." Because at some point in our lives we're all going to experience the failure to attain what we want, and the loss of what we already have. I give for example this poem by Timothy Liu. It's called "Leaving the Universe."

Can't go back
to his body. That wilderness.
At times he would let me
rest there, no other place to go.
A bedroom
full of star charts, planets tearing
free from orbit, a belt
of asteroids flying apart.
In that space
between us, the gravity
of my bed unable
to keep his body from floating
out the door.

So what do we do when we fail in love or fail in work, which are the two big issues of life according to Freud? I envision a conference that explores sorrow, fear, anger, loss, defeat, which offers us concrete tools to use when life isn't working out the way we want it to. This subject is on my mind because this has been one of the most difficult years of my life. I've had tendonitis in my hands so painful I can hardly work. My favorite uncle died in August. My mother died in May. And it wasn't affirmations which helped me, but the loving support of other grieving friends. Thank you Andrew and Dan.

In 1995 our conference was about discovering the elder within us. Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, founder of the Institute for Spiritual Eldering, calls this getting elder, not older, calls it saging not aging. This is important work, especially in our community, where youth and beauty are often exalted. But this journey isn't an easy one, and our experience may be closer to what Harold Norse talks about in his poem "You Must Have Been a Sensational Baby."

I love your eyebrows, said one.
The distribution of your body hair
is sensational. What teeth, said two.
Your mouth is like cocaine, said three.
Your lips, said four, look like sexual organs.
They are, I said.
As I got older features thickened,
the body grew flabby, then
thin in the wrong places. They
all shut up or spoke about life.

In 1995 we talked about becoming elders. In 2005 I'd like us to explore plain old getting older, how we deal with changes in our bodies, our sexuality, cognition, the death of others and our own fear of death. I imagine workshops that offer spiritual guidance for dealing with getting older, and also practical guidance: how to write a will, what to know about getting long term health insurance, where to leave our possessions, especially the letters, books, photographs that are part of our legacy as gay men to the gay community. Because statistically, two out of three of us will end up spending time in nursing homes. And we might as well talk about it here, in a safe space. In the year when we complete our fourth circuit around the wheel of life. Four times four, a year of power, a place of completion.

For our 17th conference, in the year 2006, I invite us to choose as our theme: "Evil." Many of us grew up in traditions that speak of a negative power in the universe. There are demons in Hinduism and Buddhism. In Christianity Satan is considered the enemy of God. In Judaism, Satan, whose name means "Adversary," isn't the adversary of God, but of humanity. Many of us still believe in God, or in some universal energy or Higher Power, but we've rejected the concept of evil, the sense of sin, a word which comes from

archery and simply means "missing the mark." Tom Spanbauer in *The Man Who Fell in Love with the Moon*, has this to say about the devil:

"...how he is looking to you isn't how he is. Your eyes see one thing while your heart is seeing another."

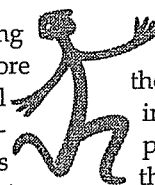
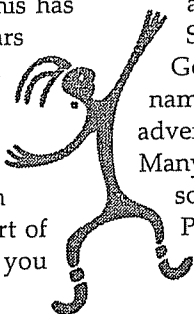
I think we've all experienced that kind of split. And whether or not we believe in a literal devil or real demons, we are a people who have had great evil done to us, and we still carry its wounds in our bodies. Year 17 might be a good time for us to look at evil, what we think about it, how we live with it, heal it, and how we can learn to handle the capacity for evil that lives within us all.

W.W. Auden said "A culture is no better than its woods." In *Two Flutes Playing* I wrote about my belief that in ancient times men who loved men were the guardians of the trees. Anyone who wanted to use their wood came to us. We talked to the trees to get their permission. And we are meeting in this ancient forest. So I propose for conference 18 that our theme be: "Guardians of The Trees: Environmentalism and The Gay Community." We have a visible presence in the political arena, we've marched for the rights of other communities, but I think it's time for us to have a visible presence in the environmental movement as well. I'd like to see panels of gay environmentalists talk about their work, teach us about toxins and pollutants support us in recycling, and in growing and buying organic products. I'd like to see gay members of national environmental groups here to recruit us. And I'd especially like to see us as a community come up with a concrete action for global change that we will adopt as a permanent part of this conference. Planting trees would be my choice.

For our 19th conference, in the year 2008, I propose that our theme be silence, and that the entire conference from beginning to end, each meal, the talent show, each presentation and every workshop, be conducted entirely in....

Conclusion

Conference 20 will mark the completion of our fifth circuit around the four directions of the medicine wheel, the time when we get to use all our fin-



gers and toes to count on. As our planners, (let's have a big cheer for them,) have established the theme of our tenth conference as "The Mask and Mirror: Through the Eyes of Janus," I propose that our twentieth conference, to be held in the year 2009, be called, "Unmasked and De-Mirrored: Through the Heart of Silvanus." I'd call it "Unmasked and De-mirrored" in the hope that by the year 20 it will be easier for us to stand naked and free in the world.

Like Janus, Silvanus was also a Roman god, lord of woods and wild places, guardian of space, not time. As protector of the trees, he was often identified with the Greek god Pan. I chose Silvanus as the patron for our 20th year because Stonewall and much of our recent history has been urban, but I believe that our true home is in the trees, as we are now. Through the heart of Silvanus, the non-dual seeing eye of the heart that Dellwood Barker's teacher Foolish Woman taught him to trust.

To do this is not easy. It may take 10 years or longer. So I'd like to share a few short meditations with you that may help on the journey.

In the West, I believe that the appropriate posture for meditation is exactly where you happen to find yourselves, sitting, with both feet on the floor, hands resting lightly together in your lap.

Close your eyes and take three slow deep breaths. Notice your body, the sukkah, the temporary shelter you are living in right now. With your eyes closed, slide your hands lightly up and down your body, gently caressing yourself. Notice your breath. Sense the community of billions of cells that you are, pulsing and alive. Be one with all that movement. And open your eyes.

We're a new species, still learning to master physicality, which is the only domain in which the human soul can grow. 500 years ago they all laughed at Christopher Columbus when he said the world was round. But today we've seen pictures of the Earth from space. Children standing on the beach know the world is a sphere. It may take us another 500 years to continue to realign our sens-

es, but that's part of our gay soul work.

Many traditions encourage us to become still when we meditate. I invite you to do the opposite. Eyes open or closed, feel your breath, and notice that nothing is really still, inside or out. At this latitude, in the time that I've been speaking, we've traveled nearly 800 miles around the planet's axis. Try and feel that.

We've traveled in our orbit around the sun over 67,000 miles. Try and imagine and feel that.

Our solar system has spun 490,000 miles around the center of our galaxy. Try and sense and know that.

The entire Milky Way galaxy has raced over 2,232,000 miles through space toward a celestial location known as The Great Attractor. See, even galaxies

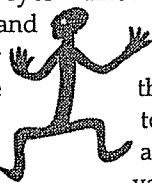
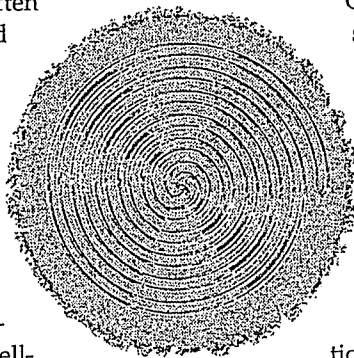
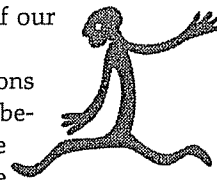
know desire. Try and feel that too.

The next time you see the sun or the moon, feel in your cells that they aren't basketballs circling overhead. The moon is a quarter the size of the Earth, and it's on average 249,000 miles from us. While the sun's volume is 1,300,000 times that of Earth, and it's on average 93 million miles away. They are huge, they are distant, and they do not rise or set. We need truer words to describe what happens when they appear and disappear.

The next time you look up at stars, know that their light is coming toward us from far away and long ago. What we're seeing isn't what's really there. One of our teachers taught us to "be here now." But as you look at a sky full of stars, try and feel how vast that "now" is. It's billions of years long, all in one moment of looking up, inviting us to experience what Audre Lorde called: "The marvelous arithmetics of distance."

As Allen Ginsberg was, when he wrote "Five A.M." the year before he died:

Land that lifts me above the clouds
into pure space, timeless, yea eternal
Breath transmuted into words, transmuted
back to breath in one hundred two



hundred years
nearly immortal, Sappho's 26 centuries
of cadence breathing;
Beyond time, clocks, empires, bodies, cars,
chariots, rocket ships, skyscrapers, Nation
empires
brass walls, polished marble, Inca artwork
of the mind;
but where's it come from?

That's what every spiritual journey is about. Looking for the answer to that question. And we can search for years. Only to discover that:

You may go to the East, go to the West,
But one day you'll come,
Weary at heart, back where you started from.

Hopefully with the same insight Dorothy had when she got back from Oz:

"If I ever go looking for my heart's desire again, I won't look any further than my own backyard. Because if it isn't there, I never really lost it to begin with."

But what is it? What is the desire of our hearts that's so difficult to find? And where is our permanent home? Assoto Saint answers that for us:

birds of a feather coo
spread their wings
at the edge of the world
they soar
stretching themselves
to God

God, Goddess, Great Mystery, The Universe, whatever we call it, that's the goal of a spiritual journey. And I do believe there's an inevitability about this. As H.D., Hilda Doolittle, said:

Why did you come
to trouble my decline?
I am old. (I was old till you came.)

The reddest rose unfolds,
(which is ridiculous
in this time, this place,

unseemly, impossible,
even slightly scandalous),
the reddest rose unfolds;

(nobody can stop that,
no imminent threat from the air;
not even the weather,

blighting our summer fruit),
the reddest rose unfolds,
(they've got to take that into account).

RAMER

Continued from page 13

Inevitable yes, we will unfold back into God, yes. But how do we get there? Here's a possible first step.

I don't go out late, no place to go,
I'm home about eight, me and my radio.
Ain't misbehavin', I'm savin' my love for you.

Step one. In our bodies, we make a conscious commitment to end our attachment to what society tells us is important—power, money, fame, great houses, fast cars, a big dick—and shift our attention to other priorities. Then comes the next step, the next level of awareness.

Night and day, you are the one.
Only you beneath the moon
and under the sun,
Whether near to me or far
It's no matter darling where you are
I think of you night and day.

God, Goddess, the Ground of All Being,
we come to understand that it is One,
constant, ever-present. And we shift our
attention to It, at each moment and in
everything we do, knowing that we really
have only one relationship in the

world, and that's with God.

And then step three. Which is inevitable, but which we may not fully realize in this lifetime. But by the year 4599, at our 2,610th conference, I believe it will be a normal part of human life, because of the pioneering work we did here, more powerful than Stonewall. Beginning the journey to realize, in our bodies, in our cells, not just in our minds, that:

You are everything, and everything is you,
You are everything, and everything is you,
You are everything, and everything...

...Cells and cities, visions and viruses,
people and planets, coyotes and flute
players. Words, birds, numbers, and
roses. Are waiting to love and be loved.
Because everything that is, is, simultaneously,
the mask and the mirror -- of God.

Thank you. ▼

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



YOUR SACRED BODY

Continued from page 1

divine, something holy.

My body is one of the things that makes me unique. Bodies are specific. I'm not a generic spirit. My soul resonates within this particular body: male, 46 years old, gay, somewhat bearish. My gray whiskers tell part of my story, as do my scars.

As spiritual people, we struggle to give our bodies a proper place in our spirituality. We need to love and accept our entire selves, including our bodies, without over-identifying and objectifying them. Understanding that our bodies enable us to connect with other men and women through the mystery of lovemaking, through touch, through eating and drinking together, helps us to appreciate what a good thing it is to have a body. At

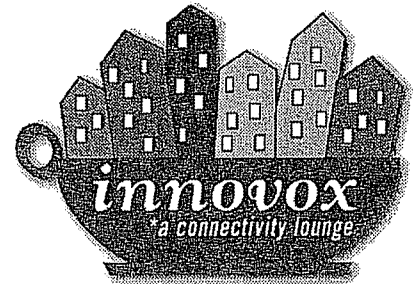
the same time, we know that flesh is mortal. If we listen carefully, we know that our bodies are speaking to us over time telling us that our time here on earth is not infinite. We will die. The body is our teacher in this sense. It enlightens our spirituality.

Accepting your body is a spiritual practice. There are practical things you can do which help heal your body image. First, take the concern seriously. Don't confuse who you are with how you look. Develop a sense of identity based on all of your attributes and on your values.

Put your body back together. Consider stretching, yoga and massage as ways to help yourself feel like more than just "skinny legs" or "love handles." Indulge in body pleasures; long baths, massage, good sex, a walk in the park on a sunny day. Make your own list.

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Learn to appreciate body types in all shapes and sizes. Don't trash men (or women) who don't conform to the "buffed" image. Seek alternative role models. Don't emphasize body size or shape as an indication of a man's worth or his identity as a man. Learn to value the person inside.

And finally, confront homophobia, including internalized homophobia. Don't accept being treated as a second-class citizen by straight society or by other gay folks. ▼

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THE MOMENT TO SPRING

Continued from page 6

sion of those fears into strengths. From this place of strength and centeredness, we can each then begin to increase exponentially that open and generous love that circles throughout the world.

So, yes, we are in a new age, and we can each claim a presence in it by searching inside ourselves and bringing our radiance to the world. The passage begins within and flows outward from each of us, creating a web of "harmony and understanding, sympathy and trust abounding." This is the moment to spring!

We concluded our retreat with Mary Oliver's "Spring."

Somewhere
a black bear
has just risen from sleep
and is staring
down the mountain.
All night
in the brisk and shallow restlessness
of early spring
I think of her,
her four black fists
flicking the gravel,



her tongue
like a red fire
touching the grass,
the cold water.
There is only one question:
how to love this world.
I think of her
rising
like a black and leafy ledge
to sharpen her claws against
the silence
of the trees.
Whatever else
my life is
with its poems
and its music
and its glass cities,
it is also this dazzling darkness
coming
down the mountain,
breathing and tasting;
all day I think of her
her white teeth,
her wordlessness,
her perfect love.



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ELDER'S PERCH

Continued from page 2

recovery was offered drugs during the trance dance. Ouch! I don't like the feeling that in some small way my past behavior may have contributed to something like that. I mean, we said that we would keep the space free from drugs and alcohol. But we didn't. And I'm not even talking about North Carolina law or our agreement with The Mountain.

Now, I know that "party favors" are part of our community. They're part of the larger community. But I have to raise the issue for you to say how you feel about this issue. Is it okay for us to condone the use of drugs and alcohol at our gatherings? If we're going to allow it, then should we continue to request that people leave them at home? When I was actively using I kind of enjoyed the fact that I was doing something I wasn't supposed to. I thought that if I kept it discreet that wasn't hurting anyone. Now I'm sure I'm wrong about that.

I'm not saying it's wrong for you to use drugs and alcohol. That's for you to

decide for yourself. What I'm asking is, is it okay for us to say "leave them at home," and to look the other way when someone brings them? I'm kind of afraid of bringing this issue up. My fear is that we'll decide not to ask people to leave them at home. Then I'll have to decide if I can continue participating. But that will have to be my choice based on what the consensus of the group is. But I'm not comfortable letting the issue lie unquestioned. Partly because it's law, and because it's part of the agreement we have to participate. But mostly because it's about honesty. And honesty is what I want the roots of the next generation of gay men to be grounded in.

But these are my personal views. What do you think? Write to Elder's Perch in care of *Visionary*, send your comments to Master_Jake@hotmail.com, or let's discuss this subject on the GSV reflector. ▼

Editor's note: *The Mountain Retreat and Learning Center serves wine during regularly scheduled social hours unless event sponsors ask them not to provide it.*



A collection of websites of possible interest to gay and bisexual men

<http://www.whosoever.org/>

An Online News Journal For Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered Christians

<http://www.spiritualdaytrips.com>

Information about daytrips designed to give you a break from city living, strengthen your connection to the Earth and refresh your spirit

<http://www.geocities.com/RainForest/4076/index1.html>

All about Shamanism, the world's oldest healing tradition, and animal spirits

<http://members.aol.com/nasalam/>

Introduction and links about the spiritual teachings of Nasalam and its related priesthood

<http://www.wie.org/>

Online version of What Is Enlightenment? magazine

<http://www.sunflower.com/~olin/MMF/brochure.htm>

Online brochure for the Midwest Men's Festival

www.themensgathering.org

Information about the annual Pennsylvania Men's Gathering

<http://www.rfdmag.org/>

Online version of the quarterly magazine

<http://www.thebody.com>

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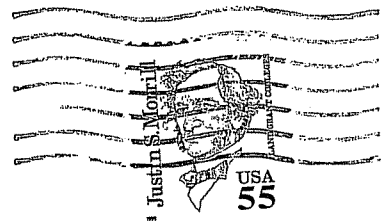
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