

MAN, ALIVE!

A Journal of Men's Wellness

Fall 1999

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Open Heart Synergy A Men's Wellness Weekend by Bob McMMain

I had been thinking of making this trip to the New Mexico Men's Wellness Summer Gathering for several years. Bob and Dave had been telling me about their past experiences there and encouraging me to go and enjoy the weekend gathering full of sharing fathering triumphs and tribulations around the campfire, storytelling, singing, ritual, music, and dance. All with about fifty men in the beautiful Jemez National Forest.

So here I was, trucking up forest road 20 in my '87 VW Syncro Westie, following Bob and his son Brett—surely the only two people I would know at the gathering—as we made our way to the weekend campsite. At age 63, retired and home again in New Mexico, I didn't have any more room to rationalize why I couldn't attend. My thoughts

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The group photo for the Men's Wellness Summer Gathering, 1999

Notes from the editor

Man, Alive! is a journal of men sharing from the heart the joys and problems of being male.

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Submission Deadlines

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Submission Formats and Requirements

Paper is okay, but please send submissions as a text file on a floppy disk or as an e-mail attachment if you can, to save us having to type your words into the computer. We'll be happy to help you do this. Please try to keep submissions below 1200 words.

We reserve the right to edit all submissions. No fees are paid and no submissions are returned. Copyright of all published material reverts to the author on publication.

Man, Alive! is published quarterly by the Men's Network Press
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With this issue, *Man, Alive!* ceases to offer subscriptions. *But wait*—that's not to say we're going out of business! No, we're simply recognizing that Men's Wellness is able to pay for publication of *Man, Alive!* from the proceeds of the summer and fall Men's Wellness Conferences. And we also want to reach a far wider audience.

We are going to automatically provide everyone on the current mailing list a three-year free subscription to the magazine. In other words, you can expect to receive *Man, Alive!* for another three years with no further effort on your part. And we will also extend the same courtesy to everyone who attends any future summer or fall conference.

These three-year extensions will not be cumulative. Every time you attend a conference, your date for receiving the magazine will be extended three years hence. So if you attend two successive fall conferences, for instance, your extension will be not six years, but three years from the date of the latest fall conference.

We plan to print the expiration on the magazine's mailing label as your only reminder of the time your "free subscription" is set to expire. But remember—the simplest way to stay on the mailing list is to attend the conferences!

It has also been decided to allow the name and address list to be used for mailings of interest to the group. All requests to use the list will be carefully screened for their relevance to men's work and for their connection to men who have attended Men's Wellness conferences in the past. You may request that your name be taken off the list for such mailings either by use of the contact points in the sidebar at left or by checking a box which you will find on the conference registration materials which you will receive in future.

Please let us know if you don't want to receive the magazine, or if you would like to have a one-year trial subscription (anyone may request this, regardless of conference attendance).

I look forward to seeing you in the fall!

David



Happy Campers (l. to r.) Barry Cooney, David Beckley, David Johnson, Ken Betzen and Pat Sauer enjoy a last hug before heading home after the Summer Gathering.

Synergy, continued from page 1

and feelings—anticipation, anxiety, expectations, doubts, do I really want to be here?—were all mixed with the wonder of the beautiful setting of tall pines and crisp mountain air. Now I was at the registration area where Pat signed me in, accepted my registration and \$30, gave me a leather string necklace and name tag in the shape of a bear, and sold me a '99 Summer Men's Gathering t-shirt. Now I was really committed to the weekend experience. I had no inkling then that I would again encounter the bear symbol shortly after the close of the weekend gathering.

After setting up my camper, having a look around, meeting a few other participants and eating my special quick veggie burrito dinner, I responded to the drumming invitation and joined the other men around a large campfire. There to my surprise I was greeted by my old friend Dave, and soon thereafter by another recent friend also named Dave. Now I knew four people there. Hey, four out of about fifty, maybe I wouldn't feel so out of place.

The weekend theme of "Connectedness" (how we connect or fail to connect with others) was presented to the group. Then introductions around the fire began with each man speaking his full name three times to the whole group. What a beautiful sound hearing the intriguing mix of first, middle, and last names as we let each other know we were present.

The rich ethnic/cultural heritage that was spoken through this name-calling was a feast for the ears. Then it was my turn: "Robert Kirkman McMMain." I liked the sound and was glad to have my name joined in spirit with others. This was followed by pairing up and talking about what brought us to this weekend gathering of men and what we wanted to get out of being there. That's when I met Gaylon, a strong spirited man with great earthy humor and a friendly disposition. There was also a Trickster in the gathering, dressed as a female clown. The Trickster never spoke, but mimed and teased various men throughout the evening. What was the Trickster's purpose? What was there to be learned from the clown's presence?

The remainder of the evening was devoted to sharing personal experiences around the fire. This involved picking up the carved talking stick and sharing from the heart. And what sharing it was! Men young and old, different stripes, different tribes, different complexions, gay and straight, sharing a piece of their life journey. Young men trying to find their way without a father. Older men struggling to be fully human in the face of loss, challenge, and change. Fathers grieving separation from their children. Men celebrating their growth as members of the human family. Humor, such as the man who said he felt like

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a kid again in the circle of men, except that when he was a kid he had two imaginary playmates and neither of them would play with him. I felt somewhat detached, but also a little self-conscious and scared. “What do I have to share?” I wondered. “What am I missing by my lack of desire to pick up the talking stick? Do I need to open my heart?”

Saturday morning’s activities began with the drum and flute calling us to gather around the fire at nine o’clock. Reaction to the Trickster was strong and vocal. Several who had found the clown humorous and provocative the night before now found the Trickster’s female attire to be a distraction or not politically correct, as well as a mask of the true person underneath. Much processing with the talking stick followed. The clown seemed to be a goad and a projection screen for some, and just a plain irritant and another example of hiding behind a mask to others. The clown was asked to unmask and join the group fully, but this was not to happen that day.

Writing about connections and sharing in small groups of three or four was next. We were asked to think about numerous aspects of connecting with others—who, why, what kind, where, positive or negative, etc. To think about others like and different from self, and how we connected or didn’t connect with them. Then we shared these musings with the others in our small group. This is where I met Sam, Benjamin and another David. Hey, it was beginning to look like there were more Davids in the world than there were Bobs! How could this be? We wrote a second time on lost connections—people from whom we had become disconnected due to interpersonal problems, distance, or death. Here I really felt the death of my Mom, Dad, “Mother” (maternal grandmother), and brother Frank. Mom and Dad conceived me and raised me. I regret not having gotten to know them better—their childhoods, dreams, fears, losses—while they were alive. Mother was the one I always knew loved me. She was a constant in my growing up years. I helped raise Frank. He was the good athlete I hoped to be but never was. I miss them all in different ways.

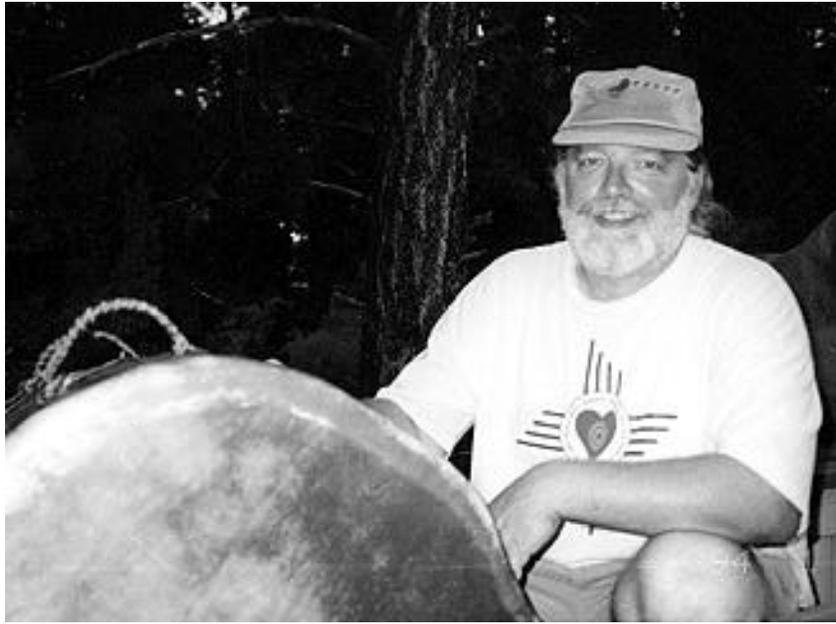
Saturday afternoon I attended Ricardo’s drumming workshop. There I was supported and

encouraged by Ricardo to learn the base rhythm and keep time with the beat of the music. I finally got it and made heartfelt—if perhaps not beautiful—music. Saturday night after the group dinner our drumming workshop group, “Original Skin,” played for the whole group while rain tapped on our tarp roof. What a thrill for me, having always felt musically challenged, to be able to drum to the beat and play with the group! Later, I held the talking stick and shared my sense of success, as well as telling my sense of shame from an early college experience when I was not allowed to join the men’s choir. The simple pleasure of keeping time to the beat of the drum did wonders for my soul.

Eventually the rain stopped and we gathered around a campfire built to heat rocks for the sweat lodge. Alan sang a beautiful song about being connected and protected, “The Backyard” (*words on page 8, ed.*). His experiences and memories of the backyard where he grew up touched us all. Shortly thereafter a man who was struggling with the hurt, anger and loss of a partner asked if anyone would object to him venting his rage around the fire, including cursing at his former mate. Several concerns were expressed regarding his request. I held the talking stick and voiced my objections to cursing another, and stated my belief that we have to be careful what we think and say about others because of the power of thought and its potential consequences—consciously intended or not. I knew he had to make his own decision, but I knew that it was wrong for me to be a part of cursing a sister, so I left the circle.

I rejoined the circle later when it was time to prepare for the sweat lodge. This was a new experience for me and I made it through three rounds. Benjamin did a masterful job of leading us in prayer, chanting, singing, grunting and groaning in the sweat lodge cave. I have never felt such hot air before, nor have I felt such primitive positive energy among men. We were packed like sardines, buck naked but not self-conscious as we went through the sweat. Welcome, welcome, welcome, grandfather, grandmother. The great spirit of all was surely there with us in the lodge.

Sunday morning we were again called to the circle with drumming. Many were dancing and keeping time with the music in other ways. The Trickster



If it looks like a tree trunk, it is! Cliff Taber proudly displays the drum he made, which is covered with hide on both ends, with rawhide handles. The men at the Summer Gathering were happy to help him break it in.

was no longer masked as a clown, but he was still playing the tease. It was good to have him fully join the group. Many men picked up the talking stick and shared heartfelt stories of the connections, love, support, and personal growth they had experienced during this gathering. Alan sang “The Backyard” again, and many of us cried tears of joy, sadness, and longing. What a special gift of song to the group! We wrote and shared in our small groups about barriers to connection.

The closing ceremony consisted of singing a Celtic song, making eye contact with each of the other men, and the exchange of special small items that each man had contributed the day before. I said my thanks and good-byes and gave hugs to several of the men with whom I had particularly connected over the weekend. Then it was time to prepare to leave, but first I checked out the '91 VW Westie owned by David, the conference leader, and shared some secrets of the Vanagon Westie with him. Finally, we had to gather six men and have a “VW wellness healing ceremony” to cure a stuck emergency brake on David’s Westie before we left the campground.

After leaving the campsite area I stopped in San Ysidro. Following a brief phone call to my wife I stopped at the Dairy Queen, where an Ogalalla Sioux named Albert wanted to sell me a fetish for \$20, claiming it was an “old one.” I barely looked at it and declined the offer. Then Albert said, “I’m really hurtin’ man. I need to make my connection to get home. Four or five dollars would really help.” My heart opened and I gave him \$5. He gave me a gift of the fetish. It was a large, old looking fetish in the shape of—you guessed it—a bear! What a connection. I may be able to learn the intrinsic meaning of this symbol from others more knowledgeable about fetishes, but its attribution meaning comes from within me. I like to think of it as a symbol of strength, father, and giving. Surely it also symbolizes the enormous synergy of the summer men’s gathering. I was in the right place the weekend of July 30th to August 1st.

Hey, that wasn’t so bad after all! Thank you Bob, Dave, and Albert. I think I’ll go back next year! ▶▶

The Shop

by Jeff Hood

My relationship with dad's shop started before I could talk, the smell of pine sawdust imprinted deep in my soul. As a toddler I remember hugging his leg, anchoring him to the threshold, burying my face in his green pants as he came home from work. No doubt he wanted to come in, sit down and have a drink to help dissolve the stress of the day. But I was the gauntlet he had to traverse to get there. He had to pay a toll for leaving me at home all day. Now, as I approach fifty years, the aroma of fresh-cut wood still lets me know I'm around men who work for a living, who make things with their hands, who live and die by their own labor.

Throughout my youth I made fleeting visits to the shop, teases of half an hour as mom reluctantly brought us kids to the city to pick dad up after work. Half an hour was barely enough time to say hello to Gertie, the secretary, and bolt through the office to the maze of machinery, where, if the shop was still running, I slowed in awe at the roar and scream the power tools made in the production of wooden shipping crates. This was the dark and sacred realm of men at work.

The summer after I turned fourteen, dad asked if I wanted to work at the shop. My older brother had given it a try and didn't like it, and that was reason enough for me to have a go. Mom considered it a dead end, but I knew I wasn't going to get stuck there because college was waiting for me. And most important but least acknowledged, I wanted to work with my dad and to begin the test of myself as a man.

In spite of the fact that I was the boss's son, I started at the bottom, learning to swing a hammer, sweep up, and move lumber from the yard into the shop. But my education was much bigger than that. I learned to keep my mouth shut during coffee breaks so I could watch the men. I discovered who liked to get work done and who was just there to punch the

clock. I found that it didn't make any difference if I tried to hide when tough jobs came up. I learned that a busy day goes by much faster than a boring one, I learned how to survive, and I learned to love work.

I am rich with images of that time in my life. One central theme, which probably had a lot to do with mom's dislike of the place, began at the toilet in the shop. Gertie kept the one in the office clean, but it must have been some kind of initiation to enter the little stall that held the toilet for the men. I have since traveled in China and India, visiting some unbelievably foul public toilets. My experience in the shop prepared me for those least civilized sewage pits. The shop toilet was tucked into a dark corner, and a single dim pull-cord bulb shed light on the place. The acrid smell of old urine leapt out the moment the door was opened. I have no idea whose responsibility it was to supply the toilet with paper, but their service stopped there. The place looked like it had not been cleaned since the shop was built. Yellow-brown stains threatened to clog the drain. An old plunger lived in the corner, ready to deal with the perpetual overflows. The floor was caked with old wads of paper, wrinkled magazines and dusty spider webs.

The walls, however, educated my young male eyes in the subject of obvious interest to the men: naked women. There were color foldout pictures from forbidden magazines like Playboy, with suggestive comments written in the margins, "Donald's wife," "You wish!" and "Wouldn't you like this one Charlie?" There were drawings of penises and testicles approaching the danger zone of the smooth and inaccessible women. There were poems and limericks scribbled on the walls which taught me much about what a man was supposed to like. As I sneaked quick visits there, my Protestant conscience quickly lost ground to the heat in my young loins.

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I remember being confused by several messages printed on those walls to and about Johnny, the foreman of the shop. There were suggestions and pictures hinting that he preferred boys to girls for his sexual pleasure. It didn't take long before I grasped the conundrum that Johnny might be, as we then called it, "queer." My innocence and desire to be one of the boys caused me to be slow on the uptake to the obvious. His good-natured slaps on my butt escalated to playful grabs for my balls. He once took me up to the empty third floor to "show me something," opening a closet to reveal an stained old mattress. My mind tried to hear that he brought young women up there, although I couldn't imagine any of the women I knew going up there with him. But it finally hit me that he brought young men up there week nights after a Boy Scout meeting, after work with a willing clean-up kid. He had a set of keys to the back door. He was the foreman. Nobody would question his having to go back to the shop in the evening to retrieve his lunch box.

"Wait a minute," I thought, *'I'm a clean-up kid!* He couldn't possibly want me in that closet with him! What about the pictures of naked women in the toilet stall? I'm attracted to women, not men—aren't I? He's the foreman of the shop! He may not be big, but he's strong and he works like a man. His hands are rough, and he drives a cool '63 Chevy Impala, blue-with-a-landau-roof. He's not suggesting that I go in there with him—I'm the boss's son, for God's sake!" As my mind first reeled from and then accepted the fact that Johnny was coming on to me, I found an excuse to exit the third floor. At first slowly, then taking steps two or three at a time, I bolted to the safety of the factory floor.

"Looks like Johnny just showed you the third floor!" one of the other young men said, and I must have turned bright red. Shame for something I hadn't done and couldn't talk about washed over me. I know that I avoided Johnny for days after that, but he was the foreman. When I ran out of work, he was the guy to go to for my next assignment. Besides, my fourteen-year-old penis had inexplicably responded to his grabs. The girls I knew were as unavailable as the

pinups in the toilet. Here was a guy I looked up to, a guy I trusted. What would it be like to let him grab me more? I was as confused as a kid could be. "Queers" were supposed to be effeminate limp-wrists, affected speech and all that. They were filthy and wrong and the butt of half the jokes we told at school. I knew I wasn't one of them. But Johnny couldn't be either, could he? My dad hired him, made him the foreman, trusted him with keys to the shop. The trip to the third floor didn't fit. My swelling penis didn't fit. My inability to put the whole thing out of my mind didn't fit.

Somehow I escaped Johnny's advances. My conscience, my resolve that I liked girls, and some luck conspired to keep me from his increasingly aggressive advances. I eventually came to despise and pity him, and to use his warped sexuality as an aid in defining my own. I knew I would never prey on anyone as he had targeted me.

I added eight years to that fourteen-year-old's confusion before I had sex with a woman. Surprisingly, having "done it" didn't erase the confusion, but it helped me identify what I thought a man was supposed to look, act, and feel like. It helped me negate the question about my response to Johnny. I must have added another eight years, a healthy work life, a marriage, and fatherhood before my sense of myself as a man allowed me to admit a healthy attraction to other men. I've found a comfort and a love for men which carries no threat and allows me to join the brotherhood.

My experience in the shop helped me define myself. I learned how to work, how to take splinters out of my hands, and knew the feel of sore muscles growing into hard muscles. I worked with old men who couldn't speak English and who would die of heart attacks and alcoholism without any health insurance. As the clean-up kid I crawled into the furnace, choking and sweating, and came out with a gritty smile on my face.

I look back at that time with the men in the shop, the pinups, Johnny's predatory homosexuality, going to work with my dad, the smell of pine sawdust, my developing sense of what it was to be a man, and I cherish it all, for it is who I am. ►►

The Backyard

by Alan Wartes

© 1998

This is the backyard where I took my first steps
as Dad grilled the burgers and dogs.
I learned to talk as the mockingbird called
to the sound of crickets and frogs.
Battles to save the whole universe raged
out behind the house all summer long.
Mom kept us filled up with Kool-Aid and PBJ's.
We knew we could do no wrong.

And the years go by,
and the trees grow higher.
The neighbors they come and they go.
But I am connected
and my heart's protected
in this backyard,
this backyard.

This is where Aunt Judy finally got married,
the pink ribbons catching the sun.
There was a tear in my Uncle Frank's eye
when he said, "Judy, you're the one."
That party lasted the whole weekend long.
You know all of my cousins were there.
Between the sheets on the clothesline I had
my first kiss, my first love affair.

And the years go by,
and the trees grow higher.
The neighbors they come and they go.
But I am connected
and my heart's protected
in this backyard,
this backyard.

I was at college the night that my mom called
to tell me my Dad had died.
I rode the Greyhound bus all the way home.
I just sat in the back and cried.
After the funeral out in the backyard,
we gathered to say goodbye.
All of my memories of him seemed to swim
in the space between grass and sky.

And the years go by
and the stakes grow higher.
The loved ones they come and they go.
Still I am connected
And my heart's protected
in this backyard,
this backyard.

This is the backyard where my little girl
Took her first steps just yesterday.
There was a tear in my eye when
the mockingbird called, "Come out and play!"

And the years will fly
and she will grow higher.
The seasons they'll come and they'll go,
but she is connected
and her life is protected
in this backyard,
this backyard.

▶▶

Editor's note: Alan sang this song at the summer gathering. It is included on a CD which is available from him for \$15 (price includes shipping) at the following address:

Alan Wartes, P.O. Box 1711, Gunnison, Colorado 81230.

Man2Man, A Report on the Gay/Straight Dialogue

By John Bishop

This was my first gay/straight conference. It was a two-day Saturday/Sunday event held at the Deva Center in Glorieta June 5th and 6th. The Deva center is a really big house all by itself backed up against rocky hills and arroyos. You get there by driving down into this deep grassy valley, wind around and eventually come to the house tucked away to provide the perfect setting for the seventeen of us to talk about and do exercises regarding our sexuality. The theme of this conference was about boundaries.

It was really quite challenging. It's not often that twelve gay guys and five straight can sit down and talk about their own particular sexuality and orientation. We had exercises and discussions about our first sexual experiences, early attractions, masturbations, and other sexual stories that were quite active and lively. We had exercises that stretched our personal boundaries. These are discussions and exercises that, to say the least, most of us do not experience on a daily basis or, for some of us, even in a lifetime.

I could only stay the first day because I had to catch a plane the next morning in Albuquerque at 6:30 AM. I got home around midnight after exploring my sexuality and boundaries all day. I can report the emotional impact of the weekend, however, only through a poem I wrote in my car as I was speeding down I-25 to the airport.

Why should anyone care
What sex I am.
I'm attracted,
yes, I'm attracted.

Put me in a box,
Place a label on my head.
Why should anyone care
What sex I am?

Attracted to your nipple
Soft and hard
Attracted to you.
I'm attracted.

You have touched me to the core.
I bow to your light.
Attracted to you,
Yes, I'm attracted.

This conference is an incredible opportunity to explore your sexuality and that of others, whether you are gay or straight. Some men reported they knew they were attracted to other boys or girls very young. Some gay men were previously married, have kids and grandkids, some became overtly gay in their forties or fifties. We talked about the changes in other people's attitudes toward an individual when they change from being straight to being gay. I gained an understanding through this conference about the sexual conservatism that I feel in many mature single gay men.

For me, I know I'm attracted sexually to women, especially my wife. And I love many men. I cannot express to you in adequate words the depths that I have traveled through attending this conference. Some of us are born one way, others make choices in life. Regardless, we're all on a journey to be happy and at peace. There's some incredible bonding that occurs at this conference between conscious and spirited men. I recommend it highly. ►►

EARTH BODY

by David Johnson

When the sense of the earth unites with the sense of one's body, one becomes earth of the earth, a plant among plants, an animal born from the soil and fertilizing it. In this union, the body is confirmed in its pantheism. ————— Dag Hammarskjold, *Markings*

With one eye on my daughter, I admire a life guard at the swimming pool, her bikini like a postage stamp, barely covering the essentials.

She sees me staring and pulls a towel around her like a curtain, lifts her legs and hides behind her knees.

I wanted to tell her, lo and behold, our bodies follow us everywhere, and how splendid they are!
And why did you wear a bikini anyway,

if you didn't want to taunt my imagination!?! Some bodies are embarrassed in public, tucked-in at the chest, as if they were shrinking into a closet.

Other bodies strut about like peacocks, like Adam and Eve before the apple, ready to shed their clothes like aspens in late October.

A fellow walks by the lifeguard, a trickle of brown hair snakes down from his navel like an invitation. His cock is a small fist filling his suit.

An old woman with a round stomach has dimples on her thighs, soft and puffy like marshmallow. In the water she becomes a seal, fluid and fin-like.

* * * *

A woman in a yellow bikini pours sun cream into her hand. With one motion rubs it over her arms and legs, up into the white, tender parts of her thighs,

the warm tallow, the broken shadows of hair and cleft. Then she lotions the man beside her, stroking his muscles. As she bends over his back,

her breasts slip out of hiding, fall gently forward like two playful puppies. And I smell coco-butter, almonds and pina colada.

I imagine a banquet spread out on my lover's body: melons, pomegranates, pineapples, bowls of whipped cream and chocolate. A heavenly feast.

Why couldn't all of us live together? Each afternoon we could oil each other and read poems. Would the Olympian Gods ask for anything more?

* * * *

For a brief time the ancient Greeks were more fully human, more confident and brilliant than anyone else around the Mediterranean,

than all those who followed the path of penance with thorns in their backs and ashes in their hair, fearful of their own image.

The Greeks measured the size of god's shoes and walked in them, looked into the sacred mirror and gave their deities penises and breasts,

because men and women have cocks and cunts, and there's nothing finer in the whole world than women and men proud in their flesh.

The Greeks took off their clothes, oiled the skin and wrestled in the nude. Their artists made copies in marble. No shame, no fig leaves.

No black robes and incense, no hocus-pocus Father-Sky with holy book, pointing his bony finger at sin, withering testicle and clitoris with his eye.

But the ancient pagans lost their nerve, and priests wrote the new rules. Was it Saint Paul? Augustine? Saint Luther and Calvin? All those saints

who covered their genitals with blue paint. Who lit up the recesses of caves with erotic fantasies, whose gardens blossomed with whips and young boys.

Humans became separate from god, separate from trees and birds, separate from themselves.

* * * *

On the beach at Paleochora on the island of Crete is a sign in English:

Nudism and camping
It is not allowed.

The words are bent and rusty, difficult to read. Ten feet away are tents of young bodies undressing, a beach of topless, sunburned bikinis and thighs.

I am not used to the sight of so many breasts. I try not to stare while I stare.
I wonder about the ratio of cloth to skin.

Up and down the sandy coastline, breasts pointed at the buttery sky, mounds, tepees, small hillocks, loaves of bread: pumpernickel, rye, French baguettes, whole wheat, sesame, baking in the sun.

* * * *

I am slowly taking off my clothes in front of you. Use your eyes, your imagination. My shirt is off. It is incredible that I can do this in a poem!

Continued on following page.

Earth Body, continued from previous page.

My dress has fallen into a heap on the floor, as I gracefully lift it with my foot and fling it across the room.

Stop! I lied about the dress. I simply wanted something sexy to fall to the floor. Like my old, faded Levis slowly unzipped, a private showing.

I check my nipples—they seem ample, although the aureole around them is small.
I do not feel the need to cover them—what are yours like?

Why not uncover them? What are we covering up?
Could we be more honest with each other without our clothes?

My cock is small like my bank account, but I've never said otherwise. I've always believed in the process, not the product.

I am now completely nude—I have taken off all my embarrassment, my attempts to be clever and successful.

How do you feel about this moment? Could you ever love me? I could love you if you removed all your deception.

* * * *

If we could turn inside out and start over again, like a child whose skin is fresh mint or basil.
How we yearn to stand under Niagara Falls.

We're all pagans here, worshiping the oldest gods and goddesses—sun and rain, moon and mountain, sea and desert.

I admit that I find the world brighter, more colorful, when I touch the animal within, when sparks leap from your eyes like the Fourth of July.

Our bodies were meant to embrace other bodies. That is why we have finger tips and delicate nerve endings on the surface of our tongues.

Inside we are oceans of salt water, islands of tropical plants and exotic birds. Inside we are male and female, heaven and earth, god and goddess.

Inside we are one.

Editor's note: This poem was read at the Friday evening session of the 1999 Men's Summer Wellness Conference.

Looking forward to...

The Fall Conference

by Cliff Taber



Reflecting over the last three years or so, Men's Wellness has been going through some growing pains. Some see Men's Wellness as being in its adolescence, attempting to find itself. In writing this article, I went back and read the last article I wrote for MA. In that article I gently asked a few questions about why things were the way they were. I got a big mixed bag of responses. I have to tell you, as I went back and read that article, I got a big smile on my face. For me it was a kind of leap of faith to see if Men's Wellness was what it said it was. Could it support a safe place for conflict and difference of opinion? Could I deal with my own issues that were coming up and not run away? Could it all move to a place where we could honestly say what we are feeling without it all exploding? For me Men's Wellness has provided this. I feel it will continue to, as long as we can get together, take off our masks and ask each other and ourselves the hard questions.

Last year Jerry Richardson asked me to assist him in this year's conference. The theme this year is "Authenticity." During this last year Jerry and I have talked a lot about what it means to be authentic. It has been an interesting year, having this thought of being authentic swimming around in my head. For me, the first question I had to ask myself is, "do I know who I am?" And then, "Am I presenting my real self to the world? If not why not?"

I have found that I present many faces to the world, many appropriate and some not so appropriate. Different conditions call on different aspects of who we are, and we are all different every day.

One of the places that feel I can be authentic and real is at a Men's Wellness gathering, or dealing with someone I know from Men's Wellness. I think this is one of the strings that keeps me coming back. It just feels good to arrive at a place where you can let go and be yourself. A sense of safety seems to hang in the air.

Jerry and I invite you to make the drive to Ghost Ranch on Oct. 7th for the Fifteenth Annual Men's Wellness Conference (the last of the millenium!). Come jump into who you are. I hope you will come and say what you need to say, hear what you need to hear, and share your life with all of us.

Men's Wellness is only as good as we make it.

There are three more planning sessions for the fall conference, as follows. Come help us out!

Thursday, August 19	Albuquerque	6:30-9:30 P.M.
Thursday, September 2	Santa Fe	6:30-9:30 P.M.
Thursday, September 16	Albuquerque	6:30-9:30 P.M.

If you have any questions about the conference you can call us or e-mail me at:

Jerry Richardson: (505) 827-0732 (day) or (505) 988-5459 (evening)
Cliff Taber: (505) 281-1166 fax (505) 281-8853 e-mail: clifftaber@aol.com

Changing

by Will Hinds

I stand at the edge of a circle right now,
a circle of men being emotional,
tossing their dreams and torments at the center
like drunk farmers tossing horse shoes.
Poetic males, tongues slobbering wet truth on a dry event,
hearts rent and collapsing from the voice of brotherhood screaming evidence.
Old farts and young pups struggling with the concept of magnificence
as ears spring open in a listening
which echoes down the corridors of family,
stumbling over the coals of ancient fires.
Elder boys turning and twisting
and wrenching themselves into men
right before their own eyes,
into men on the verge of a nervous revelation,
gooey reality and moist spirit.
Men exorcising the monsters attached to their bodies
and the demons nesting in their psyches.
Men alone late in life, so brutalized that distant women weep
while they delicately dance on the lips of their hearts.
Men who have dragged their fragile parents behind them like victimized toys.
Men who claim largeness in small places (yet can't be seen),
and men who feel so small that it breaks your heart when you step on them.
Men who forge the myth of forgiveness
from the wrought iron tears which fall on their feet of clay.
Men who were orphaned by the absence of mother's milk
and are now lost in a jungle of hardness
—yet are so soft in their own privacy!
Men with the brawn to create,
the strength to cherish,
and the will to allow.
Men who cradle the fire of youth
and breathe initiation into the heart of their lost souls.
Yes, men: penis bearing, warrior worshipping,
dove loving, drastic dreamers of
a greatness which does not wound.
Men who are ripping off the masks of their failed relationships,
only to find a love of themselves which can endure the test of any togetherness.
Men who no longer bleed on their past,
giving birth to a willingness which allows them to walk at your side
into a future which does not yet exist.
because it's changing. ►►

My personal experience of the gathering was one of connection and growth. I had a lot of fear about leading the gathering. I was afraid I was not a leader, I was afraid the gathering would fall apart, and I was afraid I would freeze. (In fact, I envisioned myself huddling in my tent while the rest of the committee put on the gathering. I also envisioned myself leading the gathering confidently and smoothly.) I learned instead that I am a leader, and the universe generously provided a lot of support, both from within myself and from other men. I was rarely turned down on a request for help, and a good thirty of the fifty men actively participated in putting on the gathering.

Other than trying to keep all the details together (there were minor crises with the t-shirts, the firewood and the lack of a flyer), my main challenge

was to lead and be present *at the same time*. The safety of the group was powerful (who could imagine a more loving, supportive group than the men at a men's wellness gathering?) and I was able to be present while I was leading. I knew it was safe to be wherever I was and to go through whatever I needed to go through.

I want to thank the men for giving me this opportunity, and for making the gathering happen just by being there and participating. We laughed, cried, played, prayed, sweated, danced, drummed, shared, connected, had a wonderful time, and in the process generated over \$1000 for NM Men's Wellness. Who could ask for more?

E-mail addresses wanted!

We are creating a statewide Directory of Men's Groups and we need e-mail addresses for men's groups from all over the state. Please send an e-mail address (or phone number if no e-mail address) for at least one member of your group willing to be a contact person to Gary McFarland (GaryMcFar@aol.com). We hope this directory will facilitate communication between men's group about upcoming events, issues and for mutual support.

Thanks!

If you were born in 1948 and you're interested in forming a 50's group, please call David Robertson in Albuquerque, (505) 344-5489

Calendar

Fall Gathering – Authenticity. October 7-10, \$225. Jerry Richardson (505) 988-5459.

Wednesday Brown Bag Lunch – Wednesdays noon-two p.m. at the Men's Center (above Haagen-Dasz on the Plaza in Santa Fe). The "Brown Bag Lunch" is a "come one, come all" men's lunch group which has been meeting in Santa Fe for nearly ten years.

If you're looking to join a men's group, or your group is looking for new members, the contact for Albuquerque is Paul Steinkoenig (505) 255-1013 (days) and the contact for Santa Fe is Israel Serr (505) 471-1952 (days).

The Twelfth Annual Men's Wellness Gathering

by David Robertson

On Friday, July 30, 1999 at 7 pm, approximately fifty men gathered in the National Forest to spend two days together. I was the facilitator, and other members of the planning committee were Patrick Hoel, Christopher King, John Russo, Lewis Sawatzky, and Skip Van Wyk.

From all reports the men had a fun, relaxing, sharing, playful, healing weekend, full of connections with self, others, nature, and Spirit. There were three talking circles, with much sharing from the heart. There were some newcomers, many of them young men, who shared early in the weekend, and deeply. It was good to have such sharing, which I believe was an indication of the level of safety created by the group.

Each person had his individual experience of the weekend, so it is hard to summarize the gathering in an objective manner. However, some of the key elements of the weekend were:

- There were two sweats, one early Saturday morning (with about ten men) and one late Saturday night (with about fifteen men).
- Saturday afternoon was open for individual workshops, including: drumming, Sufi dancing, tracking, body painting, group discussion of mentoring, and group discussion of healing of men's groups. These were followed by free time.
- Saturday evening was the group dinner, featuring fantastic food and a lot of rain. The new 20' by 30' tarps proved useful.
- A clown in female attire by the name of Herbiétta attended the gathering Friday and Saturday and generated much laughter and entertainment, as well as some consternation and considerable discussion.
- There was a workshop in four parts on the subject of connectedness, in which all men were asked to reflect and write on each of four aspects of connectedness and then share their thoughts with their small groups. The four aspects were: connections in our lives; lost connections; barriers to connectedness; and connections we would like to make stronger.

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