

TELLING OUR SPIRITUAL STORIES

Men in Gay Spirit Visions have lots of stories.

We come from many places and have many beliefs.

In the first part of a continuing series, five GSV men describe their journeys—where they came from and what led them to their present spiritual paths.

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Photo: Ramón Noya

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ELDER'S
COURT
ADOLESCENCE

Now that we've completed three cycles around the wheel of life—12 GSV Fall Conferences—we're entering our adolescence as an organization. Remember what it was like to be a teenager? I remember feeling this incredible attraction to men and having to hide it. I remember feeling invulnerable, except for one dangerous vulnerability. I think I was already used to being called a "fag." I hated not being accepted but often pretended that I was OK being alone. I wonder what my GSV adolescence will be like. It seems to be starting on quite a different note. I'm certainly not feeling invulnerable. I accept myself much more now at 44 (soon to be 45) than I did at 13. That dangerous vulnerability—knowing more and being known by you—has made a huge difference for me about being a man who loves men. And the issue of acceptance is no longer about being liked. It's now about feeling good about my contributions to my community.



Look how the world has changed since we were teenagers, since September. Had September 11 been an ordinary day, all I'd have to say would be about our successful conference and our future. I'd discuss the beautiful men who love men who opened their hearts and lived in community for four days on the mountain. How they smiled from inside and showed their sadness and wounds. How they touched each other tenderly. How they faced hard questions about personal sexual ethics and reconciling sexuality with spirituality.

But September 11 was no ordinary day. Things are happening too quickly. (There is a river flowing now very fast...) What I say today may not make any sense in a month or so. Has bin Laden been captured? Has there been another attack in

the U.S. or Europe? Would it have been bio-terrorism or chemical warfare?

Fortunately Spirit hasn't given me the ability to see that clearly into the future. (Fortunate in the sense that learning to take one day at a time has saved my life.) I suspect some of those events are possible. How can I have any influence on them, keep them from happening or getting worse? I feel powerless, utterly vulnerable.

Yet I know vulnerability is my strength. GSV has taught me to open my heart and keep it open. You beautiful men have created a safe place for me to touch my wounds tenderly. You stand with me in the fire. You support me as my defenses burn away and you witness the birth of a wholeness from the flames.

I think we experience this as we come out as spiritual men who love men and enter GSV's loving community. We overcome evil inside us (real and perceived) and stand proud of who we are. We stand together to face the shadows within and hold them to the light of truth. We offer hope to a world dominated by fear as we offer each other hope.

We are better for knowing each other. We realize that our fears, doubts, insecurities and inadequacies from internalized homophobia have held us back from full participation in life. Spirit's grace offers a more complete sense of who we are. Still capable of evil, splendid failure, agonizing doubts and fears, we can't even think about each other without realizing how much more there is to us. No one does this work for us. We must do it ourselves—for ourselves, for each other, for the world.

The planning committee will attend a retreat the weekend of November 16th. What do we consider as we enter our group's adolescence? What are the important issues? Our Fall Conference seems to have reached its limit at nearly 150 men. We've considered looking for a new site but we love the mountain—not in spite of the meals and limited meeting space—but because of the challenge of solving difficulties in collaboration with their spirit-filled staff.

So we're adding a winter retreat—Friday, January 25 to Sunday, January 27—about silent meditation. The Spring Retreat is planned for late April with



another Fall Conference in September.

We hope you can join us for one of these events. Look for details in the *Visionary* and on the web at www.gayspiritvisions.org.

So do September 11's events really change anything? For me they make the sacred work we do that much more significant. The world, it seems, is crying out for the gifts we hold in our hearts. It longs to see evil overcome by good. It longs to see each person valued equally. We can do that. We just did it for the 12th year in a row.

To paraphrase the Hopi Elders, keep your head above water—look around you and see who's there with you. Recognize Spirit in the people you make special eye contact with. They may not be gay men. Just know they are fellow travelers going with the flow, keeping their heads above water, looking around to see who else is there. Celebrate! We ARE the ones we have been waiting for! ▼

Comments and questions are always welcome. Address them to: TreeWalker, PO Box 339, Decatur, GA 30031.

A GAY YOUTH WEB PAGE

At last year's GSV Fall Conference, Harold Cole expressed concern about the problems many gay kids experience with feelings of isolation, depression—even suicidal thoughts.

He suggested that we reach out to troubled gay kids through the web—specifically, by creating a web page with resources for young gay folk.

For several years I've maintained a website connected to my therapy practice. I took Harold's advice to heart and created a page specifically for gay youth: www.bodymindsoul.org/gay_youth.htm.

Although I designed the site for gay youth, I haven't heard directly from young folks; they may have found the web page and followed the links to other resources, which is what I anticipated. I've heard from several others though:

A Boys and Girls Club in another country that wanted help responding to gay

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



members who wanted to join in the local Gay Pride celebration;

A father with a young son he thinks may grow up to be gay;

Another parent from thousands of miles away worried about a son who wears dresses around the house.

The e-mail exchanges just may have made some boy or girl's life a little easier.

Consider creating a page yourself. You don't have to offer advice or counseling. In fact, that's probably not a good idea if it's not your area of expertise. Resources, links and your own thoughts are enough. It's not difficult, and the more pages there are out there, the greater the likelihood kids will find it when they need it. You can visit my gay youth page to get ideas—feel free to copy what you like or make a page of your own from scratch:

Thanks for a great suggestion, Harold! ▼

John is a psychotherapist and massage therapist in Atlanta. Reach him through the web at www.bodymindsoul.org.

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

GSV Heart Circle is held the second Sunday of every month, hosted by Ben Linton at 7:30 PM. For location contact Ben Linton at 404-373-9869 or email benlinton4@aol.com.

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

November 24 – GSV Potluck

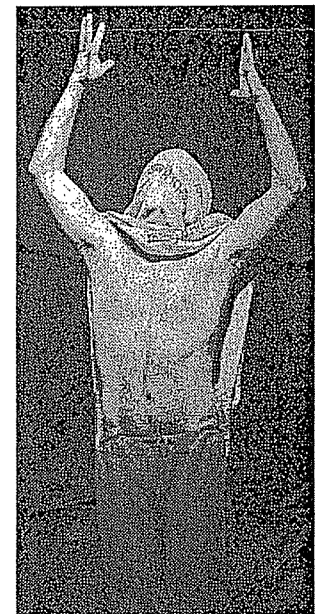
The post-Thanksgiving potluck hosted by Ramón Noya, 1385 Lively Ridge Rd. NE, Atlanta, 404-634-2221, RamonANoya@aol.com

December 15 – GSV Potluck

(Note: 3rd Saturday) Hosted by Wendell Johnson, 1608 Asheforde Dr., Marietta, GA 770-552-4744, louis8@hotmail.com.

January 26, 2002 – GSV Potluck

Hosted by George Miller, 339 Tenth St. NW, Atlanta, 404-875-1061, aagm8888@aol.com.



Jerry Soder, GSV Conference XII talent show

Ramón Noya

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.

SPIRITUALITY AND CREATIVITY

Imagine that you're sitting in a church. The multi-colored windowpanes cast a translucent mosaic of red, yellow, and blue shadows on the pew in front of you. The faint scent of incense hovers in the air. You close your eyes and focus on prayer.

Suddenly, a giggling 8-year-old boy bursts into your imagination. Irrepressibly energetic and enraptured with



BY ALEX SANCHEZ

1960's television, he stretches his arms out, pretending to be the Flying Nun.

Such is my spiritual story—including not only altars and silent meditation, but also a creative inner sprite, who is forever inventing fables and stories.

Unfortunately, too often in this spiritual journey, my attitude toward my creativity has been that of an intolerant, scolding parent.

So many times when creativity peeked out in the form of a new creative endeavor—a collage or a screenplay—I inevitably became impatient or judgmental with my efforts.

"That's not good enough," I'd hear myself say. "No one will ever be interested in that. Stop wasting time on this garbage."

Does that sound familiar? Many of us share similar experiences. Yet even so, our muse usually won't keep still. Mine certainly wouldn't.

Several years ago, a series of crises in my personal and professional life compelled me to address another aspect of my personality—my sexuality. As part of that coming out process, I was drawn to gay men's spirituality groups, including GSV.

As a result of friendships I began to

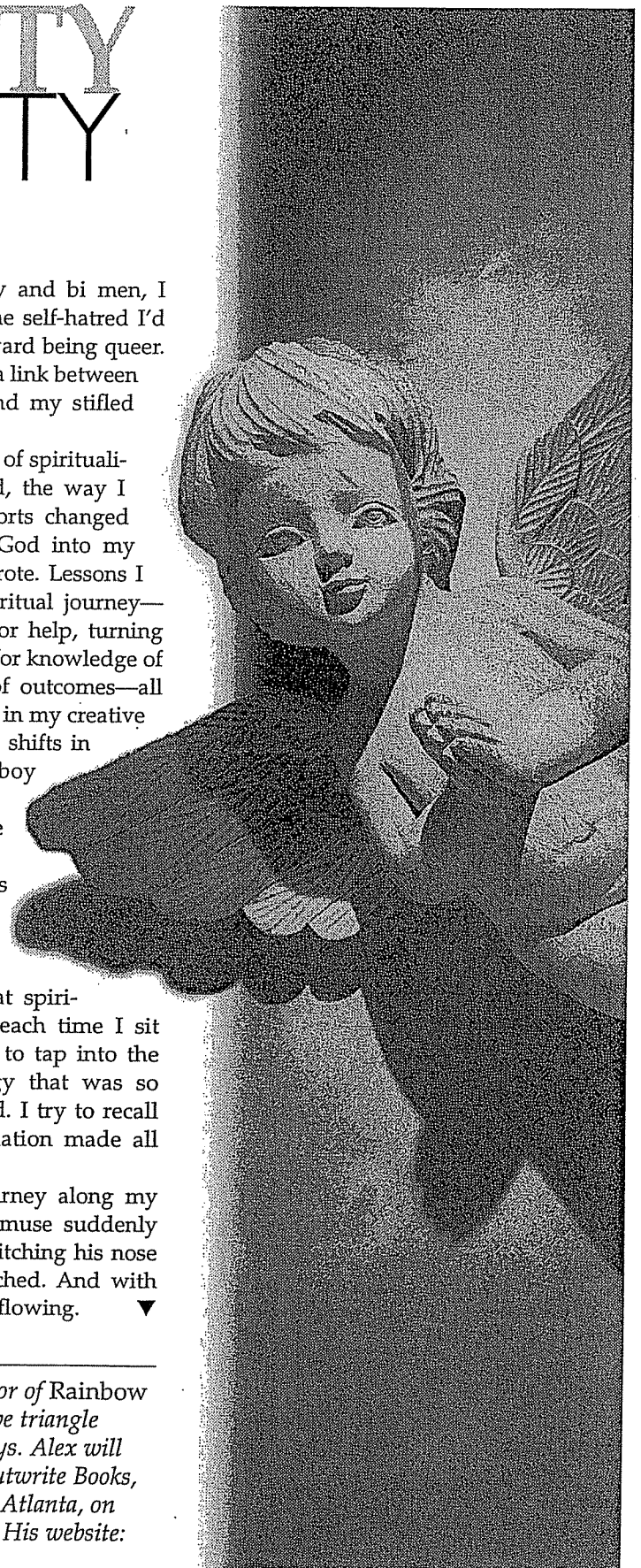
develop with other gay and bi men, I started to re-examine the self-hatred I'd developed as a teen toward being queer. And I began to identify a link between my closeted gayness and my stifled creativity.

As my understanding of spirituality and sexuality shifted, the way I treated my creative efforts changed too. I began to invite God into my writing, praying as I wrote. Lessons I learned in my new spiritual journey—such as asking others for help, turning problems over, praying for knowledge of God's will, letting go of outcomes—all proved equally valuable in my creative life. As a result of these shifts in consciousness, my boy muse began to flourish.

Some religions say we are made in the image of a creator god. This makes us inherently creative beings. Every creative effort is an acknowledgment of that spiritual inheritance. Now each time I sit down to write, I strive to tap into the creative spiritual energy that was so easy to access as a child. I try to recall that time when imagination made all things possible.

As I continue the journey along my spiritual path, my boy muse suddenly appears in my mind, twitching his nose like Samantha in *Bewitched*. And with his help, the words start flowing. ▼

*Alex Sanchez is the author of *Rainbow Boys*, a novel about a love triangle between three teenage boys. Alex will read from his novel at Outwrite Books, 991 Piedmont Ave., NE, Atlanta, on Thurs., Nov. 8, at 7 p.m. His website: www.AlexSanchez.com*



MY JOURNEY

I traveled during my younger years, attending 37 schools before high school. I never had friends, always said goodbye and never said hello. I never developed connection to one place. If asked, I always said the sky was my roof and the earth my floor.

At an early age I separated my mind from my brain. I would consult with "Harold" about decisions. Most psychiatrists would think I was probably schizophrenic and needed therapy. Through my growing years and even today people ask me about this because I suspect they feel uncomfortable.

I recognized early on that my body wasn't my real representation and that "Harold" was a vehicle the essential "I" was using in this dimension. In other words, I recognized the division between my body and the mind, or "I," and the levels for each in actions of the body.

In college I acquired spiritual books which I used until my middle years. I then met a woman. We shook hands, and several months later, without dating, I married her. We had seven children.

I was a good father. They were fine children and we did many things together, although apparently not enough. When they were teenagers, my wife and I divorced and I left for another job. We all remained friends.

In Florida I re-examined my library and found my forgotten spiritual books. I had a recurring dream of trying to get to class, always late or unable to find a room or library. Later, a psychic told me a big, black book would change my life. Several months later I found an article on a book called *A Course in Miracles*. I knew immediately I had to order it. After it arrived, I began to study it, absorb it—amazed how easily I could remember the

location of the book's important passages. People began to tell me I had changed.

Eventually I decided I needed more opinions about the book so I could learn more. I began to teach classes on it in my home. After a while, I was recognized as the only person teaching the book in that area of Florida. I eventually taught classes totaling over 4,000 students and traveling over 1,000 miles a week from St. Petersburg to Daytona.

Years later I was told to go to Kentucky and build a log cabin next door to my ex-wife. Leaving dozens of classes in Florida, I retired, built my cabin and started writing, speaking, serving churches and counseling. I didn't teach the Course as much and I began a new phase. For most of the next seven years, I presented seminars on the Course from Minnesota to Florida and kept busy.

In Kentucky I found myself in a fundamentalist community where I had no one to talk to about spiritual matters and couldn't be myself. I kept busy seeing visitors, volunteering at community organizations and taking care of my ex-wife who later died. Spiritually I continued to explore new ways of expression, to counsel, write and speak.

However, my work is still incomplete and I must find my next task. My experiences with GSV for the past five years have been valuable.

Now that you have that background, let me describe more of my spiritual beliefs. My life has always been programmed by something "other" than myself, possibly the Self that I associate with my mind. I know that I'm a part of God, the same as all other beings. I know most "things" we perceive are illusions and our only reality is what we accomplish spiritually. I know that love is the main energy that brings change.

I have always been blessed with Grace all around me. If I am in need, what I need is already there. The struggle of

GSV men holds my attention and I know I need to interact with them.

I believe time and space limits us and we should use other measurements to release ourselves from these self-made traps. I have known since childhood that I would live until November 11-15, 2011. Discovering others didn't know this about themselves was one of the shocks of my life.

Humans are a curious lot. Our sense of time and space stimulates us to ponder our place in the scheme of things. Many have glimpsed other dimensions and these epiphanies help us believe that there's an existence greater than the one we commonly know.

What, then, do we make of "religious" leaders, who have claimed through history that they alone know the "truth" and sanction the murder of those who believe otherwise?

Why is this part of my spiritual story? Because I believe part of the journey of gay men is to challenge the male, left-brained mind that has the desire to kill and destroy. Perhaps part of our purpose is to keep resisting this urge and using the female, right-brained approach.

I know there's no heaven or hell, only what we decide to make. I know there are no individual rewards, only a God or Goddess that we project and that all religions are prisons keeping us from being adults.

Empowerment through breath energy is all that we really own. It's the only force with us through life. Despite Christianity's propaganda, Jesus' only true message is about our breath. He urges us to take responsibility for our lives, quit blaming others for what happens to us and use breath to find oneness with those around us. We must use love's energy to center ourselves and others and become more.

We should celebrate this teaching. It's a full-time task. Once we understand it, everything falls into place. ▼

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

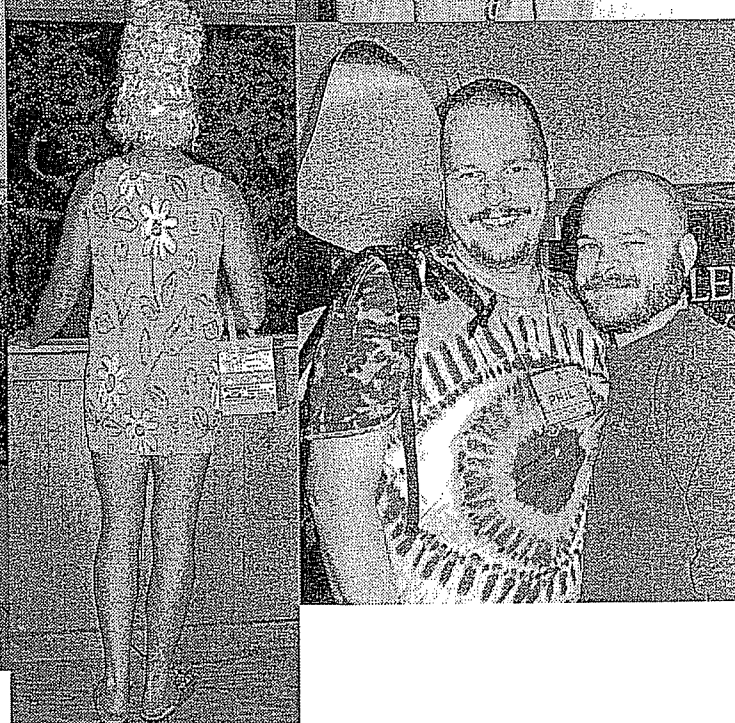
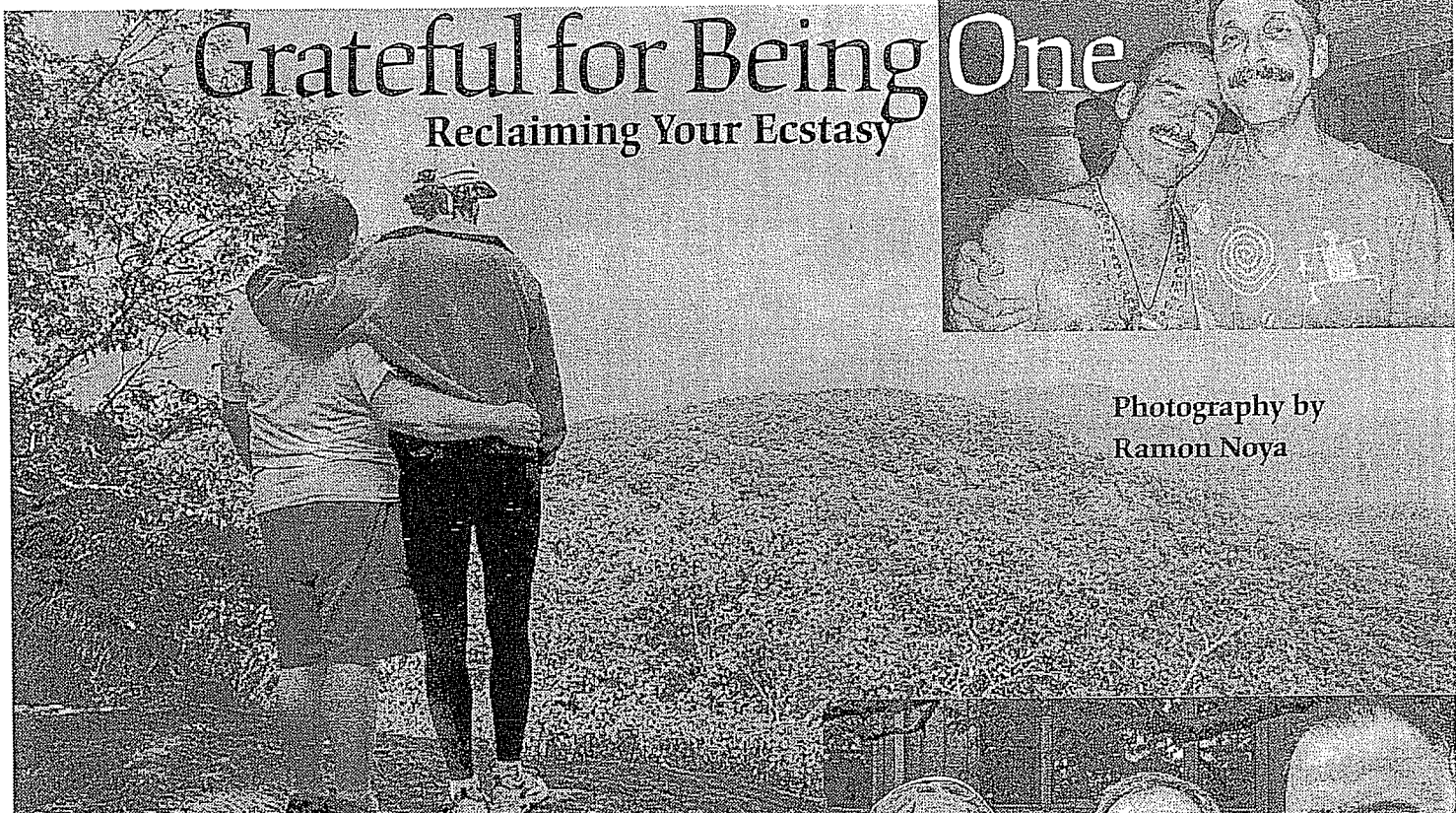


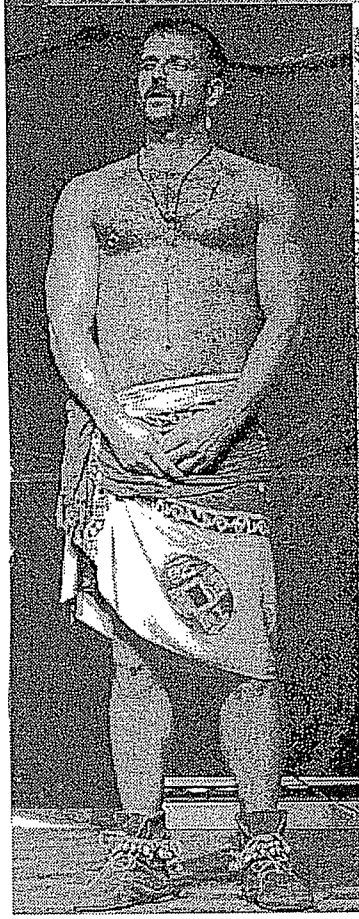
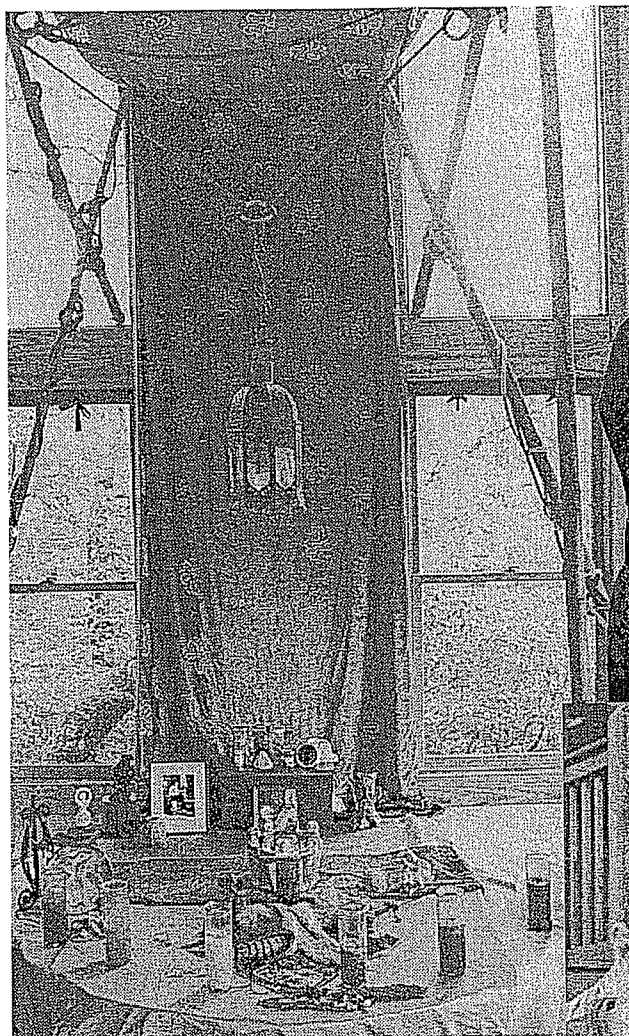
Grateful for Being One

Reclaiming Your Ecstasy



Photography by
Ramon Noya



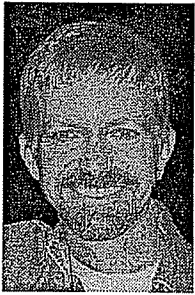


GSV Conference XII

Three Little Southern Baptist Boys

Bobby Tyler, Athens, GA

When I speak before church or spiritual groups, I often start by saying that I'm a recovering Southern Baptist. This is usually good for a laugh but also bears the seed of my spiritual journey. I was born in Rich-



mond, VA, into a traditional Southern Baptist family. My dad was a deacon board chairman and my mom was a church organist who later taught Sunbeam class:

"Jesus wants

me for a Sunbeam to shine for Him each day."

I have fond memories of growing up in that church, like playing the shepherd boy in the Christmas pageant. The boy is frightened by the appearance of the angel announcing Jesus' birth. I was to look terrified and seek safety by burying my head in the lap of one of the shepherds, played by a hunk who was the swim club lifeguard. How homoerotic was that? Of course, being in first grade, I didn't understand why I found that stage direction so appealing!

I also remember my baptism. It was exciting for a 12-year-old, as I walked behind the pulpit to my dressing room and put on a starched, white robe. At the appropriate time, I entered the chest-high baptismal pool, where the minister waited. Above was a huge stained-glass window of John the Baptist baptizing Jesus. As the minister lowered me into the font, the pipe organ swelled while the choir sang. It was a thrilling rite of passage for a young Southern Baptist.

During college, I began to question my church upbringing. At the University of Virginia, I took religion classes and appreciated the fact that there were views of God that were different than I had known before. I no longer saw God as a stern father on his heavenly throne, passing

judgment on us on Earth. I began to realize that God lived inside me and in all creation. This, not coincidentally, was when I came to terms with the fact that I was gay.

One of the first people I came out to was my sister. Being the only two siblings, we were close growing up. But when I told her I was gay, I became another person to her. She's spent the past 20 years sending religious publications warning me to stop practicing homosexuality. (I don't need to practice anymore, thank you!) I've told her I believe God created me gay and if she couldn't accept that, then it was her problem, not mine. My prayer is that one day we'll see that our love for God is greater than our differences.



Fortunately, my parents have been more open-minded. My Mom has even said: "Well, your dad and I can't say if this is right or wrong, but we love you and we want you to be happy." That's magnificent coming from a Southern Baptist.

After graduation, I moved to California and, in Los Angeles, discovered meditation. Through this practice, I began to find peace and inner strength. I often tell people it's like going to the gym or eating a balanced diet: it takes dedication but it's worth it.

Another blessing of my first California journey was discovering *Daily Word*, a pocket-sized publication that offers daily positive thoughts. I start my morning meditation by reading *Daily Word*, and it's been a companion on my spiritual journey since 1981.

I'm grateful to have lived and worked around the country and meeting people with different gifts. In Connecticut, I discovered the healing art of Reiki, and after moving to Athens, GA, I was led to seek ordination in the Universal Brotherhood interfaith ministry. After my first international minister's conference, I was inspired to combine Reiki with my ordination and pursue a healing ministry. I then approached Athens Regional Medical Center to offer my services. I am now Reiki master at the Loran Smith Center

for Cancer Support. I have been blessed to work with patients undergoing chemotherapy or preparing for surgery, and with health care workers. I've helped plan a spring retreat to train oncology nurses in first-degree Reiki, so they can better help themselves and patients.

I know when we open our hearts to Spirit's guidance, wondrous things happen. A lovely example: the day I joined Athens Regional was the first anniversary of my ordination. That is no coincidence. It's God's way of saying I'm on the right path. I don't believe in coincidences. Miracles happen daily. All we have to do is open our eyes—and hearts—to see them.

Gay Spirit Visions has helped me appreciate the fact that as a gay man I have special gifts: healer, spiritual leader, peacemaker, creator of beauty, Earth guardian. Our tribe members have much to offer and our love and peacemaking skills are needed more than ever. It's up to each of us to create the miracles in our lives, and, as members of this fabulous tribe, it's our responsibility. ▼

Bobby Tyler is an ordained minister and Reiki master. He is a certified trainer with the Fanning Institute for Leadership at the University of Georgia, Athens, and is the marketing and media relations director for the UGA Performing Arts Center. He can be reached at btyler@uga.edu.



Jennings Fort, Atlanta

My mother took me to Flint-Groves Baptist Church in Gastonia, NC, from the time I was a baby. It was named after our community's textile mills, the Flint and the Groves. I loved Sunday school—coloring drawings of Jesus, learning "Jesus Loves Me" in some language that was supposed to be Chinese and listening to Bible stories. The service afterward was boring. But I entertained myself, people say, by making a silver chalice from chewing gum foil or taking my mother's clip-ons off her ears and wearing them myself.

When I was 12, my mother decided I should become a Christian. She and her best friend accomplished this during our beach vacation. They questioned me somberly: "You want to become a Christian, don't you?" I said I



guessed so. My mother instructed me the next Sunday to march down the aisle after the service during the altar call. It was the public profession of faith. So I did. Afterward the

congregation greeted me and I cried a little, just like all new Christians. Weeks later, the preacher baptized me in the pool behind the choir loft. I had to swim out and struggle onto a cinderblock next to him to avoid drowning.

My enthusiasm didn't last long. I had questions. It made no sense that billions of people who didn't follow the Flint-Groves Baptist Church way were hell-bound. Plus, how exactly did Jesus become God as he ascended into heaven? This was a mystery. But the clincher came when I heard my aunt declare the only unpardonable sin was to deny God's existence. Do this, she warned, and you are damned. Period. No second chance. Naturally, the thought "there really isn't a God" flickered across my brain immediately and I knew I was damned. After wrestling with this nauseating condition for months, I decided if God would throw a 12-year-old into hell,

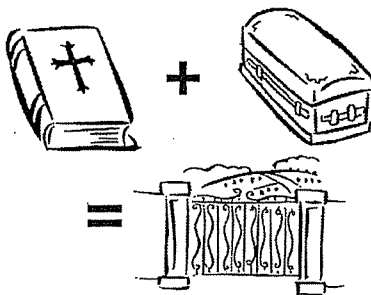
then he can forget it. God can fuck himself. Period. No second chance. He would have to beg *me* to take any of this crap seriously again.

As I grew up, though, I tried different denominations that I thought would accept gay people. I loved the Episcopalians' pageantry. But I felt they communicated subtly that theirs' was the only true way. I tried the MCC Church. But it seemed too Christian for me. Thinking hard about this, I felt it was a mystery how people could accept a religion that puts itself above other faiths. I liked the Unitarians because they seemed to believe anything goes. But sometimes the program sounded more like a college lecture than a spiritual message. Buddhism didn't seem exclusive but I couldn't find the discipline.

When my best friend, Mark, introduced me to GSV, my feelings about God softened. When I sat in that first loving heart circle, I knew this felt different. This group celebrated gayness and encouraged us with unconditional love to let our light shine. Through these men's eyes, I felt a new presence of God that wished the best for me and for everyone, no matter how they found God. I call God "Spirit" now because it seems more universal.

I try now to see the good in most all faiths. I go with my partner, John, to a Lutheran church with a gay minister and enjoy it, although I sometimes get flashes of Flint-Groves Baptist Church. I can't bring myself to recite that Christ is the "only" son of God. Maybe I'll never embrace organized religion. But I hope someday I can see Spirit in every face, every leaf and every cloud and, without thinking, release myself into this mystery. ▼

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



David Salyer, San Francisco

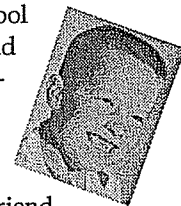
I must have been 7 or 8 when my parents decided I needed religious training. My father, an agnostic, never spoke of religion except to say that he believed people create their own hell here on earth. His guiding principle was always, "Never talk about politics, religion or other people's sex lives." My mother, whom I really liked and admired, claimed to be Baptist, though she had quit attending church before I was born. Although it's a mystery to me why I was suddenly sent to church, I'm pretty sure why I went to a Baptist church: it was within walking distance of my house.



I remember little about Sunday school or vacation Bible school. Growing up in the South, more specifically the Bible Belt, you might think I would be a walking encyclopedia of Biblical facts. Truthfully, the only thing I remember about Sunday school is that my church separated the boys from the girls and all my teachers were male. Most Sunday mornings I heard a recap of Saturday's sports rather than a stirring narration of Moses parting the Red Sea. Vacation Bible school was no better, though I did learn how to make a faux-Bible out of glue, construction paper, a bar of Ivory soap and some glitter.

As a teenager, my best friend turned out to be Catholic. I often attended mass with him during high school. As a college freshman, I converted to Catholicism, taking catechetical instruction from a priest at a parish near campus. I loved Father Underwood and remember him fondly—how can you not like a priest who tells you there's really no need to confess and do penance for masturbation!

I remained a practicing Catholic for many years; ultimately abandoning it around the same time I fully embraced my homosexuality. Certainly I know some gay men who feel that the Catholic Church abandoned *them* but I



chose to leave. I felt that I could never truly reconcile my homosexuality with my faith. Still, I admit there are many things about Catholicism I miss, like distinctive rituals and the sacrament of Holy Communion.

So for a while I felt somewhat lost spiritually. I harbor no resentment toward organized religion but I knew that it had never really worked for me. Worse, I had never developed a personal relationship with God. I had no point of view and no idea what I believed. What would it take to climb out of my private darkness? The answer came from an ex-boyfriend. One night in 1992, Tom handed me a Gay Spirit Visions conference brochure and I attended that fall. For the first time I was exposed to gay and bisexual men in a spiritual context. I know many of them shared my confusion but others seemed to walk a sacred path. I resolved to be more like them.

The first thing I had to do was accept myself as a spiritual and sexual being. As men who love men we are often inundated with negative messages about our sexual orientation. Countless religious traditions wound and undermine our sexuality. A reconciliation of body and spirit was in order—not easy, but ultimately accomplished by developing some sexual ethics that work for me.

Next, and perhaps most difficult of all, I needed to establish a personal relationship with God. Honestly, the traditional Christian concept of God (humorless supreme being with male attributes) seemed unpleasantly patriarchal. I choose to believe in a great Spirit, neither male nor female. And I choose to believe that sometimes Spirit intervenes, arranges, challenges, protects or simply stirs things up. Life is really all about choices. For me, walking a spiritual path is possible because I made a choice to do so. Sometimes I stumble. Who doesn't? And sometimes, when Spirit baffles me, I look skyward and announce: "If you're trying to make a point here, you're going to have be a whole lot more specific." ▼

David Salyer has been involved with GSV since 1992. A writer and editor, he lives in northern California. Some of his articles about HIV and AIDS can be found on TheBody.com website.

The Path of the Gay Spirit Warrior

• Vision and Power Retreat •

Dewey Beach, DE Jan 19-21, 2002

Give yourself time to heal, connect, and dream. Enjoy a weekend at the beach in community with other men-loving men as we give voice to visions, claim the power to make them real, and support each other in living with authenticity and power. Facilitated by John R. Stowe.

Information/registration: Jerry Withers 301-585-5114 or jerrybey@msn.com.
<http://earthfriends.home.mindspring.com/classes.html>

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Retreat for men who love men

Yelapa, Mexico March 9-16, 2002

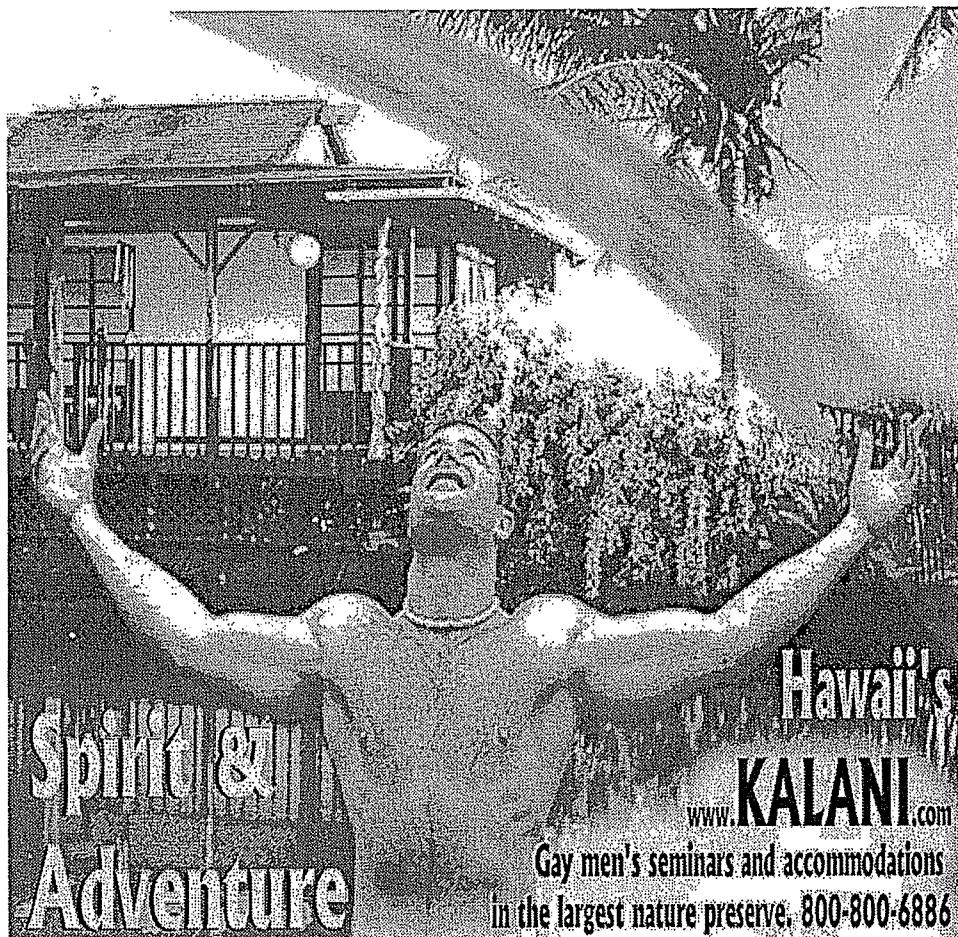
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SEPT. 11, 2001

Excerpts from an e-mail posted on the
GSV Reflector Sept. 15, 2001

I flew to New York City Monday night for a visit with customers at 2 World Trade Center. I had worked for them regularly for the last year and was to work with them on Tues., Sept. 11. I usually started at 8:30 a.m., but knowing my customers, they wouldn't show up until 9 a.m. So I lingered over the newspaper. I took the subway to the WTC from the Times Square Marriott. Usually I stay at the World Trade Center Marriott because it's next door to the towers. But I decided to stay near the theater district and catch a show on Tuesday night before leaving Wednesday.

Getting off the subway and walking to the WTC Mall, I saw people hesitating and turning around. I pushed through the turnstiles toward the WTC and heard peo-



BY DAVID LENDER

ple telling us to leave. . . . I assumed there was a gunman or a bomber. I walked quickly back to the subway and up the stairs. Everyone was looking up and I saw a huge hole in one of the towers. I was in shock, trying to figure out which tower it was, and what had happened. Someone said a plane had crashed into the building. Debris was falling and a huge cloud of smoke billowed out of the tower. Someone said people were jumping, and I looked away, not wanting to see.

Debris kept falling. Then I heard a boom and saw a fireball heading for us. I jumped around the corner of a building. Something flew overhead, smelling like formaldehyde. I imagine it was jet fuel. It struck somewhere a block or two away. Someone said it was the other plane. At that point I was totally puzzled, thinking that two planes had nearly collided and crashed into the towers.

I started back to the hotel. We were told to keep walking. . . . By this time, my cell phone had five messages but I couldn't get through to my family. . . . At a subway stop, I heard a train, ran down and got on. People were talking about a terrorist attack.

At my hotel, my room phone and cell phone didn't work. TV stations were off.

But I could download e-mail from my mom and some friends. I e-mailed them back that I was OK. . . .

Later my family, friends and I created a chat room. I described my experience and they told me how scared they were for me. It comforted me to know that we were all connected at that moment. We even had an online hug.

I eventually saw TV reports that the buildings had collapsed and heard the Pentagon had been hit. Like everyone else, I wondered if the world was ending. . . . I e-mailed some co-workers to let them know I was ok, I found out my customers from the World Trade Center were safe, and I asked if we were at war.

The next two days in Manhattan were the strangest I'd ever spent there. . . . There were few people in Times Square, so I walked to Chelsea every afternoon. On Tuesday only a few restaurants were open. I smelled the smoke and saw the zombie look on peoples' faces. . . . I was able to have dinner outside on Wednesday and there were signs urging people to go outside at 7 p.m. to show they were unafraid. At dark, people lit candles and I stood with them, needing desperately to feel the light through the pain of what had happened. I kept thinking about what a friend had written me after the attack: "See the light! See it in people's faces!" I was beginning to feel that life might actually return to "normal". . . .

Manhattan had been cut off, and it wasn't until Thursday that I really considered returning home.

By Thursday, New York City and Times Square had started to wake up. I stood in line to buy tickets for *The Full Monty* and met four women. . . . I wound up sitting next to them. Before the show an announcer said the mayor wanted New Yorkers to return to work and show the terrorists that life still goes on. . . . He said the cast was grateful we were there because their work was to entertain and they needed an audience. And they did that, making us laugh for two hours in the midst of the pain and shock.

On Friday morning, I took a cab to La Guardia, rented a car and drove to Philadelphia where I hoped to catch a plane home. I later discovered Delta had refused my reservation from Philly to Atlanta, so I drove 16 hours to Atlanta. I got in late last night. . . .

I'll spend this *Continued on back page*

GSV NEWS AND INFORMATION

THE FIRST GAY SPIRIT VISIONS WINTER MEDITATION

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Daniel has practiced meditation for decades and teaches spirituality at the State University of West Georgia, Carrollton.

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afternoon and evening with family and hope to spend tomorrow with friends. I know our lives were changed this week and I hope this experience brings us closer. I'm still looking over my shoulder and I imagine we all will for some time.

I see the outpouring of love and sympathy for those who suffered such great loss. I hear stories of the brave fire fighters who died saving others, the stories of the terrorists, the stories of those who died and of those still looking for loved ones. I hear stories of looting, telemarketing scams, bomb scares and fake Internet sites. And I hear about everyone lighting candles.

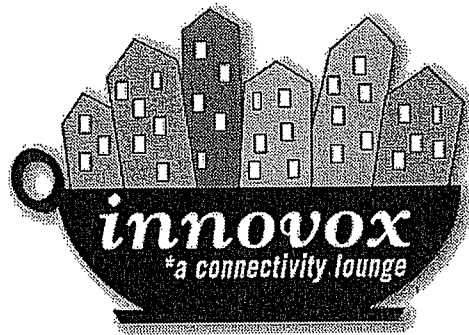
I have begun lighting my own candles again at home, and for that I am very grateful. I pray for strength, protection, love and understanding. For myself and for everyone.

—David

David Lender lives in Atlanta and has been involved with GSV for six years. E-mail: dlender@mindspring.com. He said later that the fireball was one of the second plane's engines. The hotel where he usually stayed near the towers was virtually destroyed.

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