

MAN, ALIVE!

Spring/Summer 1998 (Volume XI Number 2)

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

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Submission Deadlines

THE FIFTH DAY OF

May '98 (Summer '98)

August '98 (Fall '98)

November '98 (Winter '98-'99)

February '99 (Spring '99)

Submission Formats

Paper and fax are 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 1500 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.

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From the Editor

A little about me to begin. It's strange to see those words at the top of this piece. I haven't been an editor of anything since high school. I haven't been part of New Mexico Men's Wellness until taking on this position. I have seen earlier issues of *Man, Alive!* for the last several years, long enough to see several iterations of the editorial "pass it along" blues. I recently finished the most recent 12-week men's group sponsored by Paul Steinkoenig and David Breault (which I highly recommend). I attended the March meeting in Santa Fe, and I've talked to about 15 or 20 of the men in the organization. I've never attended a summer or fall conference, although I plan to do both this year.

The big issue at the Santa Fe meeting was trying to decide whether the alleged schism between Albuquerque and Santa Fe really exists. Several of the men I've spoken to have told me that they will not again attend one or the other gathering because of the way they have been treated, and they attribute the problem to differences between the men in the two cities. (Incidentally, Cliff Taber did not submit for publication his anticipated further discussion of this issue.) What can we do as a group to heal this split?

Here's a brief look at the staff: John McMahon is doing all of the layout; Jake Tausch, Hank Blackwell and Ray Ortiz are hounding you, the readers, for copy; Steve Smith is maintaining the name and address database and helping with the internet web site, and Jake Tausch and Kevin Clancy are doing circulation. I decide the content of the magazine and do the copy editing, as well as working on the web site, plus whatever else is left.

We still need volunteers of time as well as copy. In particular, a couple of reporters would be very helpful. Also, ideas and submissions for graphics and photos would significantly enhance *Man, Alive!* For those of you who have offered to be interviewed, you've not been forgotten—just postponed. We actually had more submissions than room to print this time, so your piece may show up next time if it's not in this issue.

This issue of *Man, Alive!* can be found on the web site:

<http://home.sprynet.com/sprynet/dbeckley>

Since taking on the job of editing this magazine (and this is my first issue!), I have told several people that I have no agenda for *Man, Alive!*, that I like it as it is. I have since realized that I agree with Cliff Taber when he said in the last issue, "*Man Alive!* is boring!" Let me tell you what I have in mind to make it different.

Men's Wellness is largely about feelings: having them, embracing them, surviving them. Sharing feelings is far more effective in person than in print, for the obvious reason that we can feel the other person's feelings without having to infer them from written words. *Man, Alive!* is necessarily about ideas, just because words are its medium.

To tell someone who is not in New Mexico Men's Wellness what you're feeling might shock them, but it's clearly not a shock to those of us who are used to such expressions. To say "I hurt" in *Man, Alive!* is, frankly, to have nothing interesting to say. By all means tell your feelings, but give your conclusions about them. What in your background makes this feeling so important to you? Where does it lead you? What understanding have you reached about your feelings and actions? What have you learned which will be useful and interesting to the rest of us?

Here's a quote from Phillip Lopate, in his introduction to the *Anchor Essay Annual, The Best of 1997*, which says well what I'm getting at:

"There are many think pieces that make a reasonable point but then continue to hammer away; they don't turn against themselves enough. Still other essays wander into a glade of pastoral appreciation where there's no tension, the stakes seem insufficient. I was on the lookout for the pleasure a mind takes in finding its way through a dangerous thicket..."

"For me, there is nothing quite like the beauty of a worldly, meditative and amply mature sensibility going about its bee-like business of constructing meaning."

As for poetry, here's my own definition of the moment:

Poetry wants to crystallize reality much like a dream. When interpreted, the best dreams do not simply lie flat on the table, but stand poised like origami, tight little structures in a unique balance of forces in opposition. They do not, then, fully decode. They store meaning which seems never to lose its power.

We're a bunch of intelligent men. Let's make a magazine which challenges and delights!

David

Men Wanted / Groups Wanted

If you're looking to join a men's group, or your group is looking for new members, contact Paul Steinkoenig (505) 255-1013.

Looking for leaders and participants interested in fostering diversity in men's groups and gatherings. Men's wellness seems to consist of mostly liberal, educated, professional, white males. Men's wellness should be a forum for all men. We need some cultural, political, educational, economic, environmental and other kinds of diversity. If you are interested in discussing this issue, or if you would like to be a leader or participant in a diverse men's group or gathering, please call David Robertson at 344-5489.

Are you:

- A male between the ages of 30 and 50?
- Currently or have you recently experienced significant health challenges?
- Interested in sharing and exploring the impact of these challenges in a supportive group setting?

For information please contact in Albuquerque:

Paul Steinkoenig, 255-1013

Ted Kostranchuk, 268-0521

Reducing Gun Violence

by Victor La Cerva

There is a plague among us, and I am afraid for my children.

When I was in medical school more than twenty years ago, I met a man named Ismael who was paralyzed from the waist down after having been shot in the spine in the New York City ghetto. He spent his days mourning the loss of the life he never had, trying to earn income by carving wood blocks. It made a deep impression on me early in my training. Since then I have seen countless tragedies from gunfire, despite the fact that I have not worked emergency rooms since the current epidemic of gun violence really began to gain momentum in 1979. As a public health physician, I continue to work with families directly affected by gun violence. Their suffering is real, and preventable.

As a former gun owner, I am horrified at the carnage among our people. At the Silent March on Washington in 1996, 40,000 pairs of shoes, with notes and photos attached, personalized the number of gun-violence deaths in one year in our country. I am saddened by the reality that the method of choice for youth suicide is now the family gun, and that most gun homicides occur between people who know each other. I have been a member of the National Rifle Association, and I believe that the top leadership of that organization is sometimes out of touch with its constituents. We have spent too much time in our society polarized between gun control and no gun control. The reality is that

there is a middle course of action that most of us can agree on, and which urgently needs our attention.

Who can fire a gun? 25% of 3- to 4-year olds, 70% of 5- to 6-year olds and 90% of 7- to 8-year olds were strong enough to pull the trigger on 92% of 64 different models of handguns.

Young children have the physical strength needed to fire a gun long before they have developed the impulse control and decision-making capacity that may prevent them from doing so. We need to promote better safety and storage practices. Perhaps the time has come to require safety courses or a minimum age of 21 before purchase or unsupervised possession is allowed. It is possible now to manufacture guns with a combination lock like the one on briefcases. There are trigger locks available for a few dollars, but many people don't use them. If you keep a gun where children or adolescents live or visit, you are being neglectful if you do not properly secure your firearms. The tragedy of a young person playing with the family gun and killing their best friend, cousin or brother is still too commonplace.

The New Mexico Not Even One team investigates gun deaths in young people in Santa Fe and Albuquerque. When community members looked at the last ten years of gun deaths in young people, they found that in seven out of the last ten years, suicides outnumbered homicides! The major public health issue involving young people and guns in New Mexico is not drive-by shootings but depressed adolescents, with or without alcohol and other drug problems, hurting themselves with the family gun. If you have a young person in your home going through some difficult times, store your guns at a friend's or relative's house.

Does it really make sense for us as a society to allow ongoing firearms access to a person who threatens to kill his family or himself? When a temporary restraining order has been issued against an individual involved in domestic violence, their firearms need to be surrendered to law enforcement for the duration of the protection order. States that have done this have seen a drop in their domestic-abuse related homicides. A study by the University of New Mexico School of Medicine showed that almost 50% of the women killed in a recent three-year period had a clear documented history of domestic violence. The vast majority of the time, their abuser used a firearm to kill them. Persons convicted of domestic violence should not have the right to continued use of firearms until they demonstrate that they are changing their abusive and threatening behaviors.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that:

- Children are safest when there are no guns in the environments where they live or play, and therefore the safest choice is to remove guns from children's environments.
- When guns must be kept, parents should be encouraged to keep guns unloaded and locked up with the bullets locked up separately from the guns.

- Parents need to talk with children about the risks that guns pose, and tell them to steer clear of guns.
- Parents should speak with the families of their children's friends to find out if they keep a gun at home. They should urge them to safely dispose of it, or else empty it out and lock it up.

The average gun owner is not an enemy, but must be part of the overall solution. We are all against gun violence, and must do what we can within our own spheres of influence to end it.

In summary, we must:

- Use safety devices already available.
- Put pressure on manufacturers for better safety devices.
- Continue to educate people about the dangers of keeping a gun at home.
- Get the guns out of the hands of those involved in intimate terrorism.

Victor La Cerva, MD works for the New Mexico Department of Health. He is the author of *Pathways to Peace: Forty Steps to a Less Violent America*, and has been active in Men's Wellness for many years.

My Father's Blessing

by Eaglecrow

There was a man around when I grew up.

I never knew him then.

He never said much about himself.

He seemed troubled at times.

He was fun, though, and he made us laugh.

He was big and you knew you were safe when he was near.

He loved to joke and tease and not be too serious.

I wanted to be just like him when I got big.

He was a man.

He had that energy about him.

There was something about him that I wanted for myself.

I didn't know what it was.

I learned later about his early years,

About his parents splitting up when he was little,

Never getting to know his own father,

Being raised by a violent abusive grandfather.

I could understand his troubles then,

Once I learned more about him.

He never treated me the way he was treated.

I'm thankful for that.

He had something I needed but I didn't know what it was.

He didn't know either.

So I went my own way as a young man.

Searching for meaning like a rudderless ship.

After many years I discovered the metaphors that shed light on my darkness.

Purpose and meaning entered my life.

I shared this, my heart, openly with this man who had seemed so far away.

At first he wasn't sure what to do with all those hugs and I love you's.

He soon became quite a hugger himself.

One day recently I shared my Spirit Stick with him.

I told him who I was.

With pride in his eyes and emotion choking his voice,

He told me how happy he was to know me.

My Father's blessing.

How sweet it is! He turns 74 tomorrow.

Editor's note: Eaglecrow is Larry Walker, who lives in Friendswood, Texas.

The Future of Men's Wellness

Notes on the March 7, 1998 Meeting by Michael Hopp

On Saturday, March 7th, thirty-four men gathered in Santa Fe to discuss the future of New Mexico Men's Wellness. As was fitting for this wild and untamed group of men, we hadn't progressed 30 seconds into explaining the agenda when one of the men called out, "I'm confused!" "Me too!", said another, and away we went. For three and one-half hours men spoke and listened, got riled up, didn't always follow ways that made others feel totally safe, apologized, shared their feelings, and basically acknowledged the concerns, frustrations, excitement and growth which Men's Wellness has brought into their lives.

It was a great meeting. We needed to talk. We needed to share and let each man figure out for himself whether Men's Wellness in its unharnessed, structureless structure works for him. Can we trust in the process so thoroughly that, even when it gets difficult, we stick with it? Sure, not everyone went home feeling all warm and fuzzy, but we met as strong and independent men who are making an honest attempt to come together and work with each other, and through our differences learn from the process.

During one point in the meeting, a few men were saying Men's Wellness just doesn't do the same thing for them as it use to. Another man responded, "it shouldn't, and it never will. It's like a relationship that changes over time. Eventually instead of taking or expecting from it, you may want to serve it and give back the things you've gained over the years." That comment has really stuck with me and has helped me maintain perspective.

Of the wide range of topics we covered, one was conflict resolution. Many of us agreed that conflict is very difficult and uncomfortable to deal with. The summer conference organizers even mentioned using "conflict" as a theme (which I enthusiastically support). We spoke of money concerns and trouble that *Man, Alive!* has faced. We spoke of the dynamics between Albuquerque and Santa Fe and the concern for some that Santa Fe has taken over the fall conference and Albuquerque has taken over the summer conference. We spoke about the differences and similarities between the two conferences. We spoke about leadership and the "choosing" of leaders. Some men felt it could be done differently, other men felt it was good. We spoke of the two-year leadership commitment and whether it is necessary. We spoke on the cost of each conference, how that money is spent and where it is kept. There was talk of creating a mission statement to express the core values of Men's Wellness. There was talk on having a dialogue with women. There

were questions on how to stay in contact throughout the year once the conferences are over. There was talk of reaching out to a wider and more diverse group of men. We heard history from several of the past leaders, where Men's Wellness began and how it has evolved.

We agreed on just a few things. Most importantly, to continue. To continue the conferences, to continue *Man, Alive!*, to continue dialogue in the most honest and sincere way possible. We agreed it would be helpful to have an annual "spring cleaning" meeting. We agreed to meet in the spring of '99.

In closing, I'd like to invite you to come to a conference. Come to the Summer Conference. Come to the Fall Conference. It's magic when men come together and share. Your voice is important. Don't be afraid to voice an opinion which others may not agree with. Remember, we're all men and rightfully powerful in our own way. Only in sharing will we truly learn from one another and have a positive impact on the future of Men's Wellness. Please use *Man, Alive!* as a forum to discuss your feelings and opinions.

Please think also about the idea of "initiating" Men's Wellness at the Fall Conference. You may come to the Fall planning meetings or send written ideas to: Michael Hopp and Jerry Richardson PO Box 23167 Santa Fe, NM 87502.

Editor's note: Michael Hopp and Jerry Richardson are organizing the Fall Conference.

Man2Man

Straight Man/Gay Man Dialogue Weekend

One Impression by Rand B. Lee

Nice guys, good food, pretty location, low-anxiety discussions—none of the external intensity I expected, which is OK, since I brought plenty of internal intensity of my own. About 50/50 gay/straight, so first day I camped around a little with Doug Conwell, unfortunately shocking nobody; gave mini-Tarot readings to make contact with guys I was too shy to say hi to; ran into a tall perfect bearded guy I have had an intimidating crush on for months (and succeeded in telling him I was intimidated by him, though I chickened out and didn't go All the Way and spell out precisely why). It is my practice now at gatherings to go up to men I'm terrified of and tell them that to break the fixation; it works, and so far nobody has hit me. Usually the reaction I get is an unbelieving laugh ("How could anybody be intimidated by ME?")

What good people these guys are, proof once again that men are not agents of the Evil Empire, though I didn't do the sleepover and therefore cannot vouch for whatever pillow talk went on round the campfire.

Second day the shit hit the fan for me. Had a choice between two scrumptious events: to get a massage by two (count 'em, two) beefy boyos (we all formed gangs of three and took turns on the table), or to attend an emotional clearing and tell-us-your-story workshop led by sparkly bodhisattva and cantor, M. Malachi. I got hit by the biggest case of the Dreads I have had in months, pure paralysis; couldn't do either—could only lie under a bench and wait for it all to be over. Occasionally our organizer's dog would come over and sit on or near my face—dogs know simply everything, you know.

After sessions complete was rescued from black paralysis by M. Malachi and my straight twin, who insisted on consoling me in my silence until I burst into tears. I weigh 350 pounds and was feeling pretty darn hideous, the usual stuff that comes up for me when I am in a group of men. Bless them and all the guys who showed me support and ferried me to Santa Fe and back Saturday and Sunday.

I still don't know what I should have done with the intense emotions I was feeling, which included old abuse related anger. Everyone was so sweet and affable and comfortable with one another, while I felt like a skulking time bomb at a bake sale. At the 7th Annual National Conference On Men and Masculinity, the only other men's conference I have ever attended (oh, about 20 years ago), some straight guy lay down on me while I wept and raged, which was oddly comforting.

We don't know at this time if we are going to have another such conference next year. I hope we will. I am glad I attended.

Another Impression by Timothy David Karsten

About twenty men gathered at Deva Foundation in Glorieta the weekend of May 16 and 17 to discuss their similarities and their differences. Some were straight, some gay, some "exploring possibilities." Basically, we were all exploring who we are, full of life's lessons and learning new ones, seeking deeper understanding of ourselves and of each other, laughing, dancing, eating, hugging, crying, being boys and being men. The differences were minor; the similarities were many.

As a so-called "straight" man, I enjoyed the intimacy I was able to create with my gay brothers. As a man, I welcomed the stories, the questions, the inquiry, the threads that wove our tales and brought us together. The hugs were great and so was the 2-on-1 massage.

I returned home, happy to rest from all of the food and conversation, happy to bask in the late sunlight and enchanted New Mexico sky. I was not alone. I was with my brothers. We had come together to share some special moments, to learn and to love and appreciate more deeply our manhood, our common boundaries, our common ascent, and our quest alone and together. These men are with me today as I journey onwards and cross the bridges that life places at my feet.

We are all a little less judgmental, a little more compassionate, a little more loving, a little more grateful to be who we are and to have come to the crossing of Man2Man.

CELEBRATING (YOU)NIQUENESS

July 17, 18 & 19, 1998

by Arnie Melnikoff

The theme for this year's Men's Wellness Summer Conference is "Celebrating (You)niqueness." The life force has created just one you. Never in the course of time, anywhere in the universe, has a being had your life experience, your genetic endowment, your potential.

Along life's journey we each have had challenges presented to us. We have our "story" to tell. Some men's stories are full of painful experiences. Many of us have had it easier, but no one gets through life without rendings of the heart. You just need to live enough years to know this.

I respect the resiliency of the human spirit to persevere despite its burdens, but it is easy to get stuck on negative thinking. If we tell ourselves, "I can't, I'm not good enough," that will limit our growth. It's easy to blame others: "I'm this way because of my mother, father, ex-wife, current wife, my children, my boss, etc."

Blaming others for our state of being ensures that our "story" remains outside of our control to change. Remember that joke about the Alpine climber whose rope snaps and someone else's life passes before his eyes as he falls to his death? It's time to get over it. It's time to shut off that negative stream of consciousness that limits us. Yell "Stop!" out loud, if that's what it takes to stop the recording. (Pull over first if you're driving.)

Part of the process of healing is to go to the deep, dark corners of the soul, to learn from the pain but not to dwell there. Some of our stories replace action. They allow us to stay comfortably where we are, and they support a victim mentality. Our story can become our reality. It closes us down, promotes resignation, protects us, helps us to survive, and can justify who we have become.

What would happen if we retold our story with a different intention? What if we envision a different outcome to the already written chapters? What if our internal judge wasn't so critical, but more loving and accepting?

Perhaps we can journey together this summer on a path that promotes a better history (*his story*). Up to 75 men will again circle the campfire to share their stories. We meet to form a safe place for personal growth to occur. Each man will be challenged to be fully present. Traditions of past summer conferences will continue. Non-competitive games, a communal dinner on Saturday night, drumming and a sweat lodge are a few of the events

scheduled for the weekend. Youth from the age of 15 and up are encouraged to attend. The cost has been kept low to make it affordable to all. Bring your friends and your brothers by blood or by spirit and welcome the men into the circle. Blessings.

Editor's note: Arnie Melnikoff is the leader of the committee which is planning the Summer Gathering.

Ghost Ranch - Chimney Rock by Jake Tausch

A 30-minute hike and gorgeous all the way ... passed a single cottonwood blazing in its autumn glory, snug in the bottom of an arroyo, surrounded by red sandstone.

The view from up here is spectacular and scary at the same time... the wind would like to push me off and the rotten rock warns me to stay back from the edge. The boulder I am sitting on feels like it is swaying in the wind.

Mountains, mesas and wooded plains roll into the distance, dotted with cloud shadows.
Awesome.

Healing the Healer Within by Michael Hopp

The theme for this year's Men's Wellness Fall Conference will be Healing the Healer Within. How is that healer within you doing? How and how often do you check in with it? Do you nurture it, feed it, cleanse it and honor the gift it brings into your daily life?
Who is this healer anyway?

Sometimes we think of a healer as a shaman, medicine man or woman, psychic surgeon, or miracle-worker. Although I think that some healers have these qualities, I think "healer" has another definition as well.

Holding a child or listening to a teenager takes no special power other than the ability to love and to care, and to be present. At first the sensitivity to water a plant, mow the lawn, pull the weeds, cook a vegetable, paint a fence or wash the dishes *consciously* may appear to have nothing to do with healing, but in the greater sense of the word, isn't this where the real healing takes place in our daily lives?

Are we fed by what we do and how we do it? Do our daily chores fill us with a sense of renewal and reward, of accomplishing something special? Do we see and feel our lives filled with innate purpose and intention simply by being who we are?

As men we sometimes find ourselves in a caretaking, provider role, always thinking of the external and problem solving, solving, solving, until finally dissolving into a tangled web of mental masturbation so far removed from feeling, compassion and gentleness that our own mothers wouldn't recognize us. Do we like ourselves in this condition? What options and alternatives do we have?

Turning to the healer within may come naturally for some of us. To others it may be scary, lonesome or unfamiliar. Yet always present and always willing, the healer within is like the sun behind the clouds, never gone away, but only obstructed from our view.

The Fall Conference weekend will be filled with opportunity for men to share what that healer means to them, what aspects have become dormant, and how to re-awaken the spirited Self. Listening and sharing with others will help us remain in touch with our own self-empowerment throughout the year.

The weekend will be filled with a mixture of the external and the internal: meditation, movement, dance, drumming, drawing, laughing, crying, touching, running, jumping and expressing the joy and revelation of being born and re-born a man. I hope you will join us.

The planning committee will expound on the theme of the conference beginning in late July. If you want to join in the planning, please notify us by July 15.

Editor's note: Michael Hopp is head of the planning committee for the Fall Conference. He lives in Santa Fe and has been a massage therapist and yoga instructor involved with the healing arts for the past twelve years.

14th Annual New Mexico Men's Wellness Fall Conference

Healing the Healer Within

October 8-11, 1998

Ghost Ranch, Abiquiu, NM

Registration

\$195 Early Registration

\$225 after September 1, 1998

Partial scholarships available.

Make checks payable to:

NM Male

P.O. Box 23167

Santa Fe, NM 87502

More information

Michael Hopp (505) 820-9363 or Jerry Richardson (505) 988-5459

In Praise of Grief Work

by Robert Speake

What if you've sat through a thousand twelve-step meetings, spent a small fortune in therapy, done family-of-origin work at dozens of exotic weekend workshops, have a library stuffed with self-help books—most of which you've actually read—engaged in some pretty hairy shadow work, shared your inner truths in hundreds of talking stick circles, and helped bring the spirits of the ancestors into your fair share of sweat lodges?

What if you've done all that and it wasn't enough?

It wasn't for me. Last December was my month from hell. My long-time significant other finally tired of my intractable shadow patterns and left me for romance with another man. And I crashed. Hard.

Up to then, I had been putting in eighty-hour weeks for two months on a project important to me professionally and financially. Afterwards, the idea of doing anything on it was laughable. Overnight, my forward progress in life stopped like a schooner becalmed while I absorbed the loss of my beloved partner and friend.

For a month, virtually non-stop, torrents of unexpected grief flowed through me, much of it from the distant past. Refreshed memories of a half dozen "failed" relationships over forty years past made me an insomniac. I processed all night long in a kind of altered dreamlike state, and when I "awoke" I wrote in my journal for hours and hours. Blind obsession and killer rage became my roommates. Two hundred neatly typed pages came out of the processing. It felt like a kind of insanity which I hoped was temporary.

My therapist introduced me to a book, *The Healing Runes*, by Ralph Blum. After that, a five-rune spread became a mainstay of my grief work, the direct link to my Higher Power which I needed to help me understand what was happening to me. But I was still crazy most of the time.

Desperately seeking relief from the round-the-clock insanity, I discovered a little gem of a book called *Good Grief Rituals* by Elaine Childs-Gowell. Through this wise woman, meaningful, self-created ritual came into my life for the first time. On the morning of Christmas eve I attended a grief service at a local Methodist church along with a number

of elderly widows and widowers, and I wept without shame throughout it. That night I surrounded myself with candles and incense and images of my departed lover and settled down to weep some more, home alone on Christmas eve, knowing she was probably in the arms of her new lover. Surprisingly, I felt mellow and peaceful the whole evening. Go figure.

The next day, Christmas day, I drove to Chaco Canyon. I traipsed a half-mile down a snowy trail to the remote ruins of a little Anasazi house and called on all the ancient spirits at Chaco to replace my hatred with forgiveness. They sent me home instead with all my rage intact. I dominated the next three weeks in my men's group with my grief, enlisting them in three powerful processes to discharge my pain and suffering.

Towards the end of my two months of grief work, after most of the insanity and rage had been replaced by peace and forgiveness, I took a book from my self-help stash, one I had owned for six years and had never read. It was *Care of The Soul* by Thomas Moore. Through this and several successive books by the same author (*Soul Mates*, *The Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life*, and *The Education of The Heart*) I've come to treasure this gentle monk/scholar/teacher turned husband/father/world traveler/lecturer. His writings have brought a clarity and simplicity to the sufferings of my life that I've never known before.

Through Thomas Moore I've come to understand that people have left me because that's what their souls called them to do, and that my soul's destiny required that I experience their leaving to teach me deeply that loss is an inseparable and crucial part of life. However my lover wounded me by her leaving, it was a necessary wound, a wound for which I am now profoundly grateful.

Some other astonishing insights have come out of my grief work, and I believe I'm forever changed by it. For instance, going into it I stubbornly clung to the belief that fierce independence was the way to go in life, and that I had lived my life as a shadow warrior kneeling before the altar of personal freedom. Coming out of it, I know that love is the most important thing in life, and I am now willing to prostrate myself—most of the time—before the throne of Venus, to suffer whatever my soul needs in the service of love. In short, my priorities are now straight: love first, then everything else. My life is now ever so much simpler.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, author of *On Death and Dying*, has this to say about love:

When you love, give it everything you've got,
and when you have reached your limit,
give it more.
And forget the pain of it
because, as you face your death,
it is only the love you have given
and received that will count.
And all the rest—

the accomplishments, the struggles, the fights—
will be forgotten in your reflections.
If you have loved well,
then it will have been worth it.
The joy of it will last through the end.
But if you have not,
death will always come too soon.

This poem has become my mantra, my new call to arms. Having emerged strengthened, enlightened, re-focused, and humbled by my latest bout with grief, I can't wait for the rest of my life to unfold.

Editor's note: Robert Speake is the immediate past editor of *Man, Alive!*

My Only Sister

by David Beckley

The girlfriend, the unknown voice on the phone,
The solace of a long distance business commute,
Called my mother one day to say,
"Tell your husband I buried our daughter today."

A review of Daniel J. Levinson's

The Seasons of a Man's Life

by David Beckley

What does the term *midlife crisis* mean to you? The stereotype of the man who goes crazy, gets a babe and a red corvette never fit me, so I never saw it coming.

In my early forties I began to have very strange feelings. Or perhaps I should simply say that I began to have feelings. I think of it as my "sitting on the couch" period. My old reliable distraction, reading, stopped working; all I could do was sit, gaze stupidly around me, and wonder what was going on. This went on for some months.

Fortunately my penchant for reading did not entirely fail me. I found the book which is the subject of this article, and it convinced me that I was going through a transition which was both normal and fairly predictable.

Levinson undertook an in-depth study of forty men between the ages 35 and 40 in order to determine whether there are developmental stages in the life of adults such as those in children. He saw enough evidence in the forty biographies to build his theory of a life which "evolves through a sequence of alternating periods. A relatively stable, structure-building period is followed by a transitional, structure-changing period." He concludes that the periods occur in a fixed sequence, and that there is a surprisingly low variability in the age (2-3 years on either side of the average) at which each period begins and ends.

Levinson says that the "mid-life transition" is typically between the ages of 40 and 45.

Perhaps the simplest and most profound idea in the book is that since we cannot "live out all aspects of the self," we have to make compromises. We decide our goal in life is to be an artist or a stockbroker, for instance, and proceed in that direction rather than some other. Levinson says that such compromises have a shelf-life of about seven or eight years, which is about as long as it takes to realize which parts of the compromise work and don't work. At the end of that time a transition period occurs in which it is necessary to make new compromises. Depending on the success of the earlier compromises, this can be fairly easy or excruciatingly difficult. The midlife transition, apparently, is the worst for most men. (Levinson also wrote a sequel, *The Seasons of a Woman's Life*, in which his further research indicates that the age map for women is virtually identical to that for men, but that their ways of going through each developmental period differ from those of men.)

The transition period is difficult to the degree to which our ideas of self are based on illusion. Life has a way of sliding out from under us. We're over here, thinking we're in control, and life is over there, proceeding on a course of its own. We sometimes see the symptoms of our dysfunctionality before the logic of it, as in my couch-sitting. So the difficult part is to realize how far off the beam we are, and to reconcile ourselves to what is really happening. Levinson refers to this process as "de-illusionment," rather than disillusionment, because there are many positive aspects to the process which are not connoted by the term "disillusionment." De-illusionment, painful though it can be, leads to greater freedom and flexibility in dealing with life, because it frees us from the bonds of our fixed ideas of ourselves.

This is the same process which Robert Bly calls "eating the shadow." The shadow is all of the aspects of personality which we pretend do not exist. One of the main tasks of de-illusionment is to accommodate the shadow elements, those parts of us which we have *compromised* out of consciousness.

I used to think that you become an adult at 21, and that's that. Nothing else changes, so adult life consists merely of one incident after another. My parents apparently thought

that way, and I think that idea was a major contributor to their inflexibility, their unwillingness to show their sons any shred of self-doubt or lack of control.

My father died at the age of 55. I think his shadow ate him alive.

The Exchange

by Steve Smith

I had been feeling somewhat edgy and unable to completely devote myself to the proceedings at the men's wellness summer campout. I wondered what would come up.

Now it was the second day about noon, and time for the gift exchange. There were six in my group, and each man placed a gift in the center of the table and explained its meaning. Each gift was more wonderful than the one before, gifts demonstrating kindness, hope, abundance. I placed my gift and explained how it was to remind me to never take things for granted. When the gifts were all on the table, each man began to choose a gift for himself and to explain what it was about the gift that was special to him. I realized as I looked over the offerings that I didn't want to have to choose one; they were all too special, so I resolved to take what was left.

When there was only one item left and all others had said their peace, I thought of the story of this gift. It was a small carved monkey which had been given to Phil by his wife when she left to travel alone in a dangerous country. During her absence Phil had talked to the monkey, telling it his fears for her. Having come to the end of these fears, he offered it with its story, and now it was in my hand. I really don't know what I said, but I felt the blood rushing to my head and that ache in my chest that I hadn't felt in so long. I muttered a few words and backed away from the group.

I leaned against a tree and began to feel the sobs come, almost silently but strong enough to shake the tree. Phil came over and put his arms around me and for a minute I did something I hadn't done since long before, when my grandfather died: I cried in another man's arms.

I told him that I didn't know where that came from, but over time I began to understand. I had left my wife a year and a half before. I tried to deal with the guilt, fear, anger and loneliness, which were painful in the extreme, but tears never came. I feared for her, because I still loved her and she seemed bent on self-destruction. She too was traveling through a dangerous country, and, like Phil, I could not nor would not have stopped her from doing what she had to do.

I had grieved much, but now I finally cried.

My Psychic Guides

by John McMahon

They told me that the ride will not be on the easy path. We are each other's greatest teacher. We are each other's biggest problem.

We each have huge issues to solve.

Yours tend to come up faster.

Mine are just always there.

That we chose each other may not be our choice.

They tell me we have been here before.

Once it was a matter of life and death.

Another time it was painful and unattainable.

This time I can see what it could be.

This time it is within our reach.

But old demons block the path.

Can the stallion in me break its tethers?

Can the witch in you speak the truth and still live?

Can our relationship handle the storm of our individual journeys?

They tell me they don't see the future, they just know the past.

Thanks a lot.

Why you? Why me? What did we do to deserve each other?

Is this a reward or a punishment?

Will our success be the fulfillment of a purpose, or is it just another step along the way?

For now it's day to day

The journey and the struggle continue.

Why does it have to be so much work?

I have to remember not to look for the end of the path, lest I miss the journey

Thoughts on Divorce

by Tony Mayne

Well, damn. Here I've gone off and done it again. For the third time I find myself in a relationship that no longer works, that's just a burden. This person and I shared eleven years of being together, having fun, working hard, and today, it's no longer there. I always thought life was pretty linear and that you could take the pieces that you wanted and make of them what you could. But what I've come to believe is that only the good parts of life are linear, and the bad are tape loops. What happens time and time again to people is that they get together in a moment, sort of a flash of commonality, then the relationship starts its deterioration.

As we tried to make more and more of our life together, I found that what we did was to sink more and more into the bad, familiar parts of our parents which prevented them from going anywhere. I have become like the people who shaped my fears and misconceptions. My partner succumbed to the same retro-living, becoming the worst of her parents too, and we became the synthesis of the worst of both sets of parents.

It's as if we lived two separate lives, one at home and the other outside. We've been unusual successes with great professional careers developed by hard work, cunning and long hours devoted to getting things done. But the ability to put that same work ethic into place at home never was a necessity.

Our event has simply lived out its life. Based on my past experience, it will probably take about two years to get over most of the hurt, the anger, the bitterness. This isn't work one can actively pursue. One simply endures, it just makes you tired and sad. I'm now 58, so by the time I'm 60 I should be willing to consider another relationship and repeat my scenario of divergence. Maybe by then I'll be so tired that I can simply accept all of the good and bad of an impending relationship. In the meantime my task is to go day to day, to get over the pain and hurt and try to acquire some understanding of what went on.

* * *

We decided to use a mediator to broker an agreement between us that would not look like the horror story of my previous divorce. (If you do this enough, you get good at recognizing what wasn't fun and rewarding. Warm fuzzies never seem to be in the cards.) We called a friend who does some domestic law and she agreed to help. She only wanted the best for her friends, and that they act as caring adults throughout the process. I had misgivings, but hoped the outcome would be better than having two attorneys duke it out on our behalf.

What emerged was something totally beyond my expectation.

After a relatively brief conversation in which we divided the things we had collected, we began to discuss what we wanted for each other. I heard my wife, the supposed enemy, saying that she wanted me financially intact and whole after our divorce. With very little prompting from the mediator, she volunteered alimony to repay my past generosity and the substantial income which we had enjoyed through the years. This news was especially well received since I had been unemployed for a year and we had no savings.

Somehow the act of terminating our marriage fostered a kindness and caring generosity which had not existed in the twelve years we were together. I also found that the desire to divorce hadn't diminished at all. Within the nominally adversarial process of divorce, respect and caring can exist. I came to find great relief in the fact that I could leave this relationship not needing to hate my ex-partner.

This left me with a profound case of ambivalence which made it harder to figure out how to heal myself. But I now have great respect for my ability to act as I feel in a climate where most people just want to hire the dirty work done by someone else. Our divorce left me with enormous pride in our being adults at a most challenging time. I have then a knowledge that very few people get, of our magnificence as individuals.