

## Juan Velasco Now is the Time – 1994

### What's the Story Behind Your Name?

VELASCO: Well, I was born in Bolivia and my name is actually Juan Antonio Velasco and everybody knows me as either John or Juan here but in Bolivia neither. Everybody calls me Jonnie Velasco and there are certain people in my family call me Juan Antonio, so there no real story behind my name.

### Do You Have Brothers or Sisters?

VELASCO: A brother that is a doctor and sister that is an artist and they live in Chili and Bolivia. My mom lives in Bolivia and she is Swedish—100% Swede—and my father passed away 10 years ago and he was 100% Spanish, seventh generation Bolivian. So I am here and I have a son and that's the story.



### How Did You End Up in America?

VELASCO: I came up from college in '61 and then I just did what everybody else does and then I got caught in the Vietnam fiasco and I did time in the military—in the Navy—and that was it. After awhile you just fall in love and stay here and make all the mistakes and hopefully you learn from them and then you make more mistakes and pretty soon it gets boring and then you see why you are making mistakes because you have bad habits. (laugh)

My father was the Don Corleone of the Velasco family. You know, in *The Godfather*, the head of the family, “El capo de tuti la capi.” That was my father. My father ran the Velasco family and he was hard on me, very hard on me. You know, there were no summer holidays in my house. I had to study all summer. I had to write. I had to read. I had to learn English. I had to learn French. I had to learn how to type. And I suppose that's made my life fuller but I lost out in a lot my ... I never had fun when I was a kid. I graduated—I was valedictorian of my class and that most people think is wonderful, except when I tell them I was the only graduate of the school. (ha-ha-ha) So that's quite a chuckle, you know. So my social life. ...



The Velasco family is a very powerful family. My mother's side of the family is a Walden family and they are dispersed all over the United States and there is no unity at all in that family. Whatever it is, the Latin family is nice to have that end of the blood. My brother is a doctor but he does public health and my sister was married to a very, very famous artist in South America. He passed away in '93 but she herself is a very fine weaver, world-class weaver, and she shows all over the world. But we are all very humble and I think the common denominator is that we give more than we receive and I think that is very powerful.

### When Did You Get Involved with What We Call “Men's Work”?

VELASCO: Well, it was in 1988, when I first went to this conference, I had alcohol problems. And again, I was a loner and I had very powerful male friends but none of them were doing any spiritual life and I saw an article in the *Albuquerque Journal* on the conference and I called up and I went to

the conference and I haven't missed a year until last year, when I was in South America during the conference, and that was the first one I missed. And, it's sure paid off. You know, it sure paid off.

#### **How Did You Get Elected To Become Conference Leader?**

VELASCO: Well, Barry Cooney—who is a dear, dear friend of mine—he convinced me that I should help him and it was a wonderful opportunity. I had a lot of fun. And of course, I had new titles, new names, and everything because I'm a control freak and I was quoted as "The Commandante" and I was "The Sergeant," and all these wonderful things and of course, one learns from these things and little by little one narrows down. It was a wonderful opportunity but it was a scary opportunity. It's like raising a one year old. You really are there and you have no alternative.

#### **What Would You Want a Man To Gain from Going to a Conference?**

VELASCO: I have a lady love, I had been living with Suzanne for awhile, and one of her kids asked me why I had such a full life? Why had I done all these things? And I said, "I volunteered." And I said, "If you want to have an interesting life, volunteer." She said, "What do you mean?" and I said, "Volunteer, do anything, go cook at the Salvation Army, go to the Men's Conference and pick up after the prima donnas. Go and squeeze apples with Harvey. Do whatever you want to do but volunteer and your life will be full. You won't become boring."

#### **As a South American, What's Your Take on Using Other People's Ceremony?**

VELASCO: The most natural part in the conference, for me, is the second or third morning when we wake up early in the morning—Saturday morning—and we have the grief ceremony, or the veteran's ceremony, or whatever it was, and that was truly something that came from within. We did not borrow that from anybody else and it's short and concise and it's us and we honor those people who died during the wars, at the first couple of conferences, and then we changed that to just a grief ceremony so that we can honor some of the men—Frank Vecchio, and my uncles, and your brother, and all these people we lose. Every year we lose someone that has been to conference, but it's an innate activity that is totally from within, and we should enhance that and put energy into that. There's no reason to be building fires and dancing around the damn things, because I feel most of the time those activities take place, I retreat and I do not participate. I am very uncomfortable, very uncomfortable, and it's something that is—luckily, at the Men's Conference, one can do that—if you do not wish to participate, you don't.

#### **How Can Men's Wellness Be More Effective?**

VELASCO: Just be softer, just be softer. I don't think that there has to be a plan. I don't think there has to be any kind of activity which is going to enhance it. I think if it moves on and it grows like it has been growing, I think it will continue to do so. If it dies, it will die for certain individuals and they'll drive out and move along with whatever else they want to do.

I have so much to share and give and I do it every day. And I think all of us have that opportunity. We must have. And I think if there is anything I want to learn from the conference it is to have more fun. I need to learn how to have more fun. I have a serious aspect to my things. I have a lot of fun in my other aspects of life.

#### **Any Advice for Future Conference Leaders?**

VELASCO: Be yourselves. Be yourselves. Yes, be yourselves and you're giving like nobody will ever understand that you have been giving. Nobody will ever know how much you gave, only you. And the benefits that you are going to gather from having led way outweigh the hours of sleep and agony you are going to go through and I think that if you are going to be going to the conference, have a good selection of jokes and make fun out of everybody else.