

# The White Crane Newsletter

*for the development of gay men's spirituality*

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## Newsletter

Here it is, in time for the anniversary of Stonewall and Gay Pride Week, the first issue of the White Crane Newsletter. It has been a long time in the planning and even longer learning how to run the computer to put it together, but it is with a sense of excitement that this issue is sent to you. The driving force behind this newsletter is my belief that as gay men we have a unique and wonderful spirituality to share with each other. A spirituality that is, in part, due to our gayness but also because we have all experienced oppression of who we are as gay men. This too, as with other oppressed groups, has seasoned who we are and thus our spirituality. This has forced us to drink from our own wells, exploring the new ways that lead to our authenticity.

Until recently it has not been common for gay men to share their personal spiritual journeys. The exploration of our authenticity has been for individual men searching their own souls alone. Many have been successful, going beyond the point where non-gay spiritualities would have had us stop. Others, unfortunately, have lost the way or given up in despair, believing gayness and spirituality to be incompatible. For these reasons, I hope this newsletter will accomplish two objectives. First, that it be a forum where we can share with each other what we have found both helpful and not helpful for our personal growth and spiritual development. And second that we might draw from what is written here a sense of encouragement in our own life journey. So everyone is encouraged to participate. Your reflections, thoughts, letters, poems and reviews are very welcome and as much as possible will be included in (Please turn to page 2 column 1)



## Spirituality

Since we all have our own thoughts regarding spirituality and what that means for ourselves, here are some points from my own perspective.

One object of nature that never ceases to amaze me are seeds, particularly the seeds of the giant redwood trees of California. Somehow, in these very tiny seeds there is contained a kind of blueprint or plan of the fully developed tree, the largest living creature on the planet. Along with this plan or blueprint is also a natural drive toward maturity and growth and when the right external conditions are present the seed becomes a tree. Certainly draught, floods and lightening hamper that movement toward fullness but the movement is always there until the tree dies. As far as I am aware trees don't have to think about their growth and make decisions about it. They just grow.

We humans are in a somewhat analogous situation. In each of us there is a kind of blueprint of how we can be as fully alive individuals. Together with this blueprint or image is our own life-long drive for maturity and wholeness. There seems to be at least one major difference between ourselves and other life forms however. For some reason we can get detached from both our inner image of wholeness, our authentic selves, and from the drive that goes with it. We become alienated from ourselves. As gay men we have all experienced this phenomena. Our inner selves had told us that we were gay and in the best of all possible worlds we would have been able to let this aspect of ourselves develop naturally. In most cases, however, our gayness was repressed by society and repressed by our very selves. Many of us tried very hard to deny who we were hoping to conform to the false image that society would have for us. But most fortunately the drive toward fulfillment is not so easily repressed. The call of the authentic self demands to be heard and acted upon and we risk great damage to our psychological and spiritual health if we ignore it. And so with much struggle we allowed our natural, authentic gay selves to be. We accepted and eventually embraced our gayness. Sexuality is just one area in our lives where this process is operative. Other aspects of our authentic selves, our creativity, emotions, relationships, talents, even our bodies, long for a similar liberation and life.

So, what does all this have to do with spirituality. I think spirituality is, in part, the process by which we become aware of this inner, authentic self, and foster its realization. Because we can be alienated from ourselves in so many areas we can engage in a life long process of self-revelation leading to growth and wholeness. There are many ways to undertake this inner journey. For some, the process of self discovery involves using one or more of the many ways of meditation. For others, different techniques may be used including psycho-therapy, dream study and yoga. Ritual is another technique we can use for self-discovery. Either alone or by gathering with others we can open the door to the fullness of life that is ours to live. And this means everything from the pleasures of life that we were often taught to deny ourselves, to the sorrows of our humanity that we have sought to escape.

It would seem to me then that there are two main ways of knowing if you are on a spiritual path that is healthy and helpful. First, as I've just described, it should be helping us uncover and live out our true, authentic selves. For gay men that means it should help us be who we are, gay and men. And second, since no one of us is isolated in this world, as part of this process of self-revelation, our spiritual path should be leading us into relationship with other people and with all creation. The redwood trees I mentioned earlier do not exist as isolated species but as part of a whole ecosystem. I think this is true for humans as well. A red flag should come up if

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(Newsletter Continued)

future issues, which are planned to come out quarterly. All correspondence should be addressed to Bob Barzan 992 Clayton, San Francisco, California, 94117-4426. I look forward to hearing from you. One last note. Though there is a long explanation, I chose the name White Crane because this bird is an ancient symbol for happiness and wholeness. A remarkably beautiful and distinctive bird, I believe it to be an appropriate symbol for gay men's spiritual quest.

## Awareness Exercise

Find a comfortable position either on a bed or sitting in a chair and let yourself relax for a few minutes. Close your eyes and take some time to notice as many physical sensations as you can. Try to notice even the feel of your clothing against your skin. Do this for about a minute and then shift to an awareness of the sounds you hear. Become aware of those sounds near you and those in the distance. Stay with these sounds for about a minute or two. Finally, become aware of your breathing. Notice the rise and fall of your chest and abdomen as you inhale and exhale with each breath. Don't make any attempt to change your respiration rate, just become aware of it. Try to stay with that awareness for 6 to 8 minutes. Besides being deeply relaxing, this exercise is excellent for developing overall awareness of what's going on both around you and within. Enjoy!



Summer

(Spirituality Continued)

we find that being faithful to an inner call puts us in a position that oppresses others or is destructive to our environment. True spirituality leads us to community and to a sense of our place in the world ecosystem. More on this later. For now I'd like to hear what your thoughts are on spirituality, so send them in.

## Timely Wisdom

On Being Gay, by Brian McNaught, St. Martin's Press, New York 1988

Be who you are and rejoice in it. This is the basic theme of Brian McNaught's recent book, On Being Gay. While reading this collection of short essays describing the gay experience I cried, I laughed, but most of all I felt pride in my own gay identity. Being gay is to be special, to be celebrated.

The essays, divided into five sections, cover a variety of topics written over a period of fourteen years. On Being Yourself, the first section, begins with an open letter to Anita Bryant and expresses well much of what we would like to say to any bigot. Other essays in the section cover the horrors and joys of coming out and conclude with a recollection of a friend's successful struggle to celebrate his own gayness.

The second section, Growing Up Gay, deals with memories and feelings many of us would like to forget; high school, proms, families and even holidays. McNaught does not ignore the pain that these topics can stir rather he writes about them in a manner that brings healing. It is the kind of healing that results when we realize we were not and are not alone; that others too had these feelings and thoughts; that others have suffered, perhaps not with us, but certainly like us.

Gay community, married gays, monogamy and relationships are the subject of the third section, Friends and Lovers. The essay, How To Find A Lover, has some of the best common sense advice I have read on the subject.

In the fourth section, The Journey Forward, we are all encouraged to be attentive to the voice within. The voice of the human spirit which draws us to our own liberation and wholeness as individuals and as a community. McNaught writes, "The voice which led Moses and the Jews out of slavery is the same voice which led all gay men and women out of the closet. It is the same voice which whispered a dream to Martin Luther King Jr...the same voice which led Gandhi to burn his English-made clothes; which led Caesar Chavez to politically organize his family and friends in the vineyards of California; which led Margaret Sanger to defy the law by providing birth control

information to women...The voice within is a constant but generally subtle longing to live life fully and equally; to live life authentically and to die knowing that you have bloomed to your full potential." (p.160)

This leads us to the final section of the book, Celebration. In one essay he recalls for us a litany of gay and lesbian activities that should make us all proud.

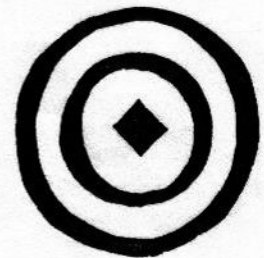
Overall I found this a book well worth reading. I certainly recommend it and I look forward to other works that may be coming from this insightful and readable author.

## Follow Your Bliss

"I always tell my students to follow their bliss - where the deep sense of being is from, and where your body and soul want to go. When you have that feeling, then stay with it, and don't let anyone throw you off. I say don't be afraid to follow your bliss and doors will open where you didn't know they were going to be." (Joseph Campbell)

## To Love

"In coming to visit today I feel that I must be experiencing the presence of God in him and in me. If there is more to life than this I do not know. I hope there is more for Gary after he dies. If this is all there is, is this enough? If I had to choose between this life and none at all, I would still choose this life as it has been. Even though his face is no longer humanly recognizable to me and the only sounds he can make are little animal-like cries and whimpers, I would still say that to love another person is to see the face of God." (from: Sitting With Death, by Josef Venker, in Creation Magazine, March/April 1989)



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