

VISIONARY

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Summer 2006

Follow Your Bliss



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ELDER'S PERCH

Good Day Brothers,

Well, it's another *Perch* where you get to listen to my ramblings. I've been asking myself what it is I want to speak about: city living, politics, friends, a good movie or this subject of bliss. Bliss is always a good thing to talk about (even better to experience). My bliss is very important to me in my busy scheduled life. My blissful experiences are not some big adventure like a mountain expedition but are more an everyday moment. A moment that clears away the clutter of my mundane life. That centers me in myself and my soul.



BY MICHAEL
VARNUM

I feel blessed to have Kennesaw Mountain State Park within walking distance from my house. I try to go walking/hiking (climbing up the mountain is hiking) the trails two or three times a week. It's in those moments that Mother sings to me...that I surrender into her blissful arms. Seeing the green, green forest rise up into the blue, blue sky. Standing in the middle of a trail with a dozen butterflies fluttering around me. Watching a lizard warm itself on a sunny rock. Coming across a deer...being able to look at each other...feeling each other's

surprise and curiosity. Or sitting in my favorite hidden forested spot and listening...watching the life move...live, all around me.

I believe that animals are messengers. They bring gifts into our lives, into our souls. The butterflies are about transformation, which is very true for me as I continue to let go of old limiting beliefs and move into my higher self. The lizard is *first* a fellow brother at heart, (and how I wished I could have stayed and joined him lazily sunning) and is about subtle perception. Also true for me as I notice changes with myself and how I interact with the world around me. The deer is about gentleness and new adventures. A reminder to be easy on myself as I move from one state of being into another as I begin to express my true heart. For me, bliss is more than a feeling. It's a moment that transcends. It's a perfect moment of time that Mother's song fills my heart. My spirit is at peace, my mind at rest, my heart joyful. It's a moment in which my spirit speaks and I understand.

I'd like to leave you with this final thought: to whom sings to your heart?

Blessings to you, my brothers.



Michael "Ma'el" Varnum lives in Marietta, GA, with his best friend, is a massage therapist/lightworker, looks for his distinguishly graying papa bear and awaits the long starry playful summer nights.

Gay Spirit Visions

Our Mission Statement

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 Internet-based communications for men who love men.



LITTLE GREEN SPIRITS

When I think of my passions, my biggest is gardening. In the spring when the tips of leaves begin to push out and the whole world turns from gray and brown to a beautiful, tender shade of green, something inside me stirs too. I can't help but dig and run my hands through the dirt.

By JENNINGS FORT



Sometimes at my compost pile, I kneel and grab a handful of black, rotting earth, full of wriggling earthworms, and just inhale the rich smell of life.

For a few years now, I've been a member of the Georgia Native Plant Society which, among other things, rescues plants from land around Atlanta about to be razed and developed. We dig grocery bags full of plants and drag them out of the woods before the bulldozers come. Although we hold back a few plants for parks or the Society's annual plant sale, most plants wind up in our own yards. A part of this passion is purely selfish. I get as many native plants as I can dig and carry for practically nothing. It's funny to see plant people who don't know each other out in the woods together. Everyone is silent at first and then when someone spots a fairy wand or a featherbell or a lady slipper, everyone runs over to see and we can't stop talking after that.

After about three years, I've planted our yard full of lady ferns, Christmas ferns, broad beech ferns, royal ferns, netted chain ferns, ebony spleenworts, trilliums, jack in the pulpits, partridge berry and some things I can't even identify. These certainly aren't showy plants, a

few small blooms in the spring, maybe, and then just green until frost retires them for the winter. I don't coddle them much. At planting, they get a handful of compost and then a few waterings until they're settled and that's it. The rest is up to them. I love it when my bags of plants bring home a seed or root hidden in the dirt, completely unexpected, that pokes up its green head in the spring. It's like a little gift from Spirit.

This issue of *Visionary* features several brothers who discuss following their bliss. These are the ways we feel love, that draw us in and make us feel most alive. The things we love to do can give us direction, signs from Spirit that show us what and where we need to be.

When I stop and think, the plant rescues have also ignited something else. In a way, I feel like I give these little plants a new home and protection because that's part of my spiritual purpose. I feel that I'm replanting our little yard the way it should be, full of the native plants that are meant to be there. I feel a deep satisfaction and peace when I can see these plants living and growing. They're little green spirits that ground my partner, John, and me and give our home a little more serenity and harmony. Few things that I do give me more satisfaction. I'd like to think that most gay men share this purpose. We're the gardeners, the restorers of green harmony for the earth. Today's politics and injustices in the world are certainly beyond my power. But rescuing and planting a little fern lightens my heart and makes me feel that I'm saying yes and thank you to life.



Jennings Fort lives in Atlanta. Contact him at jenman@mindspring.com.

GSV HEART CIRCLES

Held the second Sunday of every month at 7:30 p.m., hosted by Wendell Johnson and Lem Arnold. For location and more information, contact Wendell at louis8@hotmail.com or Lem at lem1951@mindspring.com

GSV POTLUCKS

GSV Potlucks in Atlanta, are held the fourth Saturday of the month at 7:30 p.m., unless otherwise noted. GSV potlucks are drug- and alcohol-free events.

August 26 - GSV Potluck. Hosted by Doug Caulkins and Mikel Wilson, 535 Watergate Ct., Roswell, GA. Contact them at 770-993-9959 or snakeowl@yahoo.com.

September 23 - GSV Potluck. Hosted by Craig Cook, 450 Allgood Circle, Stone Mountain, GA. Contact Craig at 404-213-1084 or Craigalee2@yahoo.com.

October 28 - GSV Potluck. Hosted by Jim Fason, 76 East Lake Drive, N.E., Atlanta. Contact Jim at 404-343-2038 or jfason@aol.com

GSV JAUNTS

Group event outings, based in Atlanta, that we share as a brotherhood. You are responsible for your own admission tickets. Please check the GSV Web site for all updated information.

Georgia Aquarium

Sunday, Aug. 20, 11 a.m.

Georgia Aquarium, meet at front entrance. Explore the wonders of Earth's watery realms.

Niki in the Garden

Thursday, October 19, 7 p.m.

Atlanta Botanical Gardens, meet at front entrance. Roam through a perfect blend of artistry and heavenly flora.



GSV is looking for a new *Visionary* editor

If you have an interest in writing, editing, coordinating publications and would like to serve the men of GSV, let us know. The GSV Council is looking for a new *Visionary* editor.

Contact Jennings Fort at jenman@mindspring.com.



GSV Evergreen PROJECT

It is interesting that the June 21, 2005, issue of *The Advocate* featured a cover story on its first annual roundup of "Future Gay Leaders." The cover story of *Time* magazine for Oct. 10, 2005 was "The Battle Over Gay Teens." Gay Spirit Visions' history of reaching out to the "Youth of our Tribe" began as early as November 2003 when Bruce Parrish led

discussions about providing speakers or afternoon chat groups on spirituality for Youth Pride, an Atlanta gay youth organization. Later, Ben Linton and Bruce suggested we provide a single scholarship to a member of Youth Pride to attend one of our gatherings. The GSV Council expanded this concept to seek young men to attend the Fall Conference in 2005 as our guests. The response to the program was positive, and nine men attended that gathering by way of this program.

The name "Evergreen Project," suggested by David Salyer, is symbolic of the Council's desire to be ever growing, ever developing, ever nurturing and ever

supporting to our tribe. GSV has clearly taken a lead as consciousness scout in this area. The Council is proud to offer this program again for the 2006 Fall Conference Sept. 14 - 17.

Please send your recommendations of gay, bisexual men 21 to 30 years old who haven't attended a Fall Conference to Chase Robinson at gchasejr@aol.com. Financial support for the project can be sent to:

Evergreen Project
PO Box 339
Decatur, GA 30031

Please write "Evergreen Project" on your check.

THE VISIONARY IS GOING ELECTRONIC

The *Visionary* will become a solely electronic publication in 2007. You'll be able to download it from the GSV Web site.

If you don't have internet access, please send your mailing address to:

GSV
P.O. Box 339
Decatur, GA 30031

Note: *Visionary* is already available for viewing, download and printing in a full color PDF file on the GSV site.

Watch for more details soon in *The Visionary*.

2006 GSV COUNCIL RETREAT

The GSV Council will convene its yearly planning gathering on Nov. 2 - 4 at Lake Logan near Waynesville, NC.

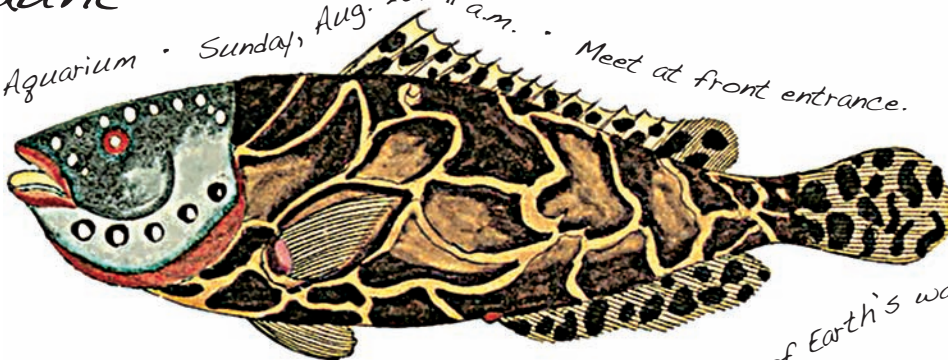
We will discuss the business of the organization and evaluate the present and direction toward the future.

Interested brothers are welcome to attend this working weekend. Remember, this will be a *working* weekend.

Reservation information will be available later.

GSV Jaunt

Georgia Aquarium • Sunday, Aug. 20, 11 a.m. • Meet at front entrance.



Explore the wonders of Earth's watery realms.

Following Your Bliss

“Follow your bliss. Find where it is
and don't be afraid to follow it.”

~Joseph Campbell

What makes us happy? What are the passions that draw us in, speak to us and lead us on spiritual journeys? Several of our brothers describe how they have found and follow their bliss.



Hesiod and the Muse By Gustave Moreau

FOLLOWING BLISS HOME

Today I believe that to follow one's own bliss is to be on a journey that is, itself, one of bliss. Daniel Webster has defined bliss as “great joy or happiness; spiritual joy; heavenly rapture.” Thus, I can rephrase my opening statement in simpler terms: the way to happiness is to find happiness along the way.

I stated that “Today I believe...” because for most of my 41 years, I could not even see past myself to really be open to the possibility of a life of bliss. For many and varied reasons, growing up as a black male with repressed homosexual feelings in Spartanburg, SC, in the late 1960s and 70s was distressful, frightening, and lonely. Both of my hard-working, high school-educated parents insisted that my sister and I strive to reach our fullest potential. I knew that they loved me and sacrificed to make our lives materially comfortable. But I did not feel that I could share certain parts of myself with them. So, I buried these parts – hid them away from the eyes of the world and myself. I did not have close friends or relatives that I felt I could open up to, although I was fairly popular and



well-respected. And, despite having grown up in the church as a conscientious, God-fearing child, I had yet to experience the reality of love. In the 13th chapter of I Corinthians, love is described as the quintessential virtue, without which all of our most noble sacrifices and exquisite gifts are empty and vain. When I used to read this passage, I could never understand why anyone would do such sacrificial, heroic deeds if they did not have love. Now, however, I can look back over my life and see how much of my giving and doing was rooted in my own neediness – my desperate attempts to get something from God or others to validate myself. I was trying to *earn* the favor of God and men when these are the *inheritance* of those who have chosen to believe that they are already loved, highly favored, heirs of happiness.

Despite all of my religious exposure


and education, my heart remained full of doubt, unbelief, and fear. I did not believe that the world was a safe, nurturing place where I could expect to flourish. I did not understand how this God that I sought to worship could love me and yet permit my existence to be so utterly lonely and despondent. I longed to be able to share myself with a male companion in an intimate, caring relationship, but doubted that such a longing would ever be fulfilled. I was afraid to speak of my true feelings of attraction for classmates who may also have been homosexual, for fear of rejection or ridicule, if I turned out to be wrong. In short, I was a double-minded man, saying I believed/wanted one thing, but in my heart distrusting the very desires and questions birthed within me by the One who created me, was lovingly indwelling me. Instead, I chose to remain reliant upon my achievements, my reputation and my possessions for any sense of significance and self-worth (the full-time job of the ego). This need to continually feed my ego, or false self, was directly opposed to following a path of bliss

opposed to following a path of bliss

FINDING JOY

because it led me away from my truest, most natural self.

My coming to follow bliss meant giving myself the gift of self-acceptance – of my history, positive and negative traits, dreams, and desires. It meant seeing the beauty in the midst of the hardships and the disarray of my life. It was finally beginning to feel, in a lasting and profound way, the love and understanding that I had so longed for. It meant knowing that I had the power to choose to become what I'd always hoped I might become. I heard the familiar words to Whitney Houston's song "The Greatest Love Of All" in a downtown Charleston restaurant a few years ago and, for the first time, really understood the beauty and power of what they meant. This is the love that, as I Corinthians 13 so eloquently states, will never fail. To quote author Aldous Huxley: "The spiritual journey does not consist in arriving at a new destination where a person gains what he did not have or becomes what he is not. It consists in the dissipation of one's own ignorance concerning one's self and life and the gradual growth of that understanding which begins the spiritual awakening. The finding of God is a coming to one's self."

As I considered how far I have come on this journey of "the dissipation of [my] ignorance" about myself, and the opening up of my heart to all of the good it longs to experience and to share, I was overwhelmed with feelings of bliss. I sobbed uncontrollably as my heart flooded with gratitude for the relief and delight of having, at last, come home to myself and found God already there. 

Randy Johnson lives and works in Seneca, SC, as a dentist. His interests include bicycling, physical fitness and development, study in the fields of spirituality and psychology, massage and new recipes.



About a year ago, I mentioned to a friend that I was having trouble with joy and that hawks were coming to me often. She suggested that I go see the therapist whom I have been journeying with for the past year. Together we experienced a spiritual, counseling, backpacking adventure in the high desert above Santa Fe and a breathwork retreat with other therapeutic activities to look at the issue of not experiencing joy.



For me, sadness seems to come easier than joy and I am aware of its presence more. Sadness is comfortable; I know how to do it. Although I understand the idea of balance - that there is joy and sadness - when I review my life, I think mostly of the sadness. I am aware that the sadness seems more overwhelming or more intense than the happiness.

I often seem apart from joy, detached, as though it is not reachable or that it is not mine. I know that I am not moving toward joy and that, sometimes, I am clearly moving away from it. Not only am I not experiencing it, I am turning from it. Last year, after a week of learning about culture and teaching counseling in El Doret, Kenya, I spent a couple of days in the Maasai Mara. The great herds were already assembling in the northern part of the Serengeti. I felt like I was home. I felt joy in the presence of these incredible creatures and with people who were living their lives so close to the earth.

Then, after an incredibly wonderful year, the dog of my heart died in December. I had to make the decision about when she would leave. I was heartbroken. I remember the intensity of the pain of losing her more than any of the joyful experiences of the past year.

I get stuck on wanting things to stay the way they are when they are good and not to change. Maybe I get stuck on wanting things to stay the way they are when they are not so good.


What I have learned is that there is a script, one that I did not write but that I

am great about following. At first, I accepted this idea somewhat half-heartedly until I mentioned it to two of my siblings. My brother knew the feelings while my sister knew part of the script. It has something to do with honoring the joyless life that our Mom has experienced. In loyalty to her, we can't experience the joy of our lives.

So, back to the counselor. Knowing my love for ritual, she told me that I needed to use ritual to move the script from a place of power. I'm not exactly sure yet how the script goes and I've not finished the ritual. What I do know is that the script lives deep inside my heart and that it hurts.

For me, the journey to living in my own joyful place is slow. I've made some progress. My partner of nine years died about eight years ago and, when I lost him, I also lost his family. He gave me cherished gifts: both beautiful things and wonderful memories. He helped me to know how to be in relationship. I learned some things that I wanted and that I wouldn't do without in future relationships: honesty, trust and sex. I have since spent some time with two incredible men who fueled some joyful feelings. Through them, I knew that I'd learned some lessons well.

So, joy is not easy for me. However, there is joy in my life. I think about:

discovery,
the rising moon,
the lightening bugs,
the first daffodil,
the smell of a gardenia,
the salt mist of the ocean,
the hawk circling above,
a loving family,
supportive friends,
a talented and dedicated staff,
a sarong in the morning air,
feeling the fur of an animal companion,
resting in the arms of a lovely man
and being grounded in the earth. 

Paul Plate is executive director of Positive Impact, an organization that provides mental health and prevention services for people affected by HIV. He lives in a 100- year-old farm house in Decatur, GA, with several animal companions. He has room for another loved one. Reach him at Paul.Plate@PositiveImpact-Atl.org.

WHAT IS MY PASSION?

My typical response to this question would be to say that my passions are my dressage horse, Coty; gardening; cooking; wine; entertaining; blah, blah, blah. In my new life, I am compelled to be more honest.

A few years after coming out as a gay man in 2003, I was at a men's spiritual conference in Albuquerque, NM. I heard a



BY ROGER
BEAUMONT

speaker describe how he had to return to his wife because her doctors just told him that her cancer had returned and the prognosis was not good. He was distraught, not knowing what he would do to continue living without his beloved wife.

I turned to a friend who had lived his gay life for many years after an experience of straight marriage, children and a successful law career. I asked him, "Jim, what is the difference between what the speaker and I feel about our respective wives? I loved my wife of 43 years but not in the same way he describes his relationship with his wife. What's the difference?"

Jim said, "Roger, you may have loved your wife and may have experienced joy and a certain happiness, but there was no passion in your marriage."

What a breakthrough moment.

I was married in the same era as Ennis Del Mar in *Brokeback Mountain*, when being openly gay was hardly an option. I lived in unconscious denial for more than 60 years. I was youngest of 12 children, born in Canada after The Depression. My father moved us to the Maine woods to a miserable camp when I was 3 and worked as a lumberjack. Two years later, he abandoned us all by succumbing to alcoholism and took his own life. I've always kept the death certificate which attributed his death to "alcoholism aggravated by drinking lemon extract." Except for his tainted sperm, I can't think of any other inheritance.

My French-speaking mother and her children lived in a foreign country, away from the support she had known in

Quebec. Fortunately, my father had qualified for benefits in that new system called Social Security. This gave my mother a meager income that helped support the family until the children could work. (Guess how I feel about the current illegal immigrant issue?) I and a couple of my sisters went to convent schools, then cold and heartless institutions. I survived somehow, learning to be the perfect Enneagram nine, self-effacing, knowing I didn't matter much, hoping that no one would ever guess the self-loathing turmoil in my heart.

After leaving the seminary in Bucksport and Bar Harbor, Maine, in 1955, (I wasn't good priestly material because I jerked off too much), I found the warmth I craved by marrying the second woman I ever dated and the only one I had ever had sex with. She had the strength and common sense for both of us. Soon, I had purpose in my life as a teacher, a father of a beautiful daughter and three handsome sons. I finally had a home and a family where I belonged.

I was, however, disappointing as a husband. From the twin bed honeymoon to the years of not knowing or sharing my feelings, I lived a straight life that saved me from facing what was deep in my heart – a longing and a craving for beautiful men. I denied my addiction for gay porn until 2001 when I was 62. By then, my daughter had come out as a lesbian 12 years earlier. That was a gift to me because it allowed me to start exploring my hidden life and start facing the possibility that I was gay.

When I attended a rite of passage in the New Mexican desert with Richard Rohr, I finally had the courage to know myself. Richard sent us out into the beautiful valleys and mesas with two questions. The first: what is your greatest fear? I was bowled over by the answer I wrote in my journal: "I'm afraid that someone will find out that I am gay." That was my real birth as an authentic human being. The second question: "What will you say to God when you die

and He asks 'Who are you? I don't recognize you. You never lived the life I gave you. You denied a whole part of yourself. Who are you?'" Since I'd gone to the retreat to better know my God, this question was just as disturbing as the first.

And so began, finally, my acceptance of who I am, a gay man who has half-lived a good life, full of comforts and much joy from a good woman, four children and 17 grandchildren and a satisfying career. But where was the passion?

I'll tell you passion. Passion is enjoying the intellectual and the sensual company of beautiful men. Passion is living in the moment, surrounding yourself with people who know who you truly are and love you *because* you are you. Passion is attending a Body Electric weekend. Passion is looking into the eyes of honest and brave men, regardless of age or size, and loving unabashedly what you see.

Passion is feeling the full embrace of

another man, skin-to-skin, simply enjoying the closeness, the warmth, the love. Passion is greeting each new day without guilt and shame. Passion is belonging to your tribe, knowing that you can ask anything of your brothers and that they support you with love and understanding. Passion is being able to face the end of your life,

knowing that you celebrated every gift that God gave you, most especially the gift of your sexuality. Honoring others and yourself, openly and without holding back, that's passion.

Caress me beloved, I cried out then. And now, ten thousand years later, I see a world about to happen where men can answer me. And only when a man has played flutes with the presence within him can he play flute with a man of flesh. Two flutes, echoing, echoing.

— Andrew Ramer, *Two Flutes Playing*

Baby, that's passion. And a whole orchestra of men, flutes playing. That's passion!



Roger Beaumont, happily plays his flute in Asheville, NC, and surrounding areas.

A POSITIVE PERSPECTIVE

When I think of what keeps me sailing through life with a positive perspective on the people and the world around me, I think of my perspective of where I am now. (I will add that my partner, Pat Boyle, asked for the ability to respond to this article.)



BY LEM ARNOLD


I am a complex person. I have a tendency to not be as open to expressing my feelings, so sometimes I may seem standoffish. That's just the insecurity speaking or because I am lost in thought. The complexity comes from the fact that often I operate on two levels simultaneously, emotional and intellectual, most times without realizing and hopefully better integrated than it sounds.

My intellectual side comes from a strong interest in analytical thinking – evaluating issues, acquiring data and coming up with solutions. I see challenges not as barriers but opportunities to challenge my own thoughts and abilities. I thrive on finding unique solutions to these challenges and sharing them with peers or friends. Much of this comes from my love of math as a child, especially doing complex calculations in my head

without paper. In college this interest was significantly stimulated by an elective I took my freshman year that challenged us to find answers in fields beyond our educational training at the time by using a logic-based approach to problem-solving. This is a part of my daily life especially in the office as a physician as well as in every day life experiences. This is also true with adoption of new technology – digital cameras and digital photography as an example. This does not feel impersonal, because it is the drive to bring positive results to those around me. I have learned that convincing people that my idea is a good solution requires that they need to have had time to process the problem for themselves before I share my proposed solution. So one thing I have learned is greater patience.

My creative drive also carries over into my gardening. It is a great way to see results of my work on a more concrete level. I thoroughly enjoy digging in the dirt and planting seeds and watching them grow. It is interesting that, at times, I enjoy planting and caring for the garden more than actually harvesting the product of my endeavors. (I can sometimes use help harvesting!) However, giving away the results is great fun and I so look forward to the arrival of the first sweet corn out of the garden.

On an emotional level, I see myself as a

caregiver who enjoys giving and frequently has a hard time receiving. Recently, I had one of my families at work tell me how they love me as a doctor. I have learned to say thank you and am becoming much better at hearing that when said. I learned long ago that the best physician is one who listens well and expresses care and interest in addition to making the right diagnosis and treatment. As an only child, one of the things that I really missed was having siblings. I always dreamed of having a brother and at one point had an imaginary brother. I have had some close friends in the past and have a wonderful partner with four brothers, but it was getting involved with GSV that allowed me to feel that I really have that family, that brotherhood, that I missed. I have come to realize that the intellectual challenges are good, powerful and a great adrenalin fix, but it is the feeling of true friendship and care that I experience with many of you in GSV that keeps me going and giving, letting me experience that natural high that can only be felt and not thought. 

Lem Arnold is a 54-year-old physician, partner and son and educates health care professionals on culturally competent care for the LGBTI. He lives in Atlanta and LaFayette, GA.



Flagging and Poi at the May GSV Potluck in Atlanta

Photos by Lem Arnold



Join us for our 17th annual
GSV Fall Conference

Navigate the Triads

Sept. 14-17, 2006

At the Mountain Retreat and Learning Centers, Near Highlands, NC

Watch for our Conference brochure soon or check www.gayspiritvisions.org for registration information.

Submission of workshop ideas for Fall Conference 2006

Brothers, if you feel so moved to present a workshop at the Fall Conference, we welcome you and ask that you send us your ideas.

Our conference will focus on the concepts of mind, body and spirit. Please write a brief

description of your workshop idea (200 words or less) as it relates to this theme. Describe your workshop and what you hope to accomplish. Workshops should last about 90 minutes.

Send your proposals with your name, address, phone number and e-mail to:

Fall Conference 2006
Workshops
GSV
P.O. Box 339
Decatur, GA 30031-0339

You may also e-mail the information to:
workshops@gayspiritvisions.org

Our deadline for workshop submissions:
Aug. 1, 2006.

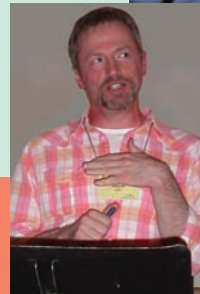
The GSV Workshop Committee will contact you after Aug. 15 about your ideas.



A scrapbook from the 9th Annual GSV Spring Retreat

April 7-9, 2006

Photos courtesy of Lem Arnold,
Mike Goettee, Jeff Jacka



**Magic
Happens!**

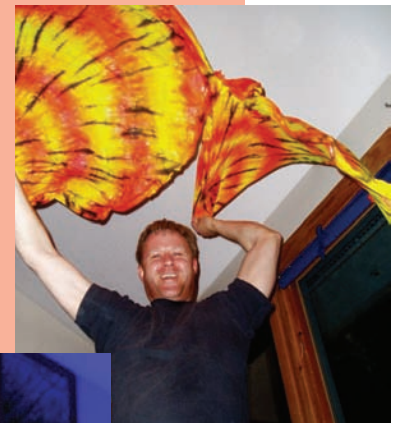




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Tigrr's Flagmaking Workshop





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