

MAN, ALIVE!

A Journal of Men's Wellness

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One Man's Fall Conference

by David Beckley

This was my fourth Men's Wellness conference. I admit to feeling a little jaded. I had been to the four planning meetings, although frankly I didn't feel I'd contributed that much. But I had a good idea of what to expect, besides the agenda: camaraderie, good feelings, power hugs, and maybe some low-level surprises. I certainly wasn't ready for the emotional roller-coaster—or was I?

I drove up with another of the Davids from my men's group and a young friend of his, who was new to me as he stepped into my car

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Jerry Richardson and Cliff Taber, leaders of the fifteenth New Mexico Men's Wellness Fall (1999) Conference, pause while planting the time capsule which will be opened in 2014, after the next fifteen years.

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

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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.

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an excerpt from

Worldwords

by Victor La Cerva

biga peula (BEE-kuh POOL-uh) New Guinea Kiriwina

Hard words; potentially disruptive true statements.

The truth will set you free. Honesty is the best policy. The truth never hurts unless it ought to. Such platitudes are not strong enough to outweigh our collective desire to avoid conflict, shame or embarrassment by leaving unspoken that which might cause harm. We all know that you can get in serious trouble for saying out loud what everyone knows to be true, whether within a social, family or work related context. Yet we also appreciate the benefits of someone revealing our unpleasant blindspots. What may be hard for us to hear ultimately serves. To utter a *biga peula* is to invite disruption of normal social amenities. Doing so often shifts things enough to create a significant breakthrough, but not without the risk of fracturing relationships. Timing and awareness become important allies. Hurtful words (even though true) spoken in anger or as punishment for perceived wrongs only increase our collective suffering. To use this concept skillfully is to uncover secrets that must be revealed for healing to occur. The motivation must be clear, the intention sincere and the outcome beneficial.

I use the truth as a revitalizing balm rather than as a weapon. Call 1-800-322-4233 to order

Fall Conference, continued from page 1

for the trip up to Ghost Ranch. The conversation on the way up was conference-conducive. Like chocolate slowly melting in a double boiler, I was already on Men's Wellness time, leaving behind the rough-and-ready world almost as if going into trance. While stopped in gridlock at the new bypass in Santa Fe, I marveled at how pleased I was simply to sit there, a *dolce far niente* (how sweet to do nothing!) attitude I've never before experienced in traffic.

Nonetheless, I was not surprised at the shock of walking into the crowd (which grew to 105 men) in the main room, the "lower pavilion," when we finally arrived at Ghost Ranch. I had to control my urge to hug everyone in sight to get to the business at hand, which was to register, get a room assignment, have my Polaroid picture taken, and to pick a clan group. A friend suggested I share a room with him, which pleased me. To join a clan I had to look at sayings taped to poles which were placed around the room; if I identified with the statement, then I had only to pin my picture to the pole (face down, so as not to prejudice later arrivals), provided there were already no more than five members. I identified with only one of the aphorisms—for which there were already six men assigned—so after twice around the poles I picked one at random. Then it was back to greeting old friends and starting to make new ones.

The bulk of the evening was spent in announcements and working within the clan on the subject of the conference, *Authenticity*. Mine was a small clan—four rather than six men—and as it turned out, I knew two of the men from the last fall conference, so I didn't feel as disoriented as I had last year, starting immediately into the meat of the conference with a bunch of strangers.

The next day, Friday, was grueling. There were emotional calisthenics in the morning followed by blocks on anger, sadness, fear and joy, those big potholes on the male road to authenticity. As for the calisthenics, Barry Cooney led us through a good hour of warm-up. We did two team events, one a round-robin with four groups jumping up and down, shouting, "Yes!" and "No!" until our knees ached. The other was an "emotional relay race," in which the teams competed by running one man at a time to the other end of the room and back. There were four such races.

In the first we had to express anger, in the second fear, and then sadness and joy. So there was moaning and shouting and horror and even some undressing, cheating and mischief. We loosened up considerably!

Then Barry had us each find a partner and sit facing each other. We took our shirts off, closed our eyes, and took turns exploring the other man's face with our hands. One of the participants later told me, "Having the other guy touch me felt no different from being touched by my wife, but it was very different when I had to touch him!"

I helped lead the sadness portion of the program, and it was strange to be one of the people giving the event. I was nervous, and glad to let David Johnson take the brunt of the effort. But I talked a little about my reasons for sadness, and that put me deeply in the mood. I think my fund of sadness is inexhaustible, the aquifer upon which floats my claim to stability.

The fear block was the longest part of the day, three hours. Most of it consisted of breaking into four groups of about four clans each, and going outside to sit on the grass in the warm sunshine to share our fears. Each group was to have a scapegoat, and after the discussion was over we were to tie strips of cloth representing our fears to the scapegoat, who lay masked on the ground. I thought to myself, "I'm doing pretty well with my fear quotient these days, I can do this," so I volunteered to be the scapegoat for my group.

They placed a mask over my entire face and began to tie me 'round, declaring their fears as they did so. I lay there on the ground, having trouble breathing through the little holes in the mask, and gave in to the experience, going limp. There was a little background laughter from some of the guys, which I attributed to discomfort, but for the most part the proceeding was solemn. One of the men told me afterward that, once the mask went on, I was not the person he knew, I was a nobody. They tied the strips of cloth around my fingers, arms, legs, groin, even one through the neck hole in my t-shirt. They manhandled me as necessary to get the job done. Then they hoisted me onto their shoulders, me still limp and wondering if I was getting delirious from breathing my own carbon dioxide, and carried me back to the pavilion.

Continued from previous page

They lay me down on the floor when we arrived and slowly began to undo the strips of cloth, which I was to throw on the fire later that evening, a burning of the fears of my fellows. I felt disoriented when the mask was taken off my face, and I remained mostly limp as I was helped to my feet, not wanting to let go of the feeling of being carried by the other men. I figured this was the closest I would ever come to being carried off the field on the team's shoulders—how odd that the would-be champion was this time the scapegoat! I really didn't know what to make of the experience otherwise, so I just tucked the memory away, wondering if it would bear fruit later.

The next morning I was so exhausted that all I could do was sleep in, until 10:30. It was good to be

alone and not under too much pressure of schedule, although most everyone else was up early and things were going strong down at the pavilion. I went to lunch with the others in the mess hall at the appointed time, still trying to wake up, and then had to race around trying to get into a workshop without being embarrassingly late. Well, I was late, but it didn't much matter. I joined a workshop on "The Tender Heart," and was glad to find some new insight into an old grief through the help of guided imagery. The wound was about my realizing at the age of five that I was not able to count on the loving support of my parents, that I was on my own. I'm still struggling with the implications of that, after having long ago thought I'd dried up that particular well of insight.



The men cover the time capsule with dirt, handfuls at a time. Among other things, each man placed in the capsule a photo of himself on which he'd written his hopes for the next fifteen years and sometimes a greeting for the men who would open the capsule.

When that workshop was done I raced around to the next one, which was about the shadow. I felt that I already knew a lot about the shadow—and mine in particular—but it was being offered by a Jungian analyst, and I hoped to learn more. After about twenty minutes of discussion, one of the men angrily broke up the proceeding, saying, “You said this was going to be an experiential workshop! This isn’t experiential!” Shadows were loosed, and the rest of the meeting was chaotic, fingers pointing, “That’s your shadow!” “No, that’s *your* shadow!” I was very uncomfortable, and the man sitting next to me stopped the group and said, “Wait a minute—I want to hear what’s going on with David.” When the attention was focused on me, I was amazed to find myself choking and sobbing. I tried to explain what was going on, but all I could say was that the finger-pointing reminded me of my home life as a boy, and that I didn’t find it constructive. The man who had spoken in anger was one I’d had some dealings with the previous year, when I could sense his inexplicable dislike of me. I knew that was a part of the equation, but I was mystified otherwise.

I cried for an hour, sandwiching it in between the end of the session and dinner. It felt wonderful to cry and to be consoled by other men who, amazingly, were talking to *me*, not just to “the guy who cried in the workshop.” It was good to grieve for I-still-don’t-quite-know-what. I sat in an adirondack chair out in the middle of the alfalfa field, trying to get done with it yet knowing it was so good for me.

The evening banquet was next, and I recovered enough to be sociable, sitting with the other men in my clan. There were round-robin toasts with champagne, going spontaneously from one man to another. I felt like my weekend was complete when I was toasted and given a round of applause for my work on *Man, Alive!*

But it wasn’t over yet. Benjamin Miller decided to give me yet another run on the emotional roller coaster. It was his task at the banquet to pass on the Men’s Wellness sword, which had been given to him the previous year. The presentation is always a surprise, and it follows a brief explanation of what the sword has meant for the past year to the person who

is passing it on. The sword’s history is chequered at best, since there has been dispute from the beginning about its suitability as a symbol for the group. Nevertheless, its meaning is very much up to the man who receives it, since there is no dogma or ceremony attached to passing it on.

One of the men who was sitting at the next table told me afterward that he thought he was to be given the sword, because he could feel a thrust of energy coming from Benjamin in his direction. I could feel it too, and I too thought it was for me. And it was. Benjamin placed the sword in my hands as I thought, “Oh, shit!” He told me afterward that he’d only finally decided on me when he lifted the mask off my face at the end of the scapegoat ceremony.

I’m 52 years old. I’m an elder in this group. What am I doing with the sword? I stood up to say “Thanks, I guess.” I told the group that I wanted them to know that I’d been terrified of war as a boy and as a young man, but that I finally felt I could do something constructive with the sword as a symbol. I told the men about crying just before the banquet, and said that it felt strange to go from scapegoat to sword-bearer on this amazing weekend. Various men congratulated me during the remainder of the weekend, some of them blessing me with their vote of confidence. This is the kind of affirmation I’ve been hungry for, for so long.

The sword is in its scabbard in its polished wooden box, upright against the wall in my little office at home. I’m still looking at it warily—I’ve even gone so far as to take it out of the box since the fall conference. But I know something is changing in me, something I’ve needed to do for a long time. It’s about moving beyond fear to claim my manhood. I’m ready for the challenge.

One final note. The angry man and I kept running into each other after the workshop. He convinced me that he’s not angry at me, but there’s more—we looked at each other in wonder. I think we both feel that some odd turnaround is happening. It’s that special Men’s Wellness cure, that bond that will be there next year, when we meet again at Ghost Ranch. ►►

Michael Hopp

Interviews

Dave Breault and David Johnson

Michael Hopp, leader of the 1998 Fall Conference, interviewed former conference leaders during the summer of 1999 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 Dave Breault and David Johnson, two of the "founding fathers" of New Mexico Men's Wellness. Dave Breault is currently a psychotherapist at the Father and Family Center in Albuquerque. Dave and Paul Steinkoenig, another long-

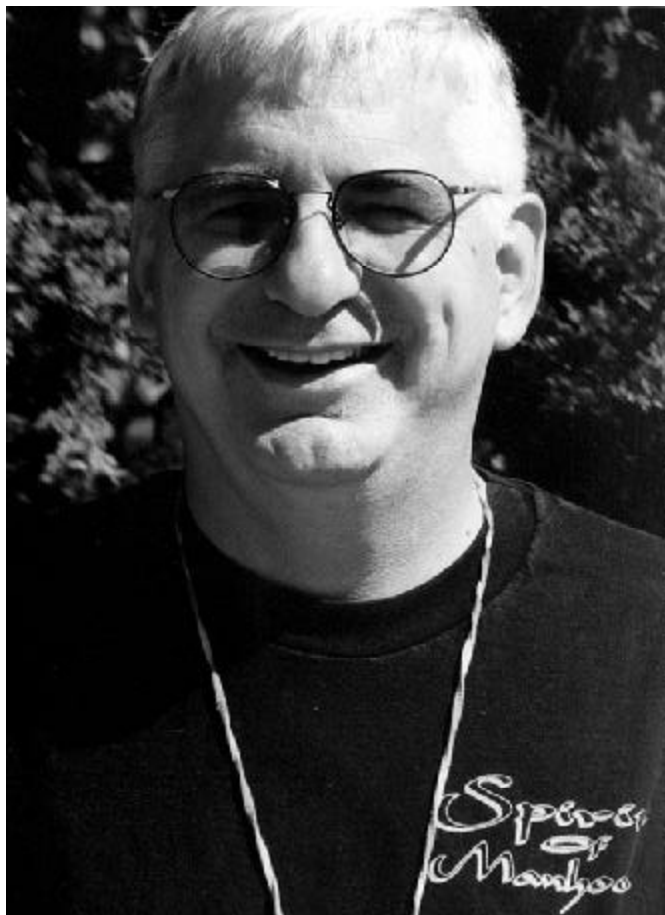
standing member of New Mexico Men's Wellness, do regular short-term therapy groups for men with the intention of helping them prepare to join long-term men's groups.

David Johnson is Emeritus Professor of English at UNM, just retired. This is the first of two parts of the interview, which will continue in the next issue of *Man, Alive!*

August 11, 1998

HOPP: Here we are in Albuquerque at the Father and Family Center with Dave Breault and David Johnson. Thank you both for being here. Dave Breault, I want to start out with you. How did you get involved in men's work to start with? What started you interested in that area?

BREAULT: I started in men's work as a clinician working with mental health problems in the United States, working mostly with public agencies, and was struck by the huge number of fatherless families, or at least single-parent families, coming in for treatment in the public mental health facilities. In the process of doing that work, I went through some points of feeling very isolated and kind of frightened in ways, and confused about what I was trying to do. I think part of it had to do with dealing with the anger of fatherless boys and their wishes for me to be their father, and the blatant desire of their moms and the mental health establishment to find father replacements for all these kids. And just dealing with the reality of "You can't do it." A therapist isn't a parent. You know, you can't replace parents. So, anyhow, I went through a period of feeling very confused and isolated about that stuff, and reached out to other men for help. Where I worked at UNM, it was kind of competitive in terms of a male staff. I have good



Dave Breault at the Fall Conference 1999

friends that were there, but somehow it wasn't a good place to be vulnerable emotionally, so I called up the mantra management—"Do you want to talk about feelings, do you want to talk about emotions, instead of just other things that men usually can talk about?"

And that started the men's support group that still meets to this day. This was 1982, I think. And that's been an enormous help to me in my life, that group. Just having a place to be vulnerable with other men and feel support. I really felt accepted there. You know, I always have. So, one of the men was Jerry Swanson, and through Jerry I met Victor La Cerva. Jerry was saying, "You know, there were some other men interested in doing some kind of conference on men's issues." And then we started having planning meetings at the Public Health office over on Stanford, by UNM. There were Victor and some of the early people. And we just started planning this conference which then happened in Glorieta in 1985.

That conference was a good experience. There were about twenty men there, and it was kind of geared toward health. And I was interested in father loss issues and that kind of stuff, and so we just did it, and it turned more into emotional issues over the years, and Victor was great in terms of health prevention kinds of issues, which remains as a theme. But it turned more into personal work and going into deeper emotional stuff and shadow stuff. And just the excitement of feeling safe with so many men! So one of the great things for me was being able to cry again, because I had lost the ability to cry in a healthy way. I cry at movies or I cry at things incredibly extreme or something, but I had lost the ability to cry, as just part of my self. You need to cry sometimes, and it's a good thing to do, and it just feels wonderful, and so that's what the conference was like for many years, a place where I could cry. It felt very, very good. Every year, to be in the talking circles, you mostly listen, and we would go on telling stories, and halfway around the circle we would be hanging on to each other, crying.

HOPP: Before I ask David the same question, let's go into your family for just a second. What's your

ethnic background?

BREAULT: I'm French and Hungarian. From the East Coast, from Connecticut.

HOPP: And what was your family structure? Did you have a father?

BREAULT: Yes, when I was born in '45, my father was away in the Navy. It was the end of World War II, and he came back when I was about 3. He was back full-time with us.

HOPP: What role did he play?

BREAULT: He's a pretty nurturing guy, but very much a traditional guy, you know, in terms of working most of the time. Being gone working and so forth.

HOPP: Was there crying in your family? Was there emotional....

BREAULT: My dad would only cry at deaths. He was very contained and pretty passive with his anger. He would just hold anger for a long time and then blow up periodically. So that's similar to me, the way I am, you know, I've been working on that for years. I feel much better about my anger, friendship with my anger, and all that kind of stuff. My mother is very eastern European, sort of spiritual. Interesting culture from the area—spiritual, musical people. She was always seeing visions and seeing the Blessed Virgin in the tree stump out in the backyard, and all that kind of stuff. I mean, my brother and sister and I were embarrassed about that and thought it was pretty crazy. You want to keep that stuff and then after we met the rest of the family, you know, other Hungarians and everything, "that's just the eastern European way with things."

HOPP: Where did you fit in with your brother and sister relationship?

BREAULT: I'm in the middle.

HOPP: You're in the middle? Older brother?

BREAULT: No, younger brother, older sister.

HOPP: Hold that thought. Let me jump to David Johnson for just a second. How did you get involved in men's work, and what was your background?

JOHNSON: Well, I think something must have happened in the middle 80's, because there was a kind of reaching out to me, I think, in '84—'85. I just felt tremendous isolation in my job teaching at UNM, and I never found the kind of intimacy with colleagues. It was always a kind of competitiveness or cocktail chatter, or whatever. As I was going into my mid-life crisis, I just felt that I was alone, and that I didn't exactly know how to share that with my wife, Mona. So with my tradition as a northern European, you just take that pain and you withdraw with it and harbor it, and I was getting close to depression. I don't think I was clinically depressed, but I would get very blue and down and feeling frustrated, sense of failure, so I reached out to Ken Betzen at that point. I said, "Can we talk?" He had been a former student, and he was teaching in high school, APS. He knew a couple of other men who were also interested—Walter Polk, Chuck Cocklereas—and we simply began to meet the latter part of '84, '85 in a men's support group, just every other week. We would get together for breakfast and there was only one rule—you had to talk about your feelings. You could not kind of spin off and just simply talk. It was so new to do this, I mean, to come and to be heard and listened to. It was like a miracle, I think, in my life. I know it saved my marriage. It probably saved my life in some ways. For men to listen and to take me seriously! A number of the men in the group had had therapy already, so they knew about attentive listening. These were all new concepts to me, that you could listen—which would be therapeutic—and those first meetings with my support group were amazing. I would look forward to them for two weeks, and then we would get together and share! I get goose bumps just thinking about it, because it was so new, and all that language of psychotherapy that we know about now was like a revelation then.

Nobody was using that language in the newspapers or media. You know, about supporting, enabling and listening and reflecting and so on, all that stuff was so new. Then we heard about a women's conference that was held at Ghost Ranch, and so we thought, "Why isn't there a men's conference?" Then we heard about the one that was being planned, the second one, after Glorieta, and it was like a magnet. We said, "We have to go!" and our whole men's group went. That was the big thing, to go as a group. And we were going to just go and do this. It seemed so right. Something was coming together, nationally and regionally, and there was something, you know, archetypal about it. I remember coming into this room at Ghost Ranch, and here were all these men. It was so intimidating and so exhilarating. I had all these mixed emotions. Chuck went, and he said, "Well, I am just going to open myself," and he became my model to this whole experience. "I am just going to open," and that's his way, anyway, just to open himself up to what was going on. I said "I'll try that, too." I didn't know exactly what that meant, then!

HOPP: Let me back up for one second, David. Your family upbringing. How did that influence you into being a teacher and then being involved in the men's movement?

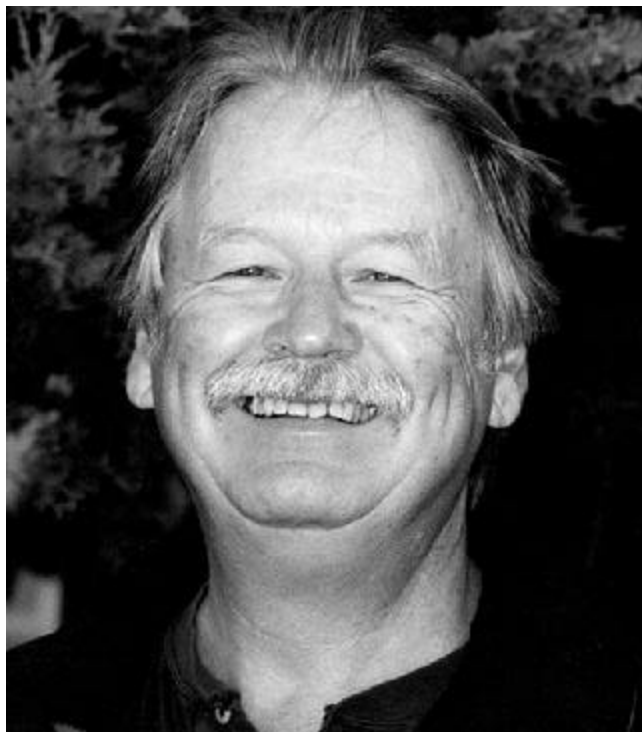
JOHNSON: Well, my father was a minister, and so I grew up in a minister's family, very much kind of in a fish bowl, in a small town in Wisconsin, so very exposed and very supportive. My father was an emotional man and occasionally would cry, and he hugged me, and I didn't realize that was unusual until I went to my first conference and heard about the absent father, or the alienated father, or the cold, Nordic father. So, my father was a little bit different in that regard, but we didn't talk about feelings in the family. I mean, that was not conversed about. My parents prided themselves, in fact, that they never had an argument in their marriage—so they buried a lot of stuff. So I had no model for talking about feelings. I had modeling for liking people. My father liked people. He liked to be around people and chew the fat with people. That was his great gift, and the

gift that he gave me was simply to enjoy intercourse with people. And so the men's conference became a wonderful extension of that, because prior to that I had become so isolated. I felt so sad about the fact that I didn't have this community, and where was the community that I needed and yearned for? And the men's conference and the men's movement became my community. I have a brother who is seven years older, so I essentially grew up kind of an only child—I mean, he's like another generation. He's gone on and he became a minister also, and there was lots of pressure for me to become one, too, so I just took one step sideways and became a teacher. You know, it was either that or a social worker! That was a way of not going into the ministry and yet doing something for others, because I was raised with the notion of contributing to the betterment of our society. It was automatic, you know, almost, what are you going to do? You are going to serve somehow, so that's kind of how that came about.

HOPP: Any other brothers or sisters?

JOHNSON: I just have 2 brothers. My mother didn't talk about feelings. She was a perfectionist, and so nothing ever suited her. And there was some sadness about her. She was very angry about the fact that she had not been allowed to develop her own talents. She had become somewhat subservient within the minister's family, and I think she would have made a great university professor. She was very, very bright, and it was a generation in which she was allowed to become a high school teacher or a nurse. That was the only thing women could do at that stage, and then when they got married, of course, they raised families. So there was anger on her part, and then frustration. My father was a good role model, generally, and there for me, so I didn't feel that kind of absence of father as men at the conference did. "Fathers and Sons" was the first really big issue, I think, at the conference. It went on for a long time, working that out. How do we become good fathers when we haven't had models?

HOPP: Let's talk about some early themes. Were there themes in the beginning, and if not, how did



David Johnson at the 1999 Fall Conference

you structure your conference?

JOHNSON: It was definitely the idea that the theme would emerge at the first or second meeting, and then blocks—we called them blocks—would be organized around the theme. And the theme was important and not important, you know. It was kind of neat that we were identifying key men's issues, but the workshops or the blocks just sort of went where they were going to go, as they still do today. The themes were about intimacy, you know, grief. I know that the conference David Kuenzli and I led was about grief, and we made a wailing wall and then burnt it.

BREAULT: Life passages at that conference—letting go and moving on.

HOPP: Was that a different theme than grief?

BREAULT: No, the focus was on letting go. A lot of grieving and a lot of identifying.

HOPP: So, why did you choose that? Why was it important at that time for men to do that?

JOHNSON: Loss is just what we sort of got to in a lot of the conferences at that time. It was like men were holding a lot.

BREAULT: Holding a lot and being warriors and competitors, you know, on the outside. Maybe we just needed to grieve, let go of some stuff and cry about it, and maybe we could move on. We kept running into this sadness, this unresolved pain that men are just carrying. That is what you do as a man. You just shut up and carry this. You just shut up and go to work and do your job and just keep quiet about that stuff, and you know, we said, “No, we don’t want to keep quiet about it. We need to talk about this stuff.” And that was kind of the energy that I felt. But I have a list of themes for all of the conferences.

HOPP: Could you read them off, please?

BREAULT: Sure. The ’86 was *Lightening the Load and Increasing the Joy*; ’87 was *The Evolving Man, Keeping the Balance*; and then ’88 was *The Challenge of Intimacy*; ’89 was *Life Passages and Moving On*; and ’90 was *The Hero’s Journey*; ’91 was *From Healing to Wholeness, Crafting the Healthy Man*; ’92 was *Interactions*; ’93 was *Passions for Living*; and ’94 was *It’s About Time*.

HOPP: Then it went into *Making a Difference*, and then it went again into *Hero’s Journey* back again in ’97, and now here we are in ’98 *Healing the Healer*.

JOHNSON: Yes, so it’s interesting, just to pick up what Dave was talking about, that the first conference was on healing. That was the focus. It was very personal, individual healing. It had very little to do with the outside world. It was the men that came, their needs, emotional needs, and the most important part of that healing, it seemed to me, was grieving. And grieving was the step to intimacy, by opening up your heart and the sadness—I think the one thing we learned, at least I learned, was the fact that the measure of your passion for living is the measure of your capacity to grieve, and they really go together. And grief is not a different bottle than joy. They are out of the same container. And as you tap into one,

you tap into the other. And as we tapped into that grief, we were also tapping into our caring, our passion for living, our joy. So, it wasn’t just a negative thing. It was like opening up that reservoir of feeling that many of us had just denied, or not plumbed to such lengths. And there was something about the company of men who understood where you were coming from. It was so different from trying to share these things with your partner, if she were a woman. Simply because she was not sympathetic necessarily. But there was something about a man saying, “I get that, I understand. I’ve gone through that. I have that same woundedness that I will share with you.” So, it was through the grieving that we began to make contact with each other and to trust each other. And because we had gone to that depth with each other and kept that trust and confidentiality, we had something to take back with us which was very exhilarating. Between conferences you could go back to those moments in your own personal meditations and relive them, recreate them, and feel that nurture. When I fell down again after that, I would try to recreate moments I had shared with some man, and the reaffirmation of that came up and I felt full again.

BREAULT: Right, I always had the image of a well or a spring, clear water, and that’s what the Men’s Wellness Conference was, where I could go and drink from the water of this fellowship, this brotherhood, where the driving force was just a sense of respect for other men, just because they were other men. Not that we weren’t accountable for shit we had done and destructive things, the hurtful things. You know, I talk to fathers a lot, and many of them feel very beat up, and I tell them, whether you are unemployed or not, whether you are alcoholic, it doesn’t matter—to *your child, you are manhood*. Just by being there, you represent all of manhood to them. And I felt that about those early conferences. There was an excitement about just respecting other men at some level like that. I want to hear your stories just because you are another man, and just because we are here together. To me, the respect and excitement about hearing stories from other men and finding a commonality drives it to this day, and that’s

really passionate for me. The other thing was the homophobia. I remember the first conference, particularly not so much the one at Glorieta but the one at Ghost Ranch, feeling it on opening night, this kind of fear and tension and stuff, that we really need to be tuned into. The new men who come have that, and I just remember it dissipating once you started talking and disclosing and building trust. It was sort of a sexual energy that was permeating the thing, but then there was a sense of excitement about conquering the sexual energy—not in a negative conquering sense, but it’s like, “Hey, you know, we faced this. We all didn’t turn gay.” In fact, we are trying to accept gayness, and all that. These were issues we struggled with all the time, but I think that’s a really important part of us, that we took the risk to face that and just be with it and just keep the work. And the other one was Victor, the “magician with ritual.” Victor has a natural gift for the symbolic and the ritual, and I think that was a very important container for a lot of what we were doing, because some of it would turn more into therapy and get too heavy. But Victor has a way of creating a symbol, you know, the drum, the bowl, this sort of stuff, and I think it’s real crucial for us to attach some of the emotions and the stories to these symbols and rituals, to carry the thing. And then, we were always struggling with how much ritual, because we sometimes get too much. Everything’s a ritual, you know, marching here, marching there....

JOHNSON: Yes, you’re so right, Dave, For many of us who had become secularized in our own lives, to rediscover ritual was a religious experience for us, and we hadn’t done ritual since we left the traditional church. And all of sudden, here we were doing rituals at the men’s conference and giving over to them and feeling something that was very powerful, and this was new. And we’re creating this as we’re doing it! And we say, “Wow! There *is* something to ritual!” And you’re right, Victor understands ritual. The rest of us were kind of suspicious, I think. “What do you mean, ritual?” We had given up all the ritual of the Catholic Church in order to become who we were, and there we were with drumming and candles early on.

HOPP: Let me ask you both a question on ritual. We get some feedback now of some men who are saying, “You know, you are not explaining the ritual enough,” and then there are other men who say, “Don’t explain the ritual, let me have my own experience.” How do you handle that balance over the years of looking back and saying, “The ritual is good and provides something”? How do you walk that fine line? How much explanation to give?

JOHNSON: I think there needs to be some. I think it’s a mistake when new men are simply dropped into a ritual, and I think certainly some explanation is helpful. I think you can also get too long and too labored. One of the things I think happened with the young men’s initiation, for example, was that there was no



Michael Hopp at the Fall Conference, 1999

explanation about what we were doing. We didn't know how to deal with the symbols involved and so that kind of backfired for some of us. So, I think that's an example of the need for some explanation, some written part, it could be part of the portfolio, the registration packet, you know. You don't have to do it the same each time, but you could say, "These have traditionally been the ingredients."

HOPP: If a new man walked into the conference fourteen years ago, into this container you created at that time, where men were listening to each other, and the new man walked in today, how do you think those two containers differ? Is there still a safe container?

JOHNSON: One thing that has changed over the years is that usually over half of the men at the conference are what you might call experienced conference-goers. It's the job of the planning committee to provide challenges for both groups, those who are new and those who are experienced. I think that's one of the problems for someone new. In the early conferences, almost everybody was new. It was wonderful, like going into a different world. There were things that you could try, and they might work, simply because they were new. A leader of a small group maybe didn't do a very good job of preparing, but

then the group would find some way. There was always something from another man in that group that made the difference. It wasn't necessarily the lack of planning, or whatever. There was a lot of energy and imagination going into that.

BREAULT: I think there has to be a balance between really being sensitive to what new men might be fearing, anxieties and so forth, as well as excitement, but not over-focusing on them. I think you can over-focus on the new men, and that sometimes creates more anxiety, too. But we shouldn't just march ahead with a lot of things that just sort of disregard them. These are just some of the things the leaders would talk about in terms of basic guidelines, like there are no have-to's about disclosure—you disclose if you feel safe. If you don't feel like it, that's okay. You know—we accept you here for just being here, and that kind of thing. So, I think some rules and some guidelines are good to talk about, and to express some of the excitement about just being men together and working on men's issues. ►►

Editor's note: *The final portion of this interview will be featured in the next issue of Man, Alive! Thanks to Rosemary Hopp for transcribing this and Michael's other interviews with the former conference leaders of New Mexico Men's Wellness.*

Darby McQuade, Bob McMain, Wayne Mathias and Cliff Taber (l. to r.) smile after a good meal at the Ghost Ranch dining room during the 1999 New Mexico Men's Wellness Fall Conference





Rick Heptig, David Cain and Peter Cubra (l. to r.) at the Fall Conference 1999.



Scott Dow, Robert Beck and Benjamin Miller (l. to r.) at the Fall Conference 1999



Yan Ross, Carl Breuning, Steve Faher and Barry Cooney (l. to r.) at the Fall Conference 1999.

My Mind's Eye

by Randall Larson-Maynard

In my child mind's eye
It's always dark, cloudy, raining, black
and white
Mud and noise
The sloshing of wet boots and canvas
Explosions, tears, popping sounds.

In my child mind's eye
I am not a listener in 4th grade math
Sliding smoothly the pencil on the surface
gray on blonde veneer.
I mark the years on the desk
5,10,15 and 3 makes 18
Time to fight.

In my child mind's eye
GI-joe comes incomplete.
Fatigues, canteen, crew-cut, and beard
One too many legs
I tear one off at the knee
Now I can "play."

In my child mind's eye
Always it's those commies
Vietnam, China, Cambodia, Laos
Always the war
Always the TV news
Walter tells me the body count each day.

In my teen mind's eye
Always aware of the time
15,16,17,18
Time to fight the cold war
Ford, Carter, Reagan and Russian leaders I
cannot pronounce
ICBMs, B52s, nuclear warheads.

Always aware of the time
In my teen mind's eye
I walk to the post office
I pick the form
I register to fight
I am now alone
And now I wait
19,20,21,22,23,24,25,26,27
I wait.

In my young-adult mind's eye
I turn away from the Falklands and Iran
I can't bear the thought
My fear is an ally to pain
Struggling with terror to soothe the wounds
That hatred has festered.

In my young-adult mind's eye
I see the remnants of war
Battered souls, torn hearts
Veterans like my GI-joe
Missing parts and sanity.

In my adult mind's eye
26, 27, no fighting
Desert Storm and I turn away
I can't bear the thought
More body counts, more pain
Cluster bombs and stealth bombers
Oil fires that blacken the sky.

In my adult mind's eye
I hear the names
One by one
The tears fall from my heart

Continued on following page

Rivers of pain held back by the dam of time
The torment of 35 years
Trampling the weak boy soul
Crushing the little boy soul to room the
adult soul.

In my adult mind's eye
Bosnia and Yugoslavia
I cannot turn away
Ethnic cleansing and rape
It stares me in the face
With its evil eyes and hateful breath
People destroying people, land, homes,
lives.

In my adult mind's eye
The losses are too great

I cannot bear to hear, one more time, the
news of the fighting
But I cannot turn away
It is in my blood and flesh
The wars of my elder-fathers course through
me.

In my adult mind's eye
It's always dark, cloudy, raining, black and
white
Mud and noise
The sloshing of wet boots and canvas
Explosions, tears, popping sounds
In my mind's eye
My chin falls to my chest and
I cry. »»

Calendar

A follow up meeting to discuss the Fall Conference will be held on Sunday, November 14th from 1:00 to 4:00 P.M. at the Santa Fe Community Yoga Center at 826 Camino de Monte Rey, in Santa Fe. All conference participants are welcome. We will be discussing conference evaluations, conference finances and use of the conference mailing list and other related items. To get to the Yoga Center (if you are coming from the south), take the St Francis Drive exit off of I-25 heading north. After the fourth stop light (San Mateo), you will see the St Francis Professional Center on the left. Camino de Monte Rey runs on the north side of the center. Turn left onto Camino de Monte Rey and go west. If you get to Pacheco St., you have gone too far. You will see a kiosk with a sign, "Sun Tree Compound" on the left, right off of Camino de Monte Rey. Turn in that drive and head all the way in back of the buildings. The Yoga Center is on the back side all the way at the end. If you have any questions, call Jerry (988-5459) in Santa Fe, or Cliff (281-1166) in Albuquerque.

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).

Greater Than I Have Done ©1990 Eric Schneider

I was hitchhiking on the boulevard 'bout a year ago today
When I got a ride from the blessed Lord; He was driving a golden Chevrolet.
He turned a corner marked "Paradise," and parked on a crowded street,
And He said, "This is the time and place you and I were born to meet."

I said, "Lord, I can't believe it! Have You really come to me?
I've prayed and sung each morning just to serve You faithfully.
Tell me, then, where shall I go? What would You have me do?"
Then He put this song into my heart and told me to sing it to you.

He said, "Go among my family whether they are near or far
And remind them, for they've forgotten, who they really are.
Tell them they're a golden light far brighter than the sun
And tell them that the works they do shall be greater than I have done."

Then He showed me a place where children fight and die in East LA
And where they cry instead of eating in a city called Bombay.
"Tell me, Lord," I begged of Him, "what is it I can do?"
So he bade me come into this house and sing these words to you.

He said, "Go among my family whether they are near or far
And remind them, for they've forgotten, who they really are.
Tell them they're a golden light far brighter than the sun
And tell them that the works they do shall be greater than I have done."

Then He drove me back to the boulevard, to the place where we had met.
And He sealed my heart with His own Love, so I could ne'er forget.
Now I've come out to your coast, traveling up and down.
Be sure you stop and hear my songs before I leave your town.

He said, "Go among my family whether they are near or far
And remind them, for they've forgotten, who they really are.
Tell them they're a golden light far brighter than the sun
And tell them that the works they do shall be greater than I have done."

Editor's note: This is the song Eric Schneider played at the close of the 1999 Men's Wellness Fall Conference.

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