

Winter 2010

# VISIONARY

THE JOURNAL OF GAY SPIRIT VISIONS

Volume 16, Number 1

# GSWV

**GAY SPIRIT  
VISIONS 20 YEARS**



First GSV Conference, 1990

# VISIONARY

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George Miller  
*Elder of Archives*

Jennings Fort  
*Elder at Large*

**The 2010 Gay Spirit Visions Council**  
consists of the Council of Trusted Elders  
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## ELDER'S PERCH

I have been honored to serve as Presiding Elder of Gay Spirit Visions for the past two years. I'm especially



By David Salyer

proud to have been at the helm in 2009, the year of our milestone twentieth anniversary fall conference. This event featured the fresh perspectives of innovative performance activist Peterson Toscano, a shape-shifting storyteller for our times. He proved to be a marvelous complement to our rich history, brought to life through timely and poignant presentations by original Radical Faerie and early GSV organizer Franklin Abbott and longtime mentor Andrew Ramer.

Each year it takes a dedicated group of council elders and stewards to get the work done – *all the work*, not just the fall conference planning. This past year it has been my privilege to share these responsibilities with a diverse and talented group of guys who not only volunteered, but also delivered. My heartfelt thanks to Tony James, Phil Robst, Kim Pittman, George Miller, Jennings Fort, Ken Berman, Craig Cook, Gary Kaupman, Ray Taratoot and Al Taylor.

Under ordinary circumstances, my term as Presiding Elder would be com-

plete. However, at the request of the organization's elders, I have agreed to remain in the position through 2010. Then what? If you attended the fall conference or have talked to someone who did, you know that we have begun a discussion about sustainability – *how can Gay Spirit Visions endure for another twenty years?*

We tackled that question at our annual council retreat in November. Under the skillful guidance of wise and indefatigable guest facilitator Paul Plate, the fifteen men in attendance identified a goal: *transform GSV*. After brainstorming, naming our fears and listening to Spirit, we reached consensus that it's time to gradually release the operations, planning and leadership of GSV from Atlanta control. The existing paradigm for involvement on the council is that you have to commit to attending 9 of 12 council meetings held the fourth Saturday of the month in Atlanta every year and, additionally, serve on at least one fall conference subcommittee. Consensus appears to be that the Atlanta-centric model is increasingly less viable, excluding too many men from service.

Here's the *action plan* that emerged from the council retreat:

By February 1, 2010, a regionally diverse *task force* will be formed to promote a paradigm shift away from the current Atlanta-centric GSV model. The task force is to be composed of past and present GSV council members, plus other GSV brothers who express a willingness/commitment to transform GSV.

The *goals of the task force* are: (a) identify and mentor men outside the Atlanta

Continues on next page

**Gay Spirit Visions**  
*Creating safe, sacred space for men who love men*



### 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.

Elder's Perch, continued

community for participation in a transformed vision of GSV; (b) shadow the existing Atlanta-based council throughout 2010 with the objective of coordinating the 2011 fall conference; (c) develop a new organizational structure and identify leadership beyond 2010; (d) research the steps necessary to maintain incorporated, non-profit status for GSV after transformation; and (e) locate and invite fresh perspectives and voices for events and service possibilities.

The criteria for participation in the task force are: (a) commitment of 6-8 hours a month toward the goal of transforming GSV (including, but not limited to,

occasional attendance at a regularly scheduled GSV council meeting in Atlanta, conference calls and email communications); (b) willingness to attend the GSV spring retreat (April 30-May 2, 2010) for a face-to-face task force session (this is *not* mandatory, and the inability to attend does not automatically exclude a man from serving on the task force); and (c) a commitment to service beyond 2010 with an intention to collaborate in producing the 2011 fall conference.

Stepping up as acting coordinator of this task force is longtime GSV brother Jim Jones. If you would like to be part of the Gay Spirit Visions metamorpho-

sis, contact Jim by email or phone – moonxdragon@earthlink.net; 770-304-0120 – before February 1, 2010.

At the fall conference, one man said to me, "I just found GSV; it can't go away."

With a goal, a plan and a group of committed, resourceful volunteers, I sincerely believe there's no reason why Gay Spirit Visions can't transform and flourish beyond 2010.

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*David Salyer is a retired journalist and HIV/AIDS educator living in Atlanta, Georgia. He has been involved with Gay Spirit Visions since 1992. Reach him at cubscout@mindspring.com.*

## Editors' Page

Gay Spirit Visions has just held its 20th fall conference and I was happy to be one of the attendees. I attended my first fall conference in 1996, and now I have attended a total of 12 fall conferences. I have enjoyed all of them and always leave the weekend with a wonderful feeling of inner peace. Sometimes I wonder about the 8 conferences that I missed, so for this issue I have asked several men to write a short reminiscence of a particular conference. In this issue we have a short reminiscence of each conference. We are starting with Franklin Abbott writing about 1990 and ending with Larry Johnson writing his thoughts on 2009.



By Al Taylor

Looking back over the years I am amazed at the large group of talented men that have been a part of this brotherhood. I have met many of the pioneers of GSV, and I have been fortunate to hear about some of the others whom I have not met. Through the years I have met several hundred men who have attended conferences on their spiritual journeys. Some of these brothers have attended only once and I wonder what impressions of this group remain with them and what part of them remains

with us. There are many who have been around for several years and continue to influence GSV with their love and energy. And then there are those men whom you expect to see at each fall conference. These men continually bless GSV with their loving energy, and I believe they are blessed in return with the love and support of GSV. There are several who have attended most of the conferences but only Andrew Ramer has experienced all of them. Though the members come and go, once you are a part of this tribe it will always be a part of you. And in turn, you will always be a part of GSV. I honor all those whose spiritual journeys have passed through this tribe.

It seems that GSV may be at a crossroad. Is there a storm ahead or will there be smooth sailing? The forecast is not clear. GSV is not exactly what it was 20 years ago, and I do not believe will be the same in the next 20 years. But I am confident that this tribe of Men Who Love Men will still be around giving love and support and creating safe, sacred space. I am grateful for the loving support of GSV and hope to continue to lend my support in return.

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*Al has been involved with the brotherhood of GSV since 1996 and considers this to be a blessing. He may be reached at [adtaccountant@yahoo.com](mailto:adtaccountant@yahoo.com).*

## Assistant Editor

I chose to miss the 2009 Fall Conference due to having overcommitted in other areas of my life, and I was working on a new relationship. This was the first Fall Conference I had missed since I discovered GSV in 2006. I do feel sad that I made that choice to miss it, yet it was the best choice for me.



By Migs Halpern

Reading the submissions by the many contributors, I had tears flowing freely from my eyes as I identified with so many of the deep, touching events that GSV has given me the opportunity to experience.

I hope you enjoy these reminiscences as much as I have and that you have received some of this incredibly valuable depth of unconditional acceptance that I get with every contact with GSV.

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*Migs currently lives in Fairview, NC, about 11 miles from Asheville. He is single, and dedicated to being the best man he can be. You can reach him at [mkpnmigs@me.com](mailto:mkpnmigs@me.com).*

# The 9th Annual Gay Spirit Visions Winter Meditation January 15-17, 2010 The Mountain Retreat & Learning Center, Highlands, NC

**Following a busy holiday season, we invite you to participate in an event that explores meditative practices. Just as a new year is getting underway, treat yourself to a weekend of stress-reduction and fellowship in the peaceful environment of The Mountain.**

**More information and registration details:  
[www.gayspiritvisions.org/events/retreats.html](http://www.gayspiritvisions.org/events/retreats.html)**

Photo: Lem Arnold

## CALENDAR

### 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 at The Mountain in 2010 have been set as follows:

- Winter Meditation—January 15-17, 2010 at The Mountain Retreat & Learning Center, Highlands, NC.
- Spring Retreat—April 30-May 2, 2010 at The Mountain Retreat & Learning Center, Highlands, NC.
- Fall Conference—September 30–October 3, 2010 (optional 9/29) at The Mountain Retreat & Learning Center, Highlands, NC.

### GSV POTLUCKS

GSV potlucks in Atlanta are held the **second** Saturday of the month at 7:00 p.m., unless otherwise noted. GSV potlucks are drug- and alcohol-free events.

Please check our site for locations:  
[www.gayspiritvisions.org](http://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](mailto:service@gayspiritvisions.org)



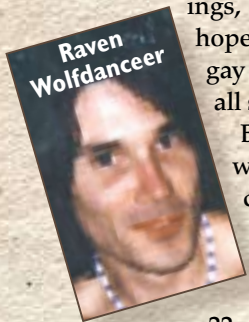
The Fall 2009 issue of *Visionary* was combined with this 2010 double issue for the 20th Anniversary of Gay Spirit Visions.



# GSVV GAY SPIRIT VISIONS 20 YEARS

## OUR HISTORY

In the 1970s, a small group of gay men was inspired by the Southeastern Conference for Lesbians and Gay Men to begin annual spiritual retreats at Running Water, a North Carolina farm that was one of the sanctuaries of the Radical Faerie movement. The Faeries emphasized individuality and organized events by consensus. By 1989, development around Running Water farm made large gatherings there impractical. Seeking alternatives, several men realized they wanted to change more than just location. A new, Atlanta-based organization—Gay Spirit Visions—was created, and our first conference was held in 1990. While maintaining some of the elements and philosophies of the early, Faerie-inspired Running Water gatherings, Gay Spirit Visions hoped to be accessible to gay and bisexual men of all spiritual paths.



By November 1995, with six successful fall conferences behind us, we decided to incorporate. A charter was signed on December 22, 1995, 12:50 AM, halfway between the Winter Solstice and New Moon. After successfully navigating bureaucracy within the Georgia Secretary of State's office, we became legally incorporated as The Council of Trusted Elders of Gay Spirit Visions, Inc. in January 1996. Leading us that first year were Bernhard Zinkgraf as Presiding Elder, Epiminondas Sam Coppock as Bursar, Al Cotton as Recording Elder, and Treewalker Martin Isganitis and David Salyer as Elders at Large. The remaining charter members, or planners as they were called at the time, were Joe Chancey, Dandelion Bruce Tidwell, Jeff Glauser, Magic Boy Todd Kinney, Jonathan Lerner, Bruce Parrish, John Stowe, and King Thackston. The

council and planners also received advice and guidance from west coast resident and author Andrew Ramer.

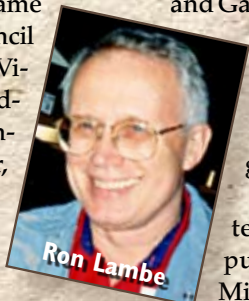
Over time, Gay Spirit Visions, or GSV as it is commonly known today, has evolved considerably as an organization. We began by organizing and facilitating our annual fall conference, but now offer winter and spring retreats, publish an online journal, *Visionary*, maintain Internet-based communications and sponsor a variety of events, including potlucks. Although we are an Atlanta-based group, our events draw men not only from the southeast, but the entire country and occasionally Canada and abroad.

### How it Began

Simply titled "Celebrating Gay Spirit Visions," our first fall conference in 1990 was inspired by a tradition of gay men's gatherings held from 1978 through 1989 at Running Water, a farm and retreat center in the mountains of North Carolina.

In 1978, Running Water owner Mikel Wilson invited a men's caucus from the Southeastern Conference for Lesbian and Gay Men to meet at his mountain homestead, hoping such a gathering would encourage discussion and exploration of spirituality and alternative gay male identities.

John Jones, Rocco Patt, Peter Kendrick, and Ron Lambe purchased Running Water from Mikel Wilson in 1979, desiring to live and develop an intentional community there. They incorporated as Stepping Stone, a legal entity holding the title to Running Water. Soon, twice-yearly gatherings were scheduled and Running Water became one of the sanc-

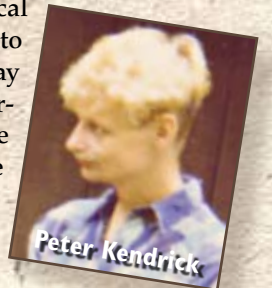


tuaries of the Radical Faerie movement. *RFD, A Country Journal for Gay Men Everywhere* was published at Running Water from 1980 to 1988. But by 1989, development around Running Water made large events there impossible and the land was sold.

Running Water was gone, but fortunately Stepping Stone wanted to sponsor an alternative event. Former Running Water dwellers Peter Kendrick, Ron Lambe and Raven Wolfdancer, all Radical Faerie veterans, hoped to keep the energy of earlier gatherings alive. But they also wanted to refocus and create a less anarchic, more structured event accessible to gay and bisexual men of all spiritual paths. A new location had to be identified as well. The Mountain, an affirming Unitarian Universalist affiliated retreat center outside Highlands, North Carolina, welcomed us after several southeastern conference centers refused to accommodate a gay event.

Harry Hay, founder of the Mattachine Society and the Radical Faeries, was invited to keynote the first Gay Spirit Visions conference (Harry's keynote address). There were also presentations by visionary writer Andrew Ramer and Atlanta poet Franklin Abbott. And although now traditionally held around the autumnal equinox in September, that first conference was held in November.

Gay Spirit Visions is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization.



# GSV XX

## GAY SPIRIT VISIONS 20 YEARS

OUR FEATURE



Second GSV Fall Conference, 1991

## 1990:

Year One GSV FRANKLIN ABBOTT

*"...we came seeking a common consciousness and with a sense of urgency to experience the vortex of our collective dreaming as spiritual Brothers. We marveled at our eloquence as we expressed our inner knowing as Gay spirit pioneers."*

—Raven Wolfdancer

*"None of us were welcomed into our tribe. This is our major job now, to clarify who we are so that we can welcome the succeeding generations, so that we can become the elders that we didn't have."*

—Andrew Ramer

*"I fervently pray that what we bring is pure Faerie in Spirit, and not reworked or warmed-over Hetero material garnished with a little glitter here and there."*

—Harry Hay

*"Remember the wonderful touch, taste and shape of the first man you touched who touched you back with equal desire. Remember your first love, the feel of his skin on your skin, the dissolve into passion, the surrender to climax, the lull into afterglow. Now remember another love—and another—and another—and another."*

—Franklin Abbott

Raven Wolfdancer's words introduce the booklet of keynotes from the first Gay Spirit Visions Conference. My words and those of Harry Hay and Andrew Ramer are taken from the three keynote speeches we gave at the conference. I am glad to have them as my memory lacks precision. What I can tell you about what happened that first time is this: we were more beautiful, more radiant and more full of grace and joy than we had ever been

before. I remembered that twenty years later when I stepped back into our sacred circle and fell in love again with all we were, with all we are and with all we are becoming.

—Franklin Abbott,  
All Soul's Day, 2009, Stone Mountain

## 1991

BOB STRAIN

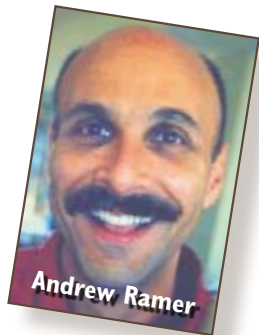
I thought I would cry forever in the closing circle. As a gay man, I had never felt so safe.

We were feeling pretty unsafe two days earlier. Gay, black, and urban, my best friend Ricky was anxious about a trip into the South. It didn't help that we spent a night in Lynchburg(!), Jerry Falwell's home. We got lost in the mountains between Johnson City and Asheville (there was no interstate there yet), and we arrived in fog to what seemed a deserted camp. Despite our nerves, we still felt called there.

Dinner Friday (the conference only ran Friday-Sunday then) eased our fears as we began meeting men on an incredible journey—gay spiritual seekers. Later, all 90 of us opened with a heart circle in the lodge (the upper treehouse didn't exist yet). James Broughton and Joel Singer presented a late-night festival of their beautiful films. We began to breathe and make friends. Many are still in my life.

Saturday was a whirlwind of keynotes, panels, and workshops by Andrew Ramer, Franklin Abbott, Charlie Murphy, Dave MacDonald, Don Shewey, John Stowe, Crazy Bear, Sequoia Thom Lundy, and others. How to choose? Saturday night featured riches of music, dance, prose, poetry, and costumes.

The community capped the evening with wild



Andrew Ramer



Harry Hay



Franklin Abbott



Bob Strain with Jim Jones

dancing and drumming under a full moon. Looking into the beautiful faces around the fire, I knew I had found a haven to which I would return often, safe and loved. And so it is.

## 1992

### MIGUEL MOLINA

It took three years of gentle probing from John Stowe for me to arrive at The Mountain. It was an amazing weekend full of opportunity to reconnect with so many friends who had taken divergent paths. Somehow we made it to GSV without having planned such a reunion. We were about 85 guys on the Mountain. That spirit of reunion continues to be my experience. That year and maybe a year or more after that, we had "Mo" with us singing opera from the top of the tower. Was that a concertina he was playing? I also remember that we had 2 hearing impaired men, who needed interpreting services. I was pretty rusty at that point, but thank goodness for all of the willing hands to rub my aching shoulders.

From the start I've always felt the love and welcome from The Mountain staff. Was it '92 that they respectfully asked us to keep our shirts on? Having come from Faeries' experiences, many would have been happy with a skirt or even less.

After 17 years, memories may merge. No doubt some are embellished, but these are a few sweet ones from long ago. In 2009 I am more comfortable in my skin than I was in 1992. I still enjoy the old history and still love creating new experiences with the men of GSV... I still love the wonder of it all.



Miguel  
Molina

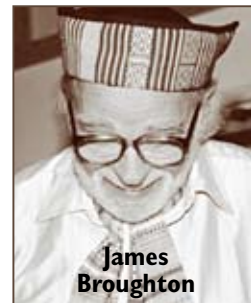
these men, and why did they seem to have all the answers? How would I fit in with this group?

In those days, Friday night was not a dance; it was a grieving ritual for those who were lost in the previous year. The weeping and wailing scared me a little at the time. Some really powerful emotions were swirling around me.

Tom Spanbauer was the keynote speaker that year. I had not yet read *The Man Who Fell in Love with the Moon*, so I felt a little lost but was able to get up to speed thanks to some of my new friends who had read it.

What stays in my mind most vividly from my first year is when The Mountain staff attended the closing heart circle and told us tearfully that we were the group that they most enjoyed having at The Mountain. Tears flowed down my own face as I realized how much the weekend, the men, and The Mountain had changed me. I likened it at the time to how my mom used to rededicate her life to Jesus every few weeks in church; she was so caught up in her heart opening to Spirit.

Finally, from my first conference I developed a long-lasting pen pal friendship with Dogwood (Mark Clinard), which endures to this day. I'm so thankful for all the meaningful friendships I have nurtured through GSV.



James  
Broughton



John Stowe



## 1994

### TIM FLOOD

My first GSV, September '94, a scattering of memories. Knowing no one, I'd read Al Cotton's article about Tom Spanbauer's '93 keynote in *The Voice*, serendipitously noticed at my Atlanta lesbian friends' home during a rare visit from Florida. Perhaps here were gay men like I knew must exist, because Del was one — Del now dead for 7 years. Winding up The Mountain road, nervously laughing, "another fine mess...!" Randy Taylor's banner across the road, magic in the trees, a part of me awakening, aroused. An apparition by the volleyball court: Cassandra alone in the trees hanging pink and orange things in the branches. Alone and scared in the cabin. Deep breath, arrive early for fire lighting, manage a big gay hello to a burly man who shies away only slightly and says, "I'm not gay, I work here." Oy. Treewalker lighting the fire, genuine reverence, Native

The original "Gay  
Spirits" designed  
by Randy Taylor

## 1993

### BRAD PITTS

My friend Sam Coppock first told me about the GSV fall conference he had attended in 1992. I myself was undergoing a spiritual awakening following many years of agnosticism. I was craving a nontraditional, spiritually enriching event for gay men, so I accompanied Sam the following year, 1993.

Not knowing exactly what to expect, that first night I sat on the porch of my cabin and wondered just what I had gotten myself into! Who were all



Brad Pitts



Tim Flood

American is here, great. Opening ceremony, small group leaders with long (willow?) poles in the air with banner-scarves, each an eco-system, nature and pageantry blended, fabulous! I'm in the "Wetlands" group, swamp thing, typical. Re-frame as turning point, the end-beginning point of the cycle, perfect! Voicing this in group, leader David Salyer looks at me like I have 12 heads. Whatever! (Any chronology ends here.) Andrew Ramer, "Faces of our Tribe," jokes that his head-shot in the brochure makes him look like Uncle

Fester. True! He speaks of the gay archetypes: Scout, Flute Player, Shaman, Warrior... the icons on King's welcome banner! Brilliant, creative minds, yes, yes, yes. David Sereda, singer/songwriter, gentle, tender, the heart is welcomed and honored here, yes, yes. Hal Carter and Kevin Greene, warming up for holotropic breath work in the lodge great room. Lying on the floor, we call out the hurtful names we've been called. Then we call out the hurtful

things we've said to each other. Truth telling, balance, so beautiful. Then breathing, sweating, purging, collapsing into David Baker's sweet gentle embrace. Body, home, yes. Drumming under David's protective shadow into the night, sex in the woods and in the air all around me. It ends, the name-forgotten mystic approaches, takes my drum-raw hands in his, bathes them in touch. At breakfast, a fellow drummer asks, "What?" He shows me his blistered and bloody hands. Mine, like a baby's ass. Oh my. A late night tree-house mourning ceremony for Raven's death by violence: Not knowing him, and looking to end my long grieving, I do not stay. The talent show, around the piano in the lodge great room... the shiny, the tender, the stupid... pure joy. Closing circle, the HIV-brother telling of his steadfast HIV-negative partner killed in the seat next to his own in a car wreck. Such hearts. Strong, facing illness and death and loneliness. And each other in shameless, teary-eyed loving. My people... some of them, at least... at last.

## GSV 1995

### Our First Christian Keynote

GARY KAUPMAN



If you are relatively new to GSV, you might look at the above title and say, "so why is that a big deal?"

Well, because GSV sprang from a Faerie/Pagan tradition and the folk who walked those paths did not find themselves greeted with open arms by most mainstream Christian churches. Raise that to the third power, if the Faerie/Pagan folk also happened to be Fey Folk.

Now, Reverend Malcolm Boyd was a pretty special kind of Christian what with his history of activism in the Civil Rights Movement. And the fact that someone of his stature in the Episcopal Church had come out in 1977 was a pretty big deal.

I remember John Brock (who was raised in Kentucky coal mine fundamentalism) telling Malcolm that his book "Are You Running With Me Jesus" had saved John's life as he tried to reconcile his feelings for men with what he was hearing about people like him from the pulpit of his family's church.

I also remember a dream visit from Raven at this conference (he was murdered in December 1993, so this was the second Fall Conference without him,) and him going on at some length about how much he admired Malcolm as a man, but that having him as a keynote was not at all happy-making. No surprise here, given that Raven had been raised Catholic and spent some time in Seminary as a young man. We never discussed it at length, but I had the impression that finding the Faeries had returned him from a long walk in the spiritual desert he had entered after he left Seminary.

Malcolm's partner, Mark Thompson, was a copresenter at this Conference, and in my memory, his presentation on Leather/SM/Dark Eros was at the hot heart of GSV this year. There had been Leather workshops at previous Conferences, but Mark's presence brought our level of erotic excitement and expectation to the highest yet. Maybe ever.

David Sereda (the queer Canadian musician,



Raven  
Wolfdancer





not the Canadian-born, American UFO guy) joined us for the last time. He came out in 1981, so like Malcolm, he was on the cutting edge in his work life.

Jesus, whips, and love ballads all presented by experts. Where else but GSV?

## 1996

### HAROLD COLE

Back in 1996 it was a big deal for me to attend a conference with such an abundance of talent, skill and showmanship. I was most impressed by the open-



Harold Cole

ing program, all of the drama. Then I was introduced to all the new relationships which were unfolding right before me. It was like being introduced to another world on a huge stage of a prominent drama. The speakers, the leadership, and the decoration of the tree house were beyond my imagination.

After the first shock of the welcome parade had worn off, I began to perceive some of the personalities involved, like Andrew Ramer, with whom one could talk and also play. The structure of GSV began to enter my conscious being and my transformation began. I was hooked.

I began to make new friends who introduced me to different perspectives, such as freedom to wear skirts or dresses, or just to be as outrageous as one felt like being and still be accepted by this strange community I had discovered. This acceptance let me know that I was home, safe, and a member of the tribe where I would always be welcome. I began to own some of my outrageous feelings and learned that I could speak to a group or a friend and still be acceptable.

The speakers, especially Andrew Ramer, brought tonal views to an expanding mind. It began to form

me into ways I was not used to, and at the same time I welcomed this transformation into freedom.

I appreciated all aspects of The Mountain, including the deck, the trees, and the care we needed to take to be kind to the ecological aspects of our physical space. I admired the structures of the programs designed by our leaders. And then came

talent night with a depth of talent I could not take into my being, except that I was sitting on Broadway and all the talent in New York was unfolding before my eyes. The shows were great and represented the wealth of talent of all who attended.

Then at the end we attended our Heart Circle and shared deeply with each other those dreams and values of life that GSV created just for us. Thank You GSV.



## 1997

### MATT HUFF

"Your heart is closed," declared the man sitting next to me at dinner. I was struck at the audacity of his statement seeing as I had just met him. He didn't know the first thing about me. Yet, his words stunned me, expressing in language exactly what I had been feeling for some time, but unable to say. I was 24 and had been out for about two years. Depressed and lonely, I was completely lost in the search to rediscover myself as a young gay man. It was true; my heart was closed, hardened after years of feeling confused, afraid, ashamed and isolated. I remember a sense of relief melting over me at that moment, amazed that some stranger somehow intuitively understood my wound.

"Your heart is closed," he said, referring to my heart chakra. "You should have Bernie Morin work on you. And you should hug trees," he ordered. I had no idea what he was talking about.

On Saturday, I found Bernie, a gifted shamanic healer and Reiki Master, and asked him to perform some Reiki on me. He generously obliged and we nestled ourselves in the solarium of the Treehouse. Although I believe in energetic healing, I also approach the idea with a healthy



Matt Huff





King Thackston

dose of skepticism. This moment was no exception. For most of the Reiki treatment, I felt nothing. I was disappointed by this because I wanted proof that something was happening, that I was being healed. Bernie finally placed his hands over my heart chakra. After a few minutes, I began to feel a tingling sensation. It was like champagne bubbles were rising up from the center of my chest. I thought I was imagining this, but no, the sensation was increasing. It was real. I began giggling. "Yes," Bernie smiled, "it's okay to laugh." And I did. I laughed and giggled like a child for a long time as I felt my heart opening up —opening up to feel hope again, to feel loved again, one champagne bubble at a time.

My heart has been open ever since.

## 1998

### GERRY COWLEY

I was born in Buffalo, NY in June 1939. I moved to Sarasota, FL in October 1994. The move was triggered by two occurrences. A sister, living in Sarasota, called to encourage me to move. Around the same time I had a simple dream of a large white egg that cracked open and a bird, fully feathered with extraordinarily beautiful plumage, emerged. Intuitively, I knew that the messages of the two occurrences were connected. I was to move and beautiful things would happen!



Gerry Cowley

Prior to the move I was closeted. So, at 55, it was time to come out to myself, my family and all other non-threatening inhabitants of my circle of activities. Though the decision was quick and irreversible, the process was and continues to be at a measured pace. I made friends quickly. I joined the Gay Men's Chorus. A friend from the chorus told me about GSV. He had never attended but wanted to. So we registered. I flew to Asheville, where he spends six months of the year. He, a friend and I drove to The Mountain in a van.

We pulled into the parking lot near the office. When we stopped, two guys standing close-by opened the sliding door, reached in, took my hands and pulled me out, yelling in unison, "WELCOME!" I felt like I was being born. That was September 1998.

At supper that evening, I sat across the table from a man a little younger than myself. His

conversation skills were extraordinary. He was articulate. His name was Don Clark. He was the keynote speaker for the conference. The whole conference was like that. I experienced my first labyrinth. It was meticulously laid out with leaves raked into rows and embedded with tiny Christmas lights so that we could walk the labyrinth after dark. My small group leader was Franklin Abbot. Andrew Ramer wove a magical spell with his words about our tribe, our "walks-between," two-spirited gift to the planet. I bought his "other" book, *Revelations for a New Millennium*, which I devoured at 40,000 feet on my trip back to Florida.

The beautifully plumed bird of my dream was singing in my heart. Fall GSV 2009 was my twelfth consecutive conference.

That's my story and I'm sticking with it.

## 1999

### DAN ELSWICK

As I drive up the twisty mountain drive, a banner says: "Gay Spirit Welcomes You." I am hopeful but overwhelmed —everyone is hugging.

The directions are called at the opening ritual —I feel the energy flow into the room. Ah, this group knows how to move energy. "Masks and Mirrors" is the theme for the conference, and only much later do I see how GSV has given me an opportunity to lift the "socially-acceptable" mask and look closely in the mirror, opening to my true self.

Watching the dancing by the fire, I sense a tribal heritage that is unspoken. Whirling energies flow from this ritual fire to points far beyond.

My cabin mates are free spirits. They dress in amazing outfits and open their hearts to me. Their example sparks a creative spark in me that burns for months after I return home. Other men that I meet here bring similar fabulosity to the fore. Remember painting our nails on the Lodge Deck?

Andrew Ramer, our keynote speaker, holds our hearts with words for the mind. Small group is a favorite time —Lion Heart has an amazing ability to hold us in a sincere and authentic space and just allow us to be. Thank you, dear one, for your many contributions to this tribe.

I drive down that twisty mountain drive, and this time a banner says: "Gay Spirit Go With You." It did. Thank you for 10 great years.



Dan Elswick

## 2000 PEREGRINE

I hopped in my VW alone and pointed it north into the mountains, fearful of venturing into terra incognita outside the Perimeter.

As I drove up past Clayton, I remember the waterfall and the butterflies-in-the-stomach feeling of anticipation at seeing other gay men searching for Spirit. Clouds quickly appeared to envelop The Mountain. I was driving into a mist-veiled dream.

I knew no one. As I pulled up past the dining hall, the first person I saw was Kraig Blackwelder, in a skirt. I was titillated, but terrified. I checked into my cabin and stayed by myself, weaving, as the welcome mailing suggested, my "energies with the spirit of The Mountain." Although alone, I felt an overwhelming sense of acceptance. I then met Acorn and I felt as if I met a long-lost brother across many lifetimes.

I wore a sarong for the first time that day. The Heartweaving had me in tears almost instantly as I mourned the loss I felt from not having experienced this before. At the opening heart circle, when asked for one word to describe why I was there, mine was "unveiling."

The drumming that night awakened in me a deep connection to "Tribe" and to the magical trees that danced with us.

I attended Bernard Morin's workshop on Reiki and knew instantly that I had found a sage and teacher, among many, many others who would come through the veil onto The Mountain every year afterwards.

Outside the Perimeter, indeed.



place. 150 men attended, and the first Winter Conference was scheduled. The program guide and artistic Treehouse transformation provided serene, yet captivating and inspiring supports. We actually were "the ones we had been waiting for." Strikingly, keynote Rudy Ballentine from New York—and having volunteered significantly in the aftermath of the collapsed structures and lost lives—provided us with particular and special insights into holistic healing. In return, we helped to support, nurture, and renew him. I experienced Conference XII as a deeply spiritual and conscious one, even as was the theme, "Grateful for Being One." The tender and loving energy of the weekend grew, opening us to each other and possibilities buried deep within. John Stowe, King, and Ramón were core planners. I sang and played Jacques Brel's "If We Only Have Love," being nurtured in my own giving. I remember distinctly not wanting to leave. We bravely saw and opened moments for tender,



compassionate, earth-shattering, and capable spiritual and unconditional love. I will not forget both this trying time and this hopeful, meaningful gathering. Thank you for the opportunity to remember and share the unique occasion of the 2001 GSV Fall Conference XII.



## 2001 GSV Fall Conference XII, BRUCE CHEEK



Expressly glad to return after missing the 1999 and 2000 Fall Conferences, I longed for the nurturing, expansive, and deepening GSV experience. The 9/11 attacks had just occurred. Heightened emotions and thoughts were received with exceeding warmth, compassion, and not-taken-for-granted sacred and safe space. We showed what the world could really be – a worthwhile, loving

## 2002 DARRYL HANSOME THE JOURNAL

Thur eve Sep 2002

We're here. But where in the hell is here? Corey insists that I wear this flaming red Ann-Margret-like hairpiece. It isn't going to happen. Ever! And there's this mist-like fog, so deep I can't even see my feet. There's a heaviness in it that's electric and alive.



Fri morn Sept 2002

Last night. So many men. So sensual. Walking



King Thackston  
as "Green Man"

blind, trusting, with candles to a ritual. So much sexuality. I forgot that I even had the wig on after awhile. Off to my small group, whatever that is. It's still foggy.

#### Fri nite Sep 2002

My small group leader wears makeup and women's hats. He's from Florida. Uh-huh. There are others in my group like me. Virgins. Wide-eyed with amazement and anticipation. Looking out from the perch of the cabin I can only see knurled limbs reaching out to me. Is there still a world out there? It doesn't matter.

#### Sat eve Sep 2002

My heart's erupted and can't contain my emotions any longer. Dancing with such abandon I've never witnessed before. Steve wears a new hat to each meeting and we love it. Listening to Andrew, it was as if I was again sitting on a park bench in Brooklyn being gifted with heartfelt slices of life. I knew the keynote speaker was addressing only me. I heard it all Christian. I'm told that there is a talent show brewing. We'll see.

#### Sat late nite Sep 2002

He took me up to the tower, and I saw stars in the hole in the sky.

#### Sun afternoon Sep 2002

The fog has finally lifted as the magic comes to a close. Tears run down my cheeks. Maybe, just maybe, they'll have me back.

## 2003

### NICK PATRAS

I arrived at the Fall Conference 2003 with a good deal of fear and trepidation, pushing myself to attend the gathering in response to an eagerness to deepen my spiritual awakening. As we drove up the winding drive to The Mountain, I felt my stomach knotting up, and realized I had no way of returning to the safety of Atlanta and the airport home. The famous quote: "That which does not kill you makes you stronger" kept ringing in my head.

As the weekend progressed, it was the small group meetings that provided me with a safe space to explore what I was feeling, and the opportunity to get to know seven beautiful and supportive men. By Sunday morning, it was as if I was seeing with new eyes and walking about a foot off the ground. I had attended several powerful workshops and witnessed a talent show unlike anything I had ever

seen. I had experienced intimacy and honesty in a potent and delicious combination.

I could have never predicted what a cathartic moment that last group session Sunday morning would be for me. As I began to speak, my tears began to flow, leading to uncontrolled sobbing. My heart had been sufficiently cracked open, allowing all the pent up fear, sadness, disappointment and longing to flow out. Without a word being spoken, I was supported and loved in a way so real and meaningful, I will never forget it. With each coming fall, I cannot wait to return to The Mountain to recharge and reconnect.

## 2004

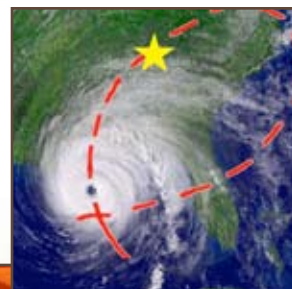
### ART BLUE

When I arrived to the fall conference, there was a buzz in the air about nude massage, a sweat lodge, and a morning self-pleasuring session. I was fearful of all three of these experiences and kept my armor securely on. My fear of such intimacy revealed more about myself than the other men involved.

During the weekend I attended a workshop led by Teddy Jones and Treewalker where there was guided imagery with ethereal harp music. During the workshop I received my metaphorical wings and was transformed from the fearful ugly duckling into the beautiful swan. There were tears of joy and celebration as other brothers received their wings as well.

Another workshop I attended was Andrew Ramer's elder workshop. In this workshop I got in touch with my inner elder and realized that

**Hurricane Ivan paid an unexpected visit during the 2004 conference leading to a little edginess balanced by romantic candlelight dining.**



within myself is the wise man who can mentor me intuitively on my spiritual journey.

I led a collage workshop where I had men make collages celebrating their sexuality and spirituality. I was amazed that some men were able to make collages with images of both, and yet there were men who had a hard time adding sexual images to their spiritual collages. Having been a conservative Christian myself I understood such resistance.

That weekend opened a portal for me as I began to work with Hunter Flournoy as a mentor who introduced me to the sweat lodge. And Jerold Soder also became my mentor as we explored tantric sex, which helped me connect my cock, heart and mind. And by the next year I was attending George Miller's nude massage. I am a true testament that "Shift Happens."

## 2005

### Journey to The Mountain

#### ARNOLD "DRAGONFIRE" PELUSO



Arnold Peluso

The 2005 fall conference was a "journey" that started with a GSV potluck and a heart circle in the spring of that year. I knew then that I had to attend the fall conference. Here is my story of that wonderful journey to The Mountain.

A few GSV brothers, whom I had met at other organizations, told me about GSV and invited me to check it out. Once I attended that first potluck, that was it. The journey had started. I soon realized that the big event each year was the fall conference. I had to attend. I had heard that "drumming" was a part of the gathering, which interested me. I had to buy a drum and learn how to play it, or at least try anyway. I was told that Craigalee played the drums well and he would be able to help me. To make a long story short, I contacted Craigalee, bought a drum, and took a few lessons. I was ready for the conference, or so I thought.

My journey continued. I was driving to this place called The Mountain. I thought I knew what to expect (weekend retreat with men), but it was so much more right from the start. The drive to North Carolina and The Mountain was beautiful and scenic with breathtaking views everywhere I looked; it gave me a peaceful sense of joy and excitement of what was yet to come. When I arrived I was greeted at the parking lot by a man I didn't know, who welcomed me. He said he was going to help unload the car and drive me to the top of the mountain. I was speechless. Someone was helping me. It felt great

and put me at ease. I knew then that this would be a weekend I would never forget.

The conference started with the opening ritual and lighting of the fire, a combination of Pagan and Native American traditions. It was impressive. I was excited and getting emotional at this point, joyful and feeling connected to this place and all GSV brothers. This was a new experience for me. I had never been on a weekend retreat/conference or even camping with a group of men. I felt the love and passion everyone had about being there. The lighting of the fire really got my attention, but I didn't know why, until later. Later that night after the heart circle, we moved to the main lodge to dedicate the Erotic Temple, led by Hunter Flournoy. It was a mind-blowing experience for me. To see the honor given to men acknowledging our life-giving energy and maleness was wonderful. It truly celebrated the Erotic Body.

The story of this conference goes on and on with one great event after another. They all held meaning for me, and I continued to get emotional and choked up many times when I tried to talk. I felt love and a connection with everyone. Now back to the fire; on my second day I awoke early, before anyone else in my cabin, I went out and started to walk. I didn't know where I was going but soon was drawn to the fire pit. I sat there and watched as it burned and started to think about my life and people I had lost through death or falling out of touch with them. I cried, but then I thought about the new people that I met here and a great sense of their love and acceptance came over me. I put some more wood on the fire and left. Throughout the conference I was drawn to the fire many times. For me it became a place to sit and meditate. It gave me power and peace.

The conference was a life-changing experience for me; I found a kind, loving, brotherhood of men. That is what GSV is all about. And the journey continues ... to The Mountain and back. Life will never be the same for me.

## 2006

#### MICHAEL "JUNEBUG" GILCHRIST

In 2006, the first thing I saw when I came to The Mountain was a red heart-shaped balloon that said "I love you." To me it said "Welcome Home," something I had been longing to hear. I had never felt at home with my family or my



Michael Gilchrist



straight friends or even the gay community. I was longing to find a deeper connection with men like me, men that love men. I started out as a man that fears men. But over the next couple of days, I was around 140 men that hugged me and touched my heart in a way I had been waiting for all of my life. I met many amazing men that year, but two were very special. One was Jeff Jacka, or "Tiger" as I knew him. He had told me about GSV. I came up to The Mountain to "surprise" Tiger and amazingly he was in my small group. It was a very powerful group that I will never forget. The other is Cassandra. I came to find out the red heart that had meant so much to me had been his. My first year at GSV turned out to be his last. I remember someone said that he commented that some of our new members "Didn't get it." I think he meant the indescribable essence of GSV. Every day I stop and ask myself, "Do I get it? Am I keeping the fragile essence of GSV alive in my heart?"



## 2007

### JOHN SCHUMACHER

I arrived to GSV in 2007 a complete neophyte, traveling almost 3000 miles from California to Atlanta at the suggestion and urging of my friends, Arnie, Frank and John. Although I was such a newbie, everyone was very nice. 2007 was my first introduction to the splendor and beauty of the nature and to the top of a mountain, at the ends of the earth. In 2007, all the guys seemed to be so nice and friendly – I



was on the go all the time. And that year Arnie Vargas, Duncan Teague, and Andrew Ramer gave their workshops in a triad, which worked out well, making even those groups small and intimate. I loved the self-pleasuring at dawn—a little early, but hey, a worthy cause seeing other men sleepily grab their dicks and slowly waken and enliven that organ too – as good as coffee! My small group was stupendous and we were all a mess, but fortunately for us, oh so willing to talk about it and work on it, which was great. I fell in love with an angelic harp player, but that did not translate outside The Mountain environment. The little cabin for sex worked great – one time I was there with a pagan, and another with a cute young hung massage stud from Atlanta, who took good care of me. The Parade of Beauty and Talent Show were great. I met many other great guys, and almost in a nanosecond it was time to go. Also, I got a mini-tour of the trails and cliffs from someone who knew them and was amazed by incredible vistas offered by the stunning location of The Mountain. The food was basic comfort food, but there always seemed to be too little. And, unfortunately, the head honcho that ran the festivities with an iron hand put a damper on any man who was trying to be uniquely impressive and artistic. All in all I had a great time in 2007.

## 2008

### MARK (THUNDER) ZUMBACH

Monday before the conference, Junebug called and said, "I think I need to prepare you for this." My reply was something like, "Uh oh, prepare me for what?" He blurted out something like, "Well, it's just that I've been talking up GSV for a couple of years now, and I just think it's so amazing, and I'm just worried that because you've never been, and you've only heard these great things from me—well, maybe you've got some unrealistic expectations."

Fair enough. We agreed that Junebug would give me a more complete "rundown" of what to expect. Halfway through, I stopped him and said, "Okay, so this is sounding like a 4-day Oprah show that will have me ready to cut my wrists."

Junebug replied, "Maybe I've gone too far in the other direction. You're really going to have an amazing time."

So, a couple days later, Yahoo map in hand, I raced out of work to head to The Mountain. Panic started to set in about an hour past Winston-Salem. "I could still turn around," I thought. But I kept going. Something pulled me forward—toward what?



At the 2009 Fall Conference, founders and brothers from Running Water Farm, where the seeds of GSV were planted, reminisced and shared stories at The Mountain. Left to right, front row: Craig "Craigalee" Cook, Franklin Abbott, Mikel Wilson, Gary Briggs, Peter Kendrick, Ron Lambe. Back Row: Martin Isginitis, Doug Caulkins, Bob Strain, Andrew Ramer.

Junebug needn't have worried. I had an amazing time. I met men, whom I immediately felt I'd known my whole life. I heard life stories that, while different from my own, were filled with commonalities – joyful and painful. I heard things from session speakers that changed me. And, in the end, I truly felt I'd come home.

## 2009 LARRY JOHNSON

2009 was the first GSV event for my partner and me. We'd done some Tantra workshops and Body Electric, so we were open to gay men together in groups. Because it was the 20th anniversary of GSV, I can't help but parallel many of the events of the weekend to the renewed interest in Woodstock, primarily through the remembering of the history involved throughout the weekend.



I've always been an avid reader, especially of gay fiction. In my pre-Internet days in western Oklahoma, it was as close as you could get to any revelation of gay life elsewhere. To hear that many of the names I had read about had been participants in GSV was moving and a reminder of the incredible debt that gay men in 2009 owe their forefathers.

It was a great experience to once again realize that gay men can meet in a positive environment without the cloud of alcohol or drugs and still have amazing experiences. The ability to openly express affection and allow one's inner being to emerge in a totally safe environment is uplifting and affirming. The opportunity to try on a new persona, perhaps by doing a bit of drag for the first time or participating in a meditation group when that's not one's norm, is also not to be minimized.

The experience was wonderful, and some of the friendships formed in a short weekend will likely last a lifetime. It is definitely an event to go on the calendar for coming years.



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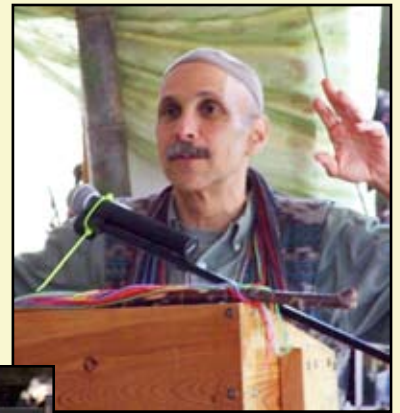
### In Memoriam

Gary Briggs of Asheville, NC died on Christmas Eve.

He was a participant in the original Southeast Faerie Circle. He attended the last GSV conference and shared his remembrances of the early Running Water days. Gary was gentle, thoughtful man whose well-considered convictions often led him to take meaningful action. He will be missed by many.

# THE 20TH ANNUAL GSV FALL CONFERENCE

OCTOBER 1-4



Photos by  
Lem Arnold





