

MAN *Summer 2004*
ALIVE!
A Journal of Men's Wellness



MEN and NATURE

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Notes from the Editor

One of psychology's favorite pastimes is coming up with names for the self. In the relatively new field of eco-psychology, for example, there exists the radical notion of an "eco-self." While joining a long list of "selves" including such favorites as the "authentic self," the "false self," or the "child self," which are shaped primarily by our social experiences, the eco-self is a different animal altogether. Eco-psychologists explain it something like this: the eco-self is that part of us that evolved along with the rest of nature, that is with the non-human world. It is, therefore, that dimension of ourselves that we share with the rest of the animal kingdom, at the very least. Perhaps we even share this self with the plants and the rocks as well. Indeed, Alan Watts once suggested that the earth "peoples" like an apple tree "apples."

The seed of this self may have taken root in the first blue-green algae appearing in the primeval seas of our planet. That would make it about three billion years old. It contains, therefore, the wisdom of billions of years of evolution and experience on this earth. To arrive at its current state, the eco-self has gone through countless forms, transformations, permutations and upheavals. Many of its attempts to survive in an often violent and dangerous world failed and were relegated to evolution's graveyard. But the eco-self that emerged after three billion years is an extraordinary piece of work. It is exquisitely tuned to the non-human world and possesses astounding powers of perception, intuition and judgment, especially when in its "natural" surroundings. This eco-self dwells in the most ancient neuronal structures of our brain and body. In modern humans, however, we have largely lost access to its power.

We can approach, at least, some of those conditions in which the eco-self makes itself known when we find ourselves many miles in on some wilderness trail and suddenly a buck with an enormous rack crosses the path ahead. We feel a quickening of our pulse and a mysterious excitement seizes us; we become suddenly more alert, more focused, more alive. Or, our noses register the musty odor of damp decaying matter on the floor of an old forest and we seem to remember an ancient sense of being at home. Perhaps the sound of rushing water draws

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Man, Alive!

is a journal of men sharing from the heart the joys and issues 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 via e-mail if at all possible, to save us having to type your words into the computer. Photographs should be in .jpg format. We'll be happy to help you do this. Please keep submissions below 1500 words.

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MEN and NATURE

CANYON DAYS

Todd Tibbals

Full moon night over Ed's raw land near Tres Piedras; late September 1994. Nine men, all 55 years old this year, are bedding down on the ground. Frost is everywhere for a dawn sweat lodge to kick off the Vision Quest. Six of us then set out for S.E. Utah. The aspen are blazing, a bear lumbers across the road, spirits are high. Night falls beneath Cathedral Butte overlooking alluring Upper Salt Creek, quintessential slick rock canyon country.

Walt; David and Gaylon. We duos consume most of today searching for our power spots. After rejecting several areas Walter and I chose a shapely, angular canyon. We move about slowly hoping a place will speak to one of us. Several false starts and almosts.

I am finally smitten by a lofty sanctuary of huge red rocks strewn about like hunks of rare beef, in front of a tall lacquered canyon wall, with a bit of sandy "beach" and a couple of small trees. As Brigham Young proclaimed when he spotted the Salt Lake Valley: "This is the place!!" I feather my spot while watching Walter move on around the Canyon walls. An hour later he

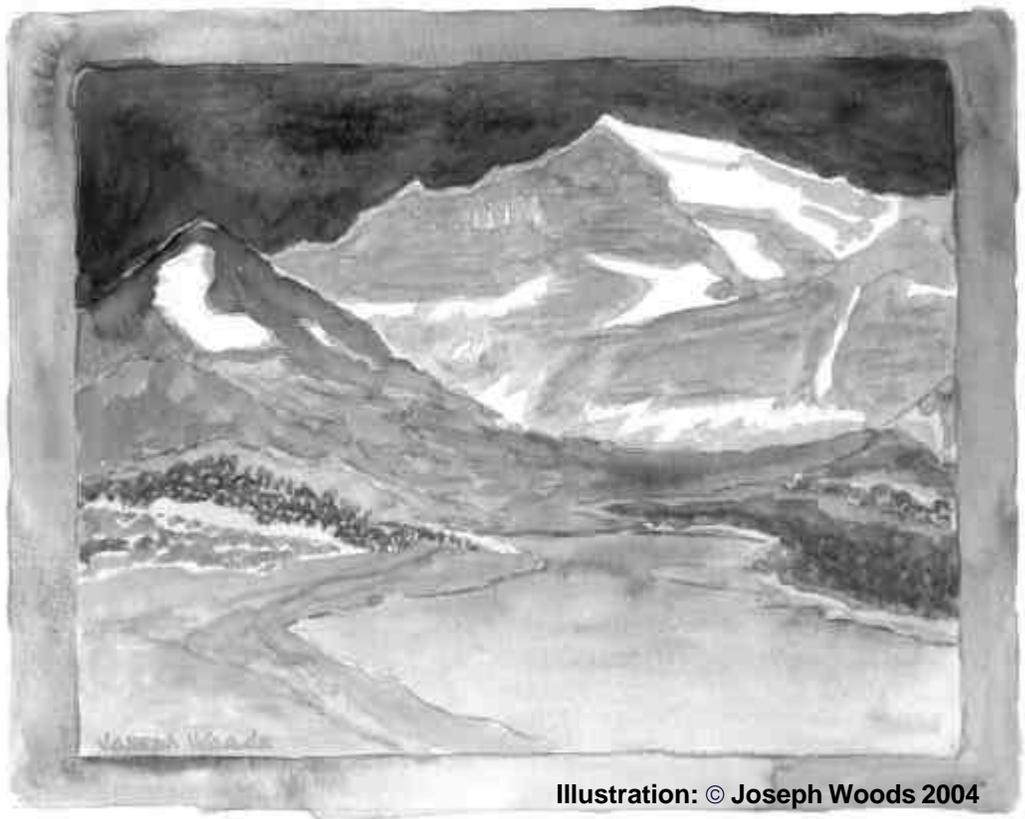


Illustration: © Joseph Woods 2004

We're returning to the area of our first Quest when we all turned 50. The other trip was with a seasoned Vision Quest guide. Now we're on our own. I put my watch in my backpack hopefully not to be eyed for the duration. Next morning Gaylon, John, Walter, David, Walt and I hold a "rim ceremony." We're a motley outfit of New Mexicans, except David who's in from NYC. He's nursing a bum tooth. Gaylon has low back woes. Says his new chiropractor "took one look at my body and ordered himself a new BMW!!" John with his gentle British cadence is our unofficial ritual maestro.

We snake down the rocky trail, with a vow of silence until making camp 1,000 ft. lower and four miles in. Perfect weather and come-hither landscape. I flash back to my other forays into Utah God's country. A scrub oak grove near spring-fed water becomes our base camp, amid sandstone cliffs. The last meal (before fasting) is devoured on a rocky shelf where we later drum and dance the moon up. In the crisp morning air we do guided meditations focused on our projected fasting places, then pair up, based on these images. Walter and I; John and

has found his special place.

Out of earshot, we set up a colored flag in our adjacent trees as our way of signaling. Hungry and tired we reunite and turn back to the oak grove for evening foodless activities with the others. We six each burn symbols of what we're hoping to let go of. I exterminate some old family photos; John torches a picture of clutter on his desk. Tuesday morning we each cram about 10 qts. of water into our packs (sans food), with sleeping bag and tarp but no tent. Walter and I give an abrazo at the portal of our canyon, not to reunite until Friday. My power spot seems welcoming—feels like coming home. Still agreeable weather. Like a cat I circle around in my new address, unable to lift my eyes off the feast of shapes and colors near and far. I'm more relaxed than on my first Quest. Being a visual junkie, I begin connecting with nearby rock shapes and naming them: "Grandmother Rock," "Primo," "View to a Mountain Lion." It feels like community!

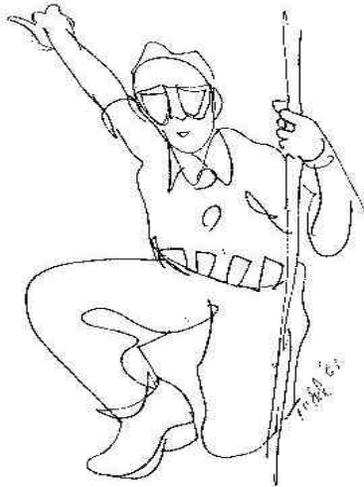
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MEN and NATURE

CANYON DAYS

continued from Page 3

I meditate off and on, focusing on my trajectory through life for 55 years, and the important people along the way. I dialogue with them, relating what they've meant to me and what I hope our future together will be. When hunger draws near I sip more water. At dusk I'm drumming on my little ceramic tabla, when I barely make out Walter changing his flag color. All is well in our canyon! That night my only cover is a blanket of stars. Wednesday, I decide to remain naked all day in honor of Indian Summer. I automatically ruminate on past breakfasts, then distract myself with some yoga stretches. The body feels different, less sure of itself. Longer meditations today as I obsess less about food and find a deeper level of awareness. Fasting seems to enrich the brain chemistry. A raven glides above with his squeaky wings and calls out: "Who goes there—in my lair?" I scan the canyon, intent on a rare cougar sighting. Maybe a mountain lion is watching me. Late afternoon I notice



the shadows of my naked body on the rock walls like some sort of magic lantern show of pictographs. I'm starring in my own one-man pantomime! I make shadow puppets with my hands—birds, rabbits, etc. I ponder the history and geology of this place. Have any other humans sojourned right here? Who were they? How can most city folks survive without canyons in their souls?

Walter's latest flag is comforting as the day ebbs. Tonight is cooler and I'm squirming in my bag. Strange dreams! Thursday dawns mostly cloudy. I'm hungry and missing my sun. Time drags. The water is holding out. I totter over to my signal tree feeling weakish. If I had had a flag that conveyed: "Walter, I'm restless today," I would have hung that. Grandmother Rock winks at me saying: "Cool it dude, be imperturbable like me!!" My meditation is wobbly today. Late afternoon winds bring darker cumulus. Yesterday I shouldn't have thought: "This weather is too perfect!" I'm a Keystone Cop trying to rig my tarp at dusk in gusty winds. Sweet Jesus, it starts raining hard. Add thunder and lightning!! I keep mostly dry for awhile. My plan of having the traditional small, final-night vision-welcoming fire is washed out, literally. Hour after hour it blows, sometimes with horizon-

tal rain, finally soaking everything. The tarp is toast! I alternate between primal fear and defiance, sometimes screaming out loud. I wonder about my five cohorts. It's comforting knowing they're in the area, but I conjure imaginary newspaper headlines. Temps are dropping and I fear this could morph into snow, trapping us in these canyons, with our undernourished bodies. The only vision I'm having tonight is of my relatively sedate life back in N.M. I don't think I actually slept.

A most welcomed dawn pokes at my fuzzy consciousness. The storm is over. I take inventory of myself and the soaking gear. Walter-dear-Walter and I signal each other. I gather a few mementos from my power spot and hug Grandmother Rock. I'm weak and dazed as I make my slippery way slowly down to the canyon floor. Then a knowing hug from a disheveled but smiling Walter. Enroute back to base camp it starts hailing!! "Lo que faltaba!!" ("and now THIS") I exclaim to my companion. It doesn't last long. We shriek with joy as we're reunited with the other two pairs. The six of us look skinny and scuzzy. The most welcomed brunch couldn't have tasted better. Afternoon talking circle. David relates that he had intentionally parked himself out in the open thunder and lightning area in his shredded K-Mart rain poncho, tempting fate. We all feel a sense of rebirth and renewed purpose. That evening around the campfire we sound like veterans of Guadalcanal with our survival stories. Saturday morning we pack up and chug back up the long hill to Cathedral Butte, with depleted strength but swelling spirits. Driving home, the traffic seems oppressive and reentry to the dominant culture difficult. Weeks later there's some thunder one night. I pull the covers up and flash back to Grandmother Rock, wondering if she's still smiling. §



Illustration: © Joseph Woods, 2004

MEN and NATURE

OUT OF THIS WORLD

Brett Nelson

Four years post-bypass surgery, I'm huffing and puffing as I climb a steep trail up from the Pecos River, looking for trail #280. I'm sure I've gone too far, and still no trail. I backtrack and walk off through a meadow where I think the trail ought to be. Sure enough, it's there.

Another mile and I can stop for camp. But I'm encountering lots of deadfall - fallen trees held 2-3 feet off the ground by their branches. Hard to get over with a heavy pack, they slow me down and wear me out. And the trail keeps disappearing - several times I have to wander around to find it again. Finally, I think I've gone a mile, and the light is fading. I find a spot in the dense forest for my tent, pitch it and unpack my gear - setting up everything I need for dinner around me so I can cook and make tea without moving. Ahhh....

By the time I'm done, it's getting dark, and I still need to hang my food to keep the critters out. I grab my flashlight and go looking for a good tree, far enough away but not so far I can't find my way back. The trail is hardly recognizable in the dim light, and none of the trees seem to have a branch I can get a line over. I drop the heavy bag on the trail where I think I can find it and keep looking. When I find a tree, it's about 8:30 and pitch black.

I head back for my food bag, but I can't find it! Circling around, nothing looks familiar. I have a hard time finding my way back to the tree. I look again, round and round, back and forth, trying to keep my bearings. Still no luck, and I start to panic a little as my flashlight gets dim. I'd better find my tent - I don't want to spend the night out in the cold. It takes about 5 minutes to find it - seems like 15 - and my pulse slows a little. I put new batteries in the flashlight and find the bag in a few minutes, but now I don't know where the tree is. When I finally hang the food, it's almost 9:00, and I've been stumbling around for 40 minutes. I swear and scold myself.

After breakfast and coffee in the morning, I pack up and head for the stream junction where I'll fill my water bottles and pick up trail #264. More deadfall and disappearing trail until I hit the stream in another mile. When I start climbing, it's steep and slow, but it's a gorgeous day and I'm on a good, clear trail now. I take it easy, wanting to conserve energy for tomorrow.

After about a mile and a half, I walk into a large meadow with what looks to be a frequent horsepackers' camp. I follow a trail out the other side up to another meadow on a hillside - and NO TRAIL! AGAIN! I drop my pack and walk around the meadow, getting my first breathtaking glimpse of the peaks. No trail after 10 minutes, and I sit down to rest and eat. Then I hoist my pack and head off in the most likely direction. I figure I'll cross the trail somewhere if I fan out back and forth. It gets steep again, and there's more deadfall to climb over now that I'm off trail. It takes another hour of this before I cross the trail, and I plop down, relieved and exhausted.

In 20 minutes I take off without my pack to figure out which

direction I need to go. I'm doubly lucky this time - I pick the right direction, and it's only 5 minutes to a junction with markers. I go back for my pack, relieved that I know where I am.

The trail is clear now - for about a mile, that is. Then it disappears crossing a marshy area. This is getting old! Looking at my USGS quad and Forest Service maps confuses me. Why are they so different? Am I here, or there? Have I gone too far? Not far enough? It takes me 15 minutes of wandering back and forth to find the trail.

Back for my pack again, and in another 20 minutes I'm at the junction with trail #255. 10 more minutes and I'm at the bottom of a steep climb, but it tops out quickly at a beautiful meadow with a little brook running through it and the Truchas Peaks rising above. I find a delightful campsite in the trees at the near side of the meadow. Plenty of time to set up camp, get water, cook, eat and relax. I want to climb the peaks tomorrow, but I'm exhausted. We'll see.

In the morning I feel better, but not very energetic. I've got to find the trail. No sign of it through the meadow last night, so I wind around the north side of the meadow looking for a trail leading into the forest. When I don't find it, I just head in the direction of the ridge in between the peaks where I know the trail eventually goes.

This puts me back on a steep grade off trail, with the inevitable deadfall to climb over again. My pack is lighter with most of my gear left back in camp, but my legs don't have any life in them. It takes me 40 minutes to go less than a mile, when I hit the Skyline Trail 100 yards from Lower Truchas Lake.

I give myself a breather taking photos at the lake, then hike around the lakes and start up the talus slope below the peaks. It's only another ¼ mile or so to the ridge between the peaks, but it's agonizingly steep, with gravel that slides out from under my feet with each step. I slog along 15 or 20 steps at a time, then pause to bring my heart rate out of the 170's - but it's OK, I've tested that before. Still, my bypass surgery 4 years ago is at the back of my mind - not far back. I'd prefer to have a heart attack somewhere else, thank you.

In 45 more minutes I reach the knife edge ridge at 12,400 feet, totally spent. The chasm on the other side seems to go

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photo courtesy of Brett Nelson

MEN and NATURE

EARTH MOTHER

Robert Francis Johnson

She who bore us all
weeps for the barren
soil we now provide.
Yet, love goes on
giving birth
to eternity.
We who see
a little more
bow our heads
In awe,
as the mother of
us all
eats the anger
and violence
and sends back
flowers
in springtime,
year after year
after year. §



photo courtesy of Brett Nelson

MOONSTRUCK

Continued from previous column

Like a temple robber
transformed by
sacred sights not meant for
unbelieving eyes,
I bow and retreat
leaving every jewel in place,
over my shoulder,
casting furtive glances, to make sure I did not
imagine, but saw. §

MOONSTRUCK

Mark Bennett

I come in ignorance,
drawn like a moth to the light.
Graceless, noisy snowshoes carry me to this
gleaming porcelain altar at the top of the world.
Shaggy pine soldiers stand guard at this temple.
Moonshadows spill onto the perfect whiteness.
Hoarfrost reflects the light
turning this high mountain meadow
into a gem-strewn delight for midnight eyes.

Stopping and setting the snowshoes,
only the breath moves.
As if guided by a strong hand,
my head bobs reverently,
left and right, releasing
thousands of tiny flares that
pulse blue, red and green
from the snow. Dazzling.
Have other eyes beheld such treasure?

What if a celestial presence
senses the wonder
in my heart
and gazes upon this place
noticing one more
precious, beautiful light
pulsing from my being
on the snow
under a full moon?

AMBUSHED

Brett Nelson

The wash is unimpressive,
the hike to the bottom short.
Its floor is a dry carpet of sand
dragging on my boots with every step.
No water anywhere now.
The marvels duly noted in guidebooks
are all down canyon,
but I turn up toward the slot
that tugs at my curiosity.
In minutes I slip between two walls of rock
maybe 20 feet high and 10 feet apart.
The slot twists back and forth
and the walls begin to close in,
cradling my path.

And there it is in front of me,
the handprint of violent torrents
that scoured for thousands of years
down through a crack in the bench above,
breaking through underneath,
with a small gap at the top where the
still reaching fingers of rock almost touch.
Out of the elongated oval below
shines light of a color I've never seen,
baked deep within this sandstone womb,
pregnant with a burning golden ember
deep in the well of hell, or heaven, or both.

Innocent of expectation and defense,
I am purely, virginly taken -
captured without raising a finger,
I surrender instantaneously in outrageous love. §

MEN and NATURE

THE DOLPHIN EXPERIENCE

Joseph Woods

Something very large passed just under my feet. The water was warm and clear, but I could not see under the surface because of the glare from the bright summer sun. I was more than just a little concerned because a large shark had encouraged us to leave the water just yesterday as we surfed a favorite beach a short distance from where I now had my feet dangling over the sides of my surfboard.

Someone close to me let out a loud yell and my blood ran cold. In the next second everything changed as a large bottle nose dolphin jumped high out of the water and splashed a surfer twenty yards from me. All was well. A pod of dolphins had come to play. They jumped, spun around and sang to us. Everyone was laughing as we shared their water world for the next ten minutes. They disappeared as quickly and mysteriously as they came. Over the years I have been visited many times by these wonderful creatures. Their visits have always been on their terms. I just watch, enjoy and learn.

I spent most of my summers on a beach near a small Mexican village on the Pacific coast. One morning I noticed several of the local villagers at the water's edge pointing out to sea. At first I did not see anything unusual, and then I realized I was seeing a huge dark area in the water several miles out. As the dark area got closer to shore I realized that I was watching a huge pod of dolphins. They were their usual playful selves, jumping and swimming very quickly. The pod covered an area bigger than a football field. After watching them for several minutes they were suddenly gone. They left me with a feeling of wonder and awe of the natural world.

During one of the most difficult times of my life the dolphins were there to help. I worked on an ammunition ship off the coast of Viet Nam for over a year. Although the waters of the Tonkin Gulf were clear and beautiful, our ship sailed through them on a dark mission. The surface of the water was a mere twenty feet away, but worlds away from my reality. One afternoon when I had a rare free moment, I snuck to the bow of the ship. I looked down on a perfect double bow wave. The calm blue surface of the water was divided into perfect aquamarine waves. I fell into a dreamlike trance just watching the water when suddenly I was joined by my old friends the dolphins. They rode the waves to perfection. I so wanted to join them.

Just knowing they would be there from time to time helped me to retain my sanity in a crazy reality of war.

I often dream about the dolphins. In the dream time they are able to fly through the air and even swim through deep space among the stars. They often have a message for me, a solution to some current problem I am dealing with. Shortly after Marine World Africa USA opened in the next town I found myself walking through the main gate and asking where the dolphin show was. I passed magnificent big cats, lions, tigers and bears, but made a straight line to the dolphin tank. I entered from the top of the bleachers and before I could catch my breath I witnessed two beautiful dolphins break the surface of the water and spin just as they had shown off all those years

before on a Texas beach. I just cried. I sat near the front and no kid there enjoyed the dolphin show more than I did. In my head I thanked them for saving my life in Viet Nam and being there for me in my dreams. I could not help but think that they were there to observe us, a strange land creature that balanced on two legs and didn't know how to have fun.

Just a few years ago I was paddling out in small surf on the Gulf side of Florida.

There were many surfers out, but I found a place where I could have a little room around me. As I paddled through the last wave of a set, before me a baby bottle-nosed dolphin surfaced. We made brief eye contact and then he was gone. I felt as though something had been communicated between us, as I often think of that last encounter and how wonderful it was just to see such a beautiful wild animal so close. §



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**New Mexico Men's Wellness
2004 Summer Gathering:
VIOLENCE:
Choice or Destiny?**

July 30 - August 1, 2004

Registration on Back Cover or Contact:

Sal Treppiedi @ (505) 275-7256

Readers Pick Up the Pen

BROTHER, BROTHER, BROTHER, MERCY, MERCY, MERCY ME

Robert Francis Johnson

"I would like for you to design an industrial system for world culture that treats nature as its enemy to be evaded or controlled; that measures the prosperity by how much of your natural capital you can cut down, dig up, bury, burn or otherwise destroy; measures your productivity by how few people are working, progress by the number of smokestacks...destroys biological and cultural diversity at eveturn with one size fits all solutions, requires thousands of complex regulations to keep you from killing each other too quickly. Can you do this for me? Welcome to this morning!"
William McDonough

"You see war is not the answer for only love can conquer hate" with thanks to Marvin Gaye for the title and the quote about war; a man tragically murdered by his own father. And we are at war indeed, with other people, the Earth and ourselves, as violence has become not only epidemic, but also the filter through which we view the world around us. What is going on, and what can we begin to do to begin to heal this wounded land?

I was a somewhat lost child as my father left after my birth and didn't have much to do with me as a child. At eight years old I had rheumatic fever and was put in the hospital for about a month. When I went in the hospital it had been winter; when I got out it was spring. I will never forget the beauty and intensity of that spring's kiss as it reached out to me and reminded me that I belonged even with my mother's alcoholism, and my father's forgetting. Even as difficult as my life gets at times the natural world is always there to nurture and love me. That numinous experience has never left me. It was a great healing and the beginning of the work that this article is about...my calling...helping us to remember what we've forgotten about being human, and the importance of the earth in our lives.

Most of us, I believe, were born with the notion of the superiority of man over nature, over women, over the creatures of the world, and that all of this incredible beauty is here to serve us as we see fit. Contrast this view with the words of a Native American poet, Simon Ortiz:

*My son touches the root
carefully, aware of its ancient
quality. He lays his soft,
small fingers on it and looks
at me for information.
I tell him: wood, an old root,
and around it, the earth, ourselves*

I hate to say it brothers, but the intellectualization of our world, and our separation from nature, because of the errors, and arrogance of Western Science and Philosophy has us at the brink of extinction. The separation of mind, body, spirit and world as Descartes pronounced in "I think therefore I am" instead of the healthier "I love therefore I am," or "I relate to all

this beauty therefore I am," has set western culture on this wild ride of narcissism, entitlement, and contempt. If we look at the face of the president and many of his power brokers, what's most visible on their faces is contempt. The posture of contempt is a shame-based defense against the shadow of our lives. In her doctoral dissertation entitled

"Killing Beauty In America,"

Jungian therapist Constance Buck looks at the amount of genocide perpetrated against the native peoples in this country of ours. We have a horrific history of violence by western culture; in the last century alone we killed over 100 million people. Do we have a right to call ourselves civilized? Do we have the right to posture as a superior culture? I don't think so.

I personally believe this disconnect from the natural world, and our uncomfortableness with our own nature is at the heart of our pathology as this poem by David Wagoner suggests:

Lost

*Stand still. The trees ahead and the bushes beside you
are not lost. Wherever you are is called here,
and you must treat it as a powerful stranger,
must ask permission to know it and be known.
The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,
I have made this place around you.
If you leave it, you may come back again, staying here.
No two trees are the same to raven.
No two branches are the same to wren.
If what a tree does is lost on you,
you are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows
where you are. You must let it find you.*

Brother, brother please take time each day to remember we come from the earth, and the technological environment we live in [we leave our natures when we forget] is part of our world, but can only be alive and healthy if we have our heart and soul in the natural world as my poem suggests below. And, also remember... Love is the answer and the question doesn't much matter!

WELCOME HOME BROTHER
Robert Francis Johnson
earthprayers@hotmail.com

A bouquet of men
touching the land
while
singing the songs
of their hearts.
The Earth,
she weeps for
joy,
having waited
so long
for her lover
to return.
§

Readers Pick Up the Pen

NEARER TO DEATH EXPERIENCE

Neal L. Apple

I thought I was going to puke as soon as I heard his first words: "I waited until the end of the day before calling you." Doctors don't wait until the end of the day to call you with good news. "You've got prostate cancer. One out of four biopsies on the right side and two out of four on the left were positive for cancer." I got that hard to describe feeling in the pit of my stomach - nausea, crampy like I had just been punched in the belly and felt sweaty and lightheaded. I knew my vagus nerve had kicked in. Vagus means "the traveler" - it's a nerve that goes a lot of places in the body. In that moment, the vagus was cutting my pulse in half, lowering my blood pressure, and decreasing blood flow to my brain so that I might pass out and get the hell out of the situation I was in - listening to some really bad news that I did not want to hear. I guess the vagus only partially fired because I didn't pass out and Dr. Kolosseus went on some more and I jotted notes down on a Post-It note I have kept as a memento. "Sending to UNM to get outside consultation. Low Gleason score 5/10, not aggressive." Apparently I underlined the not aggressive. I guess I liked that. I wrote the date down, too. 4/15/03. Tax-return day. Bad enough day as it is - paying huge sums of money to a government that I generally disagree with, but anyhow

I remember his talking about the two options. Surgery, i.e., radical prostatectomy and radiation, of which there are various kinds. Surgery had a slightly better cure rate at 5 years, 82% vs 80% or something like that. All I remember is thinking "If I even have anything done about this, I'm having radiation." Forget the surgery, even the name is scary, RADICAL prostatectomy. The prostate is way down in the pelvis - a really difficult place to get to. I remember Dr. Bishop, a urologist who used to live here, talking to me about that procedure while we were putting our scrubs on in the men's locker room before surgery "Very vascular area, patients need transfusions, bloody operation." No way, not for me.

I suppose it was the right thing for Dr. Kolosseus to do - waiting until the end of the day. I wasn't in great shape after talking to him, and it would have been difficult to shrug that news off and continue seeing my own patients. I felt very, very altered. I did not know it then, but I was just at the beginning of a three-week period of being in an altered state. The altered state I experienced is one that has been experienced by some others whom I have spoken to who have been diagnosed with cancer or life threatening illnesses or thought they had cancer and what I have found interesting enough to want to write about.

In writing this article, my intention is two-fold. I am pushing myself to remember and record details about my experience so that I might more fully integrate what happened into my being and, secondly, people reading these words might find this interesting or stimulating. I have been encouraged by friends who appreciated my openness as I was going through the different stages of this illness and treatment. Having just turned 50, I think I am part of the first wave of people in and around my age group to be diagnosed with cancer, so there is

more curiosity and interest than there probably would be in the 70 plus age range where many more people have gone through cancer diagnosis and treatment.

There was one detail I may have overlooked if it weren't for some friend who asked me what it was like to get the news from the doctor the day before. I remembered a small sense of excitement hearing that I had cancer. This seemed a bit odd to me at the time. Why would anyone feel excited hearing they had cancer? I knew in that moment I was embarking on an adventure and I also knew I was hearing truly life-changing news. My life would never be the same. I think I felt excited because I knew this experience would lead to my growth, and nothing is more exciting to me than my own and others' growth. I told a friend I wanted this experience to expand who I was, but not take my life. At least most of me didn't want to die, but more on that later.

The altered state I was in is hard to describe in words. I felt very, very present in my body. I also was aware of a deep sense of gratitude to be in my body. I was not sleeping well those first few weeks. I recall spending many hours lying awake in bed, aware of my breathing and feeling quite content to just be breathing. Normally, when I can't sleep I feel angry or frustrated that I'm awake and anticipate a rough day ahead. During those days, however, it was just fine with me to lie there awake breathing. I have reached that state during weekend long Vipassana meditations, but usually only after one or two agonizing days of my mind wanting me to be doing anything else - anything other than just sitting there being aware of my breathing in the present moment.

I recall delightful showers in the morning, being able to feel each individual little stream of hot water coming out of the showerhead hitting my back. I felt tremendous gratitude for hot indoor showers and for my body that could feel that delicious sensation. My "normal shower" was not usually that kind of experience. I'm often lost in thought - usually thoughts of the future, thoughts about meetings I had that day, difficult surgeries I had coming up, phone calls I needed to make, etc., etc.. Sometimes I'm so lost in thought I'll put hair conditioner on my hair before shampooing or finish my shower not remembering whether I used the conditioner at all. Not so in those days. I was showering and really enjoying it. I was, as they say, "living in the moment."

The last time I had this gratefulness for my body was the night after my father died last summer. I remember lying in bed feeling my body and feeling very grateful to be in a body. That experience was short lived, but similar to my three-week experience.

The other really notable experience was a real heightened appreciation and enjoyment of my encounters with people, particularly at work. Some days I'll see 50 to 60 patients. Some encounters are more pleasurable than others, and I have to admit that a few times I have been known to excuse myself from my patient and go outside in the parking lot and scream or throw rocks, then come back more ready to deal with the matter at hand.

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Readers Pick Up the Pen

NEARER TO DEATH EXPERIENCE Continued from Page 9

During those three weeks, however, I enjoyed every visit - each encounter, each human being seemed very special to me. I was very aware that those moments with the patient were our time to be together, and it seemed very easy to find something to enjoy about the person I was with. I recall being with an elderly patient who was complaining about something I knew I would never find the reason for nor be able to cure. That was always the way our visits went - she was never happy and I always felt inadequate. During this particular visit, however, I sort of let my vision and hearing get fuzzy, and suddenly I saw this incredible human being who had learned how to get peoples' attention by complaining when she really just wanted to be loved. So I just loved her, and more or less forgot about her complaints and we both seemed a lot happier than we usually did when we parted.

My friend Howard Ottenheimer told me what I was experiencing was "2 by 4 therapy" - a term he made up. It was as if I had been hit in the head by a 2 x 4 and knocked into another dimension. Recently, after watching a videotape on near death experiences, I realized what had happened to me was a "nearer to death" experience, and that was the stimulus for the altered state. I have always known that I would die someday, but that "day" had always seemed a long ways away. Suddenly, after hearing I had cancer, the possibility of that "day" being a lot sooner than I had expected became very real. I don't think I physically was closer to death, other than knowing if I did nothing about the cancer there was an 85% chance I would not live another 15 years. Emotionally, however, I moved nearer to death and I think that stimulated the altered state. I was made suddenly aware that I might be a "short-timer," a term I first heard from my brother describing men in the army close to their discharge. I really understood that the present moment is all I have and I wanted to make the most of each moment. §

To be continued in the next issue.

MEETING MELANCHOLY

© Philip Green

Richard Jameson woke up with a heavy mantle of gloom riding squarely across his shoulders. In fact, he was severely bothered by how connected to him this molten malaise was, like a humped disfigurement, not easily shed. Were this a constant visitor, he would move on with calm resignation, knowing others would see it only in the downcast sadness of his eyes. But this morning was new and unsettling. He began the quick, desperate search, parsing moments, cataloguing events, trying to find the source, the catalyzing erosion that opened the doorway of his soul to this depression, this visitation of momentary madness. Here he was on vacation, withdrawn from his daily toils and the connection to outwardly imposed stress. The choices before him were all those wonderful activities available in a safe, tropical climate. The beach wandered for miles with its soft surf. Beyond the end of the beach were some coral formations known for stunning snorkeling. The sky was clear with the gentle morning sun beckoning the waking world to reading and tanning.

But Richard was immobilized. There had to be a reason for his heaviness. Was it unpaid bills? Maybe frustration over how poorly he stood up for himself two weeks ago when he argued with Jan about where the spending money for this trip would come from. Surely today's trouble could be traced to that management change at work that seemed to move him out of the mainstream. Or was it closer to his body?

"I am in an eternal struggle to keep my cholesterol below 200, and now that I'm older, I can't seem to lose a pound without waging a war on food. This chronic pain in my neck makes it hard to stay as active as I used to. Riding an exercise bike is just not the same as playing half-court basketball."

The more Richard thought, the longer the list became. His mind suddenly went from harboring fear of the unknown to the ever-present savior of our souls, rationalization.

"Wow, with all the unresolved issues I carry and the problems imposed on me that I have no control over, I should feel fortunate to have any peace at all, any spark of optimism."

But soon Richard's mental blinders opened wider. He realized nothing on his "list" was different on this morning. In fact, it was just a little over 3 weeks ago that he had enjoyed an especially memorable good day. He had awakened with a fresh spurt of creativity and sketched some neat ideas for the house addition they were planning. At the office his creativity had continued as he solved two lingering design problems on his robotics project.

And so here he was, stuck with no understanding, no diagnosis, no remedy. As he began to focus more clearly on what was right in front of him, he realized he was overwhelmed by the oldest of human responses. He was stricken with fear. Was this clinical depression? Would he need to take medication? Weren't the side effects summed up in the single word, lethargy? Was he finally, in spite of all his efforts to stay physically and mentally healthy, going to fall into the bipolar disorder that dissipated the last 40 years of his father's life? With the fear more fully painted, it was clear that the picture was large, but more importantly, that he stood too close to it. Richard took mental steps back and began to see around this large, chaotic, colorless cloud of doom. He caught glimpses through small openings and was able to recreate his perspective that had been so cunningly obscured.

Richard had read Oliver Sachs' book, "The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat" and had been amazed at the extent of the bizarre behavior that can be a part of life for those with neurological dysfunction. He particularly was impressed by more than one account of someone who had taken medication to modify their behavioral symptoms only to reject the medication at a later date because of the very personal and inspiring elements of their behavior that were compromised by the treatment. They chose to live with the unacceptable part of themselves to avoid losing their identities.

"These feelings, the anxiety, the malaise, the missing intention.....they all rise up inside of me and are a part of me. I have tried to push them away, disprove their existence, even attribute them to someone else. After all, we know I "shouldn't" feel this way. But I am free to embrace these feelings, accept

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Readers Pick Up the Pen

THREE SONS GONE

Raymond Johnson

Two fathers lost their sons
Separately
Yet not alone.
I know the fathers
The sons by word and inference.
Then one and one-half years ago
Mike lost his son.
That makes three fathers
With missing sons.

Of the sons two touched guns
One with liquor one with choice.
Two touched liquor before their deaths.
One had rubber on the pavement
Going fast
So very fast.

BUDDHAS, BARS AND BROTHELS

Jim Mischke

"You want to get fucked or you want to get stoned?" I had pretty well eschewed the drugs for a while, so the choice probably seemed obvious to my guide. I had encountered him almost the moment I had pulled into Bangkok, or he had me. He had sniffed out a G. I. and his money. Easy enough, I guess. I had applied for a 3-day pass. I remember when the supervisor had come out in that twelve degree north of the equator blazing sun of Southern Thailand while I was working on an MD-3 generator set and told me I would soon be seeing something unbelievable. It was 1969 and the Vietnam War was still raging; Washington's strategy had become high altitude intensive bombing and my life had irreversibly changed through getting stuck in a very nasty war.

As a poor city kid I had always longed to travel, and the supervisor hadn't just been shitting, either. Bangkok! The loathsome, acrid smell of exhaust from two cycle motorcycle engines, the dust on my tongue from the streets. The plethora of chatter of everyday conversation in a tonal language. The myriad odors of pungent, spicy cooking. Hustle, bustle, market activity! To the uninitiated, it seemed like a teeming, screaming ant hill. Bangkok- the noise of a third world city. I was glad to be greeted by this unreadable guy with an old car which he seemed to keep running with bailing wire and sheer ingenuity. He had made me an offer: "I'll take you anywhere you want, find you whatever you want, anytime, anyplace. At the end of your stay, you pay me whatever you think it's worth." I studied his dark brown eyes: "I want to study Buddhism."

He didn't know where to place me in his world. He squinted back at me. What the hell kind of G. I. was this? No drugs, no sex? He'd been thrown a cultural curve: "O. K., but first let me show you the town." I think he had had hopes of edging me into the familiar work routine: bars and brothels. The monks

at the temples wouldn't really be available till sunset anyway, so Prasert insisted upon an afternoon at the local coliseum-type edifice. It started out with Thai sword fighting. Not bad. Obviously rehearsed. The fencing team had clearly devoted itself to keeping the blood sport to a minimum. Not so the Thai kick boxing! It was a Roman holiday, par excellence. Bloodletting became the point. A few more cold beers and the edge of disgust was dulled sufficiently. Not what I usually did for entertainment, but I had wanted to see Bangkok. A few more cold ones matched with some hot food while the traditional Thai dancers displayed their interpretive performing skills and a centered calm had found its way back into my solar plexus. Art!

As the sun set, I beheld the Temple of Dawn, a place which surely embodied legend: Gunga Din, On the Road To Mandalay, The Man Who Would Be King and all of the other tales woven to bring the mystique of Southeast Asia to the West by imaginative souls like Rudyard Kipling. The air had begun cooling off. I have always been the kind of guy who seeks the shadows. My spider-like tendencies felt more closely satiated as I sought the cool dampness of the beautiful tropical garden which the monks traditionally maintained for the guests. The blood and dust and beer were all gone. I was with a very different part of myself which had emerged rapidly but subtly. Who was I and why had I come to this monastery? I clarified for myself while explaining my mission to two young apprentice monks.

Met with surprise, met even with uncertainty, I was ultimately received with friendliness. Instantaneously, the two novices in saffron robes had appeared, seemingly eager to welcome me. I figured that the temple received relatively few American visitors. The two translators seemed pleased that an American surgeon (it was only discovered hours later that "sergeant" had been mistranslated) had shown such interest. They, in their easily understandable English, explained how they had come to be where they were. One was an architect, the other an engineer. They were serving a year at the monastery in fulfillment of a cultural role expectation placed upon all young men of their age group and class position. Upon my inquiring as to why they did not intend to extend their stay at the temple, they replied, with an anxious sadness, that they were merely "in the sandbox of the Buddha" and that perhaps any subsequent spiritual endeavors would ultimately prove unfruitful.

As night fell, an elderly monk appeared and we sat in the garden which now emanated a sweetness of fragrance which I, in retrospect, imagine might have characterized the cornucopia of Eden's blessings. I presented my philosophical quandaries, proposed my hypotheses and simply asked my questions. The old man sat in his saffron robe and considered intently the suppositions rendered through the translators and patiently responded, sometimes rechecking to be sure that a fine point had been accurately conveyed. Time seemed to have no definition anymore and I began to understand a new system of possibilities as the nature of the Buddha became more clearly conceptualized. The old monk, the leader of Buddhism in a more northerly province, appeared to have occupied some eye of a metaphysical cyclone. How long our encounter transpired is perhaps immeasurable.

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BUDDHAS, BARS AND BROTHELS Continued from Page 11

My space was jarred as someone announced that it was midnight. I felt that as a guest I had overextended my stay. The monks seemed not to care, yet thanking all, I arose to depart, and started down the garden path, closing with, "Please thank my gracious host for speaking with me about Buddha." In the dark, I heard the sound of flip flops increasing in volume behind me. Someone was moving behind me at a fast pace. In that sort of startle response sometimes referred to as "war nerves," I spun around to meet my assailant. It was the architect. He spoke almost wildly, as if the message meant the difference between life and death. Intently, he insisted, "The old man says 'Not Buddha!- the Buddha.'"

Through a gift of grace, I understood intuitively, immediately, the implications. Perhaps through our conversation, the old man had seen that I was ready to receive. Buddha was not somebody's name, it was a position, a phenomenon - and further, it was a state of being, a state of spiritual fulfillment, a state of grace. It was a possibility which my own culture had never held out to me. The West, in its "God out there" orthodoxy, had lost that possibility of Christhood (spiritual anointedness, in view of the fact that we are all sons and daughters of the creator), even though Jesus of Nazareth had admonished: "Very truly I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do, and in fact, will do greater works than these..." (Jn 14:12) Yet sadly, it was the Gospel of John which had reformulated "The Christened One" into a being who had been "begotten, not made" at the moment of the Big Bang when the ultimate and only voice had said: "Let there be light!" Untouchable and unlike us, the Christ was "the" light of the world. As humans, how could we, also, be of such light? We were hopelessly inferior, irreparably fallen. After the Church had rearranged doctrine, we were no longer the Christ's evolutionary younger brothers. "The Christ" had become Christ; christening became an empty ritual because no one could hope to attain that now unspoken furthest Implication of spiritual heritage. Within the flash of seeing this, I had been born again!

I left that monastery, and I left Bangkok. Eventually I left Thailand and the military behind, but I have always carried with me the anointing of the old monk. In a way, because it has separated me from others, it has culled me out of the herd: it has left me with an open and runny wound. But far more to the point, it has rendered me a window looking out upon the soul - perhaps the deepest blessing I have ever received. I have since become aware as to the history of the spiritual atrocity foisted upon the entire Christian culture: our rightful birthright having been purloined, leaving us in psychospiritual poverty. We had been institutionally deprived of the legacy originally freely rendered by the spiritual entity upon whose behalf the church had purported to speak. The keepers of the keys to the kingdom had succeeded in severing us from that which was rightfully ours; this atrocity never to be acknowledged, it had rendered an intractable wedge driven between psyche and spirit.

In so comprehending, I have come to work daily to be mindful of the deepest truth of my essential humanity: I AM a

Christ. I have balanced this by remembering that everyone else around me is, as well. Birthright restored, salvation achieved. I have regained my sanity. Redemption! To contact Jim, his e-mail is jmischke@sisna.com §

PERSPECTIVE ON "GAY MARRIAGE"

Steve Smith

I am a forty-five-year-old child of a "Gay Marriage." So far, most of the arguments pro and con that I have heard seem beside the point. If I may I would like to present my opinions and observations. To the best of my ability I will try to avoid emotional appeals as ineffective and common enough on both sides of the argument. I see no reason to argue that anyone need to change their religious views; such things are too private to debate in an open letter. The core of my views are centered on the family and legal functions of marriage in society.

Worldwide, marriages have been in place since recorded history began. Religions have been involved in marriage in varying degrees depending on the degree to which religion influenced the government of a given society. A clear distinction in the function of marriage exists between religious marriage and social marriage. Religious marriage binds families to specific religions, provides additional involvement of the church, social life and of course "divine sanction." Social marriages provided the mundane and necessary governmental and legal functions of establishing social caste, ownership, citizenship, inheritances, partnerships, joining of families, guardianship and parental relationships along with all their accompanying responsibilities. So important was social marriage to society that from a strictly functional point of view there have never been societies with religious marriage without social marriage. Of course there have been societies with social marriage but no religious marriage. For example in the British Isles the concept of marriage began outside the Christian church and remained that way up to the 1200s when church doctrine changed.

Why is social marriage so important? Social marriage is a linchpin of law and when additional social responsibilities and benefits have been granted to the citizenry, marital status is a critical element in the implementation of those new concepts. In most instances government will recognize familial relationships such as parental recognition, siblings, adoptions, maternal and paternal bloodlines as well as in-law relationships. Such recognition has changed the course of history on a number of occasions. On a daily basis these laws help ensure the raising of succeeding generations, the maintenance of family structures and social security either in the form of children to look after aging parents or the recognition of persons deserving of financial assistance when faced with the loss of a partner in the rearing of children.

Most people can recite one or two benefits available to legally married couples that are not available to those couples that are not legally married. There are over 1600 such benefits

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SUMMER GATHERING

July 30 - August 1, 2004

Violence: Choice or Destiny?

Sal Treppiedi

The topic for the upcoming 2004 Summer Gathering will be "Violence: Choice or Destiny?" The inspiration came from events that have surrounded us as human beings (war, concealed weapons, etc.) and as men (those that transpired at the 2003 Fall Conference). The event will begin on Friday evening, July 30th, and end on the afternoon of Sunday, August 1st.

Understanding that the planning committee is far from completing its mission, I'd like to share some of our thought processes from our first meeting. First, it became very clear that we did not want to focus this gathering on only one aspect of violence (i.e.: violence against women, anger, etc.). Instead, we believed that violence should be looked at from a broader perspective. This is not to say that these issues will not be covered or discussed, but they will not be the sole focus.

The group of six began to further investigate the topic of violence and its relation to masculinity. We looked at society's views of violence, different areas of society where violence can be found. For example, in sports and on television, violence is viewed as entertainment, yet the majority of people will place negative connotations on violence. All one has to do is flip on the television to shows such as "NYPD Blue," "CSI," "ER," or even "Will & Grace," and some form of violence will emerge.

As we studied further, one of the group members felt it might be helpful to look in the dictionary for a definition of violence. It was here that this topic began to open up. We used two dictionaries and, while we came across standard definitions and usage, what we found was astonishing. The first, "The Winston Dictionary: Advanced Edition" was copyrighted in 1945. One of the definitions we can across was "great strength or energy, physical or emotional, forcibly exerted or expressed." Below this, we found "intensity," "eagerness," and "passionate" used as synonyms. We agreed that these words did not indicate negativity.

The second dictionary, "Scott, Foresman Advanced Dictionary," was copyrighted in 1993, and it gave us something similar in "...strength of action, feeling, etc.; fury, passion." In this book, violence contained seven different definitions. The last one, which truly gave us things to talk about, was "rape." One word, plain and simple, with a number "7" before it.

The discussion exploded from here. We began to consider guiding questions such as "Is violence effective in certain situations?," "Why does society automatically go to the negative connotation of violence?," and "What are some of the positive aspects of violence?," and "Where does violence fit into wellness?"

In future meetings, the group plans to continue exploring this issue. We are excited about the prospects that this topic brings, but understand that there is much work ahead of us. I

would like to thank the planning committee for some wonderful and insightful meetings. If you wish to join the planning committee for this year's gathering, please contact me via email at salteaches@yahoo.com. Future planning dates are being scheduled for June and July. We anticipate a very powerful gathering with emotions being stirred and the possibility of many feelings coming to the surface. On behalf of the planning committee members, we look forward to seeing you in late July in the Jemez Mountains. §

SPRING RETREAT 2004

Herb Cherry

*You have not grown old, and it is not too late
To dive into your increasing depths
Where life calmly gives out its secret
Rainer Maria Rilke*

These timeless words express the shared intention that Kenn Holsten and myself carried into the planning of the Spring Retreat. The invitation was offered to each of the 18 men gathered and every man was free to plow the depths and/or use the time for healing, renewal and regeneration, in the magnificent setting of the Jemez Mountains with the roaring river next to camp and the hot springs nestled on a hillside nearby. We invited men to volunteer in the co-creation by giving one-hour sessions in the open space of practices used in their daily lives in order to go within, create stillness, or enter a non-ordinary state of awareness, we often call sacred space. Volunteers came forth and provided experiences in sitting meditation, walking meditation, focusing and yoga.

Silence was suggested for part of the time or for the whole time as one man chose to do. We chanted, journaled, sang, shared, sounded and moved our bodies, walked and hiked. Each one was free to participate in these experiences or take time for themselves. Strikingly to me, and I believe everyone else, during the extended sharing of the first circle on the first night, the men dove in deeply with magnificent heartfelt honesty, speaking their truths and expressing their longings for healing and transformation. The courage it took for everyone



Photo Courtesy of Herb Cherry

Kenn and Herb Co-Leaders of Spring Retreat

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SPRING RETREAT 2004 Continued from Page 13

to open their hearts and souls was remarkable, and I have rarely had such an experience. The tone was set. We were a group with a shared resonance to take personal responsibility for our lives and our work there at the retreat. Throughout the weekend we listened respectfully, learned from each others' wisdom, and held the space patiently with non-judgment and group support.

The space in Harmony Hall was transformed with loaned decorations and Kenn built a beautiful altar which for me carried the feeling of compassion (with statues of Buddha) and candles for light (each man having his own candle burning throughout the weekend). We each placed objects on the altar and/or photographs of special ones and told the group the meanings of these items. This was a beautiful opportunity for me to deepen my knowing of each man there and many of the sharings were very moving.

Morning Yoga was especially wonderful and soulful. Our teacher was very skilled in creating a deep experience, meaningful themes and great music and postures we could all handle. It was a good opportunity to connect with the body and observe the mind. Personally, the retreat was another opportunity for me to journey into unknown regions of my soul. I have for years quested for a more fulfilling state of consciousness and a larger capacity to experience life. Opportunities present themselves all the time and unexpectedly, and the retreat was no exception. For example, I have been moving away from the concept of having to do everything myself without depending on others. This is hard-won new territory. I developed a severe case of sciatica one week before the retreat which significantly limited my getting around. Here was another chance to let go of control, do the best I could from bed on the phone and ask for help. Men responded with generosity and everything got done. I surrendered into the situation without guilt or ingratiating, just plain old gratitude. What abundance in my life and what a fantastic group of brothers. To each one who lent a hand, a hearty "Thank You."

Yet another example of my own work done at the retreat was to take time to look into the psychogenic roots of the sciatica. Synchronously one of the men at the retreat had dealt with severe pain using the body-mind connection prescription recommended by a Dr. Sarno, and he had the book with him which I then read. My pain decreased significantly when I accessed some deeply repressed emotions in the privacy of my room. I believe the spirit created by the group in the space of focus that was there helped me a great deal to that end.

Saturday was diverse and the weather was ideal. The second circle gathered in the evening, and we sang our way down to the campfire where we shared poetry, prose and personal stories. Again, what an amazing time shared; we laughed, shed tears and we ended with spontaneous singing of some good oldies. We reconvened for some energetic body movement, sounding our own personal song and wound down to silent meditation.

We opted to spend Sunday AM in silence which included a 5-star breakfast buffet organized by Kenn in our own space in Harmony Hall. The silent time allowed for journaling, walking

and looking for something in nature that spoke to us of what we would like to bring into our lives. If possible we brought the "find" back for part of our last circle that afternoon. The silent time was greatly appreciated by the men. They really dove in again.

For me, the retreat was yet another time to dissolve separ-



Photo Courtesy of Herb Cherry

ration from myself, others and the Great Spirit. I feel so blessed to be part of this community and am grateful for all those who showed the way in the past. Each man has the opportunity to step up and participate as a co-creator in so many capacities. When Kenn asked me to join with him last year, I carried some hesitancy. I had never done anything quite like this before. The journey was a great learning, and I landed in a place of total enthusiasm for being a co-convenor and saw that I had gifts to offer here. It was a chance to drop the need to feel responsible for everyone having the perfect experience. When I relaxed into just being my authentic self and committed to doing the best job I knew how to do, everything flowed.

After the last circle I concluded the following:

1. everything that was supposed to happen, DID,
2. each man got exactly what he needed,
3. I can trust myself when I am clear, have intentions that transcend egoic needs, keep an open heart and am real,
4. Co-creation is our hope for the future,
5. Men are amazing and have the power to transform and evolve,
6. Nature carries important messages to us particularly when we allow for the silence to better hear and see what is being spoken,
7. More younger guys from diverse cultures could add even more to our community.

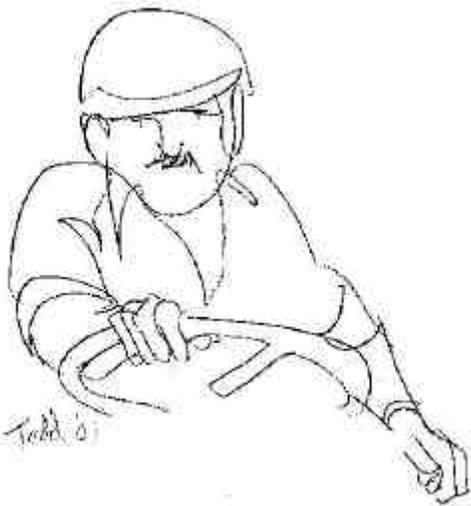
Kenn asked me to include these words: "I could not be more pleased with how the Spring Retreat went. Working with Herb on envisioning and co-creating the weekend was very special and the level of deep sharing surpassed my highest expectations."

In closing, I want to thank each and every man who came to the Retreat and participated with their full hearts and full intentions to be more than who they are. Thank you, Kenn, for your clarity, wisdom and heartfelt presence. Finally, as with any experience - you had to be there to really get it and I therefore urge anyone whose interest might have been tweaked to sign up for next year! §

Readers Pick Up the Pen

PARKING ODYSSEY (for Grace and Mike's Mom) Jeff Rahn

My daughter and I drive through concrete parking structures
it doesn't matter where we are. We drive through each floor
to see what's in store when we reach the top
we get out of our car to look at mountains and skyscrapers
that taper off in the distance
That last part when we drive out
from inside the tower is our favorite
sun sun, see air, sea sun, see sun sea
feeling wind on your face, Grace
a place in your heart where
you're not apart
buildings feel like canyons and we're in them
I've been dead, fed bullshit my whole life
suddenly I'm free and know the key to life .
on the way up I'm thinking about all my complexes,
moral and intellectual thoughts and I'm caught.
then we drive together
ascending the tower
and come out on top
plop on god's planet
for just a moment
why do we expect second best?
now when I drive to the top of our parking tower
I feel showered with love, as light as a dove
my life is complete, no need to compete
compute, persevere or rate
this experience versus another
if I could write a little bit of this feeling?
maybe I can, maybe I can, what's your plan?
and how do I fit into your parking Odyssey?§



OF LIGHT AND LOVE © Philip Green

My god, how I long to write of light and love
To articulate the joy undergirding my life,
The love of folk and family tangible like morning fog,
The warmth of my morning lover, wed a decade ago,
.....cuddled head to toe.

I want to speak of the wonder I feel
To be of any intelligence at all
In this vast, complex, and wonderful panoply
Of planets and stars and galaxies without measure
.....arrayed for my pleasure.

How amazing it is that a fiery ball
Nearly a hundred million miles distant,
Too hot for life or love or children or pets,
Rises on my horizon. A thousand churning prisms fall,
.....reminding me that I am small.

I would call forth fine phrases, embroidering
Water, lapping the near shore of an inland lake.
The gentle rise and fall of waves by polite breezes,
Willows sway, like fly-fisher's fine finesse
.....draining my anxious soul of excess.

But I've been told that to say it is to lose it,
Lose the magic dance of the senses,
Turn the silent graceful ballerina to stone,
Reduce hundreds of horizon hues to a statistical mixture.
.....capture the taste of ripe papaya in a picture?

It is enough to know I have been there,
With only trinkets and reminders left,
Touches of deja vu, old pictures, stories.
This world I bathe in is enough for this man.
.....tomorrow I will awake brand new again.§

**Plan to Attend the
NMMW Fall Conference
October 21-24, 2004
Ghost Ranch
(Details in next issue)**

**For further information, contact:
Howard Kaplan @ 505/348-4011
or
Tony Harris @ 505/526-2398**

straight down - WAY down. There's a lake somewhere down there in the trees at the bottom. I'm in another world, looking straight down at the whole Pecos watershed. I feel godlike perched up here, and humbled by my smallness and weakness at the same time. I take photos and rest for 15 minutes. Then I crawl around huge boulders to look at the path to Middle Truchas Peak. It looks like an impossible scramble over boulders, some bigger than me, and no trail to the top.

"You're crazy! You're 14 miles from a parking lot, and you're half dead from getting this far. What are you thinking?! You can't climb another 700 feet in 1/2 mile, off trail over boulders, for God's sake! You couldn't climb on top of a dog house!!"

I hate being so close and not making it. It takes me 10 minutes to decide that I really am crazy to think about it. My heart's still beating pretty hard after 25 minutes rest. There's courage and guts, and there's ego and denial. And then there's plain bull-headed stupidity. What am I trying to prove?

Coming down I follow the trail from the lake to where it exits the forest on the far side of the meadow from my camp. Back in camp at mid afternoon, I luxuriate in rest, drugged with fatigue but happy. I haven't seen a soul for 48 hours, as if this is all here just for me. After a while, I move camp to an even more beautiful meadow 1/4 mile away that I saw on the way down, which appears to be the place on the map I was headed for coming up, and which I could have followed the trail from. C'est la vie! In spite of everything that went wrong, I stood there on that ridge on the top of the world with the immensity of the Pecos Wilderness at my feet.

There's something profoundly satisfying to me about stretching myself to the limit when it leads me to some rare experience of natural beauty in a world that bears no relation to the one I live in daily. It feels like my effort has earned me permission, and the wilderness opens its arms to me like a son and welcomes me to its secret places. I feel blessed to just be there - and crazy in love with it. Actually, you don't have to hike a long way or wear yourself out. It can be anywhere that takes you out of your familiar world into a wholly different reality. She's out there. Waiting. With open arms. §

WHAT?

You Haven't Been to a
New Mexico Men's Wellness
EVENT!

Check Out Page 19
BE There, YOU
Make the Experience

NMMW Summer Gathering 2004

Friday, July 30th - Sunday, August 1st

**"VIOLENCE:
Choice or Desitny?"**

For further information please contact Sal Treppiedi at
salteaches@yahoo.com

**PLEASE REGISTER
EARLY!**

(See Back Cover for Registration)

MEETING MELANCHOLY Continued from Page 10

them as rising up from my own dark interior. If they need more from me, they will let me know. I give them free rein to clarify their needs. I am going to treat myself in a respectful and caring way."

With a loving resignation that seemed to be a balm for his stiff immobility, Richard Jameson grabbed his gear and went snorkeling. §

Notes from the Editor

(continued from Page 2)

us to it like children to their mother.

Of course, the existence of an eco-self may never be proven. Yet, several men have shared here, in prose and poetry, their sense of gratitude, wonder and awe at this earth's magnificent beauty and power. One writer laments the often mindless destruction of the natural world by human beings and warns of the dangers inherent in our blindness. I like to believe that each man spoke from a place as old as life itself.

But, dear readers, don't stop there. There are some very moving and thought-provoking pieces addressing other topics in this issue of Man Alive! as well. Much thanks and deep appreciation to all who contributed to the Summer '04 edition.

Love and Hugs,

Gary McFarland
Editor
§

PERSPECTIVE ON “GAY MARRIAGE”

Continued from Page 12

including but not limited to health, inheritance, power of attorney and social security. For example I am helping support my unrecognized mother to the tune of \$5000.00 a year. I am unable to deduct this from my taxes, as I would be able to if my parents had been allowed to legally marry. Again any ancestors of mine who seek to understand their history will hit a dead end in the public record when they research my portion of their genealogy. I will not even be able to legally take bereavement leave from work when she dies. In fact, if her siblings or nieces objected, my sister and I could be kept from her deathbed. This woman provided a full-time mother's role for my sister and me, yet there is no legal recognition of this fact. She has done well also by society in that she helped us to become literate, honest, hard working citizens with a social conscience. We care for her and are as much in her debt morally as any other children would be to their parents. My sister and I feel emotionally and honor bound to provide such assistance to her as we can. We do so regardless of any government recognition. Family must always come before governments. She is indeed mother though there is no legally recognized relationship between us. She could not even have adopted us without rupturing the legal relationship with another mother.

I have heard the argument that marriage is an institution, I would argue that it is much more than that. It is a crucial civil mechanism in a healthy society. While many heterosexual couples choose not to take advantage of social marriage, same sex couples have no choice in the matter. Of course both can make their vows to their god and hold it precious in their hearts but the legal withholding of material advantages imposes an unwarranted burden which ultimately hurts all of society.

The American Constitution clearly established a doctrine of separation of church and state for good reason. Any endorsement of one faith's perspective will unfairly penalize any faith's views where they differ and create a governmental endorsement of a subset of religions. Not all religions ban gay marriage. Any legal definition of marriage that is more restrictive than the religious least common denominator will by fiat quickly begin having a deleterious effect on at least some religions' efficacy. While this has happened before, such as the federal ban and enforcement on polygamy aimed at the Mormons and the Sun Dance ban aimed at some Native American tribes, it is and should be a rare, questionable and exceptional action.

In general there are two basic beneficial functions of law in any government. One is a descriptive device which seeks to manage and describe society as it is. The other is a proscriptive function seeking to modify social behavior. Proposed bans on “gay marriage” do not seek to change behavior or handle existing social functions but rather simply deny a given group the benefits available to other groups who are acting in the same social manner. Existing laws and legal status function on neither of these levels. It can be said that governmental laws can have a third function based on inaction. In many areas the wise government chooses not to weigh in on subjects where a clear need has been demonstrated. The American govern-

ment by remaining mum denies over 1600 benefits to certain groups of citizens. In doing so it creates a grossly unfair treatment of its minority populations, which has a ripple effect through society and culture. In fairness, previous opportunities to correct this oversight have been limited due to a more persistent persecution of gays, while other minorities have gathered more and more acceptance. On the other hand, I believe the time is right to effect this change: society has become more tolerant than it has been in times past, and the recent attempts to force the issue make this an ideal time to rectify the situation through equal treatment under the law. There will never be a time when 100% agreement can be reached so I see no reason for delay.

I frequently feel a sense of the attacking of beliefs coming from opponents of same-sex marriages and I feel this must be addressed. Keeping in mind the distinction between social marriage and religious marriage I would object to any attempt by government to force changes in church practices, just as I object to any attempt by religions to change governmental practices. Fortunately I do not get the impression that this is being asked for. Additionally the act of legalizing same-sex marriage would not even create governmental endorsement! The sale of cigarettes (and the accompanying taxation) is legal and yet the government is quite clear that it does not condone smoking. Legalization of “gay marriage” would be a simple acknowledgement of the practice and attempt to treat similar positions in society in an equal manner.

As regards the Orwellian double-speak proposal to changing the name of marriage “for gays” while granting some benefits and responsibilities, I feel this would confuse the issue and create more rift than result. On the other hand it might relieve a lot of confusion if a separate term for all social marriages were to become the norm. §

Hey, Hey Whata you Say

**Join us at the
Summer Gathering in the
Jemez Mountains**

**See Page 13 for more
Information**

DIRECTORY OF CONTACTS FOR MEN'S GROUPS IN NEW MEXICO

(This directory is a work in progress. Please send corrections, additions and subtractions to GaryMcFar@aol.com. Let's get every men's group in New Mexico represented on this list. It will provide a rapid means of disseminating information pertinent to Men's Wellness among groups. Also, if you are interested in joining a group, you can use this list to find a group in your area and then contact the representative to find out if the group is open or not, its exact meeting place and if it meets your needs. Gary McFarland.) §

Northern Region

Max August — Santa Fe — 820-1248

maxaugust@earthlink.net

Intergenerational group "Wounded and Clueless"

Michael Hamilton — Santa Fe — 699-3936

eagle_call@msn.com

Rob Hawley — Taos — 758-8176 rob@taosherb.com

— New Warriors group

Victor LaCerva — Santa Fe — 983-4233

victorL@doh.state.nm.us

Robert Spitz — Santa Fe — 988-3541

robtspitz@aol.com — Wednesday Lunch Group

Paul Zelizer -- Taos — 758-9066 mrc@laplaza.org —

Men's Resource Center of Northern New Mexico



Central Region

Dave Breault — Albuquerque — 266-9233

dbreault@lobo.net

Bob Hollingsworth — Albuquerque — 294-4908

Writer's group and a regular group

Gary McFarland — Tijeras — 875-7357

garymcfar@aol.com

David Robertson — Albuquerque — 344-5489

robertson_d@aps.edu

Pat Sauer — Albuquerque — 299-6749

pasacom1@yahoo.com

Steve Smith — Rio Rancho — 892-6142 steve-

kendra@newmexico.com

Todd Tibbals — Albuquerque — 898-7351

tbtibbals@aol.com

Sal Treppiedi — Albuquerque — 275-7258

salteaches@yahoo.com

Hartley Wess — Albuquerque — 243-6888

hartleywess@excite.com

Southern Region

Neal Apple — Silver City apple-allen@gilanet.com

René Dominguez — Silver City -- 534-0580

renedom@aol.com

Tony Harris — Las Cruces — 524-1899

antix@zianet.com

Jim Rogers — Las Cruces — 524-9216

newvisjr@direcpc.com

Websites of interest to Men:

www.nmmenswellness.org

www.menshealthnetwork.org

www.malemenopause.com

www.vix.com/menmag

www.menstuff.org

www.themenscenter.com

www.menalive.com

communities.msn.com/nmmenswellness

PLAN on Attending the NMMW SUMMER GATHERING

July 30 - August 1, 2004

See Page 13 for more information.

Brown Bag Lunch – Santa Fe: Wednesdays noon – 1:30 p.m. at the Men's Center (54 1/2 E. San Francisco 2nd floor (just off the plaza, enter the door to the right of the Hagen-Daz store). The "**BROWN BAG LUNCH**" is a "come one, come all" men's lunch group that has been meeting in Santa Fe for the past twelve years. A place to share from the heart and be listened to from the heart. Contact (505) 690-6619 for more information.

Men's Lunch Group - Albuquerque: Fridays 11:45 -12:45 p.m., at the Father and Family Center, 3214 Purdue Pl., N.E. (one block north of Central, west off Wellesley). A drop-in men's support group for men to talk about concerns and issues in their lives. Contact Dave Breault (505) 266-9233.

Men's Wellness Adopt-A-Highway Project: Saturday, September 18, 2004. Meet at Exit 234, I-25 and Tramway, at 9:15 a.m.. Park on the southeast corner of the intersection in the open area next to the freeway. Contact: Bob McMain at 248-1001 OR David Johnson at 266-9960, or to be added to the project email list, email rdrunr@zianet.com.

New Mexico Men's Wellness 2004 Summer Gathering: July 30 - August 1, 2004. Theme: **VIOLENCE: Choice or Destiny?** For more information and/or to take part in the gathering's planning sessions, Contact Sal Treppiedi email him at salteaches@yahoo.com.

New Mexico Men's Wellness 2004 Fall Conference: Starting @ 7 PM Thursday, October 21 ending @ 12 noon to 1 PM Sunday, ~~October 24, 2004.~~ - Ghost Ranch; Abiquiu, NM; Theme: **TBA**. Contact: Howard Kaplan (505) 348-4011 (day) (505) 856-7185 (eve) email: howard.kaplan@wilsonco.com OR Tony Harris (505) 526-2398 (day) (505) 647-9670 (eve) email: abharris@zianet.com.

New Mexico Men's Wellness Winter Cross Country Ski Weekend: February, 2005; Contact: Lawrence Cook (505) 898-2206.

OTHER MEN'S ACTIVITIES in and out of New Mexico

Gila Men's Coalition of Grant County

June 12, 2004

The Gila Men's Coalition is having a "Guy's Day Off," Saturday June 12th from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at The Bayard Community Center in Bayard, New Mexico, just East of Silver City in the Heart of Southwest New Mexico. Victor La Cerva, from Santa Fe and one of the founders of New Mexico Men's Wellness will be a featured presenter. Why should you attend?

- o **Take a day for yourself**
- o **Never got the Owner's Manual on Manhood?**
Us neither - let's figure it our together
- o **Inspiring words from founder of NM Men's Movement**
- o **Activities, cook-out lunch**
- o **Tired of seeing other men as only competition?**
Discover them as friends, team players, and brothers
- o **Resource tables - health, fatherhood support/rights, books, etc.**
Cost: \$1 DONATION.

For more information contact John Eich at (505) 388-9708 Ext 23. §

Life got you confused, jazzed or bummed? Ready to do some work? Ready to help others? Albuquerque West Side Group is in need of new blood. We are down to three members-John Cook, Steve Smith & Ed Furie—and could sure use some more members. We could use your company on a weekly basis or we'd be willing to join with another small group. Contact Steve @ 505/892-6142 or Ed @ 505/890-5062, email disales@flash.net Thanks Guys! §

Don't Forget to Join THE HIGHWAYMEN

September 18, 2004 @ 9:15

See Event above in Calendar of Events

VIOLENCE: Choice or Destiny?

New Mexico Men's Wellness 2004 SUMMER GATHERING

July 30 through August 1

Jemez Mountains, NM

REGISTER

REGISTRATION FORM

NOW!

(Please Print Legibly)

Name _____ Day Phone (____)____ - _____

Address _____ Evening Phone (____)____ - _____

City/ST/Zip _____, _____ email _____

Registration Fee* \$ 35

Scholarship Requested (Max \$20) ()

(Please include written Request)

Scholarship Donation (Please be Generous) _____

Tee Shirt (Size [] XL [] L [] M) 15

(T-Shirts are expected to be available at the gathering)

TOTAL ENCLOSED: \$ _____

Send registration and check to:

**NM Men's Wellness
c/o Sal Treppiedi**

**2328 1/2 Malpais Rd SW Apt.C
Albuquerque, NM 87105**

*Note * Includes a subscription to Man Alive. We will send you a confirmation with further information and directions.*

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