

Winter 2008

VISIONARY

THE JOURNAL OF GAY SPIRIT VISIONS

Volume 14, Number 1



ADDICTION

VISIONARY

Visionary (ISSN 1533-8231) is the journal of Gay Spirit Visions and a publication of The Council of Trusted Elders of Gay Spirit Visions, Inc., a Georgia not-for-profit corporation recognized under Section 501(c)(3) of Internal Revenue Code of the United States.

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ELDER'S PERCH

I remember the first time I heard about Gay Spirit Visions—it was 1992. An ex boyfriend handed me the fall conference brochure he'd gotten in the mail and said, "Here, this looks like something you would be into." I recently discovered that 1992 brochure—a small wonder you could literally fold into a cool little box that would sit on a tabletop. It beckoned me to "*Celebrate, Dream, Weave and Experience Our Touch, Our Shadow, Our Power and Our Gifts.*" Knowing who I was at the time, I'm sure that barely resonated with me; I probably thought this gay conference thing was just a great way to get laid.



By David Salyer

My first fall conference was a deeply challenging experience—as it might be for any good Southern boy, especially one who'd been raised Baptist, converted to Catholicism as a college freshman and was flailing about spiritually as a thirtysomething adult. I wasn't prepared for the energy...the Faeries... or the hugging—I'm not from a family of huggers. And the realization that I'd dated or slept with a half dozen of the 90 guys assembled there didn't exactly help me relax (although I have since realized Spirit knew that's exactly what I needed in order to develop some integrity around the way I treat men).

Today I'm in awe of Gay Spirit Visions—this little organization is entering its nineteenth year! GSV started in 1990 with one conference and has evolved into an incorporated non-profit that creates several events a year, publishes an online journal, sponsors potlucks and maintains Internet-based discussion groups. And all this continues to be done by unpaid volunteers—guys who believe in the mission of Gay Spirit Visions and want to be of service to men who love men.

GSV thrives in spite of the fact that none of the original founders remains directly involved. The one constant has been Andrew Ramer, the only man who's attended every fall conference. In a recent letter

to us, Andrew mused about a time when he will not be able to appear, effectively making it someone else's turn to be Miss Continuity. Of course, Andrew has been so much more than that—an objective advisor, a mentor and a constant source of ideas and support.

But Andrew raises an interesting question around continuity. Of the men now serving on The Council of Gay Spirit Visions, only Bruce Parrish (Elder of Finance) and I have been around since we officially incorporated in January 1996. As men rotate on and off the council, a newcomer will inevitably ask why we do whatever we're doing the way we do it. Bruce and I sometimes struggle to remember the details of some discussion about some decision the council made ten years ago. I never really want the answer to be, "That's the way we've always done it."

So we have our archives, we have our oral history for now, and we have eighteen years behind us. Last year we finally commissioned a logo. We've launched a new and vastly improved website this winter, and fall conference planning is about to get underway again. There's every reason to believe that GSV will reach the age of 20. But one day there may be no one on the council who was there in 1996, or even 2006—which is the year I looked at everyone and said, "*How could we be around almost 18 freakin' years without a logo?*"

Did anyone who attended that first conference in November 1990 (yes, November, not September) think GSV would be around twenty years later? I decided to ask a couple of them. First up was Gary Kaupman, my editor back in the day as a writer for *Southern Voice*, Atlanta's gay and lesbian newspaper. "I think I have always assumed that the men-loving-men energy that I learned from the Faeries would be around forever." Loved that answer because I was reminded GSV was indeed a spin-off of the Radical Faeries, yet we have endured long after the Faeries stopped making regular appearances at our events.

Then I asked Andrew Ramer if he remembered thinking GSV might be sustainable for twenty years back when the first conference was planned. "Hmmm," he paused before adding, "they were planning a conference, not the first conference; I don't think anyone was thinking year two at the time." But like Gary, An-

Continues on next page

Editors' Page

This turned out to be a difficult issue for me. I had what I believe was an inspiration from Spirit giving me the topic of Addiction for the theme of this issue of *Visionary*. I know addiction is a big issue in gay society. Alcohol, Drugs, Food, Gambling, Sex, and Shopping are



By Al Taylor

just some of the addictions we face. At first I did not realize how difficult it would be for some of us to put our stories to paper. I had several who wanted to write, and then became unable to once they tried to begin their articles. I understand their struggle and respect them for following their hearts. I confess it has made me look at my life and habits as well. What I saw was not easy to digest. I have considered how addiction affects my life. During my life I have struggled with excessive drinking, drugs, drowning myself in work to avoid relationship

issues, and obsessing with sex (usually one night stands or bath-house style sex). I still have issues with some of these.

I want to apologize if this issue offends anyone. I hope to promote discussion and dialogue about addiction. If this issue's theme helps one brother I will be your happy editor. It has given me the inspiration to make some changes in my life. Already it has made a positive impact on my life. I hope some of you benefit as well.

In this issue a few of our brothers speak of their struggles with addiction. We have letters from two therapists among us who work with those struggling with addiction, one who bravely speaks of his own battles with addictive behavior. Then there is a brother who speaks of his addiction to alcohol. Also a brother writes anonymously of his fight with addictive behavior. I thank you all for your contributions.

Once again I would like to say how much I believe GSV has helped me these

past 10 or more years. I am grateful to have found this organization. Being Editor is a small way I try to give back to you. I am blessed with a lot of assistance putting *Visionary* together. I want to thank Migs Halpern for being such a wonderful Assistant Editor. You are more like a Co-Editor in my opinion. I am also very grateful to Mike Goettee for his expert Design and Production. I would also like to thank Bruce Parrish, Tony James and David Salyer for aiding in the final proofing of *Visionary*. And finally thank you to Jennings Fort for showing me the ropes and all of you who have made written contributions to *Visionary*.

I look forward to any comments or suggestions any of you may have.

Al lives at a place he calls Hemlock Hollow in Farner, TN. He enjoys the company of his seven dogs and looks forward to visits from friends and family. Contact him at adtaccountant@yahoo.com.

Assistant Editor

My submission here is short, as I have written one of the articles which follows. Multiple addictions have been with me all my life. At one time or another I have felt the effects of severe addiction to food, sex, love, romance, spending, and drugs (prescription narcotics). I have worked hard and live in gratitude for my addictions.

Yes, gratitude. For many years I lived in denial of the addictions. Then, as I entered 12-step programs, I felt a lot

of anger and played the victim. I judged myself justifiably victimized for having received these addictions from my parents and society. Finally, having done a lot of work in various venues in my life, I have come to understand that these addictions, and learning to befriend them and understand them, were my call to spirituality.



By Migs Halpern

I was an atheist with no need for Spirit prior to, and early in my addictions. I am now a human being who connects regularly with Spirit for myself and my brothers. I am immensely grateful for this path through addiction that has shaken me out of my ego and into the path of Spirit.

Migs lives in Asheville, NC. At 56 years of age, he is working and playing at having a truly healthy relationship in his life. You can contact him at oso@mhalpern.com.

Elder's Perch continued
drew was not surprised by our longevity.

I originally joined the council in 1994, in awe of those men and the work being done. I barely spoke the first year, having no sense of what I had to offer. I think I believed most of them were more enlightened or spiritually evolved than me, too. Eventually I discovered my voice and spoke up. No one ever tried to shut me down; I have always been heard, which I now know is different and better than just having everyone agree with me. Most fortunately, I aban-

doned my self-imposed spiritual inferiority complex and quit being ashamed of what I believe.

And like Gary, I believe men-loving-men energy will be around forever. I hope Gay Spirit Visions will be around long after I'm not. But safe, sacred space for men must be created and maintained. The longevity of GSV depends on men stepping up, releasing their fears about not having anything to offer and just doing the work. The Council of Gay Spirit Visions is not a mysterious, enigmatic, closed group. You are welcome to at-

tend any meeting, witness and decide for yourself if it's a good fit. It's work, for sure, but we try to accomplish it with a little fun and a minimum of drama. So consider becoming part of something that encourages men to *Celebrate, Dream, Weave and Experience Our Touch, Our Shadow, Our Power and Our Gifts*.

David Salyer is a retired journalist and HIV/AIDS educator and activist residing in Atlanta, Georgia. He is currently single, not desperate. Contact him at cubscout@mindspring.com.



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.

Please feel free to suggest future themes for *Visionary*. Here is a list of some upcoming themes.

- **Thoughts or Visions of the Afterlife**
- **Removing Judgment**
- **Forgiveness**

For questions, comments, suggestions or submissions concerning *Visionary* please contact Al at visionary@gayspiritvisions.org

THE 11TH ANNUAL GAY SPIRIT VISIONS
Spring Retreat
May 16-18, 2008

**Mikell Camp
Toccoa, Georgia**

The Council of Gay Spirit Visions invites you to join us as we gather for the first time at Mikell Camp & Conference Center, a beautiful 460-acre facility located in Toccoa, Georgia.

Enjoy a weekend of activities such as hiking, volleyball, dancing and even swimming in an outdoor pool. With a flexible schedule, this event also provides men with an opportunity to create spontaneous workshops. Relax and catch up with old friends, or make some new connections!

A bi-level facility, Mikell Camp's upper level has a dining hall, swimming pool, arts and craft building, auditorium and duplex-style housing. The lower level, Retreat Village, has a conference center, fire pit, athletic field and motel-style housing that overlooks a winding creek. A short uphill path connects the two levels. All housing facilities have porches, two double beds and private baths. Parking is available on both levels.

The event begins with dinner Friday evening and concludes after lunch on Sunday. Your cost for shared occupancy is \$190; single occupancy is \$240.

Look for registration details on our website www.gayspiritvisions.org

Photos: Kim Pittman



CALENDAR

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.

Beginning with this issue, please check our site for locations: www.gayspiritvisions.org.



Hosting a potluck is a simple and effective way to serve GSV. Please let us know if you can host.

Contact Kim Pittman at service@gayspiritvisions.org

GSV HEART CIRCLES

Dear Brothers:

Regretfully, we have to inform you that GSV's Atlanta Heart Circles are being discontinued for the time being. The Council of Gay Spirit Visions would like to gratefully acknowledge Lem Arnold and Wendell Johnson, our two facilitators for these events over the past few years. Their selfless dedication to the process of creating and maintaining these heart-directed groups for us is deeply appreciated.

If you have feedback or questions, please don't hesitate to contact us at info@gayspiritvisions.org.

GSV COUNCIL MEETINGS

The GSV Council usually meets on the 4th Saturday of each month at 1151 Sheridan Road, NE in Atlanta. It begins at 10 A.M. and usually finishes before 2 P.M. Any GSV brother is welcome to attend. We also encourage our brothers to consider becoming a council member. Please contact any council member for more information.

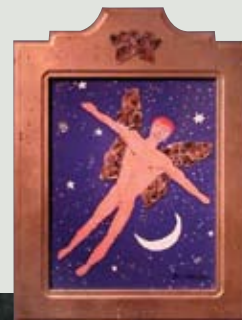
GSV GATHERINGS

The dates for GSV events in 2008 have been set as follows:

- Spring Retreat — May 16-18, 2008, at Mikell Camp
- Fall Conference — Sept. 18-21, 2008 at The Mountain (with optional Wednesday, 9/17)

Jon Whiddon, 1960 - 2008

Our brother Jon died on February 20 after a brave battle with esophageal cancer. So many of us treasure examples of his whimsical folk art paintings. We are all comforted by the memories of the warmth of his beautiful smile.



The tragedy of life is not that it ends so soon, but that we wait so long to begin it.

—W.M. Lewis

We came whirling out of nothingness
scattering stars like dust.
The stars made a circle
and in the middle we dance.

—Rumi

“Follow the Voice of your Spirit,
Remember to dream,
Listen to the
Wisdom of your Soul,
Dance to the Music in your heart.”

—Anonymous

ADDICTION

Sexual Addiction: My Story

Addiction: a word with many associations, most of them negative. Modify that noun with the adjective sexual, and it strikes fear into the hearts of gay men and straight men alike.

I am a recovering sex addict. I discovered this in 1990. In 1989, I came into the 12-step rooms of recovery for my addiction to food; I am also a compulsive overeater. So a year later, understanding addiction better, I realized I had an issue with my sexual behaviors.

How did I come to realize I had a sex addiction? My understanding of addiction on a basic, my-own-idea level was, and still is: addiction is when I have a behavior or behaviors that I don't like, that negatively affect my life, and I cannot stop repeating them. In 1990 I was married to a woman, went to porno movie houses, and had unsafe sex with men. After sex, I would feel guilty and ashamed and angry at myself, tell myself I will never, never do this again, then within 2-3 weeks I was back doing it again. I was addicted.

I was addicted to the excitement. I was addicted to the danger. I was addicted to the idea that for one moment at least, someone would like me because I was giving him intense pleasure. I was addicted to the momentary feeling of power and control, which I felt I did not have in my life. I was sadly desperate for love, and looking for it in all the wrong places.

So, feeling angry at everyone in the room, I walked into a beginner's meeting of Sexual Compulsives Anonymous (SCA) one Friday evening in New York City. (SCA is the only 12-step program for sexual addiction that is attended mostly by gay men.) I was angry that I had another addiction to deal with. I was angry that there were so many hot men in the room, all of them sex addicts, and I wouldn't be able to have sex with any of them; I felt I was walking into the room full of the enemy.

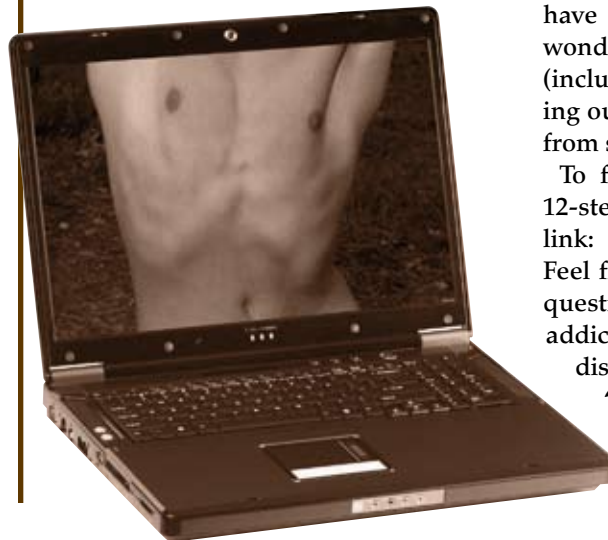
My recovery from sexual addiction has been an uneven process, now spanning 18 years. I have learned the differences between kinds of sexual addiction (sex, love, and romance addictions). I have made many wonderful friends in the program. I have learned how to date in a healthy manner. I no longer have anonymous sex, nor sexualize hot men (well, still a little of that...). I continue to learn to integrate sex into my life as a healthy element. I have safe, wonderful sex when I choose to have sex. Today I am grateful for my sexual addiction because I have grown so much, and learned so much about myself and my relationship to the world.

On page 7 is a list from the SCA pamphlet on the characteristics many sex addicts share. If you read the list and have a few ah-has, and have perhaps wondered about your sexual behaviors (including anorexia), think about checking out a meeting for people recovering from sexual addictions.

To find SCA and other gay-friendly 12-step meetings in Atlanta, click on this link: <http://aasg.info/taxonomy/term/9>. Feel free to email me if you have other questions about recovery from sexual addiction. (NB: There are important and distinct differences between various "S"-programs such as SCA, SAA, SLAA, SA, etc. Contact me at oso@mhalpern.com. for more information.)



By Migs Halpern



14 characteristics many sex addicts have in common

1. As adolescents, we used fantasy and compulsive masturbation to escape from feelings, and continued this tendency in our adult lives with compulsive sex.

2. We tended to become immobilized by romantic obsessions.

3. We searched for some “magical” quality in others to make us feel complete. Other people were idealized and endowed with a powerful symbolism, which often disappeared after we had sex with them.

4. Compulsive sex became a drug, which we used to escape from feelings such as anxiety, loneliness, anger, rejection or self-hatred as well as joy. We sought oblivion in fantasy, masturbation and compulsive sex. Sex became a reward, punishment, distraction, and time-killer.

5. Because of low self-esteem, we used sex to feel validated and complete.

6. We tended to lose ourselves in sex and romantic obsession, and became addicted to the search for sex. As a result we neglected our lives.

7. We tried to bring intensity and excitement into our lives through sex, but instead felt ourselves growing steadily emptier.

8. While constantly seeking intimacy with another person, the desperate quality of our need made true intimacy with anyone impossible. In trying to conceal our dependency demands from ourselves and others, we grew more isolated and alienated from ourselves, from God, and from the very people we wanted to be close to.

9. We feared relationships, but continually searched for them. In a relationship, we feared abandonment and rejection, but out of one, we felt empty and incomplete.

10. We were drawn to people who were not available to us, or who would reject us or abuse us.

11. We often developed unhealthy dependency relationships that eventually became unbearable.

12. Even when we got the love of another person, it was never seemed enough, and we were unable to stop lusting after others.

13. We became addicted to people and were unable to distinguish among sex, love and affection.

14. Sex became compartmentalized, and not integrated into our lives as a healthy element.

—From the “Fourfold” pamphlet, Sexual Compulsives Anonymous)



Hi, I'm a shopoholic.

I love a good bargain whether it is a shirt, t-shirt, pants, camping equipment, cool glass, cool plate, after-Christmas decoration sales (Target), oh look out. If it's a bargain, I can find a reason to buy it. You're asking me, “Do you need it?” That's not the question. I can justify anything. It's a hereditary thing from my Great Aunt Ethel and my mom. My mom is still a bargain shopper, especially the Dollar Store. Oh my god, if you could see the things she buys. If it hadn't been for us changing the way we do Christmas now, we'd have boxes of junk to take to the Goodwill.

When I sold my house, that's when it hit me that I needed to make some corrections. With the help of my best friend, I don't buy as much now but still



By Kim Pittman

it's really, really hard not to buy it. So this is what I came up with; you're going to laugh because I do. When I see a bargain I carry it around the store for a long while to get the feel of it and enjoy it, then PUT IT BACK. Oh yeah, put it back. Something about the thrill of pretending to buy and carry it around the store, I reason with myself. Do I really need this???? Usually I talk myself out of it, but enjoy the tempting thrill. It can get hard now if I am depressed, because then I want to spend. Thank god for gift cards at Christmas.

My motto: Shop, Shop, Shop until you Drop, Drop, Drop.

Hugs, Kim

Kim is the Elder of Service and has been on the Council since 1996. He has been working in the banking industry for over 30 years and currently lives in the Buckhead Community of Atlanta, GA.

YOU, ME & ADDICTION

I work as a therapist with people with the same problems of living that you and I have, which is to say that I work in the field of addiction every day, if I can expand the word beyond its customary focus on alcohol and drugs.

I didn't grow up in a family torn apart by alcoholism or other classical addiction, but very early on I noted in myself that I re-created certain patterns of eating, masturbating, working compulsively, watching porn, or spending money/shopping despite that voice in my head that said something unhealthy was going on. I felt driven, could stop myself with conscious will power when I felt too shamed and out of control, but then I'd find myself repeating the patterns again before too long.

I am a process person, meaning I'm a man who pays a lot of attention to my process, how I feel, think and act, and over the years of learning to be a therapist and pursuing my own healing I've come to some basic understanding of the addictive process I want to share here.

Everything we experience, joyfully welcomed or painfully tolerated, creates an impact on us of a certain intensity. Some experiences make us smile while others leave us belly-laughing; sometimes we feel sad while at other times we weep. This impact energy has no easy unit of measure such as ohms or watts, but we feel the difference in intensity between an uneasy fear and outright terror.

These impact energies have a natural expression which releases them from the body.

As we grow in our first family environments we get help from everyone to learn how to deal with our experience of these energies. In the best of all worlds a child whose dog has just died would have some supportive adult who would notice how sad the child was and name the sadness out loud. ("I can see how sad you are that your dog died.") This identifies for the child the name for what he is experiencing and makes the child's experience real. It blesses the experience of the impact for the child.

If the parent gives the right permission and support, the child will find the natural expression of the energy and will release it. If his dog died, he will cry or be sad because grief is the normal expression of the experience of loss. If he is able to substantially release his grief, then he doesn't have to carry the grief as ongoing baggage.

A response to a funny situation with the right support will lead to laughter. A response to an experience of hurt or injury will lead to some expression of aggression/anger. Every experience creates its own energy and needs its own expression. A milder energy will lead to a milder expression; a more intense experience of fury will lead to a more intense expression of aggression and violence.

You never
can get
enough of
what you
don't really
need.

Sadly, in the real world, the support system of parents and other important adults breaks down and does not provide the support the child needs. A parent may be busy making dinner or attending to someone else, drunk, tired, dead, thinking about something else, or just gone. I don't mean to load all the problems of addiction on the backs of parents, but the truth is that our parents are our primary source of information about how to deal with our experience.

When the support system breaks down, when there is no parent or adult to witness, name, bless the child's experience, and support him to express his response to what has happened to him, most of

this impact energy stays in the psyche and gets stored up. We call this stress.

Just as energy is physical, we experience this stress physically. As the child ages and he has more unfinished, unexpressed experience, his dis-stress increases. This distress is physical. Someone asks us what's wrong and we say we feel stressed; this is the experience of living all this unexpressed impact energy from our lives.

Along the way we learn from family and the larger culture how to feel better. Someone is told to stifle himself and he learns to repress it or bury it. Another person is given some food to comfort himself and notes that he feels better after he eats. Another finds alcohol, nicotine, caffeine, or some substance so that his experience of his stress is transformed chemically. Still another works hard and feels the relief that comes from getting busy, accomplishing, or distracting himself. And another sleeps or withdraws into depression to numb out.

If we cross the threshold of discomfort, we will do what we have learned in our past that leads us to feel better. We do not need to be conscious of the discomfort to start the process.

It's important to understand here that the purpose of the cigarette or the piece of cake is to relieve us of the distress we experience. We feel better when we stop feeling bad. When we start feeling bad again, we will start the addictive process again and reach for the next cigarette or whatever. This addictive process never will bring true relief or healing because the action of reaching for the piece of cake or cigarette is not the true expression for the underlying impact energies that we experience so uncomfortably. Erich Rohmer once said one of my favorite quotes which is, "You never can get enough of what you don't really need."

I don't have the space here to spell out completely the difference between dependence and addiction, but for most of



By Mike Katz

us when we say addicted (“I’m addicted to chocolate”) we mean what clinicians call dependence. When we keep doing it even though we know it’s not needed or not good for us, when we need more and more to feel the relief, when we start to organize our lives around obtaining or maintaining this relief, we still are in the realm of dependence. Only when the important work of our lives is interrupted personally or at work, when we do dangerous things or pick up legal charges are we addicted in clinical terms.

So how do we heal from lifelong patterns that have so much history and deeply ingrained repetition? Two things. We have to have increased support to tolerate more discomfort in our lives so that we stop interrupting our distress with what we’ve learned helps us feel better. This support can be from friends, therapy, a twelve-step program, GSV, God, medication, books, and anyone or anything that gives us the strength and courage to bear the truth of our lives.

Secondly, we have to finish what didn’t get expressed initially. With increased and truly helpful support for our experience, we can release this stressful unfinished energy and feel the true relief our souls and psyche recognize. How this finishing happens is the content of therapy and art and redemption. This release and relief is timeless and the psyche doesn’t care if it’s been a day or a lifetime since the original impacts that caused the original distress. It’s never too late to heal. The problem, of course, is that we are infinitely layered with levels of energies and stresses so that the relief of what ails us in the moment sooner or later will lead to the need to finish the next round of stress in the next moment.

Healing is the work of a lifetime. On a good day I remind myself that there is nothing better to do with my life.

Ask me questions or send comments, please, to Mike Katz at katzpsych@gmail.com.

Mike Katz has attended GSV regularly for the last ten years and counts it as a primary source of love and support in his life. He’s been working as a therapist for more than thirty years in Raleigh, NC, has two grown kids, and is enjoying new love.

ADDICTION & RECOVERY FROM ALCOHOLISM

This is one of the most amazing segments of my life. With the help of Bill Wilson (the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous), I have been sober, thank G-d, for 16 + years now. It started with my admission, after long questioning the unconscious behavior I was exhibiting. Outside of work, I used alcohol to avoid dealing with vital life issues.

Later I discovered that the rooms of AA were filled with folks with whom I had more similarities than differences. This is not what I experienced/felt when I first attended those meetings when I surmised that they were not like me. They appeared to be a “sad lot.” After all, I had not beaten my wife, lost my job, had a DUI or gotten arrested. How bad could I be? So I kept going to meetings, usually one a day—sometimes two.

Soon there were the fears of “how will I deal with dating, especially dancing while sober? Having sex? How to do this sober.” My mind even questioned how I could sleep well without my dose of evening alcohol.

What I discovered is that the highs, sober, were not quite as high, but the lows of my life were much easier to deal with.

Some of the AA slogans which I feel are powerfully accurate are: “There are no big deals.” “Don’t sweat the small stuff...and it’s all small stuff.” “If you keep doing what you’ve been doing; you’ll keep getting what you’ve been getting.” “Let go, let G-d.”

My sponsor gave me some good advice about sharing in AA meetings. Hoyt said, “don’t be concerned about what you are going to say. Just raise your hand, and when you are recognized, start to speak, and what needs to come out will surface.” He was so right! That principle still works for me today, and

I implement in at every opportunity, even in non-AA groups.

And I found the additional benefit of this is that when I share first, or at least early on in any meeting, I can listen attentively when others share. For I am not using my mental energy to plan what I am going to say.

So I began to experience life as a sober man, age 52. No more having to ask my lover, or call someone else the next day to be filled in on what had transpired the previous night. Later I became aware that these are called “blackouts.” They have nothing to do with passing out—just holes in my memory. I was surprised, since I never felt badly the next day and never got sick and had no hangovers.

Now my mornings began to have energy and clarity I had not enjoyed for many years. My serious drinking had started at age 17—thirty-five years earlier... amazing!

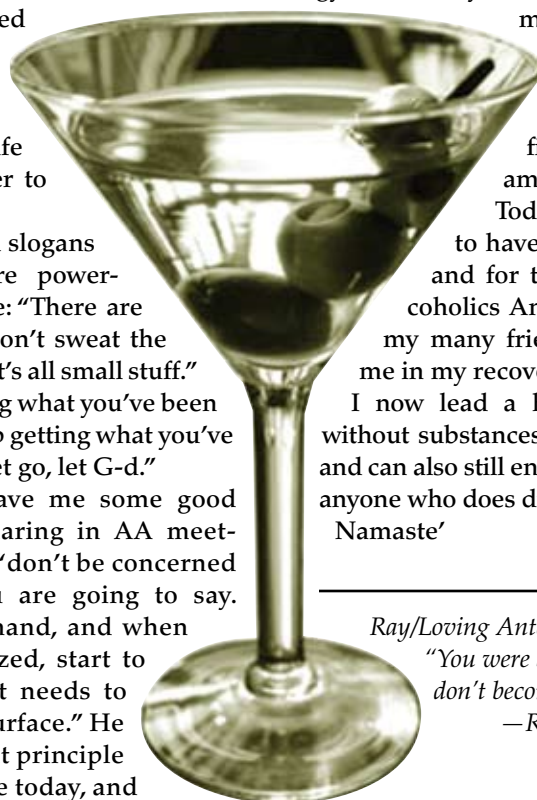
Today I feel blessed to have found my way to, and for the wisdom of Alcoholics Anonymous, and for my many friends who support me in my recovery.

I now lead a healthy, joyful life without substances to alter my mind, and can also still enjoy the company of anyone who does drink responsibly.

Namaste’



By Ray/
Starshine



*Ray/Loving Antelope/Starshine
“You were born an original;
don’t become a copy”.*

—Rabbi Simon Jacobson

Needing To Make A Change!

Last night I took a few tokes and had a six pack of beer. This morning I hate myself. I always tell myself on these mornings that I will never do it again. But to this point I have always done it again. I may not repeat last night for a couple weeks. Or I could repeat it in the next few days. You see this morning I am very unhappy with myself. I know I would be better off if I left these two things alone. Alcohol and marijuana have been a part of my life for many years. I think I am what some would call a functioning alcoholic. Others may call me the king of self-medication. I do all the things I need to such as pay the bills, go to work, and maintain a home. Aren't alcoholics those that wake up hung over every morning and then drink more to get rid of the hangover? Don't they miss work and get behind in their bills? Isn't their wake-up moment when they are about to or have just lost their homes? At this time I am not close to this point. But I am to the point that I know I would be more productive and better off if I gave up these two things.

So this morning I feel a bit groggy, less than energetic, and feel the regret of another failure. You see I can go out for dinner with friends or dine in with family and only have a drink or two. The next morning I can pop out of bed without guilt or shame. But sooner or later I will go beyond those one or two drinks. Then once again I find myself riddled with guilt and shame.

My experience with GSV has been a positive one. I see so many who are in recovery and doing very well. I admire all of you who have overcome your addictions. I often wonder what keeps you clean. What do you do when those trigger points of addiction tempt you? Is it something you learned in a 12 step program?

When I am with you in a GSV-sponsored event I have absolutely no desire for drugs or alcohol. This is a wonderful feeling. I am very happy with and fully support your alcohol- and drug-free policy. Unfortunately I do not get to a lot of GSV functions. Sometimes the only time I have been with you is during the Fall Conference at the Mountain. After the Mountain I normally go home and

go up to a month without seeking to alter my state of mind temporarily with pot or alcohol. But at some point I fall back into my state of self-medication.

I am proud of myself during these sabbaticals from drinking and drugs. I wish I could maintain them indefinitely. But up to this point I have not been successful from breaking my ritual of self-medication. Will I have to wait until I am so down on myself that I finally have the courage to attend an AA meeting? Or will it be the disaster of a DUI or an accident or both that get me to face my problem head on? I hope I do not wait that long. You see I rarely drive under the influence. I am terrified of hurting someone else or myself and that has made me have the policy of not driving while under the influence. But I have broken this policy from time to time. And this is enough to ruin my life and possibly that of others. I do not want to continue making excuses or dig deeper into denial. I really need to be free of the possibility of this type of disaster.

This is the second attempt I have made to write about my problem for *Visionary*. The first one has been deleted. Once I wrote it I was too ashamed to consider sending it in. I have been on the fence for some time about submitting one. But I could not get it out of my mind. I think that perhaps admitting anonymously that I have a problem would help me make the first step to recovery. I hope this does not insult those who have faced their addictions and are winning their battle. Those of you in recovery are my heroes. I also hope there is someone else reading this that will see themselves in this letter and consider seeking help as well.

So starting today I have promised myself to face this addiction head on. I want to be guilt free, more productive and feel better. I will look to my higher power and the support of my GSV tribe to overcome. We do not walk alone. I forget this often. But knowing GSV, the wonderful group of men who love men who love men, is a great help. Our support for each other is fantastic. Being around gay men who love more than they judge is rare indeed. I am thankful for the support I feel you will send me in spirit. I hope that the

group of GSV brothers grows larger with each passing year.

My recovery may be different than yours; I support yours and I need you to support mine. I can not make it without you. Thank you for allowing me to write this anonymously. Hopefully I will "come out" to you when I feel less ashamed. I will send this off now before I decide to delete it.

Thank you for helping me get this far!
—Anonymous

Please send support or comments for Anonymous to visionary@gayspiritvisions.org and Al will forward to him.

BELIEVE WHILE OTHERS...

Believe while others are doubting.

Plan while others are playing.

Study while others are sleeping.

Decide while others are delaying.

Prepare while others are
daydreaming.

Begin while others are
procrastinating.

Work while others are wishing.

Save while others are wasting.

Listen while others are talking.

Smile while others are frowning.

Commend while others are
criticizing.

Persist while others are quitting.

—William Arthur Ward

In the Land of the Poem

In the land
of the poem
again,
my pen
seeks a new dance
and music.

So I call directions,
cast the circle,
center:
Breathe.
(Aware
some mysteries
may never be expressed.)

Oil-wrestling
writhing words and
vagrant
visions,
sometimes I glimpse
the angel.

Muse, you may not go
until you bless me.

—Bob Strain
12/31/07

No Doubt

old rules

break down
in the act of
surrender

taking
another
breath

letting
love
do its
work

—Franklin Abbott

Dementia

i don't know when the water entered the
basement.

One day, the air was cool and crisp,
and little sparks jumped from my fingers
when i shuffled my feet across the carpet.
Later, the air was warm, pungent with moisture.
The carpet squished and gurgled as i walked.
But never was there a particular moment
when i could say that things had changed.

The squishing became routine.
So did the drips and dribbles
rising from the rug.
i wore waterproof shoes and took little notice.
Shallow puddles grew until they lapped
against the electric outlets. The fuses blew.
i plugged the TV into the ceiling fixture
and draped the cord across the moosehead.

Why i didn't think of hip boots last winter,
I'll never know. Maybe i didn't need them then.
It's so hard to remember when goldfish
weren't swimming past the recliner,
or when the moosehead didn't have a moldy
beard.

i knew something was amiss
when the water overtopped my boots
and baby brook trout nibbled the hair off my
knees.

But what was i to do?
Pouring cement in the corners made the water
murky,
and if i pumped the water out, the neighbors
would complain
i got a wetsuit.

With neither fanfare nor architect,
The cellar stairs were gated, hinged,
and raised to let the freighters pass below.
But still, there wasn't a particular day
when i ceased to venture into the basement.
Nor was there a precise moment
when the foghorns and the tumult
drove me from the first floor maelstrom
to the second story closet to get some sleep.
Though my mind as clear as coral,
i can't fathom through the gloaming
who was screaming when i boarded up the door.

—Cassandra

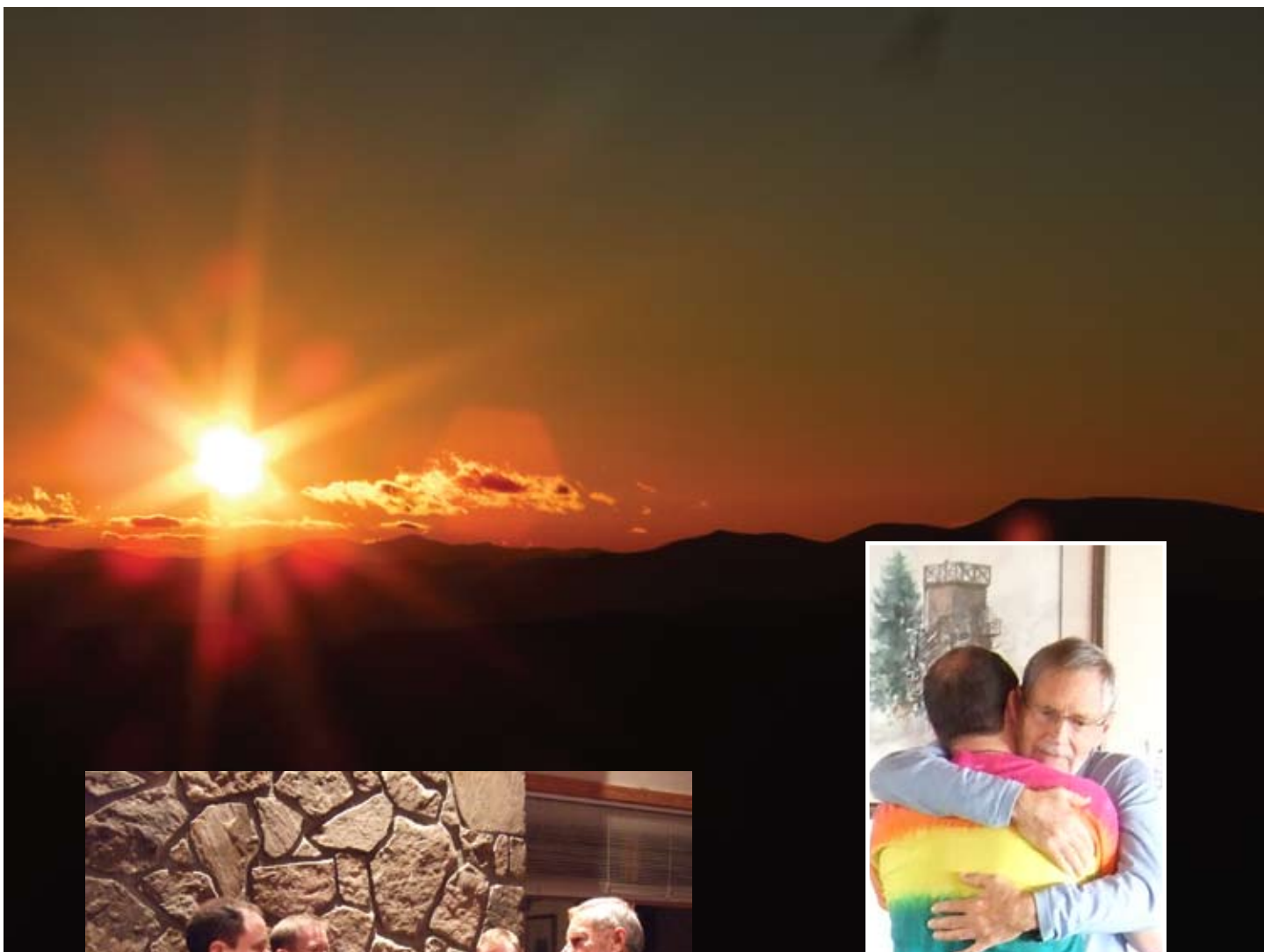
Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens, South Africa. Photo: Mike Goettee





A scrapbook from the The Seventh Annual
Gay Spirit Visions
Winter Meditation





Photos: Lem Arnold

The Four Immeasurables

May all living beings have happiness and the causes of happiness;

May all living beings be free from misery and the causes of misery;

May all living beings never be separated from happiness, devoid of misery;

May all living beings abide in equanimity free from prejudicial attachments and aversions.

—The Buddha

