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the many fabulous things IN THIS ISSUE

Oooh, no! Not another "No place like home" gag!

But this one was worth it. Hats (or maybe shoes) off to Mike Goettee for dragging yet another strange cover-design idea, kicking and screaming, into reality. Which brings us, very indirectly, to the point.



By Tim Flood

For many of us, the mention of "home" might evoke exactly that response... kicking and screaming. For others "home" may mean only delicious warm hugs scented by fresh from the oven cinnamon buns. I'm guessing that most of us fall somewhere in between, with a grab-bag mix of both.

Mindful of this, we asked ourselves... why do we so often hear in heart circles that guys feel "This is home" or "You are my family, my tribe." Given the range of what home and family might *actually* mean, I don't know how literally to take these statements. I know, of course, they are sincere expressions of gratitude in and of the open-hearted space we create and share at GSV. But then we thought it might be fun to explore the different ways in which the emotion of these statements is true... from the perspectives of several of our brothers, in the *Visionary* tradition.

So! We will hear in this issue about "Home and GSV." From Greg in Atlanta, as one of our fabulous newcomers to GSV and fresh from the experience of his first Fall Conference. From Zach in New Orleans, who has been coming to GSV, brilliantly, for a few years now but who could not attend this year's conference. And from Michael in Raleigh who has been a regular for a good while now, although regular is not the first word you'd use for our very own Junebug. And from dear, wise Bernard in Ontario, whom we saw at our 2010 conference, but whose

way south to us, for many years prior, was ridiculously blocked by the border police. (*est ridiculum.*)

Now that you are in this city-hopping mood, enjoy hearing about the transforming of Atlanta's potlucks into "Gatherings" from John Bennett. And about Asheville's (AAMOS) peace, love, and harmony... and lots of guys!... from Roger Beaumont. And about Chicago's new blooming from Kraig Blackwelder.

We also have a brief update from the "Elders Who Walk Between" and the Transition Task Force. Plus a few pix from both the Spring Retreat and the Fall conferences. Along with reminders for Winter, Spring and Fall for 2012.

If you have read this far... you fully qualify to come and play with us on the next issue of *Visionary*! This could be as simple as sending me (Tim) an email with a theme idea, or helping to chase down a few men to write to a theme, volunteering to write on a theme, or letting me know something I've missed on Facebook, even though, I swear, I do try. You get the idea.

I'll close by sending up my own mighty YAWP of gratitude. For men I am privileged to know who will speak so sweetly of and to one another, as they have on these pages. For my fellow "fools" (remember Fall 2010?) who willingly and obligingly bump about with one another on the Task Force, surviving petty annoyances, finding their way back to why we bother, to joy. For GSV, which for all its warts, all its growing *and* aging pains, has brought so many gifts to my life, as it has been to so many others. Blessed be.

Tim Flood has been in the habit of traveling to GSV from St Pete since 1994. He facilitates intra-organizational teams, is a certified Enneagram instructor-coach, and will usually laugh at your jokes if you give the slightest hint you might reciprocate.
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Task Force Update

By The Walk Between Elders And the Transition Task Force

We are calling year one of Task Force efforts (and those of many GSV brothers not formally attached TO to the Task Force) a success.

Our plan was to keep basic systems in place, and to insure that the Winter, Spring and Fall gatherings at the Mountain would take place, to see if there was a purpose and a future for them. With this same decision came the intent to sharpen the focus of these events to the spiritual end of the GSV value-spectrum.

With participant evaluations in hand from the Fall Conference, the first year cycle is complete. And we are quite happy with the results.

Over 2/3 of the Fall participants responded to the online evaluation survey, a very high response rate. New to the survey this

year was the call for worded comments on each of the "rater" questions asked. In total there were over 700 comments made... participants not only took the time for the survey, they cared enough to add their personal thoughts as well.

This says something significant: there is, apparently, plenty of energy available to keep GSV moving forward.

Some specifics are of interest. There were significant numbers of comments on changing the trance dance to a "sweat your prayers" format. All appreciated this format and the experiences it created. Another topic drawing a range of reactions was this year's format of the keynote speaker's facilitating four sessions for the entire group. Reactions to Darren Main were overwhelmingly positive: several men also expressed a de-

sire for more of the small group interactions which the workshops provided in the past. We have things to talk about!

One word to sum up the array of other comments might be "gratitude." For the men of GSV, and for the myriad benefits that time together in sacred space provides.

We on the Task Force feel that same gratitude. We are heading into this next year with renewed motivation to keep the train rolling, and address the many lessons learned this past year. The "Arc of Spiritual Practices" introduced at the Fall Conference is set to continue as plans for the Winter and Spring retreats gel (see notices in these pages) and will punctuate in ways as yet unknown on the dates set for Fall 2012. Hope to see you at one, or all of these events.

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 an online journal, and maintain Internet-based communications for men who love men.

The Gathering: Creating Space for Brotherhood

Or how the evolution of Atlanta's potlucks into a gathering of spirits was my own personal lesson



Paul started it all with a phone call. “John, when the GSV Council dissolves, the new task force will focus on the conferences. Atlanta is on its own. If we want the potlucks to continue, we will need to coordinate them separately. Will you take this over?”



Oh, God. “Paul, I don’t even like the potlucks. I only go when I don’t have anything else to do and I’m in the mood.”

And that was that, I thought. If the potlucks continue, they continue. If they die, they die. I didn’t really care.

But, Paul’s request kept gnawing at me for the next several weeks and over several get-togethers with my friend. “OK, Paul, if I do this, the potlucks need to be different. I’m only interested if we try to create a space for the energy we find at the conferences. I’ve always been struck by how that heart connection doesn’t carry over to the potlucks. After all, that is what makes GSV GSV. I’m not interested in planning just another dinner. If we create that space, and the spirit of

the conferences comes, OK. And, if it doesn’t, the potlucks can go the way they will go.”

The focus would be on community rather than eating. We would make a space where we could join our hearts, not just fill our tummies. We would foster brotherhood between men who love men. It would no longer be “the potluck” but would become the Gathering (or more specifically, the GSV Atlanta Gathering), because it indeed would be a gathering place for a community of brothers. People would want to come because they didn’t want to miss it, didn’t want to miss the open-hearted connection with their brothers.

“Do whatever you want,” Paul said, “but make sure you have food, or people won’t come.”

And there I was, feeling scared, regretful, inadequate and sticking my neck out where it just might get criticized. Not a good spot for someone who consistently plays supporting actor to the lead. And, I knew if I stayed in this frame of mind, all this would be a disaster.

So, what did I need to do? Well, it became obvious to me. I needed to get out of the way. You see, for years I have been meditating, attending growth workshops, looking at my stuff in therapy. And,

I’ve actually made real and significant changes in the way I relate to my world. Frankly, after 40 years of this, I don’t hear much new anymore, and I don’t run across too many techniques I haven’t tried somewhere somehow. It is time I stop pretending that life and growth are a mysterious mountain to climb with an elusive reward at the top. I cleared out the clutter long ago. It is time just to do it. Or, more to the point, get out of the way and **JUST LET IT BE DONE.**

Because, you see, this Gathering stuff had nothing to do with me. Just like I wanted to turn the potlucks into a container for the spirit of GSV, I needed to do the same thing with myself: just get out of the way and let me be a container for whatever inspiration or tasks were needed for the potlucks to evolve, or not. No neurosis allowed. No self-interest. No control. No ego. No investment in the outcome. As someone who will be accepting a GSV elder necklace in a mere two years, it was time I stopped pretending I am not a spiritual adult. That was what had been calling me all along, not a potluck.

So, I got to work. Paul suggested I form a planning group on the model of the conference task force. Paul, Jim, and Wendell signed up. We had only one rule: If you take on a task, it is yours to get done as you see fit. Over a few one-hour conference calls, we set out a new structure of ritual to create heart connection, all very significant but all very subtle in order to avoid any big, jarring change. We added a heart weaving, often around a theme, to connect brothers. We changed the way we read the mission statement to emphasize our common purpose. We focused on greeting our brothers and making connection when we say our names in the opening circle. We ensured we set an intentional and open-hearted tone in the evening greeting. We planned special quarterly Gatherings in a setting with the space to have more elaborate rituals, such as

GSV News and Information

a full heart circle with the talking stick. And, we made sure none of it interfered with dinner time!

Before you knew it, the tone of "the potlucks" began changing. Whether the brothers were aware or not, those of us watching saw people starting to relate to each other more deeply. Brothers started staying later and later, started giving feedback about how important the evenings were, started making suggestions about the rituals. Brothers living an hour, even two hours away, attended. New brothers came to the Gatherings, and then came back again and again. We filled the hosting schedule without even trying. The planning group began to grow. First Plamen, who was altogether new to GSV, then Luther, then Scott.

Next up, off-shoots of the Gathering community began to appear. A gay men's meditation group started with significant support from GSV brothers. A Facebook group sprang up spontaneously through an Atlanta brother and had 196 members in two days. It continues to have daily postings and discussions. Atlanta Gathering planners

began sharing experiences with a new group forming in Chicago.

And, in what seemed like the blink of an eye, my original container was filled, and other planning group members stepped up with their own containers, offering new ideas and enthusiasm to take the Gatherings to yet other levels of community in the future. (Stay tuned!)

Since the writing of this article,

the Atlanta Gathering has continued to prosper, with 40 men attending the September Gathering at Franklin Abbott's house to weave their hearts with poetic readings. For the October Gathering at Owlwood, 50 men attended to embrace and share their pride with each other on Atlanta Pride weekend and to continue the aura of the previous week's Fall Conference.

If you would like to participate in the Atlanta Gathering planning group, please join our one-hour monthly conference call at 7:30 p.m. on the first Tuesday of each month by calling 1-619-276-6333, pin ID 4788276#.

As I write this, I am visiting two GSV brothers along the New Jersey shore. Last night, Paul texted me that 23 men had driven the hour and a half to Jim's house to commune and walk the labyrinth at the back of his property. I had run into several of them the previous weekend, and they didn't want to miss the Gathering, despite the distance. They acted like I was crazy to think they would skip just because of the drive.

This GSV Atlanta Gathering ... it's just starting. But, we are on our way. As I read Paul's text message while I sat at the Jersey shore, I felt the greatest peace knowing my Atlanta brothers were sharing in the open-hearted community of Gay Spirit Visions.

John Bennett attended his first GSV event 10 years ago, a heart circle with 20 GSV brothers. Since then, he has made many friends in GSV and looks forward to making many more. He currently is the facilitator of the GSV Atlanta Gathering Planning Group, and lives in Atlanta with his two children. johnb223@gmail.com

GSV/AAMOS:

Asheville Area Men Of Spirit

Sitting on my desk as I write is a small ceramic urn containing ashes from the last three GSV retreats which I attended...mixed with ashes from the smudging ritual which we have incorporated into each monthly meeting of the Asheville Area Men of Spirit (AAMOS).



By Roger Beaumont

GSV and AAMOS have become an integral part of who I am as a mature gay man.

I came out really late in life (62 years old) and I did so with much trepi-

dation about loss of community and connection with my family of origin, my own family of 4 kids, 17 grand kids, and one great child; not to mention my work community as well as my "church" community.

Therefore finding a group of gay guys where I could be totally myself and still be loved and respected has been and continues to be extremely important to me.

My first contact with Man Spirit was in '04 when I would travel from Franklin, NC to Asheville. Jerold Soder and William Perry were co-facilitators of that



group and thanks to their continued monthly efforts, I knew I would never be alone because Man Spirit would always be there for me.

Oops. Six to seven years later, Man Spirit was losing its current leadership and momentum with the passing of Gary Briggs. Continues on next page.

GSV News and Information

Then I attend GSV and learn that that pillar of support was wavering, given the desire of the traditional Atlanta-centered leaders to spread responsibility to other areas of the country. That's when the connection between GSV and AAMOS became clear.

The primary reason for being of the Asheville Area Men of Spirit is to provide a local safe haven for gay men. The Heart Circle provides that monthly. Yet, beyond that, each meeting allows discussion of how we can be of service to the larger community, namely GSV.

It is evident that many of our local brothers cannot afford the time or the money to attend a GSV conference. Therefore much of our focus has become to find ways to support the few who can attend a conference, and to encourage

them to bring back the gold as well as the ashes and to find ways to share that with all of AAMOS. Our respected elder George Miller has met with AAMOS on several occasions and with his advice and encouragement, we are committed to continue his work in the area of Sacred Intimacy.

Another agreement of AAMOS, now 43 members strong, is to be a welcoming community to anyone of our GSV brothers from other areas who might want to visit the Asheville community. We are a safe haven (some call it The Bunny B&B) where you can come for some quiet or even to have a little fun. Any one who might be interested in forming his own local community is welcome to experience AAMOS first hand. Michael Lott came for a visit and subsequently start-

ed the Knoxville Area Men of Spirit (KAAMOS).

The well-know phrase, Family of Choice, resonates strongly with me.

I just don't know if I would still be around if it were not for my gay buddies who show me love and support, every day. I feel safe with any man who is involved with either GSV and/or AAMOS, for I am assured that they understand the balance between sex and spirit. Let's continue to support each other. YEAH!

Roger Beaumont spent 38 years in education in Florida before retiring in 1998 to live full time in North Carolina. Now, he spends most of his time keeping up with his various communities and playing host to "the world." Feel free to contact him at rogerinthenow@gmail.com

GSV Chicago: A New Branch on a Lovely Tree



by Kraig Blackwelder

I stumbled into Gay Spirit Visions over a decade ago, and between conferences, retreats, board meetings, and pot-lucks it became the core of my social and spiritual life in Atlanta. It fed my

soul in a way that nothing else had. In 2001, shortly before moving away from Atlanta, I participated in a beautiful ceremony at King Thackson's home in which he, Meadow, and TreeWalker invested me with the spirit seed to start a new branch of GSV.

I was honored and excited to act on my new investiture, and at the time it felt like the next branch of GSV might be sprouting at any minute.

Within a few months of leaving Atlanta, however, the three Ms – moving, money, and men – distracted me, and the notion of starting a new branch of GSV grew increasingly remote until it was just another brimstone-scented paving stone smoking in my heart. I assumed that any city with a significant gay population

would have something approximating GSV, in which case creating a new branch of GSV seemed like a lot of unnecessary work.

When I returned to Chicago in the spring of 2002 I began looking for a group of men that would feed my heart and soul the way GSV had in Atlanta. I lived in Chicago's extensive gay neighborhood, and I had my ear to the ground, but, for what I was looking for, Chicago was a desert. There didn't seem to be a playful, nurturing, heart-centered organization for like-minded men anywhere in the Windy City.

That being said, I had met several men who seemed to be looking for the same thing I was looking for, and that warm, wonderful group for which we all hungered bore a strange resemblance to



Gay Sprit Visions.

"Hmmm..." thought I.

Years had passed since my investiture at that point, and it occurred to me that my window of opportunity for creating a new branch of GSV was not infinite. The deaths of King Thackston and John Stowe reminded me of that. After nine years away, I came to the Fall Conference in 2009, primarily as an act of remembrance. I assumed going into it that it would be a one-time thing.

And when the GSV energy wrapped

GSV News and Information

around me like a hug from the loving Divine I was left wondering how I ever could have let myself get distracted from such sweetness.

My first knee-jerk impulse was to create, single-handedly, a new summer conference near Chicago. At some point, happily, common sense asserted itself enough that I realized that I had put the cart before the horse. While the GSV Summer Effulgence was a lovely notion, a consummation devoutly to be wished, it made more sense to build a community first and then have a celebration. I attended more Fall Conferences, and got a clearer sense of what I might create and how I might create it, and it occurred to me that I already knew dozens of men who were just as interested as I was in a heart-centered group like GSV, all I had to do was pull them into my dream.

There's an app for that. It's called Facebook, and through the miracle of online social networking, I started building a community.

"Hey," I would say, "there's this great group I belong to based in Atlanta, and I'm thinking about starting a branch here," and I would give them the Gay Spirit Visions URL. They were intrigued. The idea resonated.

I was very careful about the men I invited. In the fullness of time, GSV Chicago will become what it will become, but I wanted the initial group to comprise the sweetest, warmest men I knew, and so it was.

On the 13th of August, GSV Chicago nudged its way out of its dream egg and into reality as four men went on a road trip to the Milwaukee Art Museum for a day of fellowship and, later, shopping, as we stopped off at a fabulous Asian emporium. It was a small group, but every man had the qualities I associate with Gay Spirit Visions; they were open, gregarious, curious, and warm, and at the end of the day I was left with a sense that GSV Chicago was off to a very auspicious beginning. It was strange to realize that I was making something this magical happen, but it was strange in a good way, and I wanted more.

The next step in the process was to get regular GSV events happening in the Chicago area, and on the 8th of October

GSV Chicago held its first Gay Spirit Vision Potluck Gathering.

I was nervous. I felt like I was expected to epitomize Gay Spirit Visions for all 11 of the men who showed up that night, and I found the notion quite daunting.

The spiritual core of the evening would be the heartweaving, and I had only participated in, not facilitated, heartweavings before. I had seen them done by men I would consider grandmasters – folks like Michael Siggman and Hunter Flournoy – and I certainly had never conducted one before. This, it occurred to me, is where the rubber hits the road. This is the demarcation between being a spectator and being an agent of change. I talked with several men including Tree-Walker and John Bennet about what was involved in a heartweaving, and I asked for input on the GSV Facebook page, and armed with that wisdom, I stepped into the unknown.

The unknown, as it turns out, was surprisingly friendly. The October event, including the heartweaving, went off beautifully. The chemistry clicked, Spirit flowed, and men connected. The other attendees had never experienced a GSV event, and yet they began weaving their threads into the fabric of a beautiful new community that felt strangely familiar to me. It shocked me a bit to realize that GSV Chicago was really happen-

ing. The fact is, the principles underlying Gay Spirit Visions don't just work on The Mountain, they don't just work in Atlanta, they work wherever there are open-hearted gay men on a spiritual path. I believe gay men have a particular need for this kind of community, and it's amazing to watch the spirit jump from heart to heart like a divine spark.

We're now less than a week out from the next GSV Chicago event, and the prognosis looks good. More men are coming to this event than came last month. The number of RSVPs is creeping up, the word is getting out, friends tell two friends and they tell two friends, and so on and so on....

Before the summer of 2011 Gay Spirit Visions Chicago was a dream; now it's a reality. Men who had never met now know each other. Men who had never experienced a heartweaving now have, and will continue doing so. Men who had never tasted this kind of connection are being awakened and fed. The seed that was planted at that ritual in 2001 has finally germinated, and something lovely is growing in Chicago.

Kraig is a Gothic hippie Burner witch living in Chicago. He stumbled onto the magic that is Gay Spirit Visions in 2001. He wants more. kraigblackwelder@hotmail.com





“There’s no place like home.
There’s no place like home.
There’s no place like home.”

Ascent, **Dance**, Labyrinth

Ascending the Mountain

In 2008 I looked in the mirror and discovered that I liked the person looking back at me. A magical and sometimes difficult awakening of being a man in my own eyes; I entered into my Spiritual adolescence. Through much soulful laughter and tears of transition I am finally able to love, appreciate and celebrate all that I am and all I am becoming. As Spirit tends to move me forward, I found myself lead to “camp” in the Fall of 2011 at The Mountain retreat where I found my place within the GSV Tribe.

As with many, I was brought to The Mountain by a GSV brother. John Rivest and I drove from Atlanta talking of love, challenges and other elements within our lives. The winding, beautiful roads of the North Carolina Mountains were shrouded in an ominous mysterious fog. My senses heightened with anticipation. Balloons, rainbow ribbons and the faint sounds of men’s laughter comforted me. In this mystifying environment I knew I was “home”. Walking into the warm glow of the Tree House, I felt the shift from the misty outdoors into a warm, energized Sacred Space. The energy between these men filled my heart with thoughts of Heaven and I found myself experiencing overwhelming Joy! It was time to settle in, get some rest and start another journey. Waking the next morning to clear skies I was astonished by this mountain paradise; incredible views of highland ridges and forested valleys beneath this camp perched on the crest of a mountain. The fresh mountain air soothed me.



By Greg Fields

The Dance

Dancing like a young boy. Playing without worry or concern of the opinions of others, I found the Saturday night dance one of the most powerful experiences. I felt young, renewed, loved and wanted. I felt the power of a tribe and the safety of The Sacred Container created. I felt proud to be a gay man. The culmination of uplifting and celebratory emotions expressed through movement leading to the crescendo of brothers gathering around Bug transcending into the incredible “OM” moment where all the men in the room simultaneous toned with their voices, amazing. There were fleeting moments of innocence shared with glances between men. There was appreciation of beauty and admiration in the movement of bodies as amazing expressions of joy and freedom. It felt like an all Gay High School Dance where it was not only safe to be gay but it was wonderful and NORMAL. I could finally and authentically celebrate being a gay man with my brothers.

The Labyrinth

My Christian heritage gave me pause to this experience. Walking a Labyrinth is a far cry from the Stations of the Cross and yet the power of the space frightened me a bit. This Pagan ritual just might soil my Christian undergarments. Add to that a small insecurity that I would just not get “it” I entered this ceremony with trepidation. Well, my dire expectations did not happen.

Midway through the walk I felt the tickle of tears flowing from my eyes. As I passed each brother on the path, tender, sweet moments of embrace brought the experience to my heart. I was getting it. I mindfully continued the path, celebrating it, breathing it in, and leaving me hungry for more.

I experienced so many sweet, incredible moments. Whether it was watching Plamen attempt to get his “drag stride” down with Scott or gently coaching himself myself. Perhaps the quiet moments in small group, feeling love and patience in the room or watching Stitch’s energy flow during the dance as he bounced in joy from one side of the room to the other. The gift of a sunrise when I did not expect it; the innocence of watching a delightful talent show in a room filled with brothers from different spiritual traditions and paths. We sat on top of a mountain, watching with love as we entertained and delighted one another. So many sweet moments and beautiful men, many I did not have the opportunity to meet during the short time on The Mountain. I trust these individual fellowships will come in time and that Love will hold the space for it.

Gratitude

At present, as I write this, I am very thankful to Spirit for bringing me to The Mountain and my Tribe. My journey has been rich and blessed. I am in Love with so much and I will do all I can to be a loving member of this tribe—to make myself and my heart available to my brothers—holding space for both joy and difficult moments. Since returning from The Mountain I have been busy with this love affair between brothers and I am very happy to have my place in this “Home”, at this table, where the love is always warm and the “kitchen is always open”.

Currently Greg is enjoying a sabbatical. He enjoys photography, writing, friends/family and is enjoying his spiritual adolescence thoroughly! He has lived in the Atlanta area for the past 17 years. Greg found GSV in 2011.

Home: a Prose Poem

"Home. Let me come home. Home is wherever I'm with you."

—Edward Sharpe and the Magnetic Zeros

Home. Hmm. That's a difficult one for me. Growing up, mine was a military family; we moved from state to state or country to country every few years.

As my sense of my own queer nature matured, I felt increasingly isolated and alienated, especially at home. My



By Zach Matteson

parents were not consciously homophobic, but their insistent heterocentric sensibilities often-times seemed to supersede even common sense, and taught me to distrust the larger

heteronormative paradigm from an early age. I suffered severe bouts of depression and misdirected anger (mostly at my undeserving sister). In hindsight, what I really craved but had no vocabulary for was safe space. Space where I didn't have to fear my father's unpredictable but inevitable rages. Space in which to write my poems of exile. Space I could sneak other boys into.

And when I managed to find it, I guarded it obsessively, even aggressively—locking my bedroom door by force of habit. My mother, recently relating a story of my high school self, quipped that I grew increasingly difficult to punish as a teenager, since sending me to my room only fueled my desire to stay there. In fact, if I remember correctly, she banned me from eating anywhere in the house except the dining room, so as to force me to take meals with the rest of the family.

Whenever anyone asked me where I was from, I often claimed Massachusetts, which is where my sister and I spent the bulk of our childhood summers with my father's extended family. But now, more often than not, I simply say, "I don't know," which strikes me as a far more hon-

est, if complicated, answer. Since leaving home a decade ago and striking out on my own, I've developed a real sense of questing for that elusive hometown I never could answer to. I've since traveled the world on my own terms, visiting Holland, Greece, Thailand, South Korea, etc. But what I've discovered in my often desperate attempts to anchor my name to a physical location is that home or safe space is largely a state of mind, rather than a State of the Union.

And GSV has a lot to do with that conclusion. I don't mean to undermine the very real spiritual connection between the self and the physical world, and indeed the gorgeous backdrop of The Mountain offers a very real healing experience for those who are open to it; however, it is the spirit of kinship and camaraderie with my fellow men-who-love-men that revitalizes my faith in the all too often abstract concept of home.

I am home when I come to GSV. Not because I know every other brother's name. Not because the piano's delightfully out of tune. Not because I've kissed and hugged and cuddled and made love there. GSV is home to me because I'm free to be whomever I choose at any particular inkling. I've been the nervous novice and, in the same evening, the vixen in a red dress. Like many other brothers, GSV was the first time I dressed in drag, the first time I cried in the arms of another man, the first time I learned the long, illuminating history of my own kind. If one defines home as a source from which to glean lasting life lessons, GSV has taught me both to honor my own idiosyncrasies as well as to break the chains of my own restraint—to let go of baseless fears, to love, and to let love.

When my best friend Myron (who had been one of the first Evergreens) asked me to join him at a Fall Conference, I was not an easy convert. I feared being treated like a piece of meat, or worse yet, like an infidel at some exclusive coven. And truthfully, it was only through his kind, persistent prodding and reassurances that I

decided to join him, and—three conferences later—I couldn't be more grateful for his invitation and encouragement. I've never once been made to feel ostracized or objectified at GSV. I can be honored for my beauty as I honor the beauty in others. I can sit in on a casual conversation or slip away to the labyrinth for some quiet self-reflection.

Without gatherings such as GSV, I would feel very lost indeed in a world too often rapt in saccharine-sweet excess. My generation of LGBTQ is particularly prone to superficial exploits, and GSV offers one of the few substantive alternatives. These conferences sustain a culture which transcends race and age. My experiences at gatherings are at once spiritual and sensual, intelligent and intuitive. I may not be "from" The Mountain, but since attending GSV, "being from somewhere" is no longer the standard by which I measure whether I'm home.

Crazy Horse is supposed to have said, "My lands are where my dead lie buried." But aren't we all just billion-year-old stardust? I say home is simply a fellow traveler's campfire offered honestly.

Zach earned his Master's of Arts in English Literature in 2010. He is a prolific poet, photographer, musician, and college instructor who has founded private Creative Writing Workshops, both in the States and abroad, for more than a decade. He currently lives and works in New Orleans. zachmatt14@gmail.com



Home: Worn Smooth

Home was a hiding place when I was young. When people came and rang the doorbell, my family would hide and be silent until they left. I didn't know what we were hiding but I knew that people weren't welcome because they would judge us. I think it was something silly, like the house wasn't clean but that seemed like something unforgivable.

Being the only gay person I knew and the only one in my family I did not have



By Michael Gilchrist

any allies. I hid inside my family and from the world- until I went to college, I went to a gay bar because of all of the stories about finding my gay family. I found a lot of unhappy and unfriendly people that were also very unkind. I learned how to survive in the bar but never felt at home. I hear people tell stories about how they found their community through the bar but that never happened for me. Maybe part of it was that I chose not to have lots of sex. It seemed too risky. I was scared. I felt even more isolated thinking that if I could not connect at the bar, there was no place for me in the gay community. I felt the same thing about being a slut—if I was not a slut I had no place in the gay community.

When I came to GSV for the first time I found something I had never seen before. Gay men that will look you in the eye and smile from their heart. Gay men that will hold you and hug you and

touch you and not necessarily expect more. Gay men that tell their truth however painful. It was a beautiful, beautiful thing and sincerely for the first time in my life I was able to be at home. Home is a place I come back to after a long trip. A place I can relax and be myself- put my feet up on the coffee table—enjoy a midday nap on the sofa. A place that is worn smooth with familiarity. A place of comfort and peace. GSV feels like home. What would the world be like if we were always open and loving and truthful?

I hope you will hold a space in your heart for the brothers that have not arrived yet, the lost brothers that are trying to find their home.

Michael "Junebug" Gilchrist is an elementary art specialist and elaborist living in Raleigh, NC. He has been attending Fall GSV since 2006 (mostly for the free jewelry). You can reach him at mrg123@earthlink.net

HOME

It was 1996. I had been urged to go to GSV for well over a year, after the death of my partner, and frankly, it scared the hell out of me. Who were these people? Isn't North Carolina in the Bible Belt? Was this a Jesus crowd? What kind of religious retreat was this place? Did we have to say grace? All of my control mechanisms were on auto-pilot and at battle stations, yet I felt magnetized there in spite of my fears.

As I arrived at the top of The Mountain, wearing my best armour, one of my worst fears was standing on the bed of his pick-up truck. He was the meanest-looking mountain boy with a beard down to here, overalls, peaked cap and a demeanour that would sour milk. He turned to look as I drove by and I swear he beat up and ate three gay guys for breakfast every morning without risking even a hint of diabetes. Then I saw that he was hang-

ing blow-up hearts in the trees. My inner critic went mute. I later found out his name was Art but he preferred Cassandra and inside that gruff exterior he had the most extraordinary heart.

After registering, I decided to check out the dining-hall...food is big on my agenda. I wouldn't want to miss a meal simply because I couldn't find the place. As I walked alongside a hedge, a tall section of it stepped out and waved at me but said nothing. Was I dreaming this? I looked around to see if anyone else saw this thing. No-one. Was there something in that Po'boy I ate for lunch?. Not being sure how to react and wondering if this were somehow a spiritual test, I smiled a polite Canadian smile. I figured this guy was probably the Mountain's equivalent of Ronald MacDonald or a leafy version of Gumby acting as a Walmart greeter. Cute but I'm an adult 'fer crissakes'. On my way into the dining-room, I ran into a hunky outdoors guy who was wearing a

skirt with his hiking boots and wool socks. As soon as he saw the look on my face he said "This is my first skirt day. It reminds me of trying on my sister's dresses when I was a kid." He flounced the skirt and walked away, and I thought, "Boy is he lucky. He had a sister. My Mother's clothes hung on me like a bag."

And then it dawned upon my naive mind. I had been there about ten minutes and I had already met three people who had no fear of being exactly who they are...but, I did. The sanctity of this place and its sense of safety were obvious in everyone of those first few people I met. What an extraordinary gift. Later I realized that Green Man, as the hedge person was known, had another persona as Miss Manners with a pillbox hat, pearl earrings and white gloves. It was in the dining-room where I saw Dan Dewberry for almost the first time wearing sparkles and not much else, dancing on the tables. The staff were cracking up with laughter and my inner light bulb went on again. This uptight, controlled Canadian boy had arrived home on a mountaintop in North Carolina. I had permission to be entirely and uniquely myself without any fear whatsoever. If Dan Dewberry had the courage to dance on the dining-room



By Bernard Morin



tables in drag, what was there to fear? I was the only thing in my way.

In 2010, after a five year absence, arriving back on the Mountain was an utter joy. My heart swelled. I took massive breaths of that miraculous air, greeted the circling hawks and joined my ecstatic brothers for another unique period of timeless sharing. And under the trees I could still see Cassandra. King Thaxton was about to do Miss Manners and was putting on white gloves outside

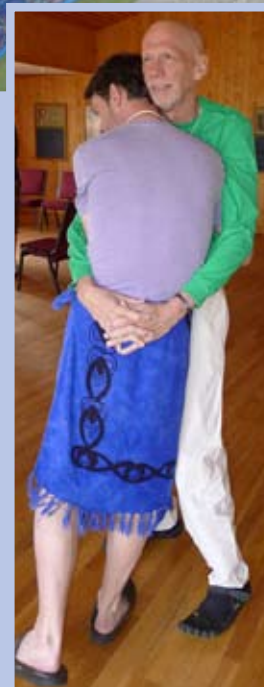
the Treehouse. John Stowe was sitting on the same bench by the path he and I first shared as we spoke about... well, everything. Ramon Noya was in the tree fort where we often exchanged ideas on the worlds we each inhabited. Everyone was still there, no matter what side of the veil they lived on.

In the dining-room on a plaque is written a reminder that we are warmed by fires we did not build and drink from wells we did not dig. When GSV is in

residence at the Mountain, we are sustained by spirits we may never have known and some we were lucky enough to touch. I feel so blessed.

Bernard is currently a playwright, an artist, a ghostbuster and an occasional teacher of non-ritual, innate Shamanism. A reformed residence adventurer, he now lives, quasi-permanently, in the small town of Port Hope, Ontario because he likes the name of it. bermor4@gmail.com.

Photos by
Lem Arnold





Photos by
Lem Arnold and Gregory Fields

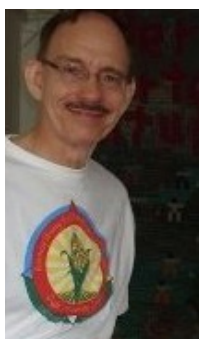






GSV Spring Retreat

april 20-22, 2012



convener of the spring retreat for 2012 Pat Boyle will announce the theme for spring soon... the "arc of spiritual practices" will continue... hint: springtime and action go together



save the dates! it's a great time of year for The Mountain and some quality time with your GSV brothers

Our 23rd Fall Conference is brewing.
Save the dates, and join in.

SEPTEMBER 27-30, 2012

GSV₂₃

In the practice of our gathering, we gather our practices to deepen our connection to spirit, and to one another



The 23rd Annual Fall Conference of Gay Spirit Visions, September 27-30, 2012



GSV 

Winter Meditation

January 13-15, 2012

Internalizing the 4 directions
in quietude and community

The 11th Annual GSV Winter Meditation • January 13-15, 2012 • The Mountain, Highlands, NC

Martin “TreeWalker” Isganitis has facilitated retreats and trainings of many different stripes over the years, among which are GSV conferences during his tenure as Presiding Elder of GSV.



Paul Plate brings reverence for Native American traditions to all he does, including service as an Elder Who Walks Between for GSV, and as Executive Director of Positive Impact in Atlanta.

Calling and releasing the spirits of the four directions, a core practice in Faerie and GSV traditions, is precious to the setting of sacred space. By calling the directions as a community practice, we commit to being present in the circle that is formed, and respectful of all that guides and protects the interactions within it.

Each soul present in this sacred space brings a unique perspective and a heart’s song that is quickened by our invocation of the great wheel. Each soul employs a personal metaphor for East, South, West and North. There are so many! The elements of Air, Fire, Water, and Earth. The seasons of Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter. The times of day in Dawn, Noon, Sunset, and Midnight. Each breath: in, fullness, out, and emptiness.

This year’s Winter Meditation, facilitated by Martin “TreeWalker” Isganitis and Paul Plate, will continue the “arc of practices” initiated at our fall conference. We will create space for all who attend to explore and deepen the personal ways they internalize the four directions, with time for guided meditation, journaling, and sharing.



Join us!

Arrive for dinner 7pm, Fri, January 13th
Depart after lunch, Sun, January 15th

Cost: \$205

An extra day (depart Jan 16 after lunch) add \$65