

VISIONARY

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**Insights, Thoughts and Stories
about Same-Sex Relationships
by Men of Gay Spirit Visions**

VISIONARY

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Editors' Page

This issue of *Visionary* has been quite enlightening for me! Not only did the following six articles inspire me, but I also learned some of the ways to help make a relationship work. There's one about a new relationship and then men in long-term relationships write all the five remaining articles.

First, the story of Stitch and Bug reminded me of the excitement of a new relationship while helping me realize you need to make yourself emotionally available to be a healthy couple. In the remaining five articles, I read words of wisdom in how these men make their relationships pass the test of time. Though I am not currently in a partner/lover type relationship, I feel these articles have addressed some of the issues that negatively impacted my previous attempts at a relationship. This has given me a more positive outlook on the possibility of having a successful long-term relationship myself in the future.

Now let me tell you about a different type of relationship between my truck and a one-legged robin that gave me much joy earlier this year. While staying in Atlanta this spring, I started noticing a lot of bird droppings on both of the outside rear view mirrors of my truck. Soon I also noticed this one-legged robin on



By Al Taylor

one of the mirrors. It went from sitting on the mirror to flying in front of the mirror, doing some sort of dance ritual with wings flapping. As I watched, it would go from sitting on the rear mirror to flapping its wings up and down on the mirror several times and then began dancing around all the windows of my truck, always stopping for lengthier dancing at the rear-view mirrors. It would usually do this twice a day, first in the cool of the morning and then again as daylight was beginning to fade. Watching the one legged -robin dancing with my truck became a part of my day whenever I was home during its dancing times. This relationship lasted for over two months, ending only when I returned to live in Tennessee full time. In moving, I actually felt sad knowing I was taking the truck away from the robin. I had really enjoyed watching that dance.

The next issue of *Visionary* will be my last as Editor, completing a four-year term/relationship with this publication. At this point, a new Editor has not been identified, so if you have an interest, please let me or another GSV council member know. I will be happy to answer any questions you might have and can mentor anyone who steps up.

Please enjoy this issue of *Visionary*!

Al splits his time between Atlanta, GA and Farner, TN. He holds a dream of having a B&B in TN one day. He may be reached at albertdtaylor@gmail.com.

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.



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S. Bear Bergman

Writer. Performance artist. Gender-jammer. S. Bear Bergman uses humor to make potentially challenging subjects – like queer and transgender issues – accessible to even the most reluctant listeners. Author of *Butch is a Noun* and *The Nearest Exit May Be Behind You*, this observant Jew candidly chronicles the pleasures and dangers of living life outside the gender binary. Speaking from the intersection of identities, Bear is a storyteller for our times.

Hunter Flournoy

A self-described apprentice to Life, Hunter Flournoy is a teacher in the Toltec Eagle Knight lineage of Don Miguel Ruiz, a shamanic healer in the lineage of Rebecca Crystal, and a pastor for Amigos de Dios, a fellowship of Christian mystics. As a psychotherapist, Hunter integrates years of learning from indigenous spiritual elders, healers and shamans into his workshops on intuitive awareness, holistic healing and personal freedom.

Michael Sigmann

A visionary returns! Creator of the Men’s Inner Journey experience; founder of The Gateway for Integrated Consciousness; author of the forthcoming book, *Living on the Threshold: Homosexuality and the Preservation of Mankind – an exploration of sexual orientation and the evolution of the species*. That’s Michael Sigmann... intensely devoted to supporting the growth of gay culture on an individual and community level.

Visit **www.gayspiritvisions.org** to view our online brochure and registration information.



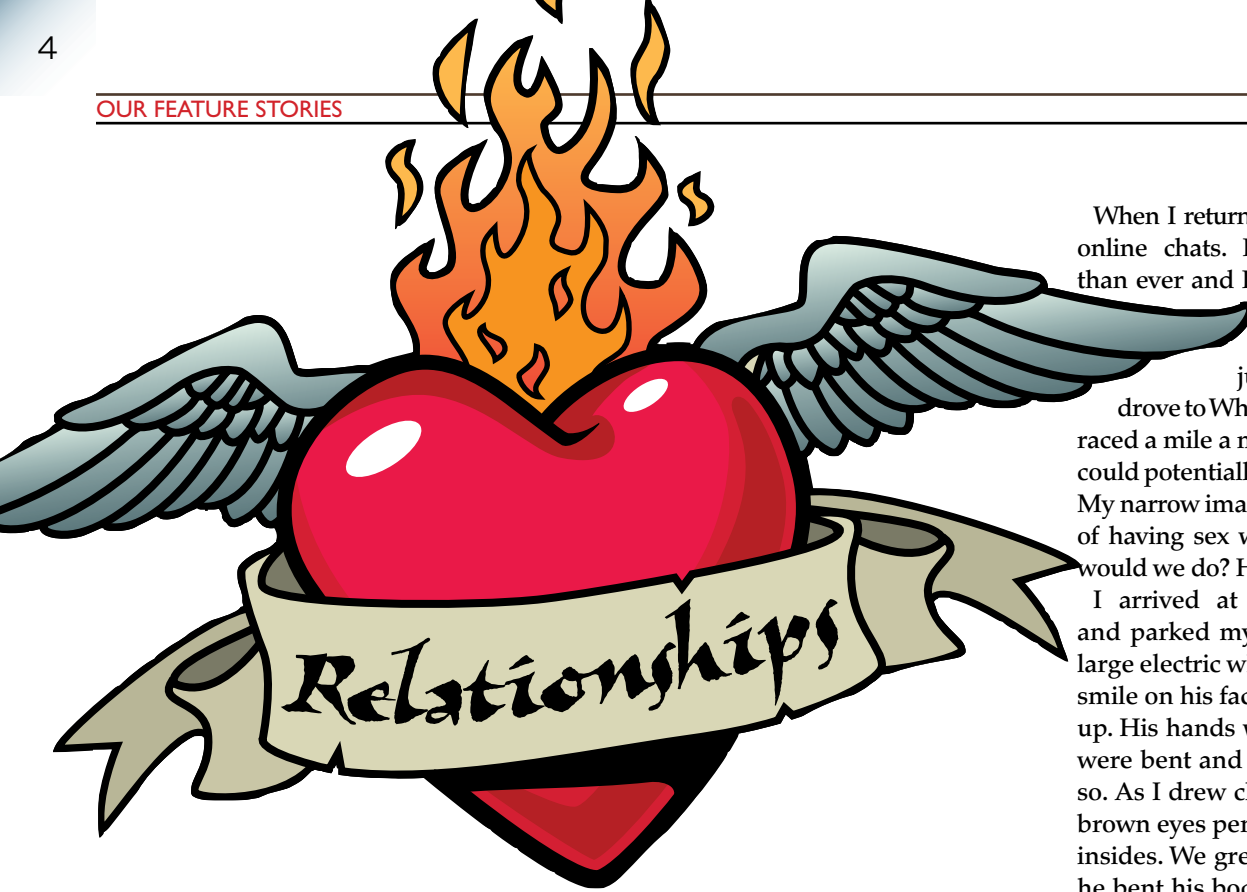
A brief note to the GSV community

The Gay Spirit Visions Task Force is meeting by conference call on a regular monthly basis. Twenty-one enthusiastic GSV brothers from around the country have made a commitment to shape the 2011 fall conference and develop a means for those outside of

Atlanta to participate. The intention is that this will become the accepted planning process going forward. Meanwhile, the current Atlanta-based GSV Council has the planning of the 2010 fall conference well in hand. So, take a deep breath with me and anticipate at-

tending Gay Spirit Vision conferences for years to come!

Thanks,
Jim Jones (Moon Dragon)
moonxdragon@earthlink.net



STITCH & BUG

I knew I was going to see him again!

Endless photos of headless torsos, butts and other revealing body parts scrolled by as I lolled about in a chat room. There was very little activity online when I got a signal that an IM was being started. I accepted the request from “Wheelieguy.” His photo was one of the occasional face pics I had scrolled past, but now I was studying each detail as we typed customary opening greetings. The photographer had caught his handsome face in the middle of an open mouthed laugh.



By Stitch and Bug

We chatted about our mornings and the weather, but then the conversation took a turn. Wheelieguy wanted to know, if we met, could I lift him into and out of bed. He wanted to know if I would be able to undress him and then get him dressed again. He said his hands didn’t work the same way as mine did. He was very eager to meet up. I evaded his repeated hints as

I was uneasy with what I’d gleaned were his physical limitations.

Summer’s journey through the calendar year continued with warm sunny West Coast days and my virtual chats with Wheelieguy continued. He was a young man with cerebral palsy living his days confined to a wheelchair. He lived alone and a helper came by to take care of his daily needs. I’d learned that he’d been successful in meeting men online, but they were all one shot deals. Each time we chatted, Wheelieguy expressed his interest in meeting. My mind swarmed with thoughts about how this would look to others. What would my friends think? I was concerned that by having sex with this man it could be conceived as me taking advantage of his disability.

I was out of computer range for the duration of an August trip, so there was no chat with Wheelieguy. As I went about my days, my thoughts continuously drifted to him. I played over our typed conversations focusing on his tenacity and eagerness. There was a pleasant tone to his wording that I realized had put me at ease about his unique physicality. My curiosity grew.

When I returned home we resumed our online chats. He was more persistent than ever and I agreed to meet to satisfy our curiosity. He typed, “I can’t promise I won’t jump your bones. LOL.” I drove to Wheelieguy’s home. My mind raced a mile a minute playing over what I could potentially be getting involved with. My narrow imagination couldn’t conceive of having sex with a quadriplegic. What would we do? How would we do it?

I arrived at his apartment building and parked my car. Sitting outside in a large electric wheelchair with the biggest smile on his face was my potential hook-up. His hands were little fists. His wrists were bent and hugged tightly to his torso. As I drew closer, his huge expressive brown eyes penetrated me, softening my insides. We greeted each other and then he bent his body sideways hitting a button on the chair with his forearm. There was an audible click and his apartment door automatically opened. He pushed his head into the headrest of the chair causing it to spin around and led the way into his home.

Wheelieguy rolled into the center of his living room and spun around to face me, still smiling. I was sure he could read the apprehension in my eyes. There was awkward silence as I took in the modest, clean apartment. Framed photos adorned the wall above his dining table. We’d typed a lot to each other over the past weeks, but now there was little to talk about.

He gave a laugh, those brown eyes alive with mischief, and asked if I wanted to lie down on his bed with him. I agreed. Again he hit the headrest with the back of his skull and the chair did an about face. He wheeled into the depths of his spacious apartment. I walked past the open door to his bathroom. A life sized cutout of Seven-of-Nine from the “Star Trek” franchise stood guard next to the open doorway of his bedroom.

Wheelieguy had parked his ride next to a large single bed. He directed me as to how to disengage him from the chair. I folded footplates out of the way so his feet could touch the carpeted floor. I undid the seatbelt that held him securely in place. Then I bent over and made my first body contact. I put my arms around his rigid upper chest and embraced him tightly. I

lifted him to standing; surprisingly he was heavier than I'd anticipated. He directed me to pivot him around and we were in a kind of herky-jerky waltz, his socked feet dragging on the floor. I got him turned around and he told me to put him on the bed. I placed (really, more like dropped) him on the comforter. My forehead beaded with sweat. This was tough work.

He asked me to lie down beside him. I took a place on his right.

"I have a joke," he said.

"Oh yeah?" I said, or something like that.

"Why am I so good at golf?" he asked. I shrugged.

"Because of my handicap," he broke into a big laugh that caused his body to shake and jerk, his big eyes alive with excitement and anticipation. Then he said, "You can take off my shirt..."

This amazing man unabashedly guided me through each step of our first encounter. I walked away dazed and somehow transformed. As I pulled my car out of its parking spot, I knew I was going to see him again.

Stitch has been active with the Faeries for the past five years. He was fortunate to have a story published in the anthology, Charmed Lives, edited by Toby Johnson and Steve Bermen. Stitch recently took on the task of editing the first-ever Canadian edition of the RFD. To reach him: tstone@shaw.ca

Bug (Ronnie) lives alone in his comfortable apartment with his cat, Duchess. Since meeting Stitch last year, the two have traveled extensively from Seattle, to Oregon, down to San Francisco and eventually ending up at the 2009 GSV Fall Conference. To reach him: ronniecurtiss@hotmail.com



What I **Think** I Know About Relationships

I've been teaching college level courses in interpersonal communication for over twenty-five years. In those courses we typically cover as many areas of and contexts for interpersonal communication as time will allow. The one area that generates the most discussion from my college aged students besides family communication is relational communication



By Scott Dillard

and in particular romantic relationships. The young are typically exploring the boundaries of what romantic love has to offer and are both intrigued and mystified by the experience.

In all that time teaching the course I have to say that I have evolved in my stance and approach to talking about romantic relationships. And I think it would be a safe bet that it always had something to do with where I stood in my own romantic life as to what I would say. Oh, sure, I cover all the usual theories of love and relationship development in pretty much the same fashion each time but if I was in a rough patch in my own life I just might spend a bit more time on some of the more negative aspects. Conversely, if I were in some euphoric state of romantic bliss, I would wax eloquently on the virtues of cultivating romance, love, and intimacy.

What my classroom teaching doesn't reveal is what I really believe about long-term intimate relationships. After being in a relationship for fifteen years, here are a few things I know for sure.

One, relationships are never complete. By this I mean that you never reach a stage where the relationship takes care of itself. It needs constant maintenance.

Two, relationships can never give you everything you need in life. If you depend on one other person to fulfill all

of your needs in life you might as well hang it up right now. No one person can be all things to you. You need friends, family, co-workers, and acquaintances to round out your life.

Three, partners need time apart. If you spend every waking moment together you run out of things to say to each other. You have to go out and live your own life so that you bring something fresh to the relationship.

Four, let it go. When you are irritated by your partner, ask yourself one simple question, "Does this really matter?" If you have to think even for a second about the answer to that question then I would say, "No it doesn't. Let it go!" You will save you and your partner a lot of time. For those of you who know Chris and me, that applies to the proper way to put toilet paper on the roll.



And finally, deal breakers are not really deal breakers. What you set in stone at the beginning of a relationship will change over time. What you thought your relationship could not weather just might be the thing that ends up pulling you closer together. Relationships take work and the work is part of the joy and the journey.

Rev. Dr. Scott Dillard is an Associate Professor of Rhetoric at Georgia College & State University and is an interfaith minister serving Unitarian Universalist churches in the Southeast. Scott may be reached at scott.dillard@gcsu.edu.



There is a saying that happy families are alike, but unhappy ones are each unhappy in their own unique way. I'm not certain that this is strictly true. Still, there are certain attributes of relationships that tend to mark them as successful.

Intimacy has been described as an unarmed encounter between two vulnerable people. Vulnerability isn't easy for men; we fear getting hurt or losing ourselves. Healthy intimacy is a dance that honors and enjoys our partner while not losing our sense of who we are as individuals. We need to be able to trust the other and to know that our heart is

safe in his care. Despite the two-becoming-one mythology around relationships, we also need space to be our own person within the union; a bond that requires surrender of individuality isn't

love, it's a hostage situation! Men face different challenges from women: many men tend to be good at maintaining individuality (perhaps at the expense of deeper intimacy), while many women tend to value connection with the other (sometimes at a cost to their sense of individuality). That means the dance of intimacy that same sex couples do may not look exactly like the dance we see in mixed-gender couples.



By John Ballew

What makes a relationship **healthy** and **happy**?

An ability to put the partner's needs on a par with our own is something healthy relationships have in common. This rarely means splitting decisions right down the middle; it's more likely that I give you what you want sometimes while I get more of what I desire on another occasion. We needn't keep score, but we have a rough sense of balance that works for us. When things get out of balance, we talk about it. It sounds obvious, but relationships flourish when each person is influenced by the needs and desires of the other – not to the exclusion of our own needs and wants, of course. But it isn't unusual for relationships in trouble to become power struggles where acknowledging the partner's need feels like a loss or display of weakness.

Communication between lovers is vital to healthy relationships; most of the couples that come to me for help are quick to mention better communication among their goals for therapy. Communication involves an ability to speak our truth to the other, to express our desires and needs in a way that helps them to get met. (Of course, knowing what your desires actually are is an important first step here, and not always an easy one.)

Equally important is the ability to listen to what the other person is saying, and to be able to respond. We long to be understood. We get into trouble when we forget that our partner needs exactly the same thing. If your partner believes you are trying to understand him when he speaks to you, he is much more likely to feel safe and to respond to you out of that sense of security.

This can be quite a challenge when emotions run hot, which is why some couples fall into the trap of avoiding conflict. While most of us dislike arguments, an ability to express differences in a way that helps us to work things through is a critical attribute of a successful relationship. Handling differences or disagreements with skill helps to keep a relationship safe and growing. Avoiding conflict

often results in storing up resentments and grievances. One or both partners start withdrawing from the relationship and it begins to weaken.

When conflict arises in a relationship we face a choice. We can move away from our partner into a self-protective stance, retreating and licking our wounds or battering down the hatches hoping the storm will pass. Or we can move toward our partner seeking understanding, reminding one another that we share love and commitment. Move-away-from or move-toward is a crucial choice. A commitment to working things through and to each other's well being helps to keep a relationship safe for intimacy. If every disagreement results in a threat to leave, the relationship will not feel like a safe and trustworthy place. Love rarely survives in that environment.

Finally, passion is an important component of enduring and "juicy" relationships. It's not unusual for the erotic energy to shift in a relationship as the partners grow more familiar with one another and the everyday demands of life intrude on the passion that may be all consuming early in a relationship. Passion in long-term relationships rarely looks like it did during dating, and it's important not to have that first rush of novelty and limerence become an unrealistic standard. Over time the ratio of cuddling to hot sex may change – or it may not. But happy relationships find a way for physical intimacy to continue and flourish.

It's certainly possible to be happy and healthy without a long-term, committed relationship. But it is in committed relationships that we find some of the greatest opportunities for growth and fulfillment.

John R. Ballew, M.S., is a licensed professional counselor in private practice in Atlanta. He specializes in issues related to coming out, sexuality and relationships, and spirituality. Visit www.bodymindsoul.org or reach him at (404) 874-8536.

Pondering Gay Relationships

Listen to me, brothers. I have some thoughts to share from my current visit here on Earth and several previous life episodes on my home planet of Gaia, where gay is the norm and where there are only a few of the others.

Both here and there one can hardly talk about relationships without talking about family. "What is family?" That is a question I often raise when I am teaching social work classes, usually on Planet Earth. Well, in gay culture today, there is quite a list of forms of committed and uncommitted relationships. There is the closely matched age-pair who seem to have chosen each other because they look so much alike. There are the daddy/boy mixed generation pairs with much variety in types. There are single persons with a few intimates, some sexually expressive, and some not. There are the recent types of legally married couples and domestic partners. In my Earth friendship circle, there is a three-some that has been happily together for 30 years. I also know some bisexual persons with a stable partner(s) of both sexes over many years in small town Georgia. Then again, I know several Latino "casa chica" or "casita" situations where a man has an official, public relationship with a woman and also has a long-term relationship with a male, but in a more private way. Some particularly talented gay Latino men manage to keep the tradition with two male partners instead of a male and a female. There are also well-documented group marriages in which both men and women have long-term multiple partners who share a home and child rearing. Let me say that on the planet Gaia we have all these relationships and no one type is considered the standard.

Most of the above relationships have existed somewhere on Planet Earth for centuries with the exception of some of the recent legal innovations. Which is



to say that human beings have been experimenting with relationships since the origin of the species. However, gay men have been particularly creative with relationships due to being outside the power structure and common social definitions for most of official history. We have used the status of outsider to exercise the freedom to experiment, and some gay men living today have experienced almost all the relationship/family types mentioned so far – in one lifetime.

So, in view of the great variety and flexibility of gay relationships, what could be viewed as a normal gay relationship? Well, I don't think there is any such thing, at least on Planet Earth. We might do better to talk about a relationship ideal that both (or all) partners would view as healthy. I suggest the following characteristics:

1. Commitment to the good of the other(s).
2. Commitment to work at staying connected.
3. A core of common values.
4. Mutuality in trying to meet needs.
5. Recognizing a rhythm and flexibility in each other's needs and desires.
6. An agreement, explicit or implicit, with some parameters around the relationship.
7. A communication system that works for the relationship.
8. Respect for the other's variations in degree of need for intimacy, security, support, and sexual expression over time.
9. A working strategy for negotiating sexual expression and intimacy.

So what are the reasons that gay men do not develop healthy relationships more often? Well, we all come from some sort of family of origin and bring the same struggles into our relationships as hetero couples do. We unconsciously start behaving like our parents. Ugh! All that mess to work through. No wonder so many of us are in therapy so much of the time or that about half of us seem to be therapists. Then there is the following list of issues I drew up with some of my therapist colleagues from back home on Gaia.

Threats to healthy gay relationships:

1. Different degrees of being out. Poor

prognosis for enduring over time unless the two parties can evolve into living in the same phase.

2. A split between sexuality and intimacy. Having different people for each.
3. Two macho persons with control/dominance struggles over the definition of maleness.
4. Unclear agreements about the boundaries of the relationship or discomfort with the lack of clarity.
5. Extreme rigidity about the boundaries of the relationship.
6. Spiritual/emotional growth of one party in a different direction from the other party.
7. Attachment to the heterosexual model (The belief that the only difference is that the two parties both happen to be male). Disaster waiting to evolve: two males can never behave like a male and female in a relationship due to lifelong socialization.

Now, I regret that I must end. I could write a long book on each of the threats above with suggested strategies that we use on Gaia, but back on Gaia we have fewer constraints about time and space. For now I must end. Of course, you may enroll in one of my relationship seminars, or make an appointment for personal or couples therapy, or read the book I am writing, "Vipers, Snakes, Serpents, and Heterosexual Models of Relationships." Or order my newest CD on self-hypnosis and expanding your relationship potential. Okay, okay, I really must quit.

P.S. I have references, if you are interested, but this is a seminal piece with traces of many scholars and schools of thought. By the way, Lem and I have been together for over 15 years. It was all the buzz back on Gaia when they heard that I was getting together with a Texan. We are so different that it is entertaining, even to us. We defy all the theories and are happily planning our retirement together. We never had a wedding, and all our friends who did have split so we do not recommend it. Come to see us in the country.

Pat Boyle is Professor of Social Work and Dean of the School of Social Work at Dalton (GA) State College. Pat has been an ordained minister since 1980. He continues to serve in community ministries, especially with the frail elderly. He may be reached at dboyle@daltonstate.edu.

Affairs of Significance

He turned to the audience and I recall the moment he said he believed homosexuality to be a threat to the church and not consistent with Christian values. He did not sound belligerent or angry and I remember him smiling. The words literally cut through me. We were in a public forum, a panel discussion, so screaming or fainting would not help the situation. I turned to the audience to seek out some support. I had to because he, my fellow seminarian, Rev. Jeffery Hood, Jr., a proud Southern Baptist, did not have a



By Duncan Teague

Photo by Sarah Smith

clue as to the pain he was inflicting.

This was an incident that occurred since my time in seminary. It was not a typical occurrence because I attend a theologically moderate, but rigorous

academic United Methodist seminary at Emory University. My point recalling this moment is to share a time when I had to deal with the feelings of those comments in that moment but more importantly at home that evening. Could he have been sincere? Those comments scared me and had me wondering about with whom I am attending seminary? How many feel like this? I was better able to face this and several confrontations and what felt like attacks because I come home to a husband, David, who cares and supports me fully. At times he loves and gives in ways I do not understand or fully grasp. I have rarely in my life had someone whose love for me has come with such a firm commitment to my total well-being.

This adventure of attending graduate school and pursuing professional and academic ministerial training means I am turning my life inside out for the sake of doing what I feel called and affirmed to do. I contemplated and worried about it as an individual, but every decision about actually doing it has been in the context of my relationship. We have the

luxury of many years together and belief that our relationship can sustain such a major life course change, and it has. I raise this point because if you are in a relationship and called into a new vocation or ministry, that calling impacts the relationships you rely upon most.

Also if you are being called into a new depth of commitment or service, you are being called out of your old comfortable life. That was my experience; the life I had was starting not to fit well. I did not fear my relationship but I knew “we” were going to have to deal with this “calling.” We, David and I, are adjusting to the increasing levels of change to our lives as I am progressing through graduate school. The plain truth is my ability to do this now emotionally, spiritually, and especially financially in the ways we are choosing to do it is because of the love and care I have from my David.

My calling was getting rather loud and specific. With or without David, the messages were very clear but I cannot imagine what this would have been like without him. So, I am called but *we* had to answer it. *We* are preparing for what my ministry will look like and how it will be best pursued with our collective life at the center of it. It may seem simple but our society does not prepare men to work in a sense of compromise and cooperation.

Gay men in relationships have to come to terms with the reality of two men attempting to do what we were not reared to do—be in cooperation emotionally with another man. The heteronormative, cultural default of heading a household with a female partner leads many men to believe we should rule ultimately in the home and in our lives. Our radical gay, spiritual natures buck this ancient idea, I hope, and the sexist foundations that keep this kind of tyranny in place.

I want to acknowledge the men who rely on the emotional and spiritual support of dear friends and not just a romantic partner or partners for deeper levels of support. When I thought about how I might manage as a Black, gay, Unitar-

ian Universalist at my United Methodist seminary without my husband, I immediately thought of my true friends. They are the folks who have been by my side for years and who helped me determine my calling. They have been crucial to where I am and where I am going. Our gay and allied friendships are crucial.

At the incident mentioned earlier—cultural competency discussions where my colleague, Jeffrey, took the risk to honestly share his religious beliefs about homosexuality—we were given an opportunity. Jeffrey shared the challenge of bringing a voice that is seldom heard among the more liberal ones at our seminary. He had been ushered from his first choice of seminary because he dared asked questions that challenged their conservative theology. Despite his rhetoric, he was concerned about not just dogma but relationships.

Jeffrey and I had lunch. I was surprised at how relaxed we were with each other. His girlfriend offers him the same challenges and support my husband does for me. It was also beautiful that we sought our humanity and our vulnerability while we shared our stories. He never said he hated gay men or lesbians; he might have been misunderstood to have said it. Some may have interpreted his words to imply support for their hatred. Our lunch was why I chose to go to seminary. I sat there not with a doctrine or a set of dogmas but with a young man. I shared the love I have for my husband and David’s love enacted every day for me. There was nothing my conservative friend could have said to change that. Jeffrey actually wants this profound love we share to be the method of change for conservatives. What an idea that Christians learn loving from gay men.

Duncan E. Teague, of Atlanta, is a longtime supporter of GSV, as a leader, keynote presenter, and small group facilitator. He is currently pursuing the Unitarian Universalist ministry and will be completing the Masters of Divinity program at Candler School of Theology of Emory University next spring. Reach him at DuncanEric@comcast.net.

Relationships and Same-Sexers

Gay marriage has been a political hot potato in the years since the appearance of HIV in 1981 changed the agenda of gay liberation and turned the focus from free sex to committed sex and, maybe more importantly, brought attention to the reality



By Toby Johnson

of successful long-term relationships among gay men and lesbians that challenged the anti-gay stereotypes of homosexuality as a path to loneliness and isolation. As a political strategy to gain

gay equality, the campaign for same-sex marriage has resulted in terrible electoral defeats with laws passed all across the country against recognition of gay relationships; and those elections, by bringing out the “conservatives,” also got anti-progressive politicians elected – George W. Bush only the most noticeable. In a way, this has been a disaster on a whole variety of fronts; the issue has been taken over by opponents of gay rights in order to mobilize voters against all progress.

On the other hand, politics aside, the focus on gay relationship has had wonderful effects in the lives of real gay people. We’ve come to understand that the anti-gay stereotypes were wrong and that we can rightly expect success in our relationships, if that’s what we want (not everybody does). Indeed, a new stereotype is developing that gay people are likely to have more success at relationship than straight people; our divorce rate is much lower compared to theirs.

The depiction of gay people in the media has changed from drag queens and scantily-clad men in leather harnesses on floats to middle-aged lesbians and cute couples in tuxes demanding to pledge troth in City Halls.

My partner, Kip Dollar, and I have been such a couple. Together 26 years now, we’ve ridden that wave of gay relationship success. In the early ‘90s, when we ran the gay and lesbian community bookstore in Austin, we were poster boys for gay marriage. In 1991, in a zap for the gay political caucus we were denied marriage licenses, on national TV; and in 1993 were the first male couple, along with female counterparts, to register as Domestic Partners in Travis County, the first such in the state of Texas. I’ve been proud of the model for happiness and success we’ve been able to provide, especially to youth just figuring out what their gay futures were going to be like. We get asked what’s the secret to our relationship.

The political defeats notwithstanding, I think the worst thing about gay marriage is the conflating of heterosexual and homosexual relationships as though they were equivalent and shared the same basic psycho-spiritual-sexual dynamics. I don’t think they do. I don’t think traditional marriage offers a meaningful or suitable model for gay men or for lesbians.

We understand sex differently; we have a different model for what our partners mean to us and their places in our lives. The fundamental model of marriage that most heterosexuals embrace and famously proclaim as family values just doesn’t apply to us.

Heterosexual marriage is based around the emotional attractions of the opposite poles of the male-female polarity. This is about having complementary organs of reproduction. The emotional bonding of man and woman fills the missing half of each in order to create the one whole being, which then gives birth to new life. Heterosexual marriage is about bonding at the level of reproduction and subsequent creation of a nest and household in which to raise children. This model of the family is traditionally hierarchical and structured. The male and female

partners have roles specified for them by their sexual function in the relationship.

Gay relationships are not based on this kind of attraction at all. Sexual attraction is not about the complementarity of the physical organs. Gay people don’t have sex in order to complete a bio-hormonal process. Our sex is not about glands and organs. Our affection isn’t about social function. Though out of fun and expression of interdependency we might use the cliché, gay people don’t see their partners as other halves, with body parts and traits and gender-defined roles that complete them.

From a traditional perspective, like that of St. Augustine for instance, gay sex then has no function; and even straight sex should be entered into only for the purpose of fertilizing the egg in the female, and done in a way that gives the minimally necessary amount of pleasure for the male to perform his function. But that’s missing the point of what sex is as a state of consciousness. Even for straight people, sex is mostly about pleasure and neurodynamics in the brain. Nobody has sex anymore the way Augustine recommended. Dr. Ruth Westheimer has replaced the saint as sex counselor.

It’s these neurodynamics that gay sex witnesses to. Our sex is about sharing that pleasure with another body, because the presence of another body (either in reality or in imagination) is what gets those processes in consciousness going. And that shared pleasure of coming to orgasm is good for us. Its healing physically and mentally and good for those around us – a satisfying sex life helps us be happy and kind to others. Understanding this difference changes the context of how we hold our relationships and has practical consequences for issues like monogamy, jealousy, togetherness, interdependency.

The stability of the family is a priority for child-rearing. Monogamy and the objection to sex outside the marriage (adultery) arise from the agreement to create a family. It’s about saying no to anything that threatens the nest. Outside the context of child-rearing, monogamy means something different. Gay monogamy may be a much looser idea.

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Literally, monogamy (one relationship) means no other lover, not no other sex. In our world monogamy is not based on the nature of the relationship itself, but on the partner's needs and expectations. It's an agreement, not a law. It arises from compassion and the concern not to cause pain to one's partner. In practice, this kind of monogamy may look like heterosexual monogamy, but the motivation is different. The former is based in a rule, the latter in a feeling. The first you have to obey; the second you respond to automatically. The first is about saying no. The second requires faithfulness, but offers all sorts of possibilities for mutual experience—three-ways, shared sexual adventures, etc. It's about saying yes. The issues of health and sexual hygiene that ensue are motivated by concern and responsibility for one another in the partnership, not just fear for one's self.

There is mutuality in our experience of sexual desire and attraction: both partners in a gay or lesbian relationship can find the same other person appealing. That my partner finds another man attractive doesn't have to threaten me. It's not about me. We can both share the attraction to him. Ideally, we let go of jealousy, feeling secure with our partners that we can share these experiences of life together. The marriage model suggests that a husband admiring another woman is adultery in the heart; and adultery in the flesh demands the Draconian penalty of terminating the relationship. The heterosexual couple can't share the sexual attractions.

Gay people can share enthusiasm for sexual experience and for self-pleasuring, for instance, and enjoying porn together. Same-sex partners have mutual interest and similar styles, opposite-sex partners, at least conventionally, don't. For gay men especially, porn provides a safe and non-threatening way for a couple to participate in each other's experience of male sexuality, to have some experience of the novelty that makes sex so appealing, but in a context of stability. We aren't bound by the rules that require that sex be reproductive. We don't have to have intercourse every time we have sexplay together as the only possible way to be sexual together. We don't necessarily have to perform for one another.

And because, as same-sexers, we share talents, skills and styles rather than being divided into sex-role-defined opposite functions, we can experience a heightened togetherness. Indeed, if there is a problem with gay relationship, it may be a surfeit of togetherness and intimacy.

In Archetypal Psychology terms, gay love and sex is about seeing one's Self in one's partner. That is, seeing that one's partner is an expression and manifestation of consciousness just as one is oneself. In Evolutionary Spirituality terms, it's "God's" realization that He's the consciousness in every being in the universe, for the universe is "God" evolving into God and discovering himself in everything. In this sense, gay relationship has mystical overtones different from, though parallel to, the reproduction and upbringing of new life.

So about the "secret" of our relation-

ship, Kip and I laugh at an ongoing joke about being Chip and Dale. We are together almost all the time and, while we have different things to do each day, we share doing most of our business and chores, working together on most projects, being extra hands and extra eyes for each other.

And we are intentionally affectionate with one another. Every day we kiss and hug; we say, "I love you" frequently, especially when one of us is leaving the house. (What if he's hit by a bus? It's a dangerous world out there; these should be our last words). I think expression of affection is a sure technique for increasing affection. It's axiomatic that if you want more affection, be more affectionate.

I think the "secret," if there is one, has been a mutual intention to stay together and, therefore, not let little points of conflict ever become big (there's that saying about not going to sleep angry). We share a common goal of experimenting with the possibility of creating our own model for life-long love.

Obviously, legal recognition of gay and lesbian relationships is a legitimate demand because such relationships involve legal issues of ownership, taxation, finances, personal responsibilities, but the model for our relationships shouldn't be traditional marriage.

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Reflections On A Mens' Spiritual Retreat

We were never so happy as to see Frank and Tom's smiling faces greeting us at the Las Palmas Airport the afternoon of April 8th. After 24 hours of travel, we were on the last leg of our journey to Los Almen-dros, the men's clothing-optional resort in Playa del Ingles, Gran Canaria, and the neat red-tiled bungalows we would call home for the next ten days.

The Canary Islands are a volcanic archipelago about 175 miles off the coast of Morocco. The sands that form the beach dunes on Gran Canaria, the largest island, are brought by winds blowing across the Sahara desert. There is lots of sun, a cool breeze, and spring and summer-like weather year-round.



By Teddy Jones

Our host was Arnie Vargas, and the plan was for this to be the first international men's retreat on the Canary Islands. The theme: Spirituality and Sexuality. As it turned out, all attendees

were from the states, and many are GSV brothers—Kurt, Tom W., Arnie, Tom G., Ian, Barry, Frank, and me.

The workshops, led by Ian, Arnie, Kurt and myself, focused on movement to release and realign our bodies with the energies of the earth, giving and receiving intimacy in mutually respectful ways, using sound to release and bless, and healing through mutual focus and meditation. There were many powerful and intimate moments.

There was also lots of time for fellowship and fun around the dinner table and swimming pool where others from England, Scotland, Brazil, France (the French diving team was a particular treat), Belgium, Germany, Italy, and Spain socialized with us. Americans rarely visit the Canary Islands because of their distance from the states, but to Europeans they are "Florida."

After the workshop, Arnie and his friend "Josemi" took us on two wonderful day trips around the perimeter of



the island. On the first we visited Mogan, a seaside resort and marina with crystal waters, brightly painted buildings, and flower-covered bridges over canals that made us think of Venice. There we enjoyed our first true Canarian meal and sunset at the beach. Next we visited Galdar, the ancient capital, whose excavated prehistoric village and *cueva pintada* (painted cave) are in the middle of a busy city. Afterwards we traveled to the blue and white fishing village of Agaete, where we ate a lunch of local produce—tuna, fresh sardines, octopus, calamari, and delicious flan—while overlooking the volcanic formation called *dedo de Dios* (finger of God).

Nightlife in Playa del Ingles centers on Yumbo, the ground-level floor of a shopping center that features cruisy open-air cafes and restaurants surrounding a square of artists and artisans. Our favorite haunt was Ricky's Cabaret

featuring karaoke and hilarious drag shows with a sharp-witted deejay called Peggy from Manchester who heartily welcomed us Americans. Our last night together we dined for two hours at Mundo, a local restaurant, whose gay waiters and chef made sure our evening was delicious in every way. It was a perfect way to say goodbye to Gran Canaria and our memorable time together.

For more about Arnie Vargas and his retreats and services, visit ajvargas.com.



Arnie Vargas

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Photos by Lem Arnold



