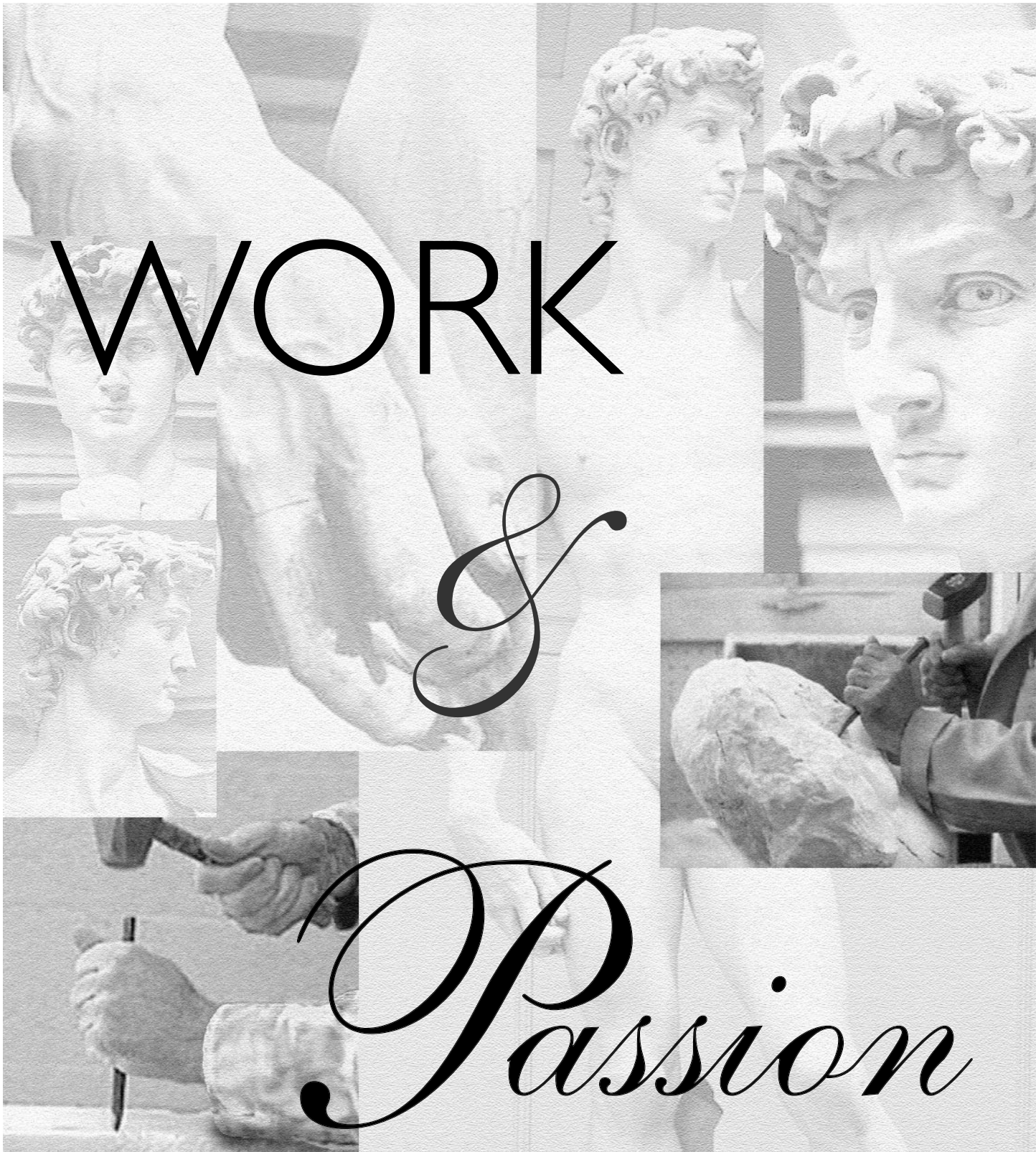


# VISIONARY

Volume 9, Number 1

THE JOURNAL OF GAY SPIRIT VISIONS

Spring 2003



# WORK

# &

# Passion

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ELDER'S  
COURT

**Hello, brothers!**

I'd like to begin by introducing myself. Eleven years ago I went to my first GSV Fall Conference. That conference changed my life. I was wrecked. I was at



BY CRAIG COOK

the end of a 12-year relationship with a man I loved. I was a raving guppy who wore a suit to the firm, made our house and two new car payments and thought my partner and I would grow old together. As my Beaver Cleaver world crumbled, GSV came into my life and, out of the fear and tears, the earth faerie energy hidden deep down inside me came up and out. In GSV I found brothers who wanted more, seekers of soul connection, Spirit, magic and the earth. I found boys who played joyfully in their male and female, asked the hard questions, and, together, faced their fears.

In the beginning I sat in on GSV meetings, listened and helped when and where I could. In those days GSV was young and loosely organized, not as complex as it is now. Years passed and, as

I continued to listen and watch, I became more and more in love and involved. I find myself today surrounded by beautiful, bright sweet men. They are my friends and they care about what is important, what I think is important. They care about you and me.

With the Winter Meditation behind us (with rave reviews), the Spring and Summer Retreats ahead and the Fall Conference unfolding, I present myself as your newly installed presiding elder and ask for your help. I want and need your help with open heart and arms, as little or as much as you can offer. Your suggestions will always be welcome and considered in consensus.

I have learned many things in 11 years: what Spirit really is, that magic does happen, that there is love, that we are a gift and a tribe. With right intention and right relationship, a little tradition and then ritual, we thrive.

I stand before you a single man, humble and in your service. Please accept my friendship, talk to me, play and work with me in Spirit, and with vision. Together we are amazing. We are the ones we have been looking for.

In love,  
Craigalee

*Craig Cook is a long-time Atlanta resident and can be reached at Craigalee2@aol.com.*

**GSV NEWS**

**GSV has a new voice mail number:**

**404-658-0221**

Call this number to leave a message for the Planning Committee if you have questions about upcoming events, adding your name to our mailing list or general information about

**Gay Spirit Visions.**

As always, you can also e-mail us at info@gayspiritvisions.org or check our

**newly redesigned web site:**

**www.gayspiritvisions.org**



## PASSION AND PROFESSION

**M**y last conversation with dear friend Ramón Noya, was about passion.

Ramón was a world-famous lighting designer. His work included several Atlanta landmarks including Olympic Centennial Park, Georgia World Congress Center and Woodruff Arts Center. He lit some of Ted Turner's art collection and

BY JENNINGS FORT



had award-winning designs published in magazines. He had made one of his passions into his profession and found spectacular success. How did he do that? My jobs have never really

satisfied me and have only been ways to make money. Over the years I've experienced brief flashes of passion in my professional life, much more frustration and disappointment. I wanted to find some of Ramón's passion. It was, he said, a spiritual journey.

He told me his story, of how, with an engineering degree, he started a business with two other structural engineers. Gradually, he realized he was drawn toward the lighting design side of the work. It was about surrender, he said. It was about resigning yourself to the fact that this is what you want to do and let the spiritual process begin. It was also about risk and hardship. After a while in the firm, his partners told him they didn't want to work with him anymore. Ramón was devastated. He left and his income fell drastically. He was scared and felt utterly alone. But he moved forward, following his love for lighting design and began finding more work. His reputation and business grew.

"When you follow this path," he said,

"you must remember that you become a weirdo, because you start thinking about your passion all the time."

This is true. At a party I once found Ramón in our kitchen with a broomstick, adjusting the track lights for maximum effect.

There is also something in this process, he said, about Spirit working, flowing through you.

I know this is also true. In a few blessed moments during my writing, the work has flowed effortlessly, from the top of my head, down through to my hands and fingertips over the keyboard, as if I were only a conduit.

We could talk more about this if I wanted, Ramón said at the end of the evening. I told him I definitely did. But we didn't continue that conversation. About a week later, in San Francisco to receive an award from his professional organization, Ramón died suddenly. But how appropriate and right for one of the last experiences to be such affirmation and respect from his peers. He was at the top of his profession, his power and his passion. It was almost as if he had completed this spiritual journey.

I'm still looking for what Ramón found. I know my passion involves writing but I haven't yet found my place. After another layoff, I'm looking for my third job in 3 years.

Finding our passions and making them our work would bring more happiness and success to our lives – surely a goal worth pursuing. In this issue of *Visionary*, we feature a section on "Work and Passion: A Spiritual Journey" featuring several brothers who have found a profession they love passionately.

So, as I continue to think about my work and passion, I think of Ramón and the many lives he touched. I dedicate this issue of *Visionary* to him. Although we didn't talk again about finding passion,

**GSV potlucks** in Atlanta, are held the fourth Saturday of the month at 7:30 p.m., unless otherwise noted.

**GSV yoga** in Atlanta, meets Tuesdays at 6:45 p.m. For more information, contact Jim Braden 404-627-2438 or [buffalonimbus@yahoo.com](mailto:buffalonimbus@yahoo.com).

**GSV Heart Circles** in Atlanta are held the second Sunday of every month, hosted by Ben Linton at 7:30 p.m. For location contact Ben Linton at 404-373-9869, [benlinton4@aol.com](mailto:benlinton4@aol.com).

**March 22 – GSV Potluck** hosted by Thom Gresham, 1931 Farmer Road, Conyers, GA, 770-483-6487, [Thomzilla@yahoo.com](mailto:Thomzilla@yahoo.com)

**April 18-20 – GSV Spring Retreat** For details, see ad on page 8.

**April 26 – GSV Potluck** hosted by Patrick Mitchell, 2781 McClave Drive, Doraville, GA, 770-451-6158, [thegardenretreat@mindspring.com](mailto:thegardenretreat@mindspring.com)

**May 24 – GSV Potluck** hosted by Michael Goettee, 3263 Wynn Drive, Avondale Estates, GA, 404-292-5825, [maxgitz@mindspring.com](mailto:maxgitz@mindspring.com)

**June 18-22 – GSV Summer Camp** For details, see ad on page 8.

If you live in the Atlanta area and are interested in hosting a GSV potluck, please contact [moonxdragon@earthlink.net](mailto:moonxdragon@earthlink.net).



maybe we're continuing our conversation after all. ▼

*Jennings Fort lives in Atlanta and can be reached at [Jenman@mindspring.com](mailto: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.

# WORK & Passion

Passion makes the old medicine new:  
 Passion lops off the bough of  
 weariness.  
 Passion is the elixir that renews:  
 how can there be weariness  
 when passion is present?  
 Oh, don't sigh heavily from fatigue:  
 seek passion, seek passion, seek passion!  
 —Rumi

## PASSION MAKES THE OLD MEDICINE NEW

BY CHASE  
 "SKYWALKER"  
 ROBINSON



Once you start making conscious decisions to follow your heart's desire, it becomes easier to recognize your passion. I had spent much of my life blending in and matching my surroundings. Discovering and stepping into my passion was a "coming out."

I graduated in chemical engineering and then spent two years in the Army. I then began a 10-year career as a process engineer. Yet, none of this was my heart's desire. There was an emptiness and lack of direction in my life. In 1985, a friend told me that he was going to try and get into medical school. He suggested that I do the same. This was my first step into passion. There was much energy in this decision and much work. To prepare, we drove 45 miles to night school twice a week in addition to our demanding jobs at the chemical plant. I felt a real excitement as I began stepping out and testing the water of my heart's desire. A year and a half later, I was accepted at four medical schools. There were many doubts along the way about whether I had made the right decision. My family was supportive but I had close friends who thought I was making a mistake. My heart told me I was on the right track. I felt peace and energy in my decision.

I entered medical school at about the time AIDS reached its peak. There was much fear. I volunteered to work in an AIDS clinic and learned much about the disease and the people living with it. As a result I was able to come out to myself. I entered the field of anesthesiology because of my experience in engineering. It has become a passion because I see myself as one who watches while others sleep.

I attended a retreat sponsored by a group called Shaman's Circle in Austin, TX, in October 1992. Through Shaman's Circle I came to find out about Gay Spirit Visions and attended my first Fall Conference in September 1993. Gay Spirit Visions quickly became a passion for me. I have witnessed a number of men find their passion at Gay Spirit Visions.

How can you find your passion? There are three elements that were important for me:

1. *Develop a spiritual practice.* Spiritual practice such as meditation, using a mantra, chanting, heart practice, breath meditation, etc. Andrew Harvey in his book, *Son of Man*, lists 12 different spiritual practices largely from the Christian tradition. In his book, *The Direct Path*, he lists 18 spiritual practices from different faith traditions. I have had a daily meditation practice for six years. I aspire to increase this to two 30-minute periods per day. The poetry of Rumi and the use of the labyrinth have also become important practices for me. I have also found having a spiritual director an important asset on the jour-

ney. This is a soul friend that walks the path with me. Spiritual practice creates the space for me to hear my heart and the space to find the courage to say yes.

2. *Listen to your heart and say "yes."* It gradually became easier for me to hear my heart. The next step was to say "yes." Each time I did this, it became easier. First, it was attending night school. I said "yes" to a job change. I said "yes" to nurture my intuition through Reiki training and shamanic journeying. As I stepped out and took a chance, I experienced the exhilaration and freedom of someone flying. That has become the litmus test for following my heart. Do I feel that freedom? I don't believe that I have arrived or obtained some enlightenment. I believe I'm on a journey. I believe that my heart is guiding me toward some deeper life passion. I'm saying "yes" much more frequently.

3. *Surround yourself with passionate people.* By spending your time with people who are passionate about what they do, you will learn their habits, practices and taste some of that same passion. They may also give you some insights to your own passion. James Abshire asked me to journey with him into medical school. Ron Wilkinson encouraged me to begin a daily meditation practice. Paul R. DesRochers and Lynn Bauman shared their passion for the poetry of Rumi. King Thackston and Gerry Mitchell guided me through the labyrinth. Bernard Morin awakened me to my intuition. ▼

*Chase is a seeker. He can be contacted at [gchasejr@aol.com](mailto:gchasejr@aol.com).*

# MEANINGFUL, SACRED WORK

I love my work. I've grown accustomed to answering the question "So what do you do for a living?" with a conversation, not a couple of words. I'm a psychotherapist, massage therapist, workshop leader and writer. I work for myself.

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



My vocation has evolved gradually over the years, although it has always involved working with people. Three of the most significant influences on my career have been my sexuality, my father and my spirituality.

I think most psychotherapists study psychology because they secretly hope to figure themselves out. That was certainly part of my motivation. As a young man I was confused about being gay. Two dear friends from high school — taunted for being sissies all through school — killed themselves at age 19. Soon after, I entered therapy to figure out my sexuality. I didn't get the answers I expected but I did learn a lot about how amazing human beings are and about how painful suffering can be.

My father had an impact on my career life in more subtle ways. He had a blue-collar job and always feared a lay off. As a result, he always worked hard, never turning down overtime. He didn't really like his work and he took early retirement as soon as he could. I remember Dad saying, "There's nothing worse than having a job you can't stand going to every day." He rarely spoke about his job. It seemed clear that he did it to support his family rather than because he enjoyed it. I knew early on I lacked his tolerance for boredom.

One of the few useful things I got from my early Lutheran upbringing was exposure to Martin Luther's idea of vocation as a sacred thing. All vocations were sacred and esteemed by God, Luther said. The vocation of priest was no more spiritual than the work of

farmer, baker or musician. What gives our life meaning is deeply sacred. If our work is meaningful, it's also sacred.

As I became more understanding of myself as both a spiritual being and as a gay man, I became a gay activist in the Lutheran church. I started to do public speaking in congregations (in the process, getting excommunicated from the church I belonged to at the time). I eventually moved to Atlanta and took a job as a counselor. My real calling, though, was my activism. How could I sit at home when I felt strongly moved to demonstrate, speak out, do something? The last two years I worked for my employer, I spent all my vacation time at conferences or participating in social justice and political causes. (Which is another way of saying I became self-employed because I ran out of vacation time.)

**"Having meaningful work isn't so much about being smart or lucky as it is about trying to be faithful to yourself and to Spirit."**

In 1987 I first read about the Body Electric School's classes in erotic healing arts and spirituality. The program really spoke to me but I threw away the article. It would have meant traveling to California and I didn't have the money. A month later I got a call from Lutheran church headquarters asking if I would attend a conference in Oakland, a mile from Body Electric. The school offered a workshop right after the conference. I went and the rest is history. In a real way, the church got me involved in erotic spirituality.

The early years of my practice were also a spiritual path for me. These were financially lean years. I often had no work scheduled more than a week in

advance. I would sometimes wake up at night wondering how I would pay my mortgage. Still, I was blessed with clients I loved who found my work useful. Spirit was teaching me a lesson, I believe: follow your purpose in life, listen to your heart, work hard and things will work out.

My early vision of what I would be doing looked like traditional psychotherapy, but Spirit had other plans. I began massage therapy as a hobby but quickly found myself doing a lot of work massaging men who were dying. These brothers were my teachers and my understanding of the body's sacredness grew. I found myself with the opportunity to teach for Body Electric. Imagine my surprise: I was so shy I had avoided Boy Scout camp in junior high because I'd have to take a group physical with the other Scouts in our underwear. Now I lead workshops wearing only sweat socks.

What have I learned from all of this?

If you can figure out what gives your life meaning, you've accomplished something important. Having meaningful work isn't so much about being smart or lucky as it is about trying to be faithful to yourself and to Spirit.

Risk is unavoidable in life. If anyone told you that life was going to be easy, they were mistaken.

Things take time. One of the gifts of midlife is knowing who we are and what's important in life.

Listen to Spirit, trust yourself and work hard. Security, status and respectability are false gods.

If my father's dream was to retire at 55, mine is to still have meaningful work to do at 75. For me, going to bed at night excited about the work I have in the morning is a great gift and I am grateful. ▼

*John R. Ballew, M.S., is a licensed professional counselor in private practice in Atlanta. He specializes in issues related to coming out, spirituality, sexuality and relationships. Contact him through his Web site at [www.bodymindsoul.org](http://www.bodymindsoul.org).*

# WORK, PASSION, SOUL

I remember my senior year in high school, wondering what I wanted to “be” in life. I had no definitive career path or life’s work in front of me. Odd jobs and a four-year enlistment in the Air Force were my experience before becoming aware and ultimately discovering my passions for personal growth, healing, empowerment and spirit.

BY JEROLD SODER



In 1992, while living in south Florida, Spirit introduced me to the Science of Spirituality Healing Ministry and its founder, William Perry. My relationship with the organization and with William became pivotal to my unfolding, evolution and connection to my passion and gifts as teacher, mentor, shaman and tantrika. I became immersed in meditation practice, channeling, massage, dream work, shamanism, tantra and healing. I explored and experienced all this at my home and spiritual center, Casa de Luna, in West Palm Beach. I became ordained as a Science of Spirituality minister in 1994. My relationship with Spirit became stronger. Expressing my passions brought me deeper into my own power. Looking back, I would have to say that I was open to Spirit’s direction. I basically allowed myself to go with the flow.

After visiting friends who had moved to northeastern Tennessee, I became enamored with the natural beauty of the mountains. Over time, a new vision of creating a spiritual retreat came to me. This dream came to fruition after many visits to Tennessee, scouting out properties on the market. This vision enlivened me greatly. Creating events to raise money to purchase retreat land sparked my imagination. Hidden Hollow Retreat became manifest in April 1996.

In the deep woods, I experience sim-

plistic living consisting of periods of immense quiet and a significant degree of isolation. All this has contributed to my spiritual growth. Having men come to this peaceful place to connect, share and heal has exceeded any past expectation. Living here has also required a profound sense of acceptance and surrender. This has not always been easy. There was a three-month period living here alone when I seriously questioned my purpose, passions and direction. In my mind I became disconnected from my source, from Spirit. I allowed fear and the ideas of an unknown future to play havoc upon my psyche. Worry and doubt became near constant companions. Thankfully, I was able to be with the fear, honor it and get through it. I believe that, because I chose not to pretend my fear didn’t exist or run from it, I came through to the other side transformed and eager again to continue embracing my vision. Holding sacred space to share of myself and my gifts, this is my work.

I have come to believe that we are all on the planet to recognize our divine Self and our divine gifts and offer both wholeheartedly. Work is a large part of our lives and we must ask ourselves: Does my work contribute to the nurturance of my soul? If the answer is no, then it is up to us to tap into divine grace and courage to make changes to support and enliven our being. I have known many brothers in this boat, struggling upstream, working jobs that bring them stress and discontent. Why?

My prayer is of gratitude. For the joy and knowing that my work is my passion. And passion is instrumental to my life being lived fully, with beauty. In peace, my brothers. ▼

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*Jerold Soder lives and manages Hidden Hollow Retreat in northeastern Tennessee. You may view his website at [www.geocities.com/hhretreat](http://www.geocities.com/hhretreat).*

“...we are all on the planet to recognize our divine Self and our divine gifts and offer both wholeheartedly.”



# FULFILLING A VOCATION

**M**y college career was oriented toward the priesthood. After graduating I was at a loss as to what I wanted to be when I grew up because I had decided not to continue my priestly vocation. My career path took many twists and turns. I worked for brokerage firms, banks, computer software start-ups. I worked in landscaping, customer service and human resources. Throughout, the priesthood and service to others remained in the back of my mind and I kept feeling as if I should be doing more. I felt aimless.

When I walked off of a job because I couldn't take my employer's abusive micro-management, I was determined that I was going to figure out what I needed to do to be happy in my work. I took a temporary job to meet expenses. The guide I chose in figuring out my work passion was *What Color is Your Parachute* by Richard Nelson Bolles. After completing



interview for it?" I got the job as a consumer credit counselor, working with the homeless, drug and alcohol treatment clients and the incarcerated to restore their financial stability. For the last five years I have been fortunate to make money doing something for which I have a passion.

It is empowering. I don't experience "blue Monday," "hump day" or exclaim, "Thank God it's Friday." I enjoy my work; it's play for me. This doesn't mean that I don't have days that I don't want to go to work. There will be tough days. The difference is that once I'm working, the day usually becomes effortless. I'm more organized, focused and creative on the task at hand. I'm alive at work. I have far fewer sick days and the money takes care of itself.

the exercises, I discovered that I like to teach, coach, counsel, mentor, advise, minister and talk about finances and travel. When sharing this information with a friend, he replied, "Sounds like my job. Want to

Feeling passion about a job is like a spiritual path. I have to stay focused on my goals and remain open to opportunities that present themselves. I'm looking to see what lessons I can learn from the new boss and the changing goals of the organization. I speak my truth with passion, spirit and heart. When I carry out an assignment, I look for what's there for me to learn. Continuously growing. Is it hard? You bet. But the rewards are worth it. The sense of peace and satisfaction of a job well done I get from this work helps me feel alive at the end of the day and to live with an open heart.

I'm fulfilling my vocation; I'm not confined by any religious dogma or collar. I can respond as I feel led by Spirit, maintaining integrity for others and myself. Currently I'm in a situation where my employer's goals are changing and my job may no longer be in the agency's future. I'm listening to determine what and where my next assignment will be. ▼

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*Ben Linton, a certified credit, housing and investment advisor, lives in Atlanta and can be reached at [benlinton4@aol.com](mailto:benlinton4@aol.com).*

Three companions for you:

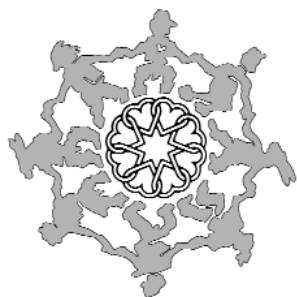
Number one, what you own. He won't even leave the house for some danger you might be in. He stays inside.

Number two, your good friend. He at least comes to the funeral. He stands and talks at the gravesite. No further.

The third companion, what you do, your work, goes down into death to be there with you, to help. Take deep refuge with that companion, beforehand.

Rumi

The Gay Spirit Visions 6<sup>th</sup> Annual



# Spring Retreat



April  
18-20,  
2003

at  
The Mountain Retreat & Learning Centers  
near Highlands, NC

We welcome **Perry Pike**, a certified leader of the  
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We will enjoy heart circles, candlelight nude yoga, drumming and massage. You have the opportunity to lead your own workshops, hikes, discussion groups, healing body work or whatever event you can imagine.

**Join us to celebrate the coming of spring with your spirit brothers.**

For more information, E-mail: [info@gayspiritvisions.org](mailto:info@gayspiritvisions.org)  
Website: [www.gayspiritvisions.org](http://www.gayspiritvisions.org) Voice mail: 404-658-0221

## **GSV SUMMER CAMP AT THE MOUNTAIN • JUNE 18 – JUNE 22**

Remember those “lazy, hazy days of summer” and those experiences of camps? (Think positively.) Well, here’s a chance to relive those glorious moments with members of our own community.

**T**he Mountain Retreat and Learning Centers in Highlands, NC, is sponsoring a Gay Spirit Visions Summer Camp from Wednesday, June 18 through Sunday, June 22. There will be a daily rate so you can attend all days, one day or just the weekend. You should receive a letter from The Mountain soon describing the activities which include rafting, low ropes, high ropes and hiking on the Appalachian Trail. There’ll be free time to enjoy sunning, swimming, reading, relaxing, visiting the botanical garden, waterfalls and, of course, shopping in beautiful downtown Highlands. Some events are scheduled on certain days while others are available as desired from several options. The Mountain staff, including the regular Summer Camp staff, will oversee and supervise the activities.

So pack those bags and get out your boots, make a flag and get ready for a thrill-a-minute magical experience. For more information, contact The Mountain at 828-526-5838.



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within a supportive  
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Trillium Retreat Center  
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March 21 - 25, 2003  
For Info / Register:  
Harry Faddis, 518-692-1255

Easton Mountain Retreat  
Greenwich, NY  
July 11-16, 2003  
For Info / Register:  
Easton - 518-692-8023  
[www.eastonmountain.com](http://www.eastonmountain.com)

Lake Garda, Italy  
October 1-8, 2003  
For Info / Register:  
Il Chioistro - 212-666-3506  
[www.ilchioistro.com/APL.htm](http://www.ilchioistro.com/APL.htm)

**\*[www.theartofpowerfulliving.com](http://www.theartofpowerfulliving.com)\***

GAY SPIRIT VISIONS 2003  
**WINTER**  
MEDITATION

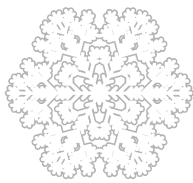
January 17-19, 2003  
The Mountain  
Highlands, NC



## Quietness

Inside this new love, die.  
Your way begins on the other side.  
Become the sky.  
Take an axe to the prison wall.  
Escape.  
Walk out like someone suddenly born  
into color.  
Do it now.  
You're covered with thick cloud.  
Slide out the side. Die,  
and be quiet. Quietness is the surest sign  
that you've died.  
Your old life was a frantic running  
from silence.  
The speechless full moon  
comes out now.

—Rumi



## MEMORIAL TO RAMÓN NOYA

Funds raised through the Ramón Noya Memorial Fund were used to purchase and install a light fixture outside The Mountain dining hall to honor the memory of our dear friend. Ramon was a GSV Elder At Large and a Lifetime Member of The Mountain. Past and present GSV leaders, from left: Kim Pittman, Joe Chancey, King Thackston, John Stowe, George Miller, Tony James, Bruce Parrish, David Salyer, Jennings Fort, Ben Linton and Al Cotton.





**VISIONARY**

GSV

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