

Visionary

The Journal of Gay Spirit Visions 2014



1990



2014



Forward

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Prologue: Running Water

To understand how Gay Spirit Visions came to be, it is helpful to look at what came before, and especially what happened in gay consciousness between about 1970 and 1990. The spirit of men who love men has been hidden from view through most of history, like an underground river that breaks to the surface infrequently, only to disappear again. This resilient waterway began to seek freedom with increasing persistence in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries in Europe and America, finally bursting into daylight for good in 1969 with the Stonewall Rebellion.

One of its currents in the 1970s was the gay liberation movement that developed after Stonewall. Groups such as the Gay Liberation Front became highly visible, demanding of society the freedom to love and live as they wished. The Radical Faeries arose as an offshoot of this tumultuous movement, developing loose networks and sanctuaries and some elements of a spiritual culture such as heart circles.

Harry Hay, the political activist who had helped organize the Mattachine Society, a 1950s gay-rights group, called the Radical Faeries to their first gathering in 1978. Hay was a proponent of what he called “subject-SUBJECT consciousness”, which he saw as gay men’s unarticulated heritage and a counter to the dominant culture’s mode of subject-object thinking. This and subsequent gatherings offered the faeries opportunities to explore Hay’s concept in community.

One such gathering was at Running Water, a farm owned by Mikel Wilson on Roan Mountain near Bakersville, NC. A small group of gay men accepted his invitation to visit following the 1978 Southeastern Conference for Gays and Lesbians

in Atlanta. Peter Kendrick, Rocco Patt, Ron Lambe, and John Jones eventually bought Running Water from Mikel Wilson and continued hosting gatherings there. When these men decided to sell Running Water in the late 1980s, they donated some of their proceeds to sustain the energy of the gatherings in the form of a conference. That bequest was the seed money for the first Gay Spirit Visions conference.

During the time of the Running Water gatherings, AIDS emerged to decimate the gay community. The crisis for gay men was existential and urgent: with death everywhere, what did spirit mean to gay men? As its name indicates, Gay Spirit Visions was created to explore various spiritual paths and visions that might answer that question.

Finding a venue in the Southeastern United States was difficult at the time. Conference organizers Peter Kendrick, Ron Lambe, and Raven Wolfdancer visited a number of retreat centers in several states, usually being warmly greeted until they mentioned that theirs was a gay group. Suddenly, scheduling conflicts would arise. Finally, they met with Shelley Denham Jackson at The Mountain, a Highlands, NC retreat center connected with the Unitarian Universalist Association. She expressed delight at the possibility of hosting the conference there, saying “We’ve been waiting for you.” The Mountain has been GSV’s home ever since.

The first Gay Spirit Visions conference took place Nov. 2-4, 1990, with 73 men attending. Writer and visionary Andrew Ramer, poet and psychotherapist Franklin Abbott, and Harry Hay were keynote speakers.



In 1991, Raven Wolfdancer, one of the conference organizers, wrote his recollection of the first conference:

“In the fall of 1990 a diverse group of Gay men met in the mountains of North Carolina at the first annual “Celebrating Gay Spirit Visions” conference. Many of us who had attended this event had known one another for over a decade of networking in the Radical Faerie Movement. On the other hand, there was a middle-aged medical doctor who had never been in the presence of more than one other Gay person at a time – ever! Yet 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 of who we are as Gay spirit pioneers. We affirmed the contributions we are making to our own culture and which we can demonstrate to the parent society.

“In our sharing at the conference we were amazed by our unique gifts: to speak from the heart; mid-wife the dying; care for the trees; to lighten the lives of others with our humor; and our ability to be resolute Gay ‘warriors,’ as well as gentle nurturers.

“At the end of our conference we had an exuberant sense of having taken great strides toward claiming our Gay historical roots. It also became clear that we have important healing and spiritual roles to inject into our ailing world and an abundance of gifts and talents to unlock within ourselves as we declare an end to our time of exile.”

Gay Spirit Visions celebrates its twenty-fifth year of existence this year. The fall conference has grown from 73 attendees in 1990 to around 120 in recent times, and from three to four days in length.

In 1996, GSV was officially recognized as a Section 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization registered in Georgia. In the past several years, major changes in the service and leadership structure have been adopted to address GSV’s growth and sustain the community. Gatherings now occur in the winter and spring as well as fall. There is a GSV website, archives, and a Facebook group. GSV-supportive groups in Atlanta, Asheville, and Chicago host ongoing events in those cities.

For 25 years, we have danced, wept, walked labyrinths, sweated, planted, laughed, hugged, dressed up (or not), meditated, breathed, and drummed. We have hosted a hurricane, sat with sacred fire, dedicated an erotic temple, and watched shooting stars from the tower. Men have come and gone, come and stayed, come and transformed. We have touched with hearts, hands, minds, and bodies. Men have offered their wisdom in workshops and keynotes, artistic gifts in the talent show, innermost thoughts in small groups, and steadfastness in holding space.

Much has changed over the years, but one constant from the first gathering until now has been an understanding that as gay men, we have purpose in this world, which needs our gifts. GSV has provided a safe environment for men to explore how best to take those talents and skills into the wider society.

This issue of Visionary offers a glimpse at where we have been, where we are now, and where we hope to go in the future. I have bathed in GSV’s gently running water for 24 of its 25 years. That immersion in the dear love of comrades has changed my life.

--With gratitude, Bob Strain (Palindrome)



Where We've Been



November 5, 1990



Present

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click a picture to time-travel



Future

1990 *Three Questions*

The first GSV conference was held Nov. 4-6 at The Mountain, Highlands, NC, which has remained our home.

The principal organizers were Peter Kendrick, Ron Lambe, and Raven Wolfdancer. Seventy-three men attended. The three keynote speakers were Andrew Ramer, author of *Two Flutes Playing*, Franklin Abbott, poet and psychotherapist, and Harry Hay, one of the principal organizers of the Mattachine Society, a 1950s gay rights group, and of the Radical Faeries.

Andrew told attendees, "Our job is to create a powerful, loving community of men." Franklin exhorted us, "Open your eyes and look at each other. See the grief and the beauty, the pain and the radiance. Know that you are not alone. We are in this life, all of us, here, now, together." Finally, in his keynote, Harry posed three questions that have resonated in each succeeding conference:

- *Who are we?*
- *Where do we come from?*
- *Why are we here?*



1991 *Big Joy*

Poet, filmmaker, and trickster James Broughton was the principal speaker at the second conference, with keynotes also by Andrew Ramer and Franklin Abbott and music by Charlie Murphy.

As the Treehouse was not yet built, the group of 104 met in the great room of the Lodge, where James and his partner Joel Singer offered an evening of their films. In his keynote, "The Holiness of Sexuality," James observed, "There is only one temple in the world, and that is the human body. ... I ask you to experience your body as a sacred place." He added, "The proper activity in a temple is worship. Share your holiness. Visit one another's temples."

1992 *Four Guardians*

In a departure from the first two conferences, 1992 did not feature a primary keynote speaker, but four "guardians" for each aspect of that year's theme: Touch, Shadow, Power, Gifts. Ron Lambe was guardian of Touch. Andrew Ramer guarded Shadow. Franklin Abbott was guardian of Power. John Stowe was guardian of Gifts. Each of these themes was examined by conferees in relation to four actions: Celebrate, Dream, Experience, and Weave. The printed program featured a fold-out spinner designed by King Thaxton to connect the themes and actions visually.



1993
Exploring Our Nature

The fourth conference theme was “Exploring Our Silly-Sacred Nature.” It was the largest conference held in GSV’s history, with 149 men attending. Author Tom Spanbauer was the keynote speaker. In his address, he referenced his novel, *The Man Who Fell in Love with the Moon*, whose protagonist Shed is a berdache, a two-spirit capable of carrying both masculine-feminine, silly-sacred energies. As an infant, Shed “didn’t reach for the bow and the feather—he reached for the feathered boa.” Peter Bear Walks, an Apache teacher and shaman, brought the tradition of the sacred fire, which continues at every conference. The Mountain staff and board of directors visited the closing heart circle that year. Shelley Jackson Denham spoke to the circle for them, saying GSV was the group they most enjoyed having at The Mountain. “No other group brings with them so much sorrow, but no other group brings so much joy and beauty.” She led the Mountain staff and directors around the circle, blessing each man.



1994
Archetypes, Music, Tears

The theme for this year was “Faces of Our Tribe.” Keynote speakers were Hal Carter and Kevin Greene, co-creators of the Rootworks transformational workshop experience, our mentor Andrew Ramer, and Canadian singer/songwriter David Sereda. Hal and Kevin engaged the conferees in breath work, movement, meditation, and introspective activities drawn from their ongoing work. Andrew introduced four gay archetypes as recorded in his book *Two Flutes Playing* – scout, flute player, shaman, and hunter. The men of the conference held a “Ritual of Tears” one evening to memorialize our brothers who had passed prior to that year. One of those men was GSV co-founder Raven Wolfdancer, who was murdered a few months after the 1993 conference.

1995
Soul’s Journey

Authors Mark Thompson (*Gay Soul*) and Malcolm Boyd (*Are You Running with me, Jesus?*) addressed the sixth GSV conference, titled “Awakening the Elder Within: A Journey of Soul.” Malcolm shared from his journey of spiritual growth and coming out as an Episcopal priest in the 1970s. Mark discussed the idea of twin souls in a gay context, and also led a workshop on Dark Eros/S&M experiences. David Sereda returned to present another evening concert. As Gary Kaupman commented, “Jesus, whips, and love ballads all presented by experts. Where else but GSV?” In activities other than the conference, the planning council took the initial steps to incorporate, and GSV donated \$1,000 to The Mountain, becoming a lifetime member.





1996

Interweaving

Andrew Ramer keynoted in the opening session of the 1996 fall conference, “Taking Action in the World: Our Work Begins.” Saturday events were completely given over for men of the conference to share their wisdom with the GSV community by presenting workshops on their particular passions and callings. The wide array of offerings included sessions on HIV and healing, S&M and shamanism, tools of magic, inner healing, HIV disclosure, spiritual networking, authenticity, poetry, the path of the gay warrior, Taoist erotic massage, dialogue on racism, drumming, Inca shamanism, recovering from fundamentalism, paper sculpture, and GSV planning. During the year, GSV completed its incorporation, and an Atlanta contingent brought GSV visibility to that city’s Gay Pride festival.

1997

Spiritual Mentoring

The eighth GSV fall conference featured anthropologist and historian Will Roscoe as presenter. The theme was spiritual mentoring, or “fairy god-fathering” as the brochure described it. He described one of his mentors from college: “Prissy...was a real role model for me because he knew how to do everything. He could sew, he could make dresses, he knew how to do drag, he knew how to make a delicious meal with four dollars, and he could fix his truck. And I thought, That’s it! That’s the way to be! No limits at all. ... It’s been the core of my message about gays. We ought to be able to do everything, and we do.”

In other activities, GSV launched its website and leased office space in Atlanta. In May, Tobias Schneebaum, anthropologist and author (*Keep the River on Your Right*), spoke at a GSV-sponsored gathering in Atlanta.

1998

Expansion, Truth

GSV’s presence grew significantly in 1998, with expansion of the fall conference to four days, Thursday-Sunday, and addition of a three-day spring gathering at The Mountain in May. Don Clark, psychologist and author (*Loving Someone Gay, Living Gay, As We Are*) addressed the fall conference on “Truth without Malice,” asking attendees for honesty in their desires and noting that “the only truth that you have to offer to another person is the truth about what’s going on inside of you.

“The only thing you have to offer to me is what you think, you feel, you believe, what your experience has been—and that’s a lot. ... This truth of desire is a first step. After that, there are many other truths that we can tell one another.”



1999
Masks, Mirrors

Andrew Ramer keynoted at the tenth fall conference, entitled “The Mask and Mirror: Through the Eyes of Janus.” In celebration of ten “fabulous trips around the Sun,” he reflected on GSV’s history and precursors and offered his visions for the future. “Mask is what we hide behind. And Mirror is that which reveals us honestly, as we are. ... [T]he two-sidedness of mask and mirror is very appropriate, for the second part of this conference’s title is ‘Through the Eyes of Janus’ ... a two-headed Roman god, the guardian of doorways, of war and peace, who looked back to the past with one face and out the future with the other.”



2000
Radiant Power

The night before GSV’s fall conference, a fantastic thunderstorm crossed the Blue Ridge, ending a severe drought. Our second decade began with the theme “Living in Radiance,” and the stressed-out trees of The Mountain seemed particularly radiant that year. Several men from within the community addressed the group: Andrew Ramer, psychotherapist John Mungo, and teacher, writer, and counselor Harold Cole, who told attendees, “Gay men glow. There is a sweetness and light that surrounds us ... something in the aura of gay men that identifies us to one another and that makes straight people like us as individuals, even when, paradoxically, they do not like homosexuals in general. ... If gay we seldom learn our potential because we are so concerned with survival. The sissy part of us that was beaten up is our divine feminine nature. We have closed that part of ourselves down. Yet this is where our power is.” As John Stowe, author of *Gay Spirit Warrior*, noted, “Living in radiance is a choice that goes much farther than just taking care of your body. It’s a commitment to bring every area of your life into its highest expression. That’s an ongoing process.”

2001 *Gratitude*

The spring 2001 gathering focused on spirituality in everyday life. Teacher, artist, and writer John Stowe asked “How can you feed spirit in your life?” answering, “With prayer. ... gratitude, refreshed each day ... mindfulness in each moment. ... You can treat yourself, spirit, and everything as alive, aware and sacred. You can witness the beauty in the world around you. ... You can feed it by bringing forth beauty in your own being, by blossoming into the radiant individual you were born to be ... by relating to yourself and to each other person with compassion and respect.”

The fall conference was themed “Grateful for Being One.” It was a challenging conference due to geopolitical events, but those who attended found healing energy in the addresses of Andrew Ramer and Dr. Rudy Ballentine, author of *Radical Healing*. Rudy had been in New York City during the World Trade Center attacks that happened eight days earlier and was deeply involved in the rescue efforts there. His calm spirit brought comfort to GSV, and the community offered him reciprocal care and solace as well.



2002 *Transformation*

“Portal to Spirit: Transforming Our Manhood” featured Christian de la Huerta, teacher and author (*Coming Out Spiritually*) as presenter at the fall conference. Following his keynote on gay men’s roles as spiritual healers, he led the entire group in a powerful meditation on inner light. A recurrent theme for the weekend was the line from Sufi poet Rumi: “Don’t go back to sleep.”

GSV also convened its first-ever winter meditation in January. Over 50 men attended the mostly silent gathering, led by Daniel Helminiak, a former Catholic priest and author of *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality*.



2003 *Relationship, Service*

In its fall conference, GSV returned to the model of keynote presenters drawn from within the ongoing community. The theme was “Right Relationship: Balance Through Service,” symbolized on the altar and in the program as a rooted tree. As aspects of relationship, the first keynote speaker Andrew Ramer discussed self, passion, and ethics.

Toltec-lineage teacher and shamanic healer Hunter Flournoy addressed the topic of community, and educator Scott Dillard spoke on conflict resolution. Finally, John Stowe discussed the Earth environment in terms of relationship and service.



2004 - 2006

A Three-Year Arc and a Surprise Guest

Beginning in 2004, GSV undertook a three-year thematic arc for its fall conferences exploring the nature of abundance.

During the 2004 conference, “Abound! Reveal Your Inner Fabulosity,” Hurricane Ivan made an unexpected and unforgettable appearance. Despite damaged cabins, flooding, no power, and considerable anxiety, the men present were able to continue the conference and to provide emotional support to Mountain staff who lost family members to the ferocious storm. As Presiding Elder Craig Cook put it, “Instead of wimping out, weak and helpless, as the outside world might expect us gay men to do, we had yet again stepped into our power.” Toby Johnson, psychotherapist, editor, and prolific author (*Gay Perspective: Things our Homosexuality Tells us about the Nature of God and the Universe*) was keynote speaker.

The theme of abundance continued in 2005 with “Abound! Gather around the Cosmic Campfire,” keynoted by Chris Glaser, Gay Christian activist and author (*Uncommon Calling: A Gay Christian’s Struggle to Serve the Church*). A Wiccan Mabon ritual during the full moon facilitated by Lord Peregrine in the amphitheater offered an additional possibility for spiritual connection during the conference.

Finally, the 2006 fall conference, “Abound: Navigate the Triads,” recognized the triad as “an ancient spiritual symbol ... a union of self-perpetuation” as represented by body, mind, and spirit. Attendees were led through an experience in each of those qualities by retreat facilitator Jerold Soder, spiritual coach Michael Sigmann, and Sufi conductor and counselor Darrell Grizzle.



2008 *Two Spirit Culture*

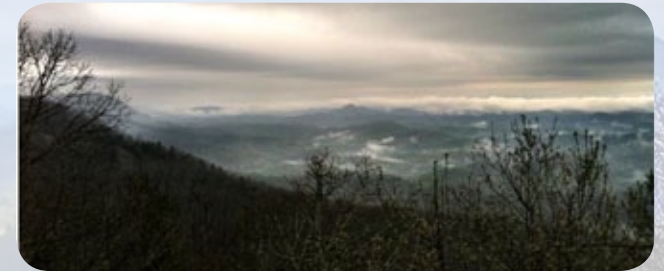
Clyde Hall, one of the founders of the Two Spirit Movement of Native American LGBT people and an authority on Native American culture, dance, ritual, and folkways, addressed the 2008 fall conference. Hall, who is of Shoshone-Metis descent, engaged the conference participants with his opening statement, “Let me tell you about my grandmother,” and continued with discussion of Native American cosmology and the place it holds for Two Spirit people. He remained engaged with the conferees throughout the weekend, attending every event.

2007

Age Of Majority

GSV turned 18 in 2007, with a website, local group potlucks and heart circles, an archive, a new logo, three annual conferences (winter meditation, spring gathering, and fall conference), and a one-time exploration of a summer experience, held at Lake Logan, NC in July. *Visionary* left its print origins to become an online journal.

Continuing the “triads” idea from the 2006 fall conference, there were three keynote speakers: Andrew Ramer, activist and artist Duncan Teague, and spiritual teacher Arnie Vargas, each presenting to one-third of the attendees in rotation.



2009

Individual and Community Survival

For its 20th anniversary, GSV invited performance activist and storyteller Peterson Toscano as the main presenter. The theme for the fall conference was “Come Tell It On The Mountain!” Through his performances and storytelling, Peterson described the ex-gay movement he had survived and challenged GSV to become more aware of and open to transgender individuals. Another important event in GSV history occurred at the November council meeting, when consensus was reached to transition the organization away from its historic Atlanta-centered service structure into a wider one as a means of ensuring its continuation. To that end, Presiding Elder David Salyer agreed to extend his leadership term through 2010 to give time for the new structure to be established.



2010

Transformation

The fall conference in 2010, “Authentic Lives, Sacred Identities,” featured writer, performance artist, and FTM gender activist S. Bear Bergman, shamanic healer and Toltec-lineage teacher Hunter Flournoy, and Michael Sigmann, author and creator of the Men’s Inner Journey Experience.

Following on the Council events of the preceding November, in early 2010 a transitional task force was established. Three long-term GSV brothers, designated as the Walks Between Elders, headed this effort: Jim Jones, Dennis Van Avery, and Paul Plate.

Working groups were established to facilitate various aspects of the conferences, and business began to be conducted more by teleconference and email than by in-person meetings in Atlanta.



2011

Deepening Spiritual Practice

The spring gathering of 2011 featured Sufi initiate Perry Pike leading the Universal Dances of Peace. In addition, as the reorganized GSV gained solid footing, a three-conference arc was undertaken spanning the fall conference and the winter and spring gatherings of 2012. Its focus was on the varieties of spiritual practice.

Teacher and author Darren Main keynoted the fall conference, “So Many Men, So Many Practices”, with insights from his Yogic tradition. The winter meditation led by Paul Plate and Martin Isganitis centered on “Internalizing the Four Directions in Quietude and Community,” and Pat Boyle led the spring gathering on “Action.”



2012 *Unforgettable Stories*

GSV had intended to bring celebrated author (and 1993 keynote speaker) Tom Spanbauer back to address the fall conference on “Storytelling as Spiritual Practice.” Unforeseen events made it necessary for him to cancel his trip shortly before the conference.

In his stead, organizers asked eight men from among conference attendees to talk about their individual spiritual journeys, leading to an incredible sharing of hearts’ truths. Chaser Rue, Pat Boyle, Kevin Biasci, Martin Isganitis, Shawn Iverson-Cook (Shauna Pleas), Joe Kiser, Tim Flood and Hunter Flournoy each shared amazing, deeply personal and moving stories on subjects ranging from sexual trauma recovery to gender identity to coming out. For two of those presenters, Shauna and Martin, it was the community’s last time to see and hear them in their physical form.



2013 *Inner Worlds*

Attendees at last year’s fall conference explored “The Kingdom Within,” with an array of spiritual tools. Each of the three primary presenters offered interactive and related events. Bernard Morin conducted a session on the awareness of energy, personal and intra-personal, and how to observe and move it. Nick Patras presented on the power and energy of an ongoing affirmation practice. Steven Jones worked through music and movement to create a profound meditation on shadow energy.

Banyan Fierer conducted So Hum (“I Am That”) meditation, and the Hawaiian ho’oponopono reconciliation and forgiveness spiritual practice was facilitated by Jim Jones and Ted Gulik. The weekend also offered opportunities for individual reflection and assimilation of the energy from the workshops and presentations.





1990 - 2013

A Community Like No Other

The first 24 years of Gay Spirit Visions taken together represent an extraordinary wealth of spiritual paths, traditions, and techniques, generously shared by keynote speakers, workshop presenters, movement facilitators, ritual leaders, performers, artists, writers, and the entire community.

That we have survived and flourished is testimony to the devotion and care of men who have served in various roles to manifest the conferences and sustain the organization through the years.

The history of this community also enfoldes the personal story of each man who has overcome his fears to ascend The Mountain in search of his spiritual tribe. With this history, which continues to evolve, Gay Spirit Visions affirms the necessary place in the world, the strength, beauty, and resilience of men who love men.

Thank you all for showing up.



Lo! Some we loved, the loveliest and best
That time and fate of all their vintage prest,
Have drunk their cup a round or two before,
And one by one gone silently to rest.

--Omar Khayyam (tr. Fitzgerald)

In Remembrance...

...we name these men we have loved, who have loved and walked with us, and who are now in spirit...

David Arpin

Ivan Bailey

Terry Barfield

Beau Braswell

Gary Briggs

James Broughton (Big Joy)

John Burnside

José Candelario

Hal Carter

Keith Carter

John Clarke

Shawn Iverson-Cook (Shauna Pleas)

Roger Corless

Michael Daigle

Steven Deitchman

Ricky Lee Flippen

Harry Oak Hamilton

Leigh Hand (Tree Otter)

Harry Hay

Martin Isganitis (Treewalker)

Jeff Jacka (Tiger)

Cary Jackson

Larry Jackson (Golden Eagle)

Ron Jilek (Angela)

David Kowalsky

Leon Lashner

Lee Leathers

William Meneely

Lord Merlin

John Mungo

Ramon Noya

Crazy Owl

Rocco Patt

Art Polansky (Cassandra)

Phillip Rush

George Smith

Pheonyx Roldan Smith

John Stowe

King Thackston (Wing of Men)

Roger Weinstein

Jon Whiddon

David Brian Witt

Lou Wolcott

Raven Wolfdancer

...and those other men now in spirit who shared heart space with us for a time before moving on.

Where We Are



September 2014



Past

click a picture to time-travel



Future

Celebrating Our 25th Year

So we arrive at 25. This anniversary year has been a busy and rich one. In addition to the three regular events – Winter Meditation, Spring Retreat, and Fall Conference – a Visioning Retreat was held in early spring to take stock, consider how the new service structure is meeting the community's needs, and plan for Gay Spirit Visions' continued growth and health.

The regular gatherings offered opportunities to reflect on GSV's history, evaluate where we are now, and contemplate our future, while the visioning gathering in particular began a dialogue of how to move forward in time. This section of Visionary reflects in words and photos the year's activities.

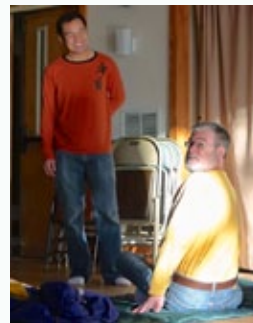
Winter Meditation: Body and Spirit

The Winter Meditation was held in January. Randall Cumbaa coordinated the gathering, which was led collaboratively by Plamen Russev, Chas Jensen, and Steven Jones.

Participants explored the relationship of physical body and spirit through several disciplines.

With assistance from Hunter Flournoy, and Naz Fontanilla, Plamen offered multiple breathwork sessions that created an energetic structure for the entire retreat. Within that framework, Chas led a Yoga practice, and Steven facilitated a dance and movement meditation.

As has been the practice for the past several winters, a planning day immediately followed the retreat. Members of various working groups and the GSV Council spent Monday making advance preparations for the 2014 Spring Retreat and Fall Conference.



Visioning Retreat: Reflecting and Planning

Articles from the March Visioning Retreat include a report by Walks-Between Elder Pat Boyle explaining GSV's new and evolving service structure. John Ballew served as guide for the visioning process and discussions. The recommendations from his report are included below. (The full report can be obtained from the GSV Council). Based on the weekend's conversation, attendees created three working agreements during the retreat. They appear after John's recommendations.



Since 1990, the experiences of support, community, and affirmation offered at conferences have been the reality of Gay Spirit Visions for most participants, as they have for me over many years.

Becoming connected with GSV in 1994, I deeply valued the offerings of heart circles, potluck dinners, etc., which mostly were based in the Atlanta area, and the conferences at The Mountain.

I was aware of a background infrastructure of the Council of Elders that planned conferences, managed finances, filed corporate reports, supported *Visionary*, coordinated monthly potluck dinners, held heart circles, and more. I knew that the Council met monthly on a Saturday in Decatur/Atlanta, and I was close friends with many of the Council members.

I was very appreciative of the great amounts of time and energy joyfully given by Council

GSV Council Evolves Over Time

members as they developed the Fall Conference and later added the Spring Retreat and Winter Meditation. I was also aware that the workload had grown over time, and I planned to help out when my family and career responsibilities allowed.

I was not really surprised when most of the long-term council members decided to retire after about 20 years of seriously hard work. In the fall of 2009, the Atlanta-based Council announced that they would plan GSV events through 2010 but would not continue beyond the Fall 2010 Conference. A call went out for a November 2009 planning meeting to consider GSV's future.

Participants at that meeting agreed to organize a regionally diverse task force that would meet by teleconference to decide next steps. Starting in February 2010, the task force began meeting to plan the 2011 GSV events and develop an organizational structure. The bylaws were amended in 2010 to allow designation of three Walks-Between Elders (to walk between the old GSV structure and the newly emerging

one) during this time of transition.

Over the course of 2011, the task force established GSV's new organizational structure, implemented in January 2012, with a Council made up of the three Walks-Between Elders and past, current, and designated future event conveners (coming onto the Council as they are identified over the course of the year). During this transition, several men with long histories of service to GSV formed a transitional team with the primary goal of continuing three conferences per year. Jim Jones, Paul Plate, and Dennis Van Avery became the initial Walks-Between Elders. They were soon joined by Tim Flood, who worked in the area of communications. These men recruited conveners for the conferences of 2011 and 2012.

Over a period of several years, a new council gradually took shape. The members included the three original Walks-Between Elders, the Elder of Communication, and the planners of each of the three yearly conferences. The continuity plan was that the planner-convener for an upcoming seasonal

conference would be named to the Council one year before that conference, and that the convener of the seasonal conference just completed would remain on the Council for a year of mentoring. Thus, the number of rotating members came out to be roughly nine, and the name Council of Nine was chosen for this planning group.

In February of 2013, revised bylaws were adopted to formalize this plan. Wider participation was assured with the establishment of working groups to assist conveners in conference planning or to assist with the ongoing work of the Council.

As this new system became more stable, conference attendance began to increase, and we moved from a survival mentality to one of growth. To discern the best directions for this growth, we organized a planning retreat in March of 2014 with participants drawn from diverse sectors of our larger community of past conference attendees and some related groups.

The overall goal of this retreat, attended by about 35 men, was to look back over the past 25 years for key values and lessons while envisioning a new future with a larger purview—increased diversity of age, generations, ethnicity, geography, and conference offerings, among other things.

This Visioning Retreat, facilitated by John Ballew, brought clarity to our evolving process, especially in terms of how we carry out the complex tasks of planning with kindness

and love always in the center. You will see information on the resultant “Path Forward” in other parts of this 25th anniversary edition of *Visionary*. The bylaws are due for major revisions over the coming year as we integrate the input from the visioning retreat.

I personally value the relationships that have grown deeper as I have become a conference convener and then a Walks-Between Elder. I believe that our next 25 years will be as significant and creative as the first 25 have been. We are on an exciting journey under the leadership of the present, quite diverse, council with members as follows:

Walks Between Elders:

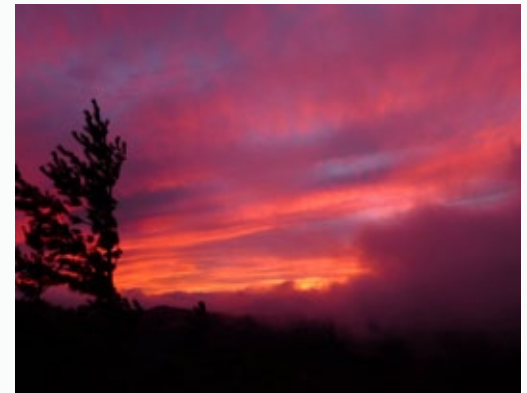
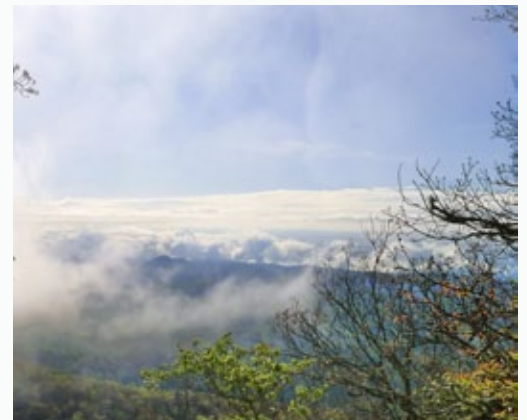
Dennis Van Avery, Greg Bonin, Pat Boyle, Steve Wilson [Jim Jones and Paul Plate rotated off recently].

Council Members:

Luis Alvarez, Randall Cumbaa, Scott Dillard, Hunter Flournoy, Todd Humphrey, Wendell Johnson.

With brotherly wishes for your daily joy and peace of heart and mind.

-Pat Boyle, Walks-Between Elder



Recommendations from the Visioning Retreat

Leadership model

The GSV community is in support of the new model of leadership that is continuing to evolve. There is concern about the complexity of the model and the demands it places on volunteers. It will be helpful to fully implement the working groups over the next couple of years and to monitor involvement while looking for ways to streamline and simplify when possible. This will take time and experience.

A challenge for GSV is to bring the process of preparing for conferences into alignment with the experience of being a participant in them. There are various ways of understanding this: implementing best practices,



or setting up operational values consistent with GSV's aspirational values.

One step toward this alignment will be using the agreements outlined earlier in this report. [Ed.: *The agreements appear at the end of this article.*] It may be useful to make them part of a ritual – reading them or handing them out before meetings, encouraging people to keep a copy visible before and during conference calls, etc.

Consensus model

Training people in the use of consensus needs to be a part of leadership development and on-boarding new leaders. Consensus is a powerful, humane and value-rich way of conducting business. However, when organizational trust is limited it can sometimes be misperceived as bullying, particularly in a community sensitive to maltreatment.

Relationships among leaders

GSV's leaders are experiencing a relatively high – and uncomfortable – level of stress. That's understandable for the reasons noted elsewhere, but the continued health of the organization and its leaders requires paying closer attention. It is a bit like a committed relationship where partners have been preoccupied and distracted. The problem isn't conflict itself, which is to be expected. The problem is more that the stresses have accumulated to the point where conflicts become exasperating.

Attention needs to be given to:

1. Building and maintaining trust between leaders. Making and keeping agreements and addressing problems rather than avoiding conflict are two ways to do this.
2. Paying closer attention to the “relationship climate” among leaders. Cultivating appreciation for one another, acknowledging the shared commitments of leaders and moving toward one another in friendship rather than pulling away from one another would help. Leaders need to monitor the health of their relationship with one another and make it a priority.
3. The decentralized model [that] requires communication to be mediated by technology, which may affect the intimacy between leaders. When everyone was physically present in one location, nuances of communication were simpler to read. Communicating by phone or computer will require more intentionality in maintaining close positive relationships.
4. When there are painful conflicts, the parties involved need to be supported in working things through in a compassionate manner. Loving-kindness and cultivating joy in service are values that would serve GSV well.

Communication

Communication is important to maintaining trust and energy within an organization. GSV has had other priorities over the past few years, but it is time to reprioritize effective communication. Keeping it simple rather than adding a new source of organizational stress would help.

Facebook is a start, but it is only a start. *Visionary* has been an impressive journal, but it has also been a great deal of work and taken a level of skill beyond that typically found among volunteers. An alternative might be to maintain a blog on the new website once the transition to WordPress has been made. The blog could be about GSV news rather than the informal chat that is typical of Facebook.

Working with the tensions in GSV

Gay Spirit Visions is always going to be a dynamic community with more diversity of background, class, spiritual practice, education level, etc., than is readily apparent. This is a strength, but the organization would do well to be conscious about it. Rituals at conferences are points of unity. They could also be points of welcome in our diversity, e.g., specifically mentioning HIV.

Workshops at conferences serve a variety of functions. They are places where diverse concerns and pieces of wisdom can be raised or shared. They help make visible what may sometimes be hidden.

– *John Ballew*, Visioning Retreat Facilitator

New Operating Principles from the Visioning Retreat:

In the spirit of love for ourselves and each other...

- we engage in respectful, honest, and openhearted dialogue;
- we agree to hold ourselves and each other accountable to speak and act with integrity in our community;
- we embrace opportunities to empower others and challenge ourselves to grow spiritually.

We acknowledge these agreements before us and we enter them together.



Spring Retreat: Remembering and Imagining

The Spring Retreat featured Franklin Abbott from Atlanta as keynote speaker. Franklin is a therapist, poet, longtime member of GSV, and a speaker at the first conference in 1990. Highlights of his two keynotes from this spring appear in this section of Visionary, along with links to the videos of each.

The retreat also featured four panels of men drawn from the community, with each group discussing a particular topic: spirituality, erotic life, family and friends, and action in the world. Two of these men – Luis Alvarez-Hernandez and Jim Best – share their panel remarks in this section.

Franklin Abbott: Building a Story Together

“We’re building a story together. That’s what this community is about,” Franklin Abbott told the men at the 2014 Gay Spirit Visions Spring Retreat. “It’s a story built on relationships. So let me tell you a little bit about some of those relationships and how we met each other and how we came together, some of the wonderful things that happened, some of the terrible things that happened.”

The retreat, held April 25-27 at The Mountain in Highlands, NC, was part of GSV’s year-long celebration of its 25th anniversary. Franklin was one of the three original keynote speakers in 1990. For this year’s spring gathering, he returned to offer two keynote addresses:



“Sacred Being, Gay Identity, and Spirituality” and “GSV at 25: Our Journey and Horizon.”

In his first address, Franklin commented, “We really don’t come here for information as much as we come here for connection. Connection is really the big piece of our

being here.” He continued, “If we really want to go back to our roots, we have to go back about 40 years” to some of GSV’s precursors: Harry Hay and the radical faeries, the creation of RFD magazine and its journeys to various faerie sanctuaries, the Southeastern Gay and Lesbian Conferences of the 1970s, and the early gay men’s gatherings at Running Water farm in North Carolina, which were “a dangerous thing. We are good at dangerous things,” he said, adding, “I hope you enjoy that danger. Danger makes all life a little more interesting. It gets the Kundalini rising.”

When the Running Water gatherings ended in the late 1980s, several men led by Raven Wolfdancer decided that a conference was needed to continue the energy of those gatherings. Raven coined the name Gay Spirit Visions for that first conference. “His vision I think was to create a place where being spiritual was a part of your everyday life. Being connected in this special way was something you just did all the time. ... We got that from the gatherings. The gatherings were a great training ground in how to shift into a different way of being.”

“There are many brothers who are not here in body but remain in spirit. Because they’re part of the story,” Franklin said. “You don’t have to be very spiritual to know that, to know that they’re part of the story, just like you and I are part of the story, and will be part of the story long after we stop being able to attend in a physical way.”

Franklin began his second talk by invoking poet James Broughton, keynote speaker at the 1991 GSV conference and “one of the most joyous beings I’ve ever met. The thing that James would say to me over and over was that there wasn’t enough of two things in this world, and that was praise and thanks. He lived in a perpetual state of gratitude.” Reflecting on his own gratitude, Franklin said knowing that those we loved live on in our hearts “challenges us to be more loving, to allow that love to flow through us, and to know that as we continue to love each other, no matter whether we are here or not, that love will continue.”

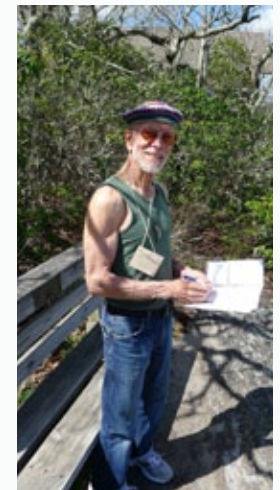
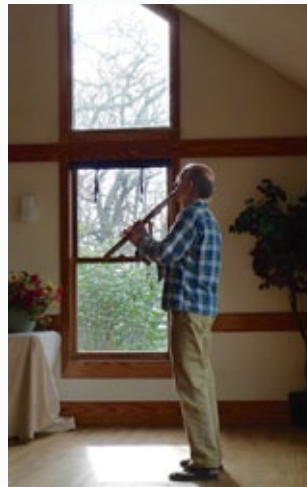
Turning to the present and future, he spoke of the role of magic and imagination in creating reality now and yet to come. “Images and imagination come from deep places

in our self. If we begin to take responsibility for that, we can have a new image and a new way of viewing things, and that is very, very empowering.

“One of the things we do here is we go into a sort of trance-like meditation, and we visualize. In faerie circles, we would visualize ... calling to younger gay men, calling to the boys out there who were struggling, who didn't know of us, letting them know, creating a sort of magnetic vortex, saying 'We're here. This is a safe place.' Calling to future generations.

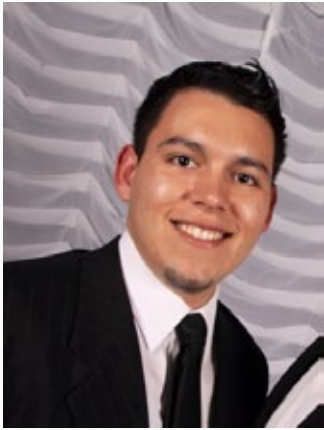
“That is a very powerful thing that we can do, whether we are calling to the young or the old, to make this energy more present in the world, to put out the intention in that magical way, that way that employs imagination. It's a really powerful thing. I feel that part of how Gay Spirit Visions came into being is that it was called into being. And future forms of men being together will come into being as they are called into being with the energy that we are putting out today. What we're doing is important, far beyond our being here. Energetically, we make a difference in the world.”

Complete videos of Franklin's two keynotes may be seen [here](#) and [here](#).



From Our Stories: Visions of Family

During the spring retreat, some brothers and I had the opportunity to talk about the passionate, but troubling topic of family. Discussing our concerns and questions with open hearts, we spoke about our biological families, our relationship experiences as gay men, and our eagerness for connections.



Gay men tend to have various experiences with their family of origin. While some are embraced, others are ostracized, humiliated, and traumatized. As we discussed our unique experiences, one thing was clear: our relationships with

our biological families shape our beliefs about relationships and the ways in which we define family. Those beliefs guide our current relationships. We try to mimic nurturing relationships, if we had them, or to avoid relationships like those that marked us negatively. Either way, my brothers and I found that trauma is a powerful force. How we see ourselves shapes our vision of family.

We may be gay, gender ambiguous, or identify with no gender, but we have been socialized as men. Even though our bodies and relationships may contradict the heteronormative definition of a “man”, our minds are still set in how we were raised. We still measure ourselves, our accomplishments, and our relationships by society’s laws of “maleness”. This can be troubling when defining family, since as gay men we do not have another way to evaluate whether we have a meaningful or successful relationship.

We have been taught that the way to have a family is to marry someone of the opposite gender and have children. While it is now possible for same-sex couples to marry, fathering children is seen as defining a healthy and productive man in society’s view. Many gay men have had the opportunity to be called fathers; others have not. Perhaps an evaluation method is not valid if it cannot be applied to everyone, so we stay once again in the dark, without a way to determine what family is to us. Not having a definition for the term “family” has not prevented us from having meaningful relationships, but we might doubt if what we have can be considered a family.

My brothers and I concluded that family is whatever your heart feels to be true. Among us, there are many types of relationships: closed, open, polyamorous, bisexual, long- and short-term, purely sexual, or based only on companionship, among others. We found that family is what makes us feel connected, even if it does not fit society’s definition. However, some brothers expressed that they often feel lonely and scared from not having a connection. We have a great desire for support, touch, validation, and belonging.

In my own personal and spiritual journey, I have tried many types of connections and relationships. The love and acceptance of my biological family has encouraged me to seek similar support and acceptance from other gay men. Hence, I have slowly developed a family of choice that complements my family of origin.

As a Latino, calling non-biologically-related individuals “uncles” and “cousins” is not strange to me. I now call many GSV members my brothers, my cousins, my uncles, and my gay dads. Their encouragement and support has led me to better self-esteem, self-image, awareness, love, and spirituality.

—Luis R. Alvarez-Hernandez

Spirituality, Jiminy Cricket, and the Phoenix

In sharing several vignettes from my story, I hope to catch a few threads of the underlying truth that increasingly binds my life together. As the years pass and the ocean of eternity looms closer, I am buoyed by the growing presence of 'Spirit' – the response to which I call 'spirituality'.

Social fear and prejudice became a reality in my life at age five, when my father made me put on my sister's dress, held me tightly, and said for the neighbors' benefit, "if you are going to act like a girl, I'm going to dress you like a girl." From then on, I felt I should be as invisible as possible. I never knew what I had done wrong. It would take me 50 years to realize that I had been relegated to victim status and was not free to be myself.



Feeling that I never belonged, I spent 30 years in marriage, and when that was no longer bearable, I divorced. The day I signed divorce papers, I was driving with no idea where to go. I saw a mature

American bald eagle in majestic flight immediately in front of me and knew I was not alone. Spirit saw. Spirit spoke.

It was a daring step for me to acknowledge that in seeking kinship I might discover there was none and that my differences would always keep me apart from community. The compelling voice of Spirit has directed me here to this moment. GSV has helped me recognize buried wounds, whether I come to lick them or find the gifts revealed in the refiner's fire. It also has helped me unwrap gifts I didn't know I already had.

The draw of Spirit was displacement: pure light dispelling the darkness, learning the voice of love instead of battling that of destruction. Spirit has repeatedly affirmed my wholeness. GSV has provided the opportunity for Spirit to do this.

In sum, my task is to answer 'yes'. By listening and accepting, I acknowledge that I am on God's map. I trust that the purpose of Spirit is ultimate fulfillment and empowerment. As a gay man, I surrender to the possibility of passion. 'Yes' is a daily practice, the walk by faith with more to see, to discover, to live, to learn, to love. Spirit is not a statement of

belief, but trust leading to action. 'Yes' means acting on a vision of expanding personal potential, and by extension the potential of others. Spirit works through the individual for the benefit of all.

So why Jiminy Cricket, and why a phoenix? From childhood, I sang Jiminy's jingle as a kind of saving formula: 'If I just follow the rules I will live a long, happy life.' There was no community, no expansion of my soul. Only when I felt the flame of my life being extinguished by the senseless rules of gender conformity did my existence turn to ashes and my true and full-feathered dragon, the wicked and wonderful, began to dance in that fire, laugh, and love being alive.

–Jim Best

Fall Conference: How We Grow Together

Keynote speaker John Stasio, founder of Easton Mountain, discussed “An Invitation to Community”, the theme of the Fall Conference, which was convened by Scott Dillard. Highlights of John’s address are included here, along with a link to video of the presentation. The conference also moved back into the practice of workshops offered by men from the community, both pre-planned and spontaneous. Topics included “AIDS—From Plague to PreP”, “The Gift of Tragedy”, “Defining Family”, and “Japanese Rope Tying Techniques”, among others. Safe and sacred touch activities, meditation, a Christian communion mass, and a Wiccan Mabon ritual of the first harvest also were offered.

John Stasio: The Call to Community

“I’ve been hearing this call [to community since I was very young,” John Stasio told attendees at the GSV fall conference. “I wanted to be part of an idealistic group of men who loved the world and loved each other and wanted to make the place better for our having been here.”



In his keynote address, he spoke of his early wish to become a priest and the discovery of his sexuality.

“I thought it was going to be a great obstacle, but I’ve come to realize that, quite to the contrary, my particular spiritual life has been enormously enhanced by the fact that I’m queer and that I love men. And I believe that’s true for all of you, whether you’re aware of it or not. ... The circumstance of our very particular lives is the curriculum for our

enlightenment.”

He continued, “I want to talk about community, but then I also want to talk about waking up. ‘Waking up’ is a phrase from the Buddhists about enlightenment.” Quoting Vietnamese monk Thich Naht Hanh, John said “The *sangha* – the community – is the new Buddha. So we are the teachers of one another. We discover ourselves in relationship to each other. We point out each other’s faults. We highlight one another’s gifts. Community is a phenomenally beautiful and challenging path for self-discovery.”

He also noted an apparent paradox. “In community, we become more our particular selves simultaneously to becoming connected to everybody else.”

John recounted his path in life from his early Catholic school days to his role in founding the Easton Mountain community, retreat center, and sanctuary in New York, where he now lives. An epiphany during a college sexual experience convinced him of the holiness of his sexuality. Not wishing to enter the

business world, he studied massage.

The onset of the AIDS epidemic sent him in a search for meaning that took him to India, where he worked with lepers in Calcutta with Mother Theresa. On the day before he left, he had tea with her, and remembers her telling him, “Go home and take care of your own, because they need you more than we do.”

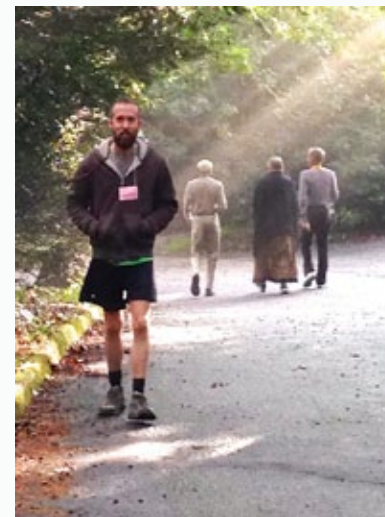
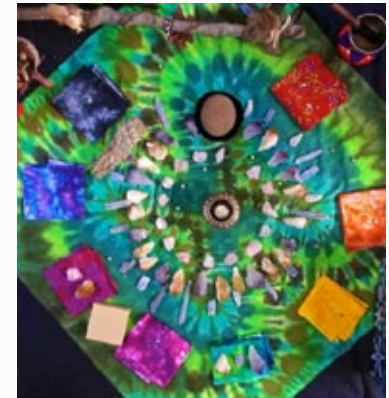
Back in the United States, he and friends began organizing retreats for gay men. “We wanted to create a community of men who love men, to celebrate our lives, and to heal together ... because the community, even in 1989, was being decimated. Everybody had lost friends. We wanted to restore the sense of community.”

“Still,” John said, “with those retreats and vacation groups, “We were experiencing community much in the way we experience it at GSV. It was temporary.” The search for permanence ultimately led him to establish the community at Easton Mountain.

“A coherent, healthy community,” he said, “is one in which the price of belonging does not compromise any part of yourself.” In creating such communities, “Our task is to create places of belonging in which every part of oneself is welcome.” This coherence allows individuals “to bring all of themselves and actually to develop more of themselves. And simultaneously, we become more connected to each other. The more we become our selves, the more we become connected to everything and everyone else. That’s the kind of spiritual mystery that underlies community and self-discovery.”

John enumerated several “tell-tale signs” of healthy communities. “Money, sex, and power are the third rails of community dysfunction,” he said, but “healthy communities do not require compliance with the dominant orthodoxy. They decentralize power. They help everyone develop their particular set of skills, and they don’t value one set of skills disproportionately to another.” Ways in which healthy communities could develop even more, he said, are “by sharing surplus, by invisible mentoring of young people, and by giving thought to how to invest social capital.”

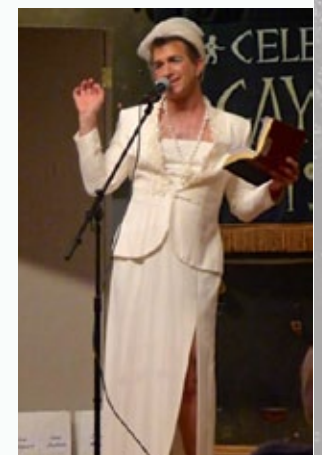
You can view the complete video recording of John’s keynote at GSV [here](#).



The 2014 Talent Show

The Saturday night event at the fall conference was originally billed as a “no-talent” show by its founder and muse, Raphael Sabatini (right). It is an ongoing fashion felony. Stars are born, or not. Now known simply as the talent show, it and the preceding Walk of Beauty are two of our cherished traditions.

By turns hilarious and moving, the 2014 show was emceed'd by Chris Fields (bottom left). All the performers from this year appear on stage at the show's conclusion (far right).



The Future



Past

click a picture to time-travel



2014

Where We Are Going

This final section of the 25th anniversary *Visionary* looks at future possibilities for Gay Spirit Visions. The Path Forward concept discussed earlier (in Pat Boyle's article, "The Evolution of Gay Spirit Visions") is introduced by Dennis Van Avery. It is currently in a question-and-answer format, and it is still an evolving process.

A diverse group of men also agreed to discuss their personal visions of GSV and possibilities for its future. In those brief articles, which range from whimsical to direct, the richness and variety of GSV experience can be seen.

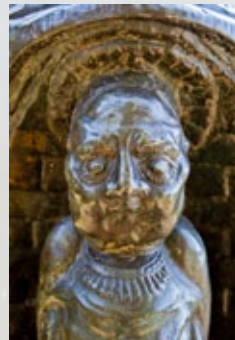
The final article of this issue is a wide-ranging interview with Andrew Ramer, one of the keynote speakers at the first Gay Spirit Visions conference in 1990 and at 19 subsequent fall conferences.

Thanks to Andrew, to everyone who contributed to this issue of *Visionary*, and especially to the talented, hard-working, and patient editorial team: Gary Kaupman for layout and design, communications elder Greg Bonin for technical facilitation and support, and Tony James for editorial assistance. Thanks also to Lem Arnold and James Creasy for use of their photos. Ron Lambe and Gary Kaupman contributed images from Running Water. Ramon Noya and many others also made significant contributions. Shawn P. Calhoun provided the photo portraits of Andrew Ramer that accompany his interview. In addition, Lem contributed the videos of the fall keynote addresses.

And thanks to you, men of Gay Spirit Visions, for the community you have built, sustained, and nurtured for 25 years now. It is a remarkable thing.



Bob/Palindrome



Greg



Tony



Gary/Pleasure

The Path Forward: Co-Creating Our Future

As we celebrate our 25th year of gatherings for men who love men, it becomes a moment to look back and also ahead. In our 25 years together, we have renewed ourselves periodically. In the past five years, we have significantly opened the conference planning model. We have become a learning organization of mentors, conveners, liaison leaders, and working groups. This shared leadership has created spirited involvement and increased attendance at our gatherings.



In March of this year, a number of us met at The Mountain with facilitator John Ballew for a visioning conference. During that weekend, we created a document of agreements, setting out a way for us to be with each other as we lead, plan, and gather. Following this visioning, the next task has been to create what we are calling “The Path Forward”.

This past spring, with Spirit’s guidance, the Council and observers fashioned the beginning of the path forward. As we co-create the future together, following this implementation path, there is much possibility for spiritual growth at both the individual and community levels.

Thich Nhat Hanh speaks often of loving kindness, deep listening, and solidity. It is our hope and desire that the path forward helps us to call these qualities into our desired future:

Loving kindness. As we open up GSV’s service structure to wider participation, we can do so with love and kindness. It can show itself in a working group, in a gathering, in a leadership meeting, in a conversation with another member of the community. We have 25 years of practice and a spirit-filled future of learning how to do this. The path forward over the next four years is both bright and challenging.

Deep listening. Communication is at the core of this transformation. We in GSV are not one community but rather a wonderful collage of men that attend and plan our three gatherings a year. Listening and communicating to our diverse groups so that they are heard and seen becomes key to keeping the path forward alive.

Solidity. Change is constant. Creating our gatherings is our work. Aligning our procedures and practices is our work. Supporting our planners, liaisons, group members, attendees, and leaders is our shared work. Decision-making is our work. All of these steps will bring additional solidity to GSV.

In this present moment, step forward with us into our Spirit-filled future.

-Dennis Van Avery, Walks-Between Elder



Questions and Answers on The Path Forward

What is The Path Forward? The Council seeks to align GSV's organizational needs with what is experienced by the community of men who attend Gay Spirit Visions gatherings. The Path Forward provides a bridge between dialogue and actionable steps that results in decisions, actions, and guidelines to promote participatory leadership and community responsiveness.

Why is The Path Forward important? Gay Spirit Visions has a long history of caring, dedicated men serving as visionaries, planners, elders, and hearth-warmers. We are an ever-evolving, ever-renewing community and organization.

Through the commitment and volunteer service of men in our community – conference participants, work group members, liaisons, conveners, and the Council – we plan three joyful gatherings a year where men who love men can experience safe, sacred, and nurturing space.

Organizing GSV's planning process, which lays the foundation for community participation through volunteer service, is one of the Council's primary tasks. The Path Forward will support all of us in bringing our planning process into greater alignment with the spirit of service, brotherhood, love, and encouragement that fills our gatherings.

How did The Path Forward develop? In March 2014, a group of men from diverse walks of the GSV community gathered for a visioning retreat to look at the rapid changes GSV has experienced since 2010. Our retreat goals included:

- Reflection on the changes of the past four years;
- Seeking a spirit-guided path forward by refining our process and identifying ways to open the organization through collaboration, community participation, and mutually supportive leadership;
- Ensuring the continuation, longevity, and sustainability of the GSV community; and
- Considering how GSV can support men in their spiritual growth.

Based on the rich dialogue about concerns and opportunities within the GSV community, the retreat's facilitator, John Ballew, delivered a wonderful report with recommendations for fulfilling our goals based on the voices he heard that weekend. [Ed.: John's recommendations appear in the "2014" section of this issue.] The Council has since consulted with John and is outlining steps that will develop a more participatory organizational framework to support the GSV community.

What steps are being taken on The Path Forward? While the Path will remain a dynamic plan, the Council has already begun taking actions toward how it envisions the Path unfolding, including:

- Drawing more diverse leadership from the general community;
- Including more open space in conference programs for brothers to share their interests and gifts;
- Creating a more inclusive welcoming statement to be read at the beginning of each gathering;
- Examining decision-making models that might be a good fit for our evolving leadership and community;
- Developing a Book of Knowledge that includes implicit policies gleaned from precedent, standard operating procedures, guidelines for event planning and related roles, best practices, and community traditions;
- Digitizing GSV's journey in collaboration with Georgia State University, which will increase accessibility to historical materials; and
- Implementing pathways for feedback and improved communications.

–*The Council of Nine*

Community Members Speak About Co-Creating Our Future

Two years ago, I moved to Asheville, and one of my goals was to establish a supportive gay community. I have attended two GSV gatherings, winter and spring 2014. I attended the first time to see if it felt like a place I could build a community that was welcoming. During the first opening circle, I said my intention was to find and be part of a community of men. During the closing circle, I said that I felt I had found that community and had been welcomed, invited, and encouraged to “come on in”.

By the second event, I had started to think about what I hoped for from the community and what I could contribute, what I hope the GSV community will create in the future.

I envision a community:

- where people have the intention to be honest and authentic;
- that pays attention to the needs of the members;
- that is willing and able to challenge itself. As an “elder” it is easy to get caught in a mindset of *this is how it is, this is how it has been, and let’s not change things*;
- that fosters building intimate relationships – deep safe friendships – with opportunities for touch and physical contact, including, if a person wants it, sexual/erotic contact;
- in which members – particularly those who have been around for a while – keep the memory alive about what it felt like to be the newcomer, the outsider, and to be driving up the mountain the first time;
- that is spiritual. The word spiritual (like love) is overused, often without thought as to its meaning. When I say a spiritual community, I mean a place where we can explore what it means to be spiritual or on a spiritual path – from Shamanism to Christianity;
- where people have fun – bring out the little boy on the playground, which for many of us was not a fun experience; and
- where I can offer my skills, perhaps some wisdom, and humor for the good of others.

I would like to see GSV broaden the invitation to: younger people, bisexual people, trans- people. From my observation, the men who attend GSV and other similar events are mature in years, wisdom, and experience, so the needs and wants are different for them than for someone in their 20s.

-Jim Stratton



Trust. Transparency. Sacred. Sexy. Silly. Pleasure.
Respect. Generosity of Spirit. Share these and we will come.
-Pleasure



In spring 2013, I attended my first GSV conference and the men of GSV provided me with the brotherhood, guidance, and vision I needed to completely reboot my life. They dared me to start enjoying my life by becoming part of a spiritual and global community. It was a lot more than I thought I was going to get from a weekend retreat. Regardless of the future, Spring 2013 will always be my watershed.

I have now attended two conferences, and I still feel nourished and guided by what I've taken away from each. I've also had the opportunity to bond with certain GSV brothers outside of the conference setting, and these friendships are immeasurably important to me.

Looking forward, I like to imagine the men of GSV as a group I share all aspects of my life with, a place where I can offer and gain support, and create history with a group of like-minded friends. As a newcomer, I am always awed by the rituals, history, and deep bonds I witness at GSV gatherings. Each time, I've walked away with not only spiritual nourishment but also practical tools that allow me to address everyday life in a healthier and happier way. I can easily envision an organization that's a cornerstone of my spiritual life and a brotherhood that's more integrated with more aspects of my entire life.

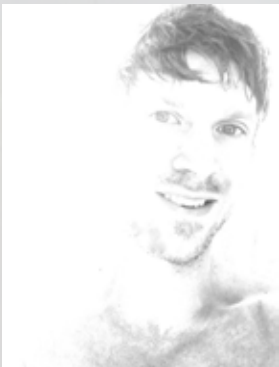
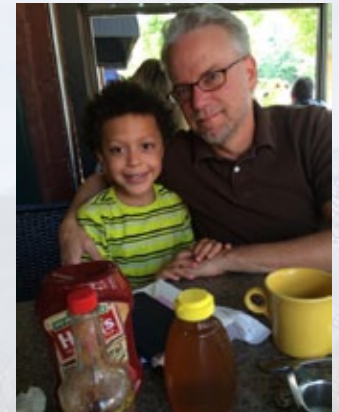
-Don Lashley

In a time of newsertainment and corporate military statehood came a small band of boldly skirted faeries. Squazillionaires furrowed their brows and said, "Oh, this will pass." And it could have but it didn't.

Spirit rooted in loving-kindness grew and grew. Women, two-gender folk, and even whole families with children joined us. We laughed, we cried, we fought. We paraded our particulars. We sang old Bulgarian love songs from the tops of towers. The center held.

On one particular tomorrow, our merry band came upon a police barricade. Just then, spirits of our dead brothers stepped up and began to remove it. A large policed man puffed out his chest and said in his deepest daddy voice, "You can't do that." A spirit giggled and whispered in my ear, "They don't know us very well, do they?"

-Pan Brock



Instead of a long soliloquy, I have decided to focus on one idea. I have found that the connections I make with men at GSV are more spiritual than the conference content. For instance, meals have long been a time when I am able to take a moment to acknowledge and thank the Divine in what is brought into my body and ask for it to be blessed, that I may receive all of the nutritive effects from both the food and my interactions with all beings. My vision would be to eat together and share this blessed time. Men can circle up before a meal, say a blessing (or silence is always golden), and enjoy the time waiting in line with each other to converse and share from the heart. This would also give us time to honor our 'elders' by allowing them to go first in a nod of appreciation and recognition. This simple act may in fact help to transform the entire gathering as we gather three times a day. Blessed be to gather for meals.

-Banyan

My vision for the future is mystical. I yearn for the magick that I experienced 22 years ago at my first conference. I was awakened to the fact that I am part of a vital and important tribe. The tribe held space for me in a sacred circle. This magick is manifested in surprises; the stories of Andrew Ramer, a conversation by the fire with Tom Spanbauer, an unscheduled Mass celebrated by Malcolm Boyd, an intimate moment on Meditation Rock, finding myself crying for no reason, laughing harder than anytime I can remember, friends that have been my brothers for over 20 years. I yearn for more magick.

-Chaser



I have been attending GSV events since the fall conference of 1997. Immediately, I fell in love its energy and knew I was coming back. GSV is a healing place. It is here that I own what I was told to disown, that I express what I was told to repress, that I celebrate what I was told I ought to be ashamed of. GSV has helped me cleanse my heart and soul of toxic beliefs and has helped me know that Spirit created me gay and delights in my being gay. I can only fulfill my highest life purpose if I bring my gay essence along. GSV transforms us into spiritually awakened, empowered, and fabulous gay men. Yes!

GSV could expand and enrich its spiritual range by including topics such as teachings from people who receive information directly from the spirit world. What are they saying? How could these messages nurture our community's spiritual growth? In moving forward to a new spiritual era on Earth, what spiritual changes are we humans called to do to keep planetary balance and well-being? How can GSV participate in this?

-Cami Delgado

A conversation with the sub-conscious of GSV in concert with the voices of those elders who have passed. They asked that this be presented in point form.

- Honor all expressions of faith at all formal occasions. Allow us to speak our faith aloud as voices of our collective love.
- Offer counseling for those of us whose lives need direction or support. Do not assume we will ask for assistance.
- Formally create opportunities for inspired gatherings at conferences.
- Celebrate our love for each other and all of humanity.
- Do not fear creative growth or change. Foster spontaneity and openness. We hunger for it.
- Ensure that planning is mindful of our consciousness and origins.

-Bernard Morin



Andrew Ramer: An Interview

Editor: Andrew Ramer was a keynote speaker at the first Gay Spirit Visions conference in 1990. (The other two were Franklin Abbott, whose keynotes for the 2014 spring gathering are reported elsewhere in this issue, and the late Harry Hay). Andrew attended all of the first 20 fall conferences and addressed each gathering. He is an elder, mentor, teacher, and visionary guide for GSV. He was interviewed on August 19 by phone from his home in San Francisco.

V: You became involved with GSV in its first year and continued to have an active role in both planning and conferences through almost all of its history.

How did Raven Wolfdancer engage you with this group and in what role?

*A.R.: I got a phone call from Raven maybe a year before the first conference saying that he had read *Two Flutes Playing* and it was very moving to him as*



a gay man, an artist, someone with indigenous ancestors, who was looking at what influences gay culture as it is evolving. So this is 1990. At some point in the year before that, we started to have these phone conversations, and then he told me about the conference. At that point, although we hadn't met, I felt that we were developing a friendship based on shared values and a similar perspective. So he said he was working on this conference, and I got very excited about it. It never occurred to me to go; it sounded small and regional. Then he invited me to come and be one of the keynote speakers with Harry Hay and Franklin Abbott.

I felt Harry Hay was like the father of us all in some ways, and I knew some of Franklin's work, and so I was overwhelmed, moved, and honored. I had never spoken at a conference before, never thought of myself as someone who would do anything like that. I was an

underground person. But I felt called to say yeah. And that was how I appeared at the first conference.

In the time between the invitation and the conference we had a number of conversations about what would go on, the structure, and I was already being woven into some of the planning of it, but in a minor way. I arrived and there was Harry Hay, and there were all of these people, and people who would become really dear and beloved friends on many different levels. As a New Yorker, as a Jew, I didn't know that I was stepping into what would become for me sacred space in the South. I came with some anxiety, all of which melted away.

*I fell in love with The Mountain. Raven and I became incredibly dear friends. The only person I had met before was Rocco Patt, who had actually come to New York. We had dinner one night. He contacted me in the same way as Raven; he had read *Two Flutes Playing*. We had dinner and he said that he was in North Carolina, and I said, "Oh, I was invited to this conference." He said, "Yeah, my partner is one of the planners." So I felt that was interesting, and when I arrived he was the only person that I knew.*

During the weekend, Raven took me aside and said something like "When we were planning this, we never thought that it would be something that would go on, but now that we're here, we're thinking it should go on. We want you to be a part of it and these are your roles:

"Role one, it's your job to be the insider-outsider, because you don't live here. You don't live in the South. You're not part of this community, but you are a part of this community. And so that's going to be one of your roles, to be the insider who also has outsider perspective.

"Role two," he said, "is energetic. Your job is to be the person who sits on the outside of the circle and holds the energy for the whole circle, for the whole gathering. In the evolution of spiritual roles, we always focus on who's at the center of the circle, and sometimes you'll wander into the center, but your primary job is to be on the periphery.

"And three," he said, "your job, from the moment you walk out your door in the morning until you walk back in it at night, is to be available to every single solitary man here, whoever wants to talk to you, whoever wants to sit with you." I don't believe he said "whoever wants

to have sex with you.” In fact, I’m pretty certain that he didn’t, but... “In some priestly therapeutic way,” he said, “this is your job: to be here for every single person.” In the beginning there were about 75 people, and it grew over the years. He said, “No matter what your personal feelings are about anybody – you like them, you dislike them, you lust after them, you hate them, they make you nervous, they don’t – that’s your job: to show up for every single person, all the time.”

I’m fairly gregarious when I know people. Otherwise I’m painfully shy and something of a recluse. That was a big stretch, but I signed up to do it and over the course of the next 20 years I was the only person who had perfect attendance. For all those years, I was at every single conference.

The conference for me was such an incredible teacher and such an amazing transformer, and I did my absolute best to fulfill those roles. Sometimes I was on the planning committee, but even when I wasn’t, lots of people called me, so I fulfilled the insider-outsider role. I didn’t come to lots of the meetings because I lived far away. I had another perspective, and when I moved to California I was even further away, but I continued to come.

There were one or two people who really pushed my buttons, and it was such an amazing teaching to always feel and hear, when he was alive and after he was killed, to hear Raven’s voice saying, “Yes, that person walked in the room and you want to walk out, but they’re coming right toward you. Open up your heart and your body and be present.”

That was an incredible teaching and an amazing gift that Raven gave me, which was that I had to find a way to deal with my antipathy, and sometimes with my lust, both of which can get in the way of being with someone in their quiet space, or in their need, or their loud space, or their desperation, or their terror, or their fear.

I had no idea at the beginning that it would become so important to me, how much I would gain from that community, and that it would grow me into who I am and how I teach and what I do in the world now. And it was such a profound honor to sit with Franklin and with Harry, having written a little book that I don’t think had even really been published yet.

V: Gay society has changed considerably over the 25 years of GSV’s existence. Have you seen GSV change in response over that time, and if so, in what ways?

A.R.: That’s a hard question because I haven’t been there in the last four years. I live in a world where increasingly no one uses that three-letter word “g-a-y” anymore, or seldom. The word has become “queer.” In some ways, when I was still coming to GSV I felt that GSV both did and didn’t become queerer.

I remember a year early on where a guy in the opening heart circle came out as being bi-, and people wanted to lynch him. And I feel like some sense in GSV of tribal affinity has shifted and evolved and become maybe more grounded in the idea that, rather than that label – “g-a-y” – we are men who love men and that some of us are also men who in a physical and intimate way love women. Sitting in the room that year, I felt so bad for this young man and thought, *How interesting. There are men in this room whom everyone loves that are going home to wives and children who don’t know they’re here, and we have no problem with that because they define themselves as gay, and here’s the young man who’s defined himself as bi- and it pushes everyone’s buttons.*

So on one hand, I think it’s utterly essential for us to have a tribal identity, whoever we are. My tribal identity as a gay man was I think shaped and formed by growing up Jewish in a dominant Christian society. So that formed some of my insider-outsiderness, before I could label myself as gay, before I came out.

I’ve seen some of that change at GSV. I think we’ve become more comfortable with the fluidity of people’s sexual preference. I don’t know whether trans- men are showing up or not, but I think the container of our consciousness is larger.



I think one of the biggest shifts probably is external. So much of our early journey was shaped by HIV, and as cocktails and medications have appeared, the face of HIV/AIDS no longer has lesions on it, and we’re not sitting in circles where people are dying in the way that we were in

the early years.

It's changed some of who we are, and I think in some ways it's been really liberating. Because our identity was really shaped both by HIV and the fact that we couldn't really talk about it, but it was always there. We don't have to do that any more. I think that's really a good thing.

Back to Jewish: so much of Jewish character is shaped by adversity and so much of 21st century queer character is shaped by adversity and all the phobias that go with it. Hopefully that's evolving and changing as the dominant society changes. I watch in the Jewish world as formerly gay synagogues sometimes become irrelevant and disappear in communities where you can be out.

So I think one of the questions to ask as GSV evolves is 'what role do we serve?' when the dominant culture is becoming more accepting of us, with you know, the spreading of same-sex marriage. I think what hopefully we'll come back to is that deeper than the gay part is the spiritual part. That's what we offer, and it's something that still isn't widely found in the dominant culture. One thing I remember Raven and Ron (Lambe) and Peter (Kendrick) saying in the beginning was that in some ways the conference itself was a cover. It was like a front. It was a way of getting gay men together in intimate space that wasn't a bar or bath, by day, a way of bringing us together to meet and discover each other and to have spirited, spiritual conversations. That's really a piece of the root structure I hope will continue and grow.

V: In Two Flutes Playing, you introduced several gay archetypes and vocations into the GSV conversation. Would you talk about what those are and how you came to identify them?

A.R.: I think because Two Flutes Playing was what got me to GSV, I was really moved that there were other people who kind of resonated with these images of archetypes. The book is channeled. Channeling was way more popular in those early days than it is now, but it was also way more bizarre. Now it's sort of commonplace and there are giant sections in bookstores – well, if bookstores still exist – of books like it. But no one was talking about the archetypal work of gay men when I set out on my spiritual journey, and the few people who were, were very underground. So in some ways I knew there were other men doing what I was doing, but sometimes I felt like I was alone out there

and the book being met by readers was really moving.

The archetypes, those images, were given to me - east, south, west, north - scout, flute player, shaman, hunter. They create a portrait of a character type, and this always becomes problematic because we live our lives sometimes in the space between archetype and stereotype, and so there's truth in both directions.

So, the *scout*. We wander around the world, because we come from all over the world, and we find each other. Whether our gayness is constructed or essential, when two men catch each other's eye walking down the street in Chicago or Cairo, a common language is spoken from eye to eye. Because we have this scouting nature, when something exciting and new opens, it's often been created – a new restaurant, a new style of clothing – by gay men.

Flute player, music. How many musicians, how many composers, how many love songs come from men who love men? What does that mean, to make beauty in the world vibrationally?

Shaman. My sense is 10,000 years ago, that the people we now call shamans were all in some way Lesbian, gay, queer, trans-, poly-, non-. The souls that come into the world through non-normative bodies shape our ability to see what's beyond our physical senses, and that's one of our great gifts, intuitively.

Hunter is the surprise to some people, but it's contrasted with warrior. It's this really powerful energy that gay men have that isn't about killing in the way that warrior is. Hunter is looking for sustenance, looking for love, looking for sex in the way that anywhere



you go in the world, gay men are stalking each other. Well, now it seems to be happening online, but when I was young, anywhere you went, all you had to do was find the nearest large park, and there were men hunting for each other. The hunt of survival in a homophobic world is a potent piece of who we are, and how we use it, as the world we live blessedly becomes less homophobic, is going to shift and change. But in other parts of the world, homophobia is flourishing, violent, and deadly. That energy is something we can invite our brothers energetically and spiritually in our prayers to own, this capacity to hunt, to survive, to feed our soul in some way.

We design things. Some of it again is a stereotype. “Makes-beautiful-lodges” people. Hairdresser people. Fashion-designer people. Certainly there are non-gay men who do those things, but we’re known for that, all over the world. It’s something innate within us.

Another piece is something – it changes now as the world changes – but one of the things that the guides who wrote the book called us was midwives for the dying. I had never heard that expression before. It may have existed, I don’t know. But that is a very potent piece.

I think what hopefully we’ll come back to is that deeper than the gay part is the spiritual part. That’s what we offer, and it’s something that still isn’t widely found in the dominant culture.

As gay men, it’s not just the way we took care of ourselves in the epidemic. How often it is that it’s the gay son who takes care of his elderly parents. Historically, there was a logic to that: often it was the gay son who didn’t marry and have children who was available. But I see now, where I have friends who are married to other men and have children, they’re still the sibling that is there for the parent. That’s another big piece of our role.

We’re beauty makers. We’re midwives for the dying. We are transformers in society. It doesn’t mean that all of us do that or have to do that. I’ve had conversations with friends who say, “I’m gay, and I love men, and I’m perfectly ordinary.” So I don’t think it’s universal and I don’t think it’s imposed upon someone, that you have to lie in bed at night and think, *Well, how will I express these things?* But I think

they’re part of who we are in some innate way. I’ve recognized that wherever I’ve traveled, those skills are there.

V: You have referred to gay men as “the walks-between people.” Would you explain what that term encompasses?

A.R.: I touched on it a bit in what I said about the shaman. We walk between genders. Parts of us are male, and parts are female. We have this capacity to be shamans, to connect with our ancestors, with the dead, with other realms of being. How often is it that the priest, the minister, the clergy people are gay men? That’s one of our skills, that we walk between many different worlds and that in order to find each other we have to walk between worlds, because there are fewer of us than there are heterosexual people.

In our journey to meet each other, how many of us have left the small towns we grew up in to go to the big cities? And now as the world is changing, how many of us are leaving big cities and moving back to small towns? There’s this kind of movement. Recently, I’ve read statistics that, of all the religious affiliations in the world, Jews move the most. I suspect that gay men move even more. There’s something in us that wants us to walk between, to move between, and the other piece of it is to connect. How many of us are quiet ambassadors between the warring factions of our families, walking between the siblings who are fighting or the parents who are fighting with the siblings? That’s one of our roles, I think: the walks-between as an ambassador, as a bridge-builder. I suppose the embodied archetype I would picture as this is Dag Hammarskjöld, the first secretary-general of the United Nations, who was quietly a gay man. That’s truly the embodiment of what it means to be that kind of ambassador, walks-between, bridge-builder, peacemaker.

V: Do any of the past conferences particularly stand out in your memory, and if so, what made them special?

A.R.: I’m the sort of person, who, when I walk out of a movie, I can’t remember anything that happened. My best friend for many years would walk out of a movie and had memorized the entire script, every costume, every camera angle, every shift. I can’t do that. I’m walking up the aisle of the theater, the lights have come up, and the whole thing becomes one pulsing gestalt of energy.

And so, all 20 of the years that I went to GSV are one thing for me. They're all happening at the same time.

In the midst of it, in hindsight, there are moments of really shining starlight. Raphael Sabatini's "no-talent" shows. The non- and anti-hierarchical notion that what we do is have, not a talent show, but a no-talent show, was so moving to me, in addition to who Raphael was, and maybe still is.

In one particular talent show, there was a doctor, incredibly accomplished. He had just started taking piano lessons, maybe he was in his 40s, and he sat at the piano and played something in a way that any of us who took piano lessons as a kid would have played it – he started, he got a few bars, it broke down, and he went back. With the exquisite vulnerability of his playing the piano really "badly" ("badly" in quotation marks, because Harry and Raphael's invitation to us was to not judge each other), I just remember sitting there crying, because I couldn't have done that. I wouldn't have been that brave, that vulnerable, and that in love with what he was doing just to want to share it just where he was. It was an incredible teaching of the Buddhist notion of beginner's mind. That stands out, for me, very clearly.

Certainly, Raven's memorial, King's memorial, both stand out, the way that people came together in tenderness and vulnerability. A man named Lee Leathers, who was dying of AIDS, came with an incredibly beautiful urn that he had bought in advance for his ashes, which he talked about in the closing heart circle. There was one closing heart circle that went on for four hours.

I remember the tension in the early years between the founders and the desires of men who came from Short Mountain and wanted no structure, way more free space, not to have to pay for anything. I don't think they came too much and ended up sitting playing cards in the dining hall, and sort of stopped coming.

We went into this one period I called the "ego wars", when men showed up with great big egos and wanted to be king or queen or princes or princesses, and this battle that was so creative of 'how in consensual space do you get to own your own space?'. How in that kind of faery-ish space do you get to decide – maybe it's a male thing, you know – who has the biggest societal dick? There were quite a few

years of that and I remember all the feeling and the phone calls that I got, and "what do we do with this person, and that person?"

Most of what I remember are really tender moments – people coming and stepping into that space for the first time who had never done anything like that in their life, and how they changed. Every fire circle burns in my mind, the ashes from previous years going into the fire. Who was there, and who wasn't.

*Standing there without Raven,
without John Stowe, without ...
What is that like, to have a brother lose a brother?*

Standing there without Raven, without John Stowe, without ... What is that like, to have a brother lose a brother? I could go on and on, but when I feel my way back into it, I feel filled in a way that I've never experienced anywhere else. That's what stands out.

This might be something of an added question, because I've said this before and this is still my fantasy: if we look at the list of our keynotes, there's this strange dilemma. We are all equally brothers, and yet some of us stand out in some ways. It always makes me uncomfortable, and yet I'm in the middle of that dilemma.

The list of our keynotes is amazing. The men who came to speak to us are pieces of history. I've said this for years: in the way that Mark Thompson's *Gay Soul* brings together a group of amazing men, I would love for us to publish all of our keynotes. We have that little book (of keynotes) from the first year, and it was Raven and Ron and Peter's vision to do that every year, but we never did it again. I don't know how many people have the artifact of that first little book, but I would love to see us publish all the keynotes. I think they all exist.

So now, looking back over 20 years and having the sort of mind that was trained to think in four directions, we had amazing speakers, elders, teachers, presenters, participants. And in no particular order of the directions – spring, summer, winter, fall – there are people who aren't always acknowledged, but whose presence is utterly transformative. So I think of the, at times quiet, at times comical, at times maddening, and at times conciliatory role that Treewalker

(Martin Isganitis) held from the first year, and how he grew into that. I think of what Dan Dewberry did and does in community that is so quiet and yet so not-quiet and utterly powerful, that opens up doors to possibilities. And in similar but different way, I think of the role of Bob Strain as elder of music and what comes from his quiet presence. And I could go on and list people, but I'm only going to list one more. Raven always used to tease me about it, because I would stand in a corner by the firepit and talk to this dead Native American guy, who was one of us and had been there before us, who got us back to that mountain and the sacred space and the ceremonies he said had happened there long before we ever showed up. Thus the energy of that place is aligned with the energy of who we are, and Native Americans recognized it long, long before. In fact, what he said is there were men who loved men gathering there long before the Cherokee were there. And so I always think of my friend who I would talk to by the fire and what he taught me about how to be in community.

V: *What was your favorite altar?*

A.R.: Definitely the big white tree. I think it was made out of pressed board and it was so exquisite. It was so beautiful, so moving, so for me an embodiment of who and what we are as a living and growing organism. I have a picture of it somewhere.

V: *What is GSV's shadow, and how can it be balanced with the abundant "love and light" energy of the conferences?*

A.R.: Good question. Some of the shadow is just the shadow of being people. Some of the shadow is internalized homophobia. Some of the shadow is the same person who can be immensely creative can be an angry, vicious, bitchy queen. Some of our shadow is that we love each other and hurt each other, judge each other, put each other down. Ageism, body image, looks, cock size, are all aspects of what our shadow is.

The tension between wanting to live in consensus on a certain level, while some of us are alpha male, no matter how fabulous our drag, is part of our shadow also. I think it's important to talk about it. I think it's important to sit and live in, to watch how the shadow plays out. I don't remember who said "the greater the light, the greater the shadow," but I think there's some truth to that. I know one of my old teachers used to say, "As you step into your role as teacher and a

spotlight is shined on you, your shadow will be greater, and you need to turn around and look at it, and you need to thank the people who you would really like to kill who are pointing out your shadow to you." That's hard to do. It would be really lovely if at every conference there was the 'shadow afternoon', where there was like a costume party, you know, 'come as your shadow'.

...[T]he value of GSV is that it's not just an organization, but it's something grounded in spirit.

On the other hand, one piece of the shadow is the way that we can be really squished, diminished as gay men, in our families and by society and that certainly continues. Just because 40 percent of the gay people in this country can legally get married, it doesn't mean that you didn't grow up in families that shamed you, even though that's changing. So that becomes a piece of the shadow.

Jung talked about the dark shadow and then there's also the golden shadow, which is the repressed parts of us that are actually luminous and marvelous, but that we don't own, that we're afraid of. Not just that we hate people and want to kill them in whatever category it is, but that we're incredibly talented and we're not sharing that.

And then, where does racism live in GSV? It was so interesting as a Northerner to come down and to find people I really love who are white men say utterly horrific things casually that I wasn't accustomed to hearing. I knew people thought them, but I've heard several really dear friends of mine at GSV say things that were really upsetting about race. So the question of race and racial inclusion has certainly been talked about a lot at GSV, but it's part of the shadow. Misogyny is also a part of the shadow, and in the past bi- and transphobia. I don't know how they play out now. I'm hoping that that's changed.

Everything has a shadow. As long as there is a sun, or a light bulb, there is a shadow, and it's part of the fullness of who we are and the shadow owned and claimed and recognized and integrated makes for wholeness. And some of the shadow is that the conference takes place in the South, and the South has its long history and patterns of politeness, things that aren't said, that for me as a Northerner were very different and I was often surprised. Like people would call me

out of meetings and conversations to talk about things and I would say “Well, bring it up in the meeting.” No one ever would.

Early on somebody – it might have been John Stowe – said to me, “Listen, there’s something you haven’t figured out. You’re in the South, and when you ask somebody a question like *can you help me work on this?* and they say *yes*, that means *yes*, and when they say *yes of course*, that means *no*.”

It took a while for me to recognize that everyone said *yes* and nothing got done, because part of the culture was... In the North and the West people just say *no*. Maybe it’s changed in Southern culture, but certainly it came up a lot for me in GSV. Everyone was always saying *yes*, and no one ever did anything. That’s not true. Lots of people didn’t do things they said they would do. Just say *no*; it’s okay to say *no*.

There was one closing heart circle that went on for four hours.

V: *GSV has changed its service structure considerably in the past several years. Do you have any thoughts or suggestions for the organization as it moves forward into this new paradigm?*

A.R.: Because I haven’t been there, I don’t know how it’s shifted from being involved. It sounds like it’s becoming more professional in some ways, which is good, but the value of GSV is that it’s not just an organization, but it’s something grounded in Spirit. So I hope that, however businesslike GSV becomes, every planning meeting begins with some kind of meditation, begins with some kind of acknowledgment of Spirit, and ends that way. And that there are periods of silence for people to just be present with what’s going on. I hope everybody is knowledgeable and informed about and infused by the history of the conference. We used to have a little orange brochure that people fought about because some felt whoever wrote it didn’t tell the story right. No story is ever told right. It’s better to have a wrong story that covers some things than no story at all. So, I think I said this to you before, it’s important to me: a tree without roots cannot live, and a community that doesn’t know its history won’t flourish. So I hope that as new people step into leadership roles, which I applaud, that they will sit with the old-timers and learn the stories

and hear what happened. Read the old keynotes. Look at the evolution of history and see how, yes, you’re holding a place of leadership now, but you inherited it and, even more important, you will pass it on.

One of the things that was so powerful for me for all of my involvement in GSV was how seriously mentoring was taken. I think that is essential and I hope it continues, that every person in a role of leadership is mentoring other people and looking out for how they will pass on the lineage. That’s not to clip anybody’s wings, because things grow and trees change, and they should, and they must, but they mustn’t lose their roots either.

V: *What is your passion, and how is that showing up in your life these days?*

A.R.: My passion is writing. I have been writing almost every single day for a month, and some of it’s really painful, because then I stop and I read the news. I see what’s going on in Gaza and I think *how can you spend all day agonizing over what’s happening to imaginary people, when real people are being blown up?* It’s sort of funny: I’ve said this to a number of friends, who’ve said, “That’s very harsh.” I said it to someone I was in a writing group with for many years yesterday, and he said, “One of the things that makes life meaningful is art, and one of the ways that we make the world a better place is by making art.” So that’s my passion, putting words together with the intention of sharing them, words being vibration, and vibration being a tool for transformation.

V: As a gay man, what is your particular vision of spirituality?

A.R.: That’s a hard question, an enormous question. It brings up a question. Everyone I know who has been asked that, or been asking it, has said, “Is gay spirituality different than other people’s spirituality?”, and I wonder. I just finished reading a book called *Kali’s Child*, about Ramakrishna, the Hindu saint, and his homoeroticism and how he struggled with it and what he did with it. So there’s simply my question about the question and then there’s some version of an answer about gay men. My vision is that we’re all on spiritual journeys, that everyone born has chosen to be here and we don’t know what we’re getting into. What holds the pieces together and gives everything meaning in the midst of chaos is the conscious recognition that we’re on a spiritual journey – spirituality therefore being our understanding of the life force that flows through everything, holds

everything together, and gives it a deeper meaning than what is apparent simply to our physical senses.

V: What has transformed in your life as a result of your participation in GSV?

A.R.: I've made some of the deepest, dearest friends of my life at GSV, now going on several decades – people whose wisdom I value, whose love I value, whose friendship is essential to me. I feel like I am a tent flapping in the wind and many of the pegs that hold me to the earth are men I met at GSV.

I showed up at GSV a painfully shy, inexperienced young man – not so young, but not old either – and from the very beginning, people perceived me as an elder. I've also played with this language about *what does it mean to be a younger elder?* But now I'm getting to be an older elder, and all of that and my role as a teacher in various communities come from the way that I was nurtured in and by GSV.

Something else is forming into words. The model of community that I learned in GSV continues to be valuable to me, relevant, and important as I look at the world. I can imagine a world where everyone has their equivalent of GSV, a place that you go to on retreat, where your core tribe gathers for a short time to dip in the waters of its tribal-ness and meet and mingle, support, hold, and heal each other, and then go back out into the world. Some of us may have multiple communities like that. When I look at what's going on in Gaza or Ukraine – two hot spots in the world – I think everybody needs a GSV for whoever they are.

That then becomes our job, I think, as walks-between. It's up to us to take that vision to the world, in the way we live in our communities, in the way we move in the world when and if we travel. That may be the biggest piece of our shadow: that we haven't owned all of our power as shamans and as healers.

What would the world be like if it were run by gay men? I seem to



recall Harry Hay once talking about how the challenge of organizing gay men, when so much of our impulse is non-hierarchical, is that other communities have great leaders, but we're a people that doesn't incline itself toward having great leaders. And that paradox is part of our teaching, that we don't need a Lenin, we don't need a great hero, we don't need a Martin Luther King.

But if human life is going to continue, I think we are all, as men who love men, required by our nature to go out in the world with more vigor and tenderness and love to model a different way of having community, of doing community, of being in community. Or on the other side of it: gay men, you're just not doing your job. All the energy you put into floats and parties and parades and drugging and sexing and drinking is all incredibly lovely and important, but take some of that and use it in the world, in all of your communities. Support all of the people who are oppressed, support the movement to not toxically poison the planet. That's what we're here for. I would say, from that other part of my voice which is critical and judgmental, that we're not doing a very good job of it.

V: You have been missed at the last several conferences. Will we see you on The Mountain again soon?

A.R.: I will not be there this year [Ed: Interview was prior to the 2014 Fall Conference.] It is my very fondest hope to be there next year. One of the dilemmas some years was that the conference was scheduled during Jewish holidays. There was a year during the times I didn't come, that I was going to come, but it was either Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur. My hope is that I will be well enough to come next year, because I miss being there. I miss that space. I miss the community that gathers there. That big rock that we meet on lives in the middle of my chest, and it needs to be replenished by the rock itself, not by my memory of it.

V: Is there anything else you would like to say to the men of GSV?

A.R.: Thank you for listening to me. Thank you for having given me so much space to show up. It's nice to be missed, and sometimes it's also really good to not be there. For a painfully shy person, I can occupy a lot of space, and that's not good.

GSV has taught me to be both bigger and smaller, louder and quieter, and that is what I believe it offers to every man who comes there – a chance to grow into himself and his fullness at the same time as he

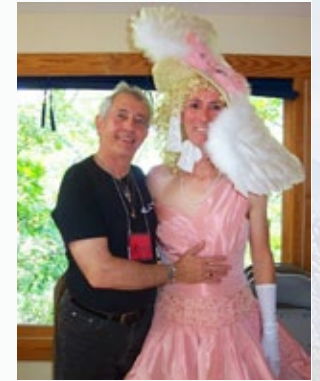
grows out of being too full of himself. In that balance, I think when we go home, we really model for our communities what's possible, because as important as the time we spend together on The Mountain is, it's more important what we gather there, glean there, harvest there, and then take home for the rest of the year in our communities.

One year we had a closing ritual where everyone spiraled into the middle, and I remember the power of being invited to turn around and face the world – to still be in that circle and to face out into the world and know we were leaving. This isn't something that we just do for those five days; this is who we are.

What's so precious to me about GSV, and in some ways I'm hearing

your question, I'm just reminded of how GSV was like a parent to me, a collective parent that really shaped and molded me. That was a gift. That was a blessing. So here I am, and it's been interesting to watch in the last number of years here, as I've gotten more and more involved in the Jewish community, it's because of what I learned at GSV that I could stand up and teach and write and do things.

That's what GSV offers to every single person, whatever it is that you do. That's the gift and the blessing of allowing a soul to emerge more and more each day in the safe and nurturing space of GSV, and then out in the world again.





Gay Spirit Visions

Creating safe, sacred space for men who love men



is a Georgia-not-for-profit corporation recognized under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of the United States

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Visionary (ISSN 1533-8231) is the journal of Gay Spirit Visions, Inc
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We are committed to:

creating safe, sacred space that is open to all spiritual paths, where in men who love men may explore and strengthen spiritual identity;

creating a spiritual community with the intent to heal, nurture our gifts and potential, and live with integrity in the world;

supporting others in their spiritual growth by sharing experiences and insights.

2015 GSV Gathering Dates

Winter Meditation
January 16-18, 2015

Spring Retreat
April 24-26, 2015

Fall Gathering
September 17-20, 2015