

MAN, ALIVE!

A Journal of Men's Wellness

Summer 1999

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Jardineros del Corazón *Gardeners of the Heart*

by Ken Betzen

Seven classes at East San Jose Elementary School, kindergarten through fifth grade, have started garden plots and are learning about natural community through the work of an Albuquerque men's group. In January David Johnson, Ken Betzen, David Witherspoon, Pat Sauer, David Beckley and Wyatt Heard decided to undertake a community based, community building project. With the help and continuing participation of Sandra Starr, APS South Area facilitator/trainer, Ken managed to find our work site. David Witherspoon suggested the focus of our work and David Johnson gave us our name. The staff, teachers and especially the students at ESJE welcomed us and eagerly went to work with us. In February

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Pat Sauer supervises the composting at East San Jose Elementary.

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

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Submission Deadlines

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Submission Formats and Requirements

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

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

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Jardineros del Corazón

words and music by Pat Sauer

We go outside and we feel the sun
Planting a garden would be such fun
There's lots to learn so we must be shown
... Jardineros del Corazón!

We find a place near our classroom door
The garden spot we've been looking for
We gather up every rock and stone
... Jardineros del Corazón!

Jardineros del Corazón
Gardeners of the heart
Working together we're not alone
... Jardineros del Corazón!

We talk about tools for a little while
Then we go to the compost pile
We feed the dirt where the compost is thrown
... Jardineros del Corazón!

We make some holes and we plant our seeds
We water our garden and pull the weeds
We wait and watch where the seeds were sown
... Jardineros del Corazón!

Jardineros del Corazón
Gardeners of the heart
Watching together we're not alone ...
Jardineros del Corazón!

Before very long our plants have borne
Calabacitas, tomatoes, and corn
How quickly our garden—and we—have grown
... Jardineros del Corazón!

Each boy and girl will grow up some day
And may travel far from East San Jose
But they'll carry within them their very own
... Jardinero del Corazón!

Jardineros del Corazón
Gardeners of the heart
Growing together we're not alone ...
Jardineros del Corazón! ▶▶

and March we did planning with the principal, Richard Baldonado, and dialogued with the participating teachers and their students. In April we worked with the students on ground preparation, mixing dozens of wheelbarrow-loads of rich brown compost with the rather sterile soil. Pat wrote the lyrics and music for our song, “Jardineros del Corazón” (see page 2), as part of a presentation to Ethicon, our “Join-a-School” partner. This month we have been planting vegetable and flower seeds, and classrooms have started sets that students are bringing out.

The Jardineros program is oriented around hands-on experience; the children are engaged in doing the work with minimal help. Adults provide protection and guidance, and David Witherspoon, Ken, Pat and Sandra are concerned with presenting the practical knowledge of gardening and with communicating and enacting certain concepts and values:

We are all equal, interested and capable. Given the space to do so, children will act out their natural equality with others, will engage with their environment, and will normally believe themselves capable of handling the tasks presented to them.

We are natural community makers. We exist in a web of life connections with other creatures, with natural cycles and with the planet. Normally, we will band together in a “village” to provide ourselves with food, shelter, mutual care, learning and social connection.

Sustainable living is a primary value. For our purposes sustainability means making value based, informed choices as we live in the world. We act on the idea that we can use the world as a resource and that we are a resource to the world. We are responsible for how we use the soil in our gardens, and we must develop ways to restore and maintain that soil.

We make every effort to weave the academic subjects and the arts into our process. Students apply basic math concepts by doing layout and making other decisions about their garden plots. They read and hear stories that tell the trials and joys of maintaining a connection to the earth through gardening, and they learn the values that help make a community viable and satisfying. They learn the scientific basis of gardening, including information about soil science, horticultural techniques, plant identification, climatology, seasonal cycles and meteorology. They do sketches of plants and of their garden plans and they hear and sing music about gardening.

The Jardineros program originated primarily in the teaching work of David Witherspoon. Over four years David has developed and applied the prototype for our program while teaching fourth grade at two other APS schools. Much of the direction and content of our program comes directly from David’s earlier work. Now we are attempting to formalize this program, developing and expanding the lessons so they can be included in a manual for gardening with school children in the desert Southwest.

We hope that other volunteers, parents and teachers will be interested in starting similar programs in other schools. If we can offer encouragement, technical assistance, or other help, please call us in Albuquerque: Ken Betzen (869-0621, e-mail: kenbetzen@aol.com), David Witherspoon (268-5497), or Pat Sauer at (299-6749).

This project grew out of a years-long discussion of community, the lack of viable community, and the possibility of creating some form of intentional (conscious) community. We undertook this project in part in order to create, participate in, and to observe a community process. We intend to continue this rather marvelous endeavor, discovering and unfolding the particular energy and practice of being in viable, enjoyable, sustainable human community. Are you interested in joining a group of men and women to meet regularly in conversation about these ideas? If so, call or write Ken (869-0621, e-mail: kenbetzen@aol.com) or David (268-5497). ►►

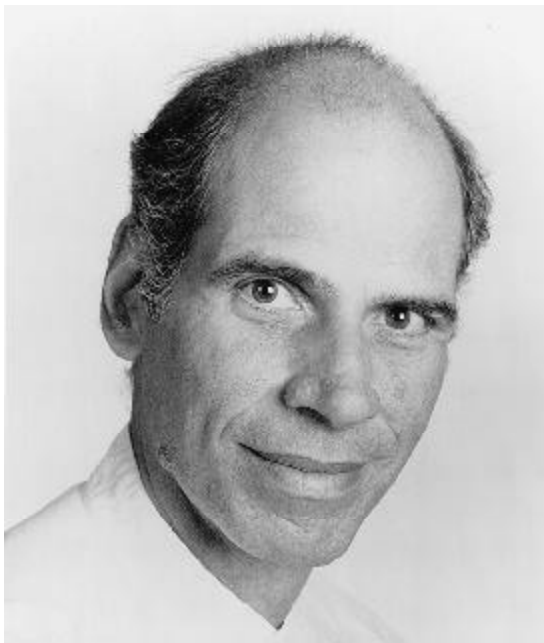
Michael Hopp

Interviews

Victor La Cerva

Michael Hopp, leader of the last Fall Conference, interviewed former conference leaders during the summer of last year to gain their advice about leading the conference and to make a record of their experience and thoughts on various subjects concerning Men's Wellness. The following interview was with Victor La Cerva, M.D., the founder of New Mexico Men's Wellness. Victor works for the New Mexico Department of Health. He is the author of *Pathways to Peace: Forty Steps to a Less*

Violent America and *Worldwords: Global Reflections to Awaken Spirit*. Besides ongoing support for Men's Wellness, Victor's latest initiatives include The Dream Team (a long-term mentoring project which he mentions below and describes in last Fall's issue of *Man, Alive!*), and a group for men in their fifties (proposed in the Spring '99 issue of *Man, Alive!*). You can reach Victor at 505-983-4233, 505-827-2320, or by e-mail at victorl@doh.state.nm.us.



Victor La Cerva

Michael How did you get involved in men's work? How did that happen?

Victor Well, one of the things was that I felt the need to have some personal men friends who were close. I still had a lot of friends back East and other parts of the country. So I felt that real need, and within the Health Department two other guys, Jeff Pine and Art Hoffman, the three of us were sitting down one day and said, "We should do a men's conference." The women had done their first Wellness Conference. We said, "Hey, we need to do one for men." So we organized the first Men's Conference and this was in eighty-two or eighty-three, before any of us had heard of Robert Bly or before any of that really took off, which was a couple of years later.

Michael Had you done any men's stuff before?

Victor No, nothing that one would label as men's stuff. I have always been on a path of trying to in-

crease my awareness, deepen my compassion and to understand in my own way what it meant to be a man in this world. So I always had those sort of conversations with whatever men I was with, but never on a sort of bigger scale.

Michael I know, some men resist that label “The Men’s Movement” and men’s work.

Victor Right. Well, I think it’s just a natural progression of groups and entities in various ways acknowledging and then wanting to move beyond whatever their perceived sense of oppression is. We had the first Men’s Conference at Glorieta, and at the same time there was a Baptist Convention going on, so we were in this little room and all these people were singing and praising the Lord in the next room. It actually was very interesting, but it was the physical beauty of the place and then there was this kind of strange room shuffle that was going on. There were only twenty of us. We tried very hard to recruit people but we only managed to get twenty people. From that conference I learned a lot of things. We put a lot of emphasis on men’s physical health, which is interesting now—we have come almost full circle in this fourteenth year to your theme of “Feeling,” which definitely involves the body. So, we brought in these exercise testing machines. We had people do nutritional recalls. We had a computer wellness inventory thing that you answered all these questions, and then you got sort of a wellness score that asked about diet, exercise and those kinds of things.

And, in one of the evenings in one of the sessions, it became very clear where the real energy was. I made up this exercise of strips of paper in a hat, and you basically, on videotape no less, pulled this piece of paper out of a hat and it would say something like, “black stockings and high heels” or “my dad” or “my best friend” or “divorce” and then you were supposed to talk for five minutes spontaneously about that. And I could see that’s where the juice was, not in this other conversation about physical health. People wanted to be able to explore their emotional lives, and then the friendship and male bonding stuff that began to occur spontaneously with all the jokes about

farts and whatnot. Walter Pope did a great job as one of the first speakers in creating some of that energy.

Michael How did you change the second year? What happened there?

Victor Well, the second year Jeff and Art weren’t interested in doing it, so it sort of became my show. I realized we needed to change venues so then we discovered Ghost Ranch. We got together a committee which included people from the first conference and some other people. In basically three or four meetings, we put together an agenda and a flow. At that time the emphasis was that, because men experience such personal isolation, they needed to move through whatever we did together as a group and not be broken out into splinter groups. The second year I think we had forty-five, the third year we got it up to sixty, and then by the fourth year we hit a hundred. At one point we hit one hundred twenty-five and everybody complained that it was too big, and we wanted to bring it back down below one hundred.

The other thing that I learned the second year—every year there was a learning—I remember there was this one guy, who was clearly from his questionnaire an alcoholic, and we had said from the beginning this is an alcohol- and drug-free event. I ended up confronting this guy in what I thought was a gentle way, but he chose to leave the conference. So then I realized that we needed to provide some psychological support if people felt they needed it. That’s where we came up with the idea that there were always going to be volunteer counselors, which we sort of downplayed the last few years, but that there would be people available if people wanted to process stuff. And also, I realized that it was not my place to try and push this guy to change beyond where he wanted to change. It really was not going to be healing to do that.

Then, I think it was the third year when it was clear to me that most of the people who were coming were white guys and we needed to try and get more diversity. So that year we did manage to get a couple people of color, Indian men. And then

this one guy named Ralph stood up and said that he had never been welcomed home from the war. I think we were talking about racism and that kind of stuff and he was talking about what it was like to be a brother in Vietnam. Then the group spontaneously got up, created a line and welcomed him home. Then we welcomed home two or three other guys. And then it became clear that we needed to do a veterans ceremony. So every year, things began to evolve. Then the veterans ceremony got more and more invigorated. In one of the first ones the vets washed our hands and everybody shared the pain that they had experienced from the war. So we had people who had experienced combat, people who went to Canada, and people who felt ashamed because they didn't go to fight, and there was obviously a lot of juice there and stuff that needed to be explored. And so then, the veterans ceremony became a piece.

A couple years after that someone said, "Hey, you aren't doing anything for elders. We need an elders ceremony." He made all these beautiful medallions and so then an elder ceremony got born. So, you are blessed with a lot of baggage of ceremonial accretions that have evolved over the years that some of us at least felt were integral things. And then the site of the closing ceremony evolved. I forget who was in charge of that. One year there was a group of three or four people and they scouted out and they said, "We don't want to do the closing down below anymore. We want to hike to this special place." So since then the closing ceremony has been there. And then one year we brought in the drum, and then the bowl, the sword.

Michael More and more stuff! Where did the money come initially? How did you do the first conference?

Victor The first conference? I think we got a small grant from the Health Department. And then after the second conference I tried to create a newsletter which went nowhere because it was a four-page photocopied thing of stuff that I found interesting relative to men. Two years later was when Chuck Cockelreas and David Johnson came up with *Man Alive!*, which was a totally different concept. And

then, that really got established as a vehicle of communication between people. I think it was the third or fourth conference that that happened.

Michael How has Men's Wellness helped you?

Victor Well, Men's Wellness has helped me appreciate the really basic theme, "You have to do it yourself but you don't have to do it alone." That's a recurrent idea which comes up over and over again. So there is that level, just all the personal work that always gets done at every conference—some new insight about your relationship with your dad or something else that you need to heal. Or some deeper understanding about my own sexuality, which is a running joke because for fourteen years we always have something to do with sexuality, and I'm still trying to fathom that great mystery. So, it has helped me confront my shadows and break out of isolation. Really, for me it's just an enriching part of my life to have so many wonderful men in it. It gave me this whole extended family of men besides my men's group that I created for myself. It feels like, in healthier ways, the extended family that I experienced growing up. My sadness is that we are all so busy we don't get together that often.

On another level, especially at the beginning, Men's Wellness for me was really about rapid manifestation of intention. A lot of times in our lives, we have an intention and then there is this kind of slow wave before we look back and say, "Yes, it's been five years, ten years that it's been manifested now. I have two children, I have the adobe house I wanted to build, what's next, what's the next big vision in the long wave?" But there it was, like why don't we have guys drawing their house and see what comes up? And all of a sudden we have fifty guys crying on the floor because of stuff and pain that came up from doing this exercise of drawing the house they grew up in. And so, that still to me is the very exciting part of the planning process. Just to come up with a kernel of structure that will allow people to have their own process and then share that process, and then seeing the idea created and having fruition so quickly, like in just three or four planning meetings. One year



Michael Hopp

we had this thing where everybody put all their crap, their hatred, and then we burned it, carried it up there and burned it. We had this wall, like a wailing wall. Just things like that and that to me is still part of the magic. Let's come up with some outrageous idea and then just do it.

Michael Barry Cooney was sharing with me the year you had black balloons, a similar thing. Your grief was in your balloon. There were small circles of men and at some given signal, all the groups let go of their balloons. And he said for him to watch his grief, his pain, go up with all these other balloons, and then watch the wind current catch all these balloons, and he said all the men broke down, it just got to them.

Victor We stopped doing that for environmental reasons. We realized, Hey, where are all these balloons going to end up? This is not a good way....

Michael I was just going to say, it would never happen in the nineties. Is that similar to the other Men's Wellness groups around the United States, where there is this kind of spontaneous...if you have an idea you can put it into action, or are they more orches-

trated, is there more control or centralization?

Victor Well, I've only been to one other official men's gathering outside of here, which was very wonderful. It was in northern California. You had to pay a lot of money and Robert Moore, Robert Bly and Michael Meade were all there. So you got to hang out with all those guys and I brought back some things from there. Again, I think part of the reason I did it was I felt the need to see what other people were up to. There was some room for that kind of spontaneity, but not a lot. It was a more organized structure and there were the gurus, which is something we always tried to stay away from. But I did bring back from there the idea of the banquet and the toasting, because I experienced that there, and I said, "Hey, this is good. This is a great way to do it." And the revolving toast where you toast all the grandfathers, and then anybody who is a grandfather can stand up and toast all the people of color, and then anybody who is a person of color can stand up...and that's how it is supposed to work. It should keep revolving on its own. And clans. When we first tried clans, it came out of my experience of being out there and being put in a clan. And then we evolved it through our own uniqueness in New Mexico. You go in like you're going into the voting booth, read about each clan and then pick one. I was gratified to be a snake. There were only twelve of about a hundred men who chose snake.

Michael What led you to trust that that would work? No guru, no centralized authority...

Victor Well, I work in Public Health, and the answer to Public Health is really about empowering communities to look at their own problems and come up with solutions. Plus, by that time there was this cadre of people who obviously kept creating new and different and wonderful things every year, so the process had proven itself within one or two years.

Michael Does the structure work then? The format we have, the planning committee, the two-man, two-year leadership, facilitation?

Victor I think at this point that, until something else

evolves, it's fine. I think, again, my job over the years is sort of to see when some new type of energy needs to be infused. And I feel proud of the fact I helped contribute to bringing in the young men. It was time for something new, something totally radically different. So I said, you know, I am going to bring in a dozen young men, where the first year we had eight and the next year twelve.

“You have to do it yourself..”

Michael What impact have the young men had on the conference?

Victor Well, first of all, I think it has been great for them, to see them transformed in the course of the weekend, and from everyone I have spoken to as a follow-up, it still remains one of those shifting experiences for them. And for the other men, I think it's quite a merit for us to remember and to note the differences. For me, it put me in a really great space of appreciation. I grew up in a poor section of Brooklyn where there were gangs, and my bike got ripped off and I was held up at knife-point and all this other stuff happened. But still, compared to what some of these men go through, I lived in a relatively safe place. Those were the four or five episodes in my entire childhood that I can remember that were bad. But some of these guys experience that kind of stuff every week or every month. So I think that it deepens my appreciation that I'm not having to do it all over again. I like being forty-nine, and I'm ready to continue that evolution. But I think for many men whose lives have not really been specifically about service, it has been very important that the notion about service as a path to your own fulfillment continues to get expanded. And one thing our culture really needs is for older men to make themselves available to serve as guides for younger men.

Again, the vision from my perspective was that we would have an event for each season. I didn't know how that would evolve. The cross-country winter event evolved fairly quickly, has always re-

mained small, and the summer event evolved. We still don't have a spring event on a regular basis, although your work with gay and straight men may solidify itself as a spring event. I always thought that might be an event where we would do couples, men and women, or an event with kids. Each of those things has been tried at different times in the spring. Or maybe the spring is the revolving, the creative...But my vision has always been that we have an event for each season.

Anyway, to get back to the initiation piece. Robert Johnson and his group had created this beautiful, exquisite present, this camping initiation experience, and then they were disappointed because women, in particular, were not willing to surrender their sons to go off with these men to do God knows what. My view of it was that you don't do an initiation until you have established a mentor relationship, and once you have a connection that is real, that is vital, that is ongoing, then you can bring those folks together and say, “Okay, now we are going to take these young men and acknowledge the growth they have experienced and their readiness to step into the next phase of their lives,” and so on. But not because they show up for a conference or were dragged to a conference and then get initiated by men with whom they really don't have a relationship. So I would do it a little differently. I would seek out those men that have mentor relationships with young men or their own sons, or nephews, or relatives, and then create something where a community of men would come together.

Michael Is there anything you would like to see added to the conference that is not happening? Any areas we have not touched on, avoided?

Victor Well, for a long time I've personally made it my business to recruit people of color, gay men, people with disabilities. And just about every year I have tried to bring one or two people that I personally reached out to. I would like to see the planning committee take the responsibility to provide that diversity. And that means we have more of those people, starting with the committee itself.

Michael So, do you involve more men of color or different...

Victor Yes, just more diversity in positions of power in the planning. I think that if we don't really keep pushing that, the natural and easy thing is to just homogenize. Not that every person who comes isn't unique and doesn't have their own ethnic riches to bring. I am not saying that. But the power structures in our society are such that we just need to be more proactive. So, that's one piece.

The second piece is, I have always felt we needed to do a more organized dance piece where, as little mini things sprinkled throughout the conference, we have somebody who really knows what they are doing in terms of dance. I experienced this at one conference I went to where this guy, Ricardo, taught us these steps where the men run together and bounce chests. It was all this wild stuff and it was just fabulous to have, once a day, that you did a dance class. So, it's another way of bringing in that movement body centered stuff in a celebratory way, and I just don't think we have done very much of that.

You know, we've done our Saturday Night Live, we've done the four circle dancing, people polka, and do whatever they want, and we get wild and all that's good. But some structured way to get people to move, I think would be great. Kind of like we guide the songbook and that sort of fell by the wayside. But men singing together, dancing together, I would like to see us really enrich that part. To have somebody who teaches singing or knows about voice and the power of voice. Again, I think that could be spectacular. We have always done visual arts things, we've done sort of experiential, you know, cross the river of acid, climbing the spider web rope, trust falls, but the two things we really haven't done are singing and dancing. So that would be the second thing.

The third thing is that we have never completely followed through on the buddy system idea. We kind of danced toward it and danced away from it. And I still think it would be a good idea, somehow, that you would have a buddy you would either

observe silently through the conference—you draw somebody's name, find out who they are, and then kind of observe them, and then as part of the closing you say, "I was your silent partner, this is what I observed, this is how your magnificence came forth, blah, blah, blah"—or that there is someone you regularly connect with at meals.

We have talked about other things, like trying to pool money to build our own space someplace where land is still relatively inexpensive. Buy fifty acres or more somewhere and put a little structure on it, but I don't know if that will ever really come together. In terms of a bigger vision, it would be nice if something like that could happen.

Michael How has your relationship with Men's Wellness changed over the years from conference leader to planning committee?

*...but you don't
have to do it alone."*

Victor I still feel that at this point it is just a part of me and I am a part of it, and as we both evolve that connection will always be there. So the connection changes just like the connection between a dad and his child. It's a metaphor that a baby is born and then needs more attention and nurture, and then as the baby gets bigger there are different kinds of lessons, and then there's a different presence that is required. I see now with my adolescent daughter that a listening presence is required. So I try to hear the new ideas, listen to the things that have come up before, and then offer advice if asked. But otherwise I try to allow her to make her own mistakes and move on.

Michael I am seeing the parallels with Men's Wellness, my desire to see this initiation or movement from adolescence into adulthood and this idea that both listening and honoring where it has been allow it to evolve. Were there any themes in the past, in the early years? I asked some other men, and no-

body knew if there were themes it the beginning.

Victor I think in the late eighties was when the theme thing started.

Michael If a man was thinking about coming to Men's Wellness for the first time, what would you say to him?

Victor I would say, "Come, you are welcome. Share your gifts and take whatever you can that will be useful to you."

Michael Is there anything you would want the person to gain from Men's Wellness?

Victor Well, the sort of essence of Men's Wellness has always been about sharing the pain and experiencing the joys of being male, where we find ourselves at this place and point in time and history in our lives. Men have always gathered. This is just the form of the eighties and nineties—one form, not *the* form—in which men can share in an open way what their lives are really about. And to me, that has always been the essence, to create a safe space where men can really talk about what is going on in their lives, and that involves sharing some of the pain and celebrating the goodness that's there. Early on, from the second conference, I said if we can get men to laugh their asses off and cry some tears, then we will have succeeded.

Michael How effective do you think Men's Wellness is?

Victor Well, I think that for those who have come even once it's had a positive impact. I have thought about it in terms of Promise Keepers and I say, "Why didn't we become the movement like the Promise Keepers, that would just take off," in a larger sense in reaching more people. I think it's because we have always shied away from being more dogma based, and a lot of people are more comfortable when there is dogma that they can get their hands around, and then there is something to join. There is nothing to join with Men's Wellness. It's just an ack-

nowledgement of where you are on your path and an opportunity to share some of that with other men.

Michael You have always had the desire to make the net wider and include more men. Why do you think that is not happening, or why are we kind of plateaued at this eighty or ninety men?

Victor There was a period where there was literally this explosion of men's groups, and part of that was reflective of what was happening nationally. But I think that when men experienced that kernel of togetherness at the conference, they wanted to keep recreating it on a regular basis in their lives. I'm personally convinced that easily over a hundred men's groups got formed as a result of people who had come to the Men's Conference, or at least that was part of the energy that had got them going or kept them going. And so, I think that in that sense, I am not talking of creating mega-conferences where there are two or three hundred people or stadiums full. I am just talking about getting more men involved in having as a healing part of their lives a circle of men with whom they can be themselves and share what's going on in their lives. Right from circle time in kindergarten in our society, there is that desire or that natural drawing together to sit down and share things. But we lose it somewhere between second grade and professional lives. So, it's almost like Men's Wellness is a portal. When you step through that portal, you get energized enough that you want to have that in your life more, but the real work gets done week to week in the men's groups. That's where you have people mirroring you, where you laugh, where you continue to experience your growth as a man in the company of other men. Not from a once-a-year shot.

Michael If somebody is interested in getting involved in the men's movement, how would you suggest that?

Victor Well, for a long time, we had Jim Spray up here who came to a lot of conferences, got real active, was involved in starting the men's center, helped us organize Father's Day events out on the Pecos for two or three years, and Jim just took it upon himself

to gather names of four or five people and then launch them into a group. And Paul Steinkoenig and Dave Breault and David Kuenzli in various ways have done that in Albuquerque, but because they are all counselors they often have done it—come to a eight-week paid group and then we'll get you going as a group. Which is okay, but I would like to see us have contacts. Another thing in that question you asked me before about what do we need to do differently that we haven't done—there are men in Roswell and in Las Cruces and in Clovis who have come to men's conferences who with some more active support would really generate significant men's movements in their own areas, and that hasn't happened but that could happen.

Michael So, what do you think they need?

Victor Well, they need regular copies of *Man Alive!* and they need funding, perhaps, to give them scholarships to get a few men from their area to come. Just like we recruit and have reached out in terms of diversity, we need to be doing that geographically within the state as well. We have had contingencies from Las Cruces, from Roswell, from Farmington, and we just need to build and strengthen them when that occurs. You know, primarily it's this Rio Grande corridor still—Los Alamos, Taos, Espanola, Santa Fe, Albuquerque. So if I was assuming the directorship at this point, I would want to put a little more energy into somehow making that happen.

Michael If somebody was talking about wanting to be involved in the planning committee but thought they were too busy, what would you say to them?

Victor I'd say, "Well, can you make fifteen or twenty minutes for me? I'll call you up." If it was someone I thought had good ideas and needed to be involved, I'd say, "I'll dedicate twenty minutes before and after every meeting to get your ideas. Here's what we are going to discuss; just give me your ideas."

Michael Any other ideas you can give to a person who is going to take on the leadership of the conference? Things to think about and to be aware of?

Victor To keep your own center; to be humble, to ask for support and help when you need it, and to manage to enjoy yourself, despite all the little things that will come up in the course of the conference and will be laid on your plate.

**“Let's come up with
some outrageous idea
and then just do it.”**

Michael Any closing comments, any things we haven't touched on that you would like to speak of?

Victor Well, I guess the next piece of big, big vision that I would really like to see the men's movement in New Mexico accomplish, which is something I have been thinking about for a long time and would like to devote at least part of my fifties to, is to take all this wonderful energy and talent that comes together three or four times a year in men's related things and really focus it like a laser for the good of the young men in our community, so many of whom are isolated, alienated and drowning. And I would like to see us create—and you are on my list for this dream team if I ever pull it together—a transforming experience that was, I don't know—two months long, six weeks, eight weeks—where we did everything we know how to do with young men: meditation, martial arts, yoga, creative work, dream work, building, experiential education. Literally turn their lives around in this eight- to ten- week period. Maybe just a dozen young men. And then provide mentors for them throughout the year, set up a college fund so that if they want to go to college, they would have resources they can draw upon. I would like to look back when I am sixty and say, "There are a hundred guys that, if it were not for that vision and that energy, their lives would have turned out very differently."

Michael Hmm. Inspirational. So, get funding and do it!

Victor Yeah! Right! ▶▶

Still Kicking

by Brett Nelson

What do you do when the prospect of this week's men's meeting is about as appetizing as chipped beef on toast? You wonder what happened to the juicy, gutsy, never-know-what's-gonna-happen-next bunch of guys you were with last year. You're starting to think, "What's with all this men's movement stuff, anyway? Maybe it was just another phase I was going through, like when I was all jazzed about learning to play the oboe, for God's sake."

Well, wait just a minute. Don't dump your group and sign up for Toastmasters yet. Life in general gets stale and stagnant at times. That's normal. I get bored when the course of my recent direction in life is run, when it's given me all it has to give. Life is calling for something else, a shift toward a new direction. So it is with groups.

I've been a member of three men's groups. The first died after about six months. The second lasted two and a half years, and there was a lot of meat in it for a while, but it lost its energy in the last year until only two or three of us were showing up. None of us knew how to fix it, and we finally gave up. Then I went to the 1994 Men's Summer Gathering and hung out there with a group that had a couple people I knew. I was asked to join the group after that, and I found out that it had already been in existence for five or six years. It's now coming up on five years since I joined it, and I've seen a lot of ups and downs.

Whenever the group seems to start losing its energy and we're just reporting on "How'd your week go?" for a while, we do something to give it a focus and shake it up a little. The first thing I remember is that we decided we would each tell and tape-record our life story. Even guys who had been together for six or seven years said they got to know each other on a deeper level, and it hadn't been a superficial group.

Another time one man wanted to talk about his "vision" for where his life was going and where he wanted to take it. We all agreed to do the same, and it became a stretch for each of us as we shared plans, hopes, and dreams that we could be asked about later. I learned how much I passively avoided having a vision to prevent disappointment, and found that I had a resistance to expressing a vision out of fear that I'd be judged for not living up to it.

We made commitments to address issues we have with each other after recognizing a tendency to avoid that, and we've done better at clearing the air of repressed hurt and resentment since then. A year ago last February we took a four-day camping trip to the Superstition Mountains in Arizona, and in November we spent three days at one group member's family cabin in the Jemez Mountains. The first turned into some intense play with good-natured verbal aggressiveness. When it eventually started to go beyond fun, we learned something about limits and each other's boundaries and sensitivities as we processed the experience.

On the second trip one guy asked the others in the group to "critique" him, and the rest of the group decided to do the same, a process which took several weeks. Each of us had different ideas of what "critique" meant and each man asked for what he wanted.

My first group started by using the "Mabinogion" stories as a catalyst for bringing up men's issues. Every so often our group has a topic night. Someone I met at the spring Men's Wellness status meeting said his group lets the man who comes up with an idea lead the group that week. I'm sure there

Continued on next page

Tired father, tired son

by Hank Blackwell

I cannot blame you
searching for a place
to stop.

You have struggled
for a half century
to bring a wounded body
so far.

Our mother married a brinksman,
yet this time the fulcrum
may favor another.

The old man on one side,
life, finally dismounting,
on the other.

I do not know
if you are ready.

This journey ends
as it began

and I may soon regret
that I may not see you again,
though I have already missed you
for a very long time.

While you tread in fitful sleep,
I swim in the desperate ambivalence
of a frightened son,
waiting for you
to go.

Still Kicking, continued from p. 12

are innumerable things that groups have done to focus, stimulate and revitalize themselves. Maybe we could start a "What's Your Group Doing?" column in *Man Alive!*

Each time we did one of our "projects," it seemed to deepen the level of intimacy and trust between members, to enrich the relationships in the group, and to revitalize it for a time. In the end the vitality of a group depends on the commitment of the men and their willingness to risk disclosure, as well as the trust that each man's level of willingness will be accepted. If those things are there, a project or task or change of scenery such as a trip together can freshen everyone's perspective enough to re-energize the way the group is working. Actually, it's been a rare week in the last five years when I haven't looked forward to our group.

And it's still kicking! ►►

Tiger Stripes in the Snow

by Jeff Hood

If we time it right,
Mike and the dogs and I,
we arrive at the top of the trail
as the sun is lowering in the
West.

We drink, snack,
remove skins and shorten poles.
The dogs lounge,
then romp and roar
as they get ready to go down.

We note the paradox
of putting on more clothes
while sweating with the exertion
of the climb.
Nylon, head to toe
assuring that we
will shed the snow.

And down, the first dozen turns
tight in spruce and fir.
Knee deep, adjusting the brakes,
subtle shifts forward and back
watching for sunken snags.

A few whoops escape us.
The trudge up hill,
the week's work,
the stress of unsaid things
starts to melt away
as evergreen leads into aspen.

The sky opens and
golden sunlight sheds color
on an almost
black and white world.
Tiger stripe shadows
whisper across the snow.

The crystalline blanket rolls
down,

dipping to every trunk,
rising and falling over her
breasts and stomach.

Like Japanese brush strokes,
it is our art to carve
a delicate line through her paper.

I fly, ten turns, fifteen!
panting closer to God, too fast,
squeak through a tight spot.

Stop, listen for Mike. Hoot.
He returns it.
I spot his purple
snaking toward me.

We breathe in the tiger stripes,
remarking, as usual,
to bring a camera next time.

Admire our tracks
as the dogs,
wallowing and panting,
erase the art work.

I'm ready to go,
but he says, "Wait,"
and we stand in the quiet
enjoying the shadow world
we have entered.

The trunks have eyes
winking at us,
scratch marks from a bear
years ago stretching up
in the Spring.
They rise up in gold
to meet the New Mexico blue.

I shed another layer of care.
This is what matters.

Dog face covered in snow.

The trunks are bigger,
farther apart.
My skis get itchy for the dance.
Flying again, sink, rise, swoop,
a clearing, a gate left and right,
his purple off to my left.

High voiced, like a boy or an elf,
my scream echoes
in the cathedral.

There are no tracks
here before us.
Today this is our sanctuary,
our prayer,
the living canvas upon which
we write our joy.
Anyone coming after
will read it perfectly.

One more stop as the sound
of the road below creeps in.
The dogs, now glistening clean
and happy too for their dance,
catch up.

The tiger skin flattens out,
sun sinking fast.
Signs of other skiers,
other artists.

Our peace today
seems all too short,
yet what does the clock mean
in this other world?

The light in his eyes,
ease in my shoulders,
and fire in my knees
tells it all. ▶▶

Grail Group

by Yan Ross

Over the winter fourteen men initiated a group to study and work with the legend of Parsifal's quest for the Holy Grail as a means of searching deeper into the archetypes that influence each of us. Meeting for a three-hour evening session once a week for sixteen weeks at the Santa Fe Yoga Center, the group is very diverse in terms of background and experience of the men involved. It has been a validating experience to realize that our common characteristics far outweigh our differences, and the depth of intimacy in our discussions reveals that, although we are indeed individuals, we share a oneness.

The principal foundation reading for the group is the book *He* by Robert Johnson, a short Jungian view of the legend of Parsifal. Johnson recounts the tale of the youth and his relationship to the wounded king, who can only be healed (and his kingdom redeemed) by Parsifal reaching the Grail Castle and asking the question, "Whom does the Grail serve?" In the Jungian analysis, each of the characters (including the damsels) represents a distinct aspect of a man. This short book can serve as a tool of understanding our lives as men in this or any other culture. (Johnson has written a similar book named *She*, using the Greek myth of Eros and Psyche as a guide for women.)

The principal guide for the four-month program has been John Matthews' book, *Healing the Wounded King*, subtitled "Soul Work and the Quest for the Grail." This book provides both further elucidation of the Parsifal legend and sixteen distinct exercises that utilize guided visualizations and shamanic journeying techniques. The group engages in one exercise at each weekly meeting.

We have been described as a "leaderful" group, because the leadership is shared by all. With fourteen men and sixteen exercises, each man has accepted the responsibility of preparing at least one exercise and evening program.

Typically the session starts with greetings and drumming to get us "present." The leader or facilitator for the evening then starts off the circle check-in, and may announce any notable issues for the session. After each man has checked in, there may be discussion of the reading or any other activity provided by the evening's leader. To date we have had kinetic exercises and free word association and focused discussion to set the stage for the exercises prescribed in the Matthews book. After the exercise we break to share a light repast, then reconvene to talk about our experience in the exercises. Closing rituals tend to center on flowing our energy upon those who express a need—our circle is powerful!

Our rituals, journeys and sharing have brought to light the differences and similarities of our wounds, and we have found great strength in realizing that our wounds often carry along with them the gift of healing. Paradoxes abound, along with enlightenment.

While honoring the intimacy and confidentiality of the group, it's appropriate to share some of the experiences. They are based on the rituals of drumming, "checking in," both intellectual and heart-felt discussion of the legends, and especially the guided visualizations and shamanic journeying. Using these methods to release ourselves from our daily lives, we have brought our wounding experiences to the surface, explored them, and in many cases transformed them into gifts. We have individually and collectively learned many things with our hearts, especially that we are not alone, that we indeed tell and experience each others' stories, and that each our lives reflects the numerous characters in the Grail myth.

It feels very empowering to learn these truths, and to learn the importance of forgiving ourselves so that we can be loving toward others. We are learning also to ask for what we need, to tell what we want. Sitting in such a circle of men and feeling the power of our weakness has been, to say the least, an incredible experience—but believable just the same.

In addition to the gatherings for guided visualizations and shamanic journeys, we recently met as a group to view a video of *The Fisher King* and follow up with discussion. As the warmer weather comes, we have talked about holding one or more meetings outside, and even taking off for a cookout or camp-out.

By the time of publication, we expect to be nearing the end of the process—and in all likelihood searching for the next steps to take in our singular and common quest.

If you are interested in forming a Grail Group or a similar activity based on a legend or myth close to your own heart, you may want to contact Clark Kimball in Santa Fe at 983-1680 (e-mail stafestyck@aol.com) or Max August in Santa Fe at 820-1248 (e-mail maxaugust@earthlink.net). ►►

Authenticity is theme for Fall Conference

by Jerry Richardson

I went through my entire year as Michael Hopp's "junior" facilitator without a clue as to what I would choose as the theme for this year's Fall Conference. There had already been so many excellent themes chosen over the years, such as Making a Difference, Healing the Healer Within, Creativity, The Hero's Journey, and I wondered what I could come up with that could touch a deep chord in men's lives. At last Fall's conference, when thinking about what I would say to the men when Michael passed the mantle of leadership on to me, I tried to think about what the essence of Men's Wellness was. I realized that one of our core values over the years was to provide a safe container where men could come and share their deepest feelings; be they joy, grief, anger, sadness, frustration or the loneliness of our individual searches for meaning in life, and we could receive support from other men in doing so. As I thought about this more, I tried to synthesize this into a concept. It came to me that the conference allowed us to be our authentic selves. On the way home from the conference, Michael Hopp and I met for a soak at the springs in Ojo Caliente to debrief, and I shared my thought that somehow I wanted to incorporate this into my theme for next year, but the wording seemed awkward. Michael suggested I reduce it to "authenticity."

I knew immediately that this was it. For me, ideally, a conference theme is something we can be inspired to incorporate into our daily lives when we leave the conference. I aspire to be authentic as a man, as a gay man, as a friend, as a fellow worker, as a judge, as a volunteer in my community, and in the many other ways I interact with the people I meet in my daily life. But there are also many barriers to being authentic, such as fear, lack of interest or engagement, lack of support, etc. If you would like to explore your authentic self and the barriers to expressing that in your daily life, I hope you will make the time to attend the Fall Conference at Ghost Ranch. Conference dates are October 7-10. Cliff Taber and I will soon be setting a schedule for the conference Planning Committee, which will begin meeting towards the end of July. Many of you have already expressed interest. The Planning Committee is open to all who wish to contribute and we welcome your participation. Contact me at (505) 988-5459 or Cliff at (505) 281-1166 and we will notify you when the schedule is firmed up. And last, thanks to all of you who have supported me in my quest for authenticity. ▶▶

Watermelon Seed by Hank Blackwell

I watched you
there in the backyard,
shiny-wet as a watermelon seed,
dressed up in your best backyard laugh.
You leaped back and forth again,
back and forth through the sprinkler.
Each jump through the delicate curtain of water
would feed you;
back and forth, back and forth,
the sprinkler would occasionally spit you out
in my direction.
You were cold and wet,
strong and muscular
during those brief forays
plopping into my lap...
then out again.
Each time you passed through

the line of water,
you left a shadow—
for a second, not longer.
The very spot you had popped through
was visible as a dry spot
in the curtain,
then it disappeared.

The marks we make in life
as we step through it
disappear
to be filled in again so quickly.

The importance is not
in the marks we make in our lifetime,
but in the juice we drip with
from stepping through it.

Men's Wellness begins with Boys' Wellness

by Alison Zelizer,

caseworker, Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Santa Fe

As a member of Men's Wellness you know how important it can be for men to find support from other men. Just as men need support from each other, boys need support from men. And boys who are being raised by a single mother need support most of all. Without a stable, consistent male role model, young men most often look to movies and television when forming their ideas about what it means to be a man. And often these images are not good ones. Also, boys without a steady male role model often look to gangs for the male support they may be lacking at home. Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Santa Fe is dedicated to finding healthy, positive role models for boys and girls in Northern New Mexico. Girls spend only a short time on our waiting list, often only a couple of months. Currently, we have twenty-five boys waiting for a Big Brother. Some of the boys on our waiting list have been waiting up to two years to be matched. We are desperately in need of good Big Brothers for these boys.

So what does it mean to be a Big Brother? A Big Brother is a man who is willing to spend two to four hours with a boy once a week, for a minimum of one year. He must also be eighteen or over with his own transportation and auto insurance. And a Big Brother must want to make a difference in a boy's life. The Big Brother relationship is like the friendship between an older brother and a younger brother. I was a Big Sister for three years, and I really enjoyed scheduling "playtime" once a week with my little sister. I don't think I would have ever experienced a water slide if it weren't for our relationship. This relationship, like all good relationships, requires time and patience. But the reward of watching a boy thrive in a one-on-one relationship is really worth the effort.

If you have any questions about becoming a Big Brother, please call Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Santa Fe at (505) 983-8360. ►►

Calendar

Man 2 Man – *Male Boundaries*. June 5-6, \$35-\$50. Michael Hopp (505) 820-9363.

Summer Gathering – *Connectedness*. July 30-August 1, \$50. David Robertson (505) 344-5489.

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

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

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

Man 2 Man

The 4th Annual

Gay/Straight Dialogue:

Understanding Our Boundaries

The 4th Annual Gay/Straight Dialogue focuses on understanding our boundaries around intimacy, spirituality, sexuality, society and friendships. We offer a loosely structured setting with ample time for group discussions, individual participation, outdoor activities, meals and rest.

\$35 - \$50 sliding scale (no one refused due to lack of funds).

Meals provided: please bring fruit or snacks to share.

Bring your own bedding and towel.

Due to the dynamics of the discussion, we recommend attending the entire weekend.

June 5-6
Saturday 10 a.m. - Sunday 4 p.m.
Deva Foundation
Glorieta, New Mexico

Space limited: Pre-registration before May 28th is Required

Information/Registration/Directions/Car Pooling:
David Edington (505) 984-1007
Michael Hopp (505) 820-9363

**New Mexico Men's Wellness
1999 Summer Gathering
Friday, July 30 - Sunday, August 1**

Connectedness

The theme of this year's summer gathering is "Connectedness." The location is the same as in previous years—the Jemez Campground in the beautiful national forest east of Cuba, NM. We will start Friday evening at 7pm and end Sunday afternoon about 1pm. Come early and get set up or help others.

Since early March, a dedicated group of volunteers has been exploring the many meanings of "connecting, connection, connected, connectedness," and what it takes to break through barriers to get there, to share it, to stay there, and to celebrate it! We want to explore connectedness with our higher selves, our basic selves, our offspring, our ancestors. And we want to explore connectedness with our brothers, our communities, mankind, all life, our universe, and all existence.

How will we do this? With storytelling, ritual, sharing and hanging out together, music, drumming and sweat lodges, while leaving room for aspects of the Trickster and Coyote.

Though the planning is well under way, we're still organizing activities, sessions, and fun stuff to reinforce the theme and make the whole weekend an event everyone will put on their calendars! We invite your thoughts, suggestions, and your participation in making this gathering happen. We are looking for a volunteer to lead in drumming, and other volunteers to lead in Sufi dancing and music. It's all tied together . . . get it?

As in the past, full and partial scholarships will be available to open up the event to all men. To be considered for a scholarship, please include a brief statement of need along with your registration.

To help with planning, we ask that you please send in your registration by the end of June. You can send your questions and suggestions along with your registration by email to vanwyk@unm.edu or by phone to David Robertson at (505) 344-5489.

=====Clip Here & Return =====

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

I'd like to volunteer to _____

Note: Registration includes a free subscription to the NM Men's Wellness Journal *Man, Alive!*

Please reserve my space(s) ____ x \$30 each = _____

T-Shirts ____ x \$15 each = _____

Please Circle Size: **M L XL XXL**

Total Enclosed = _____

Send your registration and check to: **Men's Wellness 1999 Summer Gathering**, PO Box 23346, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87502. If you have any questions, contact David Robertson by phone at 505/ 344-5489.

The Summer Gathering Campout
will be held in the Jemez
Friday afternoon, July 30 through
Sunday noon, August 1, 1999.

Details on page 19

You're coming, aren't you? (If not, why not?)

Men's Network Press
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