

VISIONARY

BECOMING FULLY

TRIBAL

Last April, I attended the death of my life partner of 28 years. Dex had suffered a ruptured aorta and, after extensive surgical intervention, wound up unconscious and on life support for a week before he died. In many ways, there was little I could do during those days at the hospital. I certainly was not able to change the ultimate outcome. And yet...



BY BOB STRAIN

John Stowe previously had given me a flower-essence oil blend that I used often to massage Dex's legs and feet. I used it now to anoint his hands and hair. The nurses said he still had his sense of smell, and so I felt he would associate the beautiful fragrance with memories of being loved and touched. Andrew Ramer had written wonderful meditations in *Two Flutes Playing* to help those nearing death; I whispered them to him and felt him listen and relax. Bernie Morin and Lou Wolcott and who knows how many others were sending Reiki energy and prayer and all sorts of spiritual sustenance and guidance for us both. The air in the hospital cubicle seemed actually to vibrate, so much ethereal healing poured in. My answering machine and e-mail server and mailbox were flooded with love and concern and support. Most of it came from Gay Spirit Visions brothers.

Dex died peacefully, knowing he was loved deeply. I was awed by how much my GSV associations had prepared me to be fully there with him, to find ways to be supportive in what was on its face a hopeless situation. In the difficult months since, my spirit brothers have visited, written, called, cried with me and shared happy memories, and held me in love and light.

I tell you all this to say "thank you," and to affirm the obvious: We are a powerful tribe of healers.

This truth was percolating in me during last fall's conference, especially as Harold Cole shared his thoughts on what it means to be a tribe and how we need to move forward with our work. Driving back to West Virginia afterward, it occurred to me that

there is room within the GSV circle to create and use ceremonies and rituals drawn specifically from our own experiences in the world as Gay men with our own customs, mythologies, and history — our own culture.

Lesbian poet Judy Grahn, in her wonderful book *Another Mother Tongue*, notes that "What gives any group of people distinction and dignity is its culture. This includes a remembrance of the past and a setting of itself in a world context whereby the group can see *who it is* relative to everyone else." Gay culture, she notes, is "old, extremely old, and it is continuous."

Perhaps it is time to look to our ancestors and craft ceremonies from what they have bequeathed us. If ritual is viewed as a container for spirit, then ritual with its roots in Gay experience seems an appropriate vessel for Gay Spirit. A recent discussion on the GSV list-serve centered on whether ritual is actually necessary, especially as individuals grow into higher spiritual awareness. I think it is useful for creating common purpose and identification within groups such as GSV, where many brothers are at many different points on their journeys.

This is not to suggest that the things that have served us well previously should be abandoned. To the contrary: GSV now has its own history and traditions that enrich us and help define us as a group. Consciousness evolves. And expands outward.

After the last conference, Bernie Morin commented, "It occurs to me that our thread of commonality seems to be Men of Spirit Who Love Men." I agree this is a fundamental connection for us, and to the extent we can build on that shared experience, we perhaps can create rituals that help define us more clearly as a tribe. When we talk about the beauty of men, male sexuality and sensuality, or coming out, or oppression, or AIDS, what brings us together is always greater than the things that seem to separate us.

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The 2001 Gay Spirit Visions Planning Committee

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ELDER'S PERCH

As I was driving home from the potluck at Innovox last night I remembered spending time with Raven Wolf dancer. Many of you may remember him as one of our original Conference Planners and a dear friend. He was found dead outside his apartment around the corner from Innovox and the



circumstances around his murder remain a mystery. But I'll always remember his admonishment to the third conference in 1992. We must come out spiritually. Ten years later we're planning our 12th Conference at the Mountain and anticipating a delightful Spring Retreat March 30th. GSV has nurtured me in my quest to be a "spiritually out gay man." It is my privilege to serve as your presiding elder again this year.

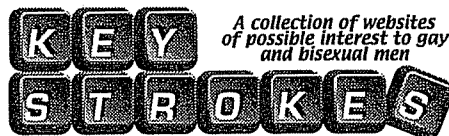
I want to acknowledge a significant change in our organization. Jim Fason, who served as Presiding Elder-elect, has answered the call of his own vision and has left GSV to pursue the manifestation of his dream. On behalf of GSV I want to offer Jim my heartfelt gratitude for his many years of service to us and the creative contributions he's made. Our gatherings were richer, more poetic, and more elegant due to his efforts. Jim, you will be missed.

In December David Salyer moved to San Francisco, and *Visionary* is transitioning into the capable hands of Jennings Fort and Tony James. David continues to help as he can electronically. I know that the new team will continue David's tradition of providing an excellent journal for your spiritual nourishment.

Beginning on the fourth Sunday in April the Planning Committee will hold monthly meetings to plan the details for Conference 12. I continue to be in awe over the talent and creativity that comes to these meetings on your behalf. It is a marvel to watch Spirit unfold in the lives of these dedicated men who unleash their efforts to create the framework for our gathering. If our visioning session is any indication of what is to come, you can expect "the best conference ever" this September.

All of this—the state of our organization—goes on in the midst of the lives of men who volunteer their time and energies. And I know that they face the same challenges we all do: jobs, families, personal challenges. Yet GSV is a place where men who love men can come to be in each other's loving company, to be "spiritually out gay men." No matter how you participate in this men-loving assembly—via the email reflector, heart circle, potluck, conference, or simply this journal, thank you for bringing your gay spirit to the table. You are most welcome here. Your presence makes a difference. ▼

Martin "TreeWalker" Isganitis is currently presiding elder of GSV. He has been a member of the Planning Committee since 1992. He is single and lives in Decatur, GA.



www.whosoever.org An Online News Journal For Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered Christians.

www.wie.org Online version of What Is Enlightenment? magazine.

www.rfdmag.org Online version of the quarterly magazine, *RFD*.

www.thebody.com A comprehensive HIV and AIDS information resource.

www.bodymindsoul.org The website of John R. Ballew, M.S., licensed professional counselor, sexuality educator, certified massage therapist and workshop facilitator.

www.rainbowquery.com Wide-ranging Internet search engine for the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community.

<http://earthfriends.home.mindspring.com> Bringing you the gentle, energetic healing power of flower essences and oils.



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 7:30 PM. For location, contact Matt at 404/248-9649 or e-mail him at pretzelulu@aol.com.

GSV Planning Meetings are held the second Saturdays of the month at 10 AM at the Friends Meeting House, 701 Howard St., Decatur, GA.

GSV Yoga meets 7-8:30 PM on Monday. For more information, contact Rocky Beeland at 404-289-9239 or rbeeland@attworldnet.att.net,

March 30-April 1—4th Annual GSV Spring Conference, the mountain retreat and learning center, Highlands, NC. For registration information, call 828-526-5838. Web site with email link — <http://gayspirit.home.mindspring.com>. For general information call Craig Cook at 404-351-6282, voice mail — 404-377-5933.

March 24, 2001—GSV Potluck Hosted by Jim Braden, 706 Stokeswood Ave., SE, Atlanta, GA. 404-627-2438.

April 28, 2001- GSV Potluck Hosted by Steven Band, 2943 Appling Way, Atlanta, GA 30341 770/936-0045 e-mail: sbmassuer@aol.com

May 26, 2001—GSV Potluck
Hosted by Mike Goettee and Roy Smoot, 1333 S. Ponce de Leon Ave. Atlanta, GA, 30306 404-378-8195, e-mail: maxglitz@mindspring.com.

When we stop and think about our lives, there's a lot to be grateful for. There are a lot of people who have helped us get to where we are today and have helped to make us who we are. This is the way I feel about Gay Spirit Visions. GSV has changed my life in many ways – intro-

editor's eye



BY JENNINGS FORT

duced me to so many wonderful gay men, helped me to feel closer to a loving Spirit, helped me to feel proud to be gay and even connected me to my partner. With this abundance in my life, I want to give back – at least some of what GSV has given me.

This has led me to the GSV Planning Committee and now to work on the *Visionary*. With the help of former editor David Salyer, Elder of Communications Tony James and other Planning Committee members, I hope the *Visionary* can continue to be a forum to share ideas and help us along our spiritual paths. Our tribe has an incredible wealth of wisdom, insight and talent with many gifts for the world. GSV gives us the opportunity to let our light shine. I hope the *Visionary* can continue to help us achieve this in printed form.

The challenge, in my mind, is how best to do this. I'm interested in what *Visionary* readers would like to see in this journal. What kinds of articles? What issues would you like to see discussed? Who in our tribe would you like to hear from? What about a theme issue? It seems to me that one of the purposes of GSV is to find who we are as gay spiritual beings. How can the *Visionary* help us do this? Please let us know. You can email me at Jenman@mindspring.com or write me: Jennings Fort, 537 Linwood Ave NE, Atlanta, GA 30306.

Please don't forget to complete the enclosed postcard confirming your address. We want to use this to update our mailing list. So if you want to continue receiving the Visionary, please complete and return the card.

I look forward to working on the *Visionary* as a part of my own spiritual journey. And I hope to learn and celebrate with all of you. ▼

Jennings Fort lives in Atlanta and can be reached at jenman@mindspring.com.



Gay Spirit Visions

A Mission Statement for Our Second Decade and A New Millennium

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

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.

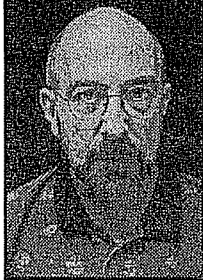
To fulfill these goals we facilitate annual retreats and conferences, sponsor social events, publish a newsletter, and maintain web-based communications for men who love men.

GSV ARCHIVE

*The time has come, the wizard said, To talk of History,
First Decade Book, Archive, and the Elder of Memory*

GSV now has an archive! —A large format portfolio with all Conference invitation brochures, programs, posters, workshop descriptions/schedules, and guest keynote photos with many accompanying event images. The archive will also maintain a

BY KING THACKSTON



library of the journal, *Visionary*, and another, smaller format album of just photos of people and events...Bliss, Bliss, and more Bliss!

Currently we have all materials for the complete eleven years and some pre-conference gatherings and mailing lists...our pre-history. If you have pertinent ephemera and/or memorabilia that you would like to pass on to the archive, it will be maintained and loved (but not returned!). We understand that many of you maintain your own files and memorabilia; and if you have something really

appropriate, you may send a copy so that you keep the original for your own archive. It would be most beneficial if photos included names and dates on the back. As our beloved Andrew Ramer encouraged us in an earlier keynote, we must create our own history by recording it for future **men who love men who love men** (and other interested parties).

The First Decade Book (working title—'the bubble book') is a dream project becoming reality—a published, salable book of all available keynote talks, panel discussions, songs, poems, prose, and rituals. In order for the book to be more than just a record of the first ten years and to impart a more

subtle flavor of what this experience can mean personally to an individual's life, we will include a personal recollection/reflection for each of the first ten years of someone's first Celebrating Gay Sprit Visions Conference.

For more information contact your *Elder of Archive*, King "Wing of Men" Thackston at 404-688-8234 e-mail at wingofmen@mindspring.com. ▼

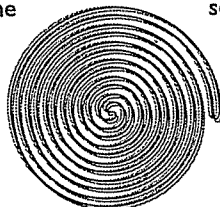


Spring Gathering of the Clan

"UNWINDING YOUR GAY SPRING"

BY BRUCE PARRISH

The Mountain in Highlands North Carolina will be the site of the 4th Spring Conference—March 30 - April 1. This will be a weekend of recreation and spiritual rejuvenation — the structure will be the unstructuring —the devas will be with us and it "will just happen!" Some of our traditional favorites will be there — heart circles,



trance dance, drumming, massage, bonfire. There will be an opportunity for any of us to lead workshops, caucuses, hikes, discussion groups, singing, poetry reading, spiritual rituals, healing bodywork, art work—let the seeds of your imagination and creative talents burst forth during this special springtime of natural beauty. Our spirit brother, John Stowe, will be our special guest

to provide a movement event. Let your "fairness" out of the closet and join in the celebration of being with **MEN WHO LOVE MEN WHO LOVE MEN!** ▼

The Mountain registration:
828-526-5838.

Web site with email link:
<http://gayspirit.home.mindspring.com>
Voice mail—404-377-5933
Craig Cook—404-351-6282

THE ROLE OF GAY MEN IN THE EVOLUTION OF SPIRITUALITY

(Harold delivered this address at the GSV 2000 Fall Conference.)

The gay movement is now more cohesive than it has been in the past. It is time to move from self-involvement to group service that involves healing of those who perceive themselves as our enemies.

Gay enlightenment comes, in part, from seeing the world from the perspective of an outsider. It comes also from bringing a different, less polarized, set of assumptions to the process of observing the world. And it comes, for most of us, from not being parents and thus not caught up in rearing offspring and holding expectations for their lives. The various forms of what is called "gay spirituality" arise from – and facilitate – this enlightened stance. From this position it is possible to understand what spirit is really about in the "big picture."

Because gay people are conditioned to step outside the assumptions of society to see sexuality in a more expansive way, we are blessed – and sometimes cursed – with this vanguard vision. If we can deal with this vision successfully, we can assist everybody in understanding the real message of spirit.

As a consequence, we gay men have a special role to play in the evolution of spirituality. We are playing it through the various incarnations of the "Gay Spirituality Movement," and whether we mean to or not, by our very existence as self-identified gay people. The point of all spirituality is to alter our attitude as we live in a state of loving acceptance of life and active good will for others.

For many people, their entry into gay life results in suffering and loss. They give up notions of self-respect; a place in society and family, sometimes even their career. All of us have faced the threatening questions about our attractiveness to other men, looked in the mirror and

wondered if we were good enough, suffered through rejections and disappointments, stood in smoky bars hoping to catch an attractive man's eye, only to go home alone and desolate. These are our spiritual tests. We are called to be true to ourselves, in spite of what authorities say. And then we are called to transform our experience of what gay life is.

The ostracism from normal society is the call to the gay hero to leave the village compound, to live as an outlaw, to embrace the desires and drives that normal society denies and represses into the cultural shadow. It is a stage of transformation that, for some, opens the way to light and life, to fulfillment and sexual joy. But for others, the failure to accomplish this transformation leads to a life of loneliness, debauchery, and dissipation.

Metaphorically, every self-respecting, proud homosexual is an alchemist transforming dross into precious metal, a fairytale maiden spinning straw into gold, or an aboriginal medicine man divining the pollen path laid out by nature. Unfortunately, the offices of psychotherapists and chemical dependency counselors are packed with homosexually-oriented people who have not successfully accomplished this alchemical transformation.

It is time to change how we think. It is time to love our lives wholeheartedly. We can't waste our lives wishing we were somebody else, somebody we are not. We can't waste our lives feeling guilty or perverted about who we are, regretting that we are not normal, that we don't have children, that we look like we do and not a dream that we have. We can't waste our lives wishing that different people had made us their friends, loved us, and taken us to their beds. It's time to be glad for everything that has happened to us.

Though there are crooks and disturbed characters among the homosexual population, the experience of most of us is that we can trust other gay men. Their spirits are true. We share something in common. We are motivated by the world's oppression to offer one another the best parts of ourselves. We

can be friends. What we want from one another is love, friendship, and shelter from the storm of the straight world. We seek—and we create—community. This communal movement, loosely called gay spirituality, is concerned with finding kindred spirits.

Gay men glow. There is a sweetness and light that surrounds us – not all, not always, and it is perhaps more visible in youth than in age. But there is something in the aura of gay men that identifies us to one another and that makes straight people like us as individuals, even when, paradoxically, they do not like homosexuals in general.

The gay community does not have a communal memory of the past; it must begin constructing one immediately.

We may be born into the tribe, but we are not raised in it. We must tell stories, weave the legends, paint the icons of another family of saints whose lives will give us light. This is the essential ministry of gay-to-gay, the only way in which, some day, we will be able to make gay children free.

We did not choose this fire, but it is the only way through to our freedom and the freedom of others still trapped inside. We are God's fools, God's gay people, called to bear God company on this impossible journey.

Not all persons are tribal members. We must heal the separation idea that has been taught to us by those who are not we.

On one level with some indigenous peoples we have been elevated, considered mystical, healers as *Berdaches*—now spoken of as *Two-Spirit*—bridges between creation and the species as wise men.

We have all been wounded, scarred and experienced pain from our fellow humans, some we even loved. We have taught ourselves to be cautious, protective, to wear certain masks, depending upon the perceived risk.

If gay we seldom learn our potential because we are so concerned with survival. The sissy part of us that was beaten up is our divine feminine nature. We



have closed that part of ourselves down. Yet this is where our power is. Gays are systems-busters. Busting the fear based concept of masculinity. Healing only takes place in sharing. Now AIDS is our transforming experience, our introduction to community and sharing.

This is what GSV is all about. Providing a safe place where we can experiment with being our essential selves, bathing in the healing power of sharing, creating a sense of community, exploring relationships not skewered by conquest and providing healing power to those so wounded they can barely speak.

As confused and tormented teens many gay, lesbian, and transgendered people felt compelled to reject religion that had no room for us and condemned us to eternal damnation. Many of us in our confused state threw out the baby with the bath water, unable to reconcile our spiritual urges with our budding powerful sexuality.

Angry with God and the church, we rejected anything that smacked of religion or spirituality. We wanted nothing to do with a deity that allowed such

needless pain and suffering to occur, not only in ourselves but in those countless millions of people - gay or straight - who have gone to their deaths feeling less than they were or they failed because of mistaken, misinterpreted and mistranslated moral teachings.

Certainly gays as Berdaches, healers, Two-spirits, and shamans have the capacity and ability to hold and comfort those who would persecute and destroy us while they suffer their own torments of change.

Who better to rescue those lost and confused souls so proud, righteous and indignant in full denial that they need any help or assistance from gays who have suffered at their hands all these same years?

We fall victim when we divide tribal expressions such as bi, transgendered, lesbian or gay. This is the trap from which we need to extricate ourselves and become a voice without threat, a voice that is not fear based, a voice that is not simplistic either/or orientation but to embrace the inclusive and very complex

arrangements of human relationships.

At GSV we use skirts as a physical expression of the feminine part of the healing process of our spirituality. We therefore honor the Goddess. MEN in skirts is a meditation and sacred ceremony honoring the Goddess, feminine, Mary or whatever label you use.

Here at GSV we have the most essential opportunity to erase the divisiveness and separation between the beautiful and the plain, the buffed and the fat, the young and the old, the cross-dressers and the conformed, the tall and the short, the talented and the not yet blossomed, the sought after and the discarded and the sheep and the leaders.

This is a space/place where we can each exercise, massage and experiment with these concepts, urges, explore unknown territory, learn about our essential selves and gain courage and confidence to develop that denied essential self into full expression.

Once that occurs (a never ending training course) then we gradually become teachers and trainers directly or by example for others to mentor and learn.

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Grateful for One's Spirituality and Sexuality Together as One
Grateful for Being One — a Homosexual

Keynote speakers:

| | |
|---|--|
| Rudolph Ballentine, M.D., Author of <i>Radical Healing</i> | Andrew Ramer, Author of <i>Two Flutes Playing</i> |
|---|--|

*Look for more Conference details in the Visionary
in the coming months.*

Gay people carry a very deep knowledge and courage of love, because to be openly gay you have to choose love above all things early on. You have to choose love beyond the dogma of your family and of society and very often beyond the dogma of the religion and of the guru you're with. You have to choose love, and that is a tremendous initiation in itself, because it initiates you into the utter, divine sacredness of love.

The aim of getting together is to give birth. Heterosexuals give birth in the beautiful way that they do. Gay beings give birth in the amazing way that they do. Look at the amazing films that Jean Cocteau and Jean Marais created together out of their profound love. Michelangelo created some of the greatest poetry and some of the greatest sculptures in the world out of his love for Tommaso de Cavalieri. Look what Shakespeare's love for the young man in his sonnets produced. I think we are coming into an age of even greater creativity. Look at what Whitman produced out of the extraordinary love for the young men in his life. A vision was birthed from that and has infused a whole civilization. The power of two gay men and women together to birth works of mercy, creativity and justice is astounding. Look what happened between Rumi and Shems, for goodness sake. Whether they were actually physical lovers or not doesn't matter. They are supreme examples to all gay lovers of what happens when two beings of the same sex fuse. We are surrounded by these examples. It's our future. We are at the crossroads in the gay movement. Are we going to go on celebrating narcissistic images of desire or are we going to discover new forms of desire, that are socially, politically, sexually and artistically transfiguring? Are we going to be frozen in the adoration of youth and physical beauty which can be liberating, but only up to a point? Or are we going to go deeper, wilder, more socially radical, more politically explosive? Are we going to find a more creative vision of gay Eros transforming the whole being? The direct path is dedicated to that transformation for straight people as well. But it is very much a prayer to all gay people to get serious about the pain of the world, to acknowledge the glory of the body and

the existence of the soul to marry all of those recognitions with their entire lives. It must be where the gay movement will go if it is to claim its true, radical place.

I would like to close with a quote from Toby Johnson's new book; *Gay Spirituality, The Role of Gay Identity in the Transformation of Human Consciousness*, pages 40 and 43.

"If we are going to 'save' religion, we must do it by developing religious sensibilities and myths that make sense in today's cosmology and respond to today's problems. And since religion is one of the biggest problems the gay community faces, we would do well to encourage and support its transformation.

If you take Jesus' prediction in Matthew 25:45 seriously, at the Last Judgment, the Judge is going to have to say to the Fundamentalists:

'Behold when I was thrown out of the Military or was fired from my job or evicted from my apartment, you didn't care. When I was sick, you

didn't visit me or lobby Congress for research funds. When I wanted to sacramentalize my relationship, you passed laws to prevent me. When I needed civil rights, you vilified me and misrepresented my claims. When I complained about injustice and demonstrated politically, you sensationalized my cause as a fundraising tactic to gather more wealth into your coffers. When I died, you picketed my funeral. Behold, what you didn't do for the least of these, my lesbian and gay sisters and brothers, you didn't do for me. Because you were not hospitable to these strangers in your midst, heaven holds no hospitality for you. Get thee into everlasting damnation.'" ▼

Harold Cole is a retired person in his 80's who spends much of his time counseling, teaching and writing. He lives in a log cabin in Kentucky.

The Path of the Gay Spirit Warrior

Easton Mountain Retreat, NY

Aug 3-10, 2001

Give yourself time to heal, to connect, to dream, and to set out on a path of authenticity and power. Build community with other men-loving men as you claim your whole, empowered being, and honor the wondrous potential of Self and Tribe. Join us for 3 or 7 days of transformation and celebration.

For information on this or other Gay Spirit Camp programs at Easton Mt. Retreat, call 800-462-9962 or contact brochure@gayspiritcamp.com.

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THE POWER OF AQUAMARINES AND DIAMONDS

BY PETER EMBARRATO

My closest friend in the world recently told me she didn't like her birthstone, March's aquamarine. My lecture quickly followed. For those of you fortunate enough to be born under this sign, the aquamarine is a gentle and peaceful gemstone. Its beautiful cool blue green color assists us with the weight of earthly life. Abundantly found in South America, aquamarine is one of the stronger crystalline forces and fortifies our sense of self-esteem, especially when dealing with power plays - an everyday event for some gay couples! Aquamarine has strong connections to the water and air kingdoms, too. Its name means seawater and there is a sense of fluidity and movement in its energies. It is a protective and nurturing crystal and once again seems to work best in times of urgency and need. Aquamarine promotes clarity of life purpose and therefore is a subtle reminder of the soft, serene beauty that awaits us. It is an excellent gemstone to wear when traveling over water and/or when overexerted. Slip into something cool and refreshing, like your gemstone aquamarine. Remember, the message of the aquamarine is to have clarity of purpose and the gates of the inner world will open before you. Alternative stones for March are jade and pearl.

April is the month we all think of as the springtime month, new beginnings. Diamond is this month's stone that is found

generously in South Africa. The diamond has always been held in high esteem and revered as the gemstone of enlightenment, illumination and inspiration. Diamonds, while not my own personal favorite, are prized by many. They are superior to any other gemstone in hardness and their brilliance is unique. They are pure carbon, an element that is the foundation of life and are formed under intense pressure and heat. Because of the way the diamond is formed, it has no life of its own and absorbs nearly everything, while warding off nothing. But still there is mystery surrounding this gemstone. Diamonds ensure an eternal bond of love between those who wear them, hence, their use in bonding ceremonies. For those born in April who prefer colored gemstones, don't despair. Diamonds come in canary yellow, blue and, rarest of all, the red diamond. The crown chakra is the placement of the diamond and its message is clear: within each of us shines a spark of the brilliant light of creation.

Regardless of your birthstone, remember the message of the topaz: be joyful and spontaneous and know that you are a spark of God. Go forth and sparkle. ▼

Peter Embarrato is owner of Topaz Gallery, near the heart of Buckhead in Atlanta. He represents more than 50 local and national jewelry artists whose talents and love for gemstones inspire

him daily. Peter can be reached at 404-995-0585 or topazgallery@atlanta.com.

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BECOMING FULLY TRIBAL

Continued from page 1

My wish list would be for Gay-Spirit-centered ceremonies of:

Initiation—for young men of any age who are new to the Gay experience, a “coming-in” ceremony. This could mean discerning and accepting a tribal name (mine is Andromeda – a pretty name and a terrible pun, I know). It could mean entering a mentor relationship with a sacred brother. Or it might simply consist of an acknowledgment that a man has joined the tribe of Men of Spirit Who Love Men, in whatever way seems appropriate to that man;

Vision—to support our brothers in recognizing and understanding their roles in the tribe and the world and in receiving the teachings of spirit. This would lead naturally, I think, to the next two areas;

Commitment—to another man, to the tribe, to nature, to humanity, to a path, with members of the tribe as witnesses;

Bridging—for men called to be emissaries to other tribes, sending them out with the spiritual protection and support of the tribe;

Elderhood—honoring men who have received the wisdom of spirit through their life experiences, and making tribal spaces to receive the wisdom they have to share. (My Lesbian friends here in West Virginia have a ceremony for this one they call “croning.” I’m not sure how I feel about the name);

Dying—assisting and comforting our brothers as they leave their bodies, what Andrew Ramer has called “mid-wives to the dying.” My experience with Dex’s death falls in this category;

Remembrance—to signify that our brothers gone into spirit, and those yet to be born, are honored members of the tribe, neither unknown nor forgotten; and

Regeneration—to refresh and renew our spirits so that the healing work we do in the world can continue in a healthful way. The annual conference is a good example of this.

Within every culture and tradition I

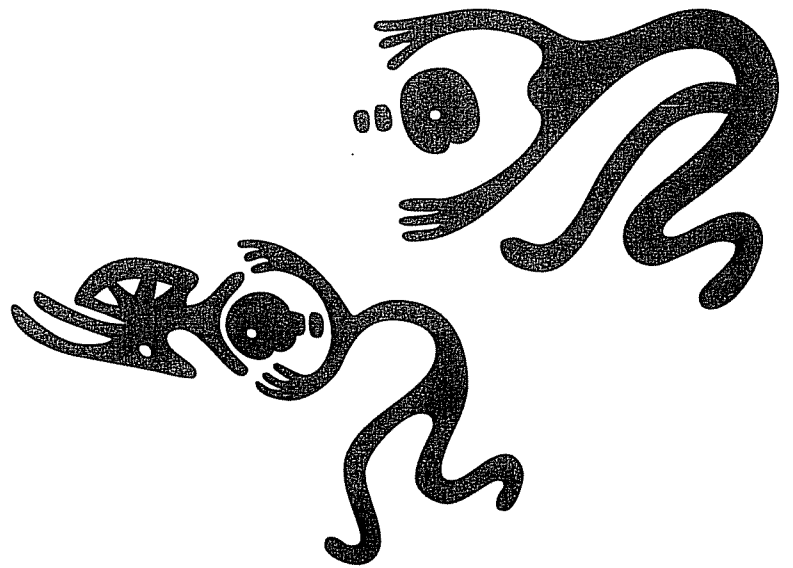
am aware of, there is some presence of Gay Spirit somewhere. I think that aspect is rightly our heritage. Although there may be much of the culture in question that is closed to outsiders, we are the spiritual kin of our Gay brothers there. Anyway, I think GSV is the right group to be developing these traditions. I think one of our most valuable “walks-between” roles is that between spirit and the larger gay community.

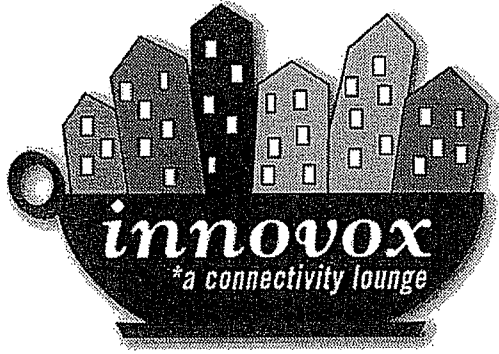
Much of this work is of course underway, some spontaneously and some as a result of real thought and work by many brothers. My hope is that we can think and talk about ways to enhance the process. We certainly have an abundance of talent within the circle, and many sources of inspiration from our Gay-Spirit ancestors.

So now you know what I spend my West Virginia winters thinking about. I’d love to hear your thoughts. ▼

Poet and musician, Bob Strain lives in Charles Town, WV, and can be reached at DamnDawg@ix.netcom.com

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