

of questions: What does it mean to be a gay man—alive, today? And rather than borrow answers from the East, they have gone to the very roots of Western spiritual mythology.

Although *fairie* has long been used as a hateful and self-effacing epithet, gay historian Arthur Evans was among the first to insist that the word—as applied to homosexual men—had an actual, living reality based in fact. We think of fairies today as being mythical creatures, stemming mostly from Northern European folklore, primarily Celtic in origin. The Celts, and the many indigenous tribes that preceded them, were nature-worshipping people with a strong matriarchal religious tradition. The many faces of the Great Mother were celebrated on special days throughout the seasons, often with sacred, sexual rites. Male sexuality, the world of the night, and the spirit of animals were embodied by a male deity known, in various guises, as the Horned One—a satyrlike figure referred to by the Celts as Cernunnos, and named Dionysus, Pan, Minotaur and Osiris in other pre-Christian cultures. The ancient tradition of nature worship persisted through Celtic, Roman and early Christian times, although it was increasingly suppressed by the corporate demands of the church. The archetypes of the Great Mother and her horned consort were eventually assimilated into Christian theology as the Virgin and the Devil.

In his ground-breaking work, *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture: A Radical View of Western Civilization and Some of the People It Has Tried to Destroy* (Fag Rag Books, 1978), Evans asserts, "Though outlawed, the worshippers of the matriarchal mix persisted underground and were known in folklore as fairies, named after the fateful goddesses whom they worshipped. Later in the medieval period, various remnants of the 'old religion' were to emerge again, only this time they were called heretics and witches. Their greatest 'crime' was that they experienced the highest manifestations of the divine in free practice of sexuality." Aspects of the Great Mother survived as the image of the three Fates, notes Evans, who were mythologized as fairies by the medieval Christian world (*fairy* coming from the Latin word *fata*, meaning fate).

Evans was a member of the Gay Liberation Front in New York City,

which formed immediately after the Stonewall riots in 1969, and later helped found the outspoken Gay Activists Alliance, where he developed a form of militant, nonviolent protest that he called "zaps." Evans's world view of gay people as tribal-shamanic figures was central to his activism; later, when he moved to the West Coast in the mid-1970s, he began to publicly expand on this history. During the spring of 1976, Evans conducted a series of well-attended lectures in San Francisco, presenting a bold conceptualization of gay spirituality based on his research about "Faeries." More privately, he had already begun to give form to his ideas through the practice of ritual with a widening circle of other gay men in locations throughout the city. I remember one afternoon during this time at San Francisco State University, where one of the first gay academic conferences in the country was being held, when Evans and a dozen followers charged through the campus wearing robes, skins and scarves, clanging bells and waving boughs of leaves. A buried heritage was being announced that day, one far removed from the imaginations of those witnessing this pagan procession.

The need to create a new inner vision—and one not based on modern Western morality—was a vital issue for many gay people during this time. Drawing new historical conclusions from old myths was one approach, but others felt compelled to separate themselves physically from the dominant heterosexual culture and to seek alternatives for body, as well as soul, in isolated rural areas. A plan for one such refuge in 1970 touched a collective nerve in gay people across the country, even though the idea was later revealed as elaborate fiction. As a means to raise media awareness, a Los Angeles group also called the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) invented a story about gay people "taking over" remote Alpine County in Northern California. The story was interpreted as real, made national headlines and created controversy and outrage. It also gave hope to many that such a plan might be true. Wishful thinking aside, some gay men and lesbians did actually go on to establish small rural communities, such as in Golden, Oregon (1970); Elwha, on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington state (1973); in Wolf Creek, Oregon (1975); and a few years later (in the late 1970s), the Running Water and Short Mountain sanctuaries in North Carolina and Tennessee.

RFD, a magazine focusing on gay country living and radical fairie politics, was created at one such community—in a large, windy farmhouse, actually—outside Grinnell, Iowa, in October 1974. According to Stewart Scofield, the magazine's first editor, "The time was right for a publication for rural gay men. The idea or dream existed in the minds and hearts of many—activists, post-hippies, fairies, queers, hermits and just ordinary guys—from all parts of the country who hadn't yet connected with one another. That deisolating connection manifested itself quite magically as *RFD: A Country Journal for Gay Men Everywhere*."

Word about the new publication quickly spread, and a deluge of mail began to arrive at the Iowa farm. Two thousand copies of the third issue were distributed by the following spring equinox. Subscribers found packets of pansy seeds stapled to the back cover of their copies. "*RFD* was more than the newsprint, the words and pictures, more than those who were intimately involved," Scofield wrote in the magazine nearly a decade after its inception. "It was the lives of hundreds of early supporters who daily sent energy to it, who told their friends about it, who wrote poetry, who read it cover from cover, who waited by their mailboxes, who dreamed with lovers about that piece of land in the future, who gardened vegetables and flowers, who celebrated the solstice and danced by the light of the moon. The readers made love to *RFD*, and *RFD* responded in kind."

Although the magazine had obviously touched a collective need, Scofield also recalled critical mail from readers who "chided us for being hippie idealist pagan gay liberationists and for the lack of material of 'real' relevance to the thousands of 'ordinary' gay men living in the country in more traditional lifestyles." Harsh words were rare, however, as *RFD* was mainly shaped and written by its far-flung network of readers, many who found the journal an ideal forum in which to express their deepest and most personal concerns.

During the early 1970s, while complex gay business and social infrastructures were emerging in major urban areas, it was rural gays who were largely questioning internal needs and values—an exploration no doubt nurtured by their relative isolation, increased self-reliance and contact with raw nature. These gay men, on the fringes of a newly

organized community, provided their movement with some of its most astute and visionary analysis. "RFD was the last gay liberation paper to begin," observed Scofield, that "advocated a separate gay culture, a we-are-different-from-straight attitude." It was a time when many gay people began to see rural life as a viable option to urban gay ghettos, and he further noted, "It seems to me no accident that not a small amount of energy in the early days of RFD came from gay lib 'heavies' who had either fled the urban madness or had returned to the country of their boyhoods."

Carl Wittman was one such man. He and his companion, Allan Troxler, had helped establish RFD from the West Coast and were among the cofounders of the Golden, Oregon, collective, in the area where the magazine was centered for a number of years after it moved from Iowa.*

Wittman, as writer and activist, was keenly interested in the potentialities of gay consciousness throughout his life (he died of AIDS in early 1986). His widely read "Gay Manifesto" was one of the most influential documents during the early years of post-Stonewall gay liberation. Written during the summer of 1969 in San Francisco, the manifesto offered a potent gay vision in which open acceptance of sexuality in all of its forms was an integral part. Later, in the mid-1970s, Wittman participated in several gatherings of gay men in the Northwest.

One of the most far-reaching of these gatherings was the Faggots and Class Struggle conference at Wolf Creek in September 1976, where the word *fairie* was asserted in a political context. But it was through work on RFD and his previous exposure to the visionary writings of Harry Hay that Wittman had begun to perceive the word as having a spiritual connotation as well.

Hay and his companion John Burnside were living among the Rio Grande Indian people at San Juan Pueblo (the traditional Tewa Indian

*The magazine, much like a movable feast, has been produced by various collectives of gay men around the country. It resides, at the time of this writing, with a collective in the Southeast and still remains a vital and lively reader-generated quarterly. Write: RFD, Route 1, Box 127-E, Bakersville, North Carolina 28705.

village of Oke-Oweenge) in rural northern New Mexico during this time. They had left Los Angeles in May 1970, bringing their small kaleidoscope manufacturing business with them. Six months earlier, the couple had helped found the Gay Liberation Front in Southern California with activists Morris Kight and Jim Kepner. Hay and Burnside had also hoped to carry their concerns about gay liberation to the Indian and Chicano pueblos when they moved to the Southwest. But it turned out not to be an idea whose time had come. According to Hay, northern New Mexico in the 1970s was a crossroads of many peoples, both indigenous and immigrant, "who were coming *from* something—a place, an attitude, an idea—rather than purposely going *to* anywhere." Nevertheless, the couple established their home as a spiritual nexus, named the Circle of Loving Companions, which for a number of years was the only openly gay listed address in the entire state. It was a place for "frightened, lonely people to develop as political gay persons, to be healed and re-inspired."

During this period, Hay found himself realizing and deepening many of his ideas about gay spirituality. He began to create a multifaceted approach to what he called "the lovely dream of being gay," an inquiry that required a more subtle and cross-cultural analysis than the politics of gay liberation had demanded up to that time. He had first used the word *faerie* to convey the idea of a separate gay consciousness in 1970, during a speech before the Western Regional Homophile Conference. "But, within this community, let the spirit be betrayed, let coercion or opportunism attempt to bind any of us against our will . . . and *presto*, like the faeries of folklore, suddenly we are no longer there. . . . Our faerie characteristic is our homosexual minority's central weakness . . . and paradoxically, also the keystone of our enduring strength."

Hay continued to expand on his concept of a *faerie* identity in public talks and published papers. It was an idea that many older gay men had difficulty accepting at the time but about which a younger generation was beginning to express curiosity.

Wittman met Hay in the summer of 1975. Hay and Burnside were returning to New Mexico from seminars they had been invited to attend

in Seattle, when they stopped to visit Wolf Creek. The two men shared their views about a "circle of loving companions" with members of the Oregon collectives, and Hay asserted the need for a community land trust (a permanent rural site) where "faerie consciousness" could be explored to full potential by gay men. Wittman was especially moved by Hay's vision, and in the autumn of that year he wrote in *RFD* that "the notion of foundling, growing up a foreigner in family and culture, and returning to the larger whole—this notion I put on gently, like a new robe, wondering if it becomes me; afraid of vanity, but yearning for dignity, I find myself saying, yes, it fits. Ah, but politically, is it misleading? Where are my hard-won ideas about separatism, confrontation, group consciousness? Are we not members of a lost and dispersed tribe, rather than errant offspring? Isn't it a bit spiritual, ignoring the real needs to unite politically? I decide not. This vision . . . is a mantle to wear over whatever else is me, one which I feel will become my other attributes."

Wittman's debate echoed the feelings of many others—that the political and the spiritual need not be exclusive of one another. In fact, the synthesis of the two was a reality fully expressed in many gay lives during that time. According to Faygele benMiriam, a political activist since the early 1950s, "There was a time when fairies were the most politically directed of gays. We formed a nucleus of people who were trying to change patterns of dress and attitude and ways of treating each other. We were out there saying, 'We are different than others'—and giving that difference expression. Many fairies were looking at the next step."

BenMiriam was a resident of the Elwah community and then relocated to the Wolf Creek area, where he worked on *RFD* for several years. Later, he moved to North Carolina, and continued to work on the magazine, which had also traveled east. BenMiriam remembers gatherings of gay men in the early 1970s where questions about a unique gay identity were expressed. "We didn't call ourselves 'fairies' back then, but we were."

Groups of outrageously dressed gay men would travel between Boston, Ann Arbor, Seattle and San Francisco in cars painted with slogans proclaiming *Gay Power* or *Faggots Against Facism*, recalls benMiriam,

who, in the spirit of the times, once went a year and a half without wearing men's clothing, including the time he was working for the federal government. "We were trying to keep some sort of gay spirit alive during a time of great attack and repression. Fairie-identified gay men refuse to be automatically ghettoized. We have long been on our communities' front lines and, in many cases, have formed its political basis."

The investigation of gay consciousness by small groups of gay men around the country; a growing inquiry by Carl Wittman and many others in the pages of *RFD* and elsewhere; the radical reevaluation of a gay heritage by Arthur Evans, whose work had appeared piecemeal in *Fag Rag* and *Out* magazines during the mid-1970s and then in book form; and the synchronistic reclaiming of a *faerie* identity by Harry Hay were all important foundation stones for the alternative movement soon to come.

The need to retreat and explore gay sensibilities in a protected environment remained a compelling issue within the subculture. But it was a minority opinion, a voice counter to the central thrust of a civil rights movement working hard to downplay the concept of difference. In 1979, Hay and Burnside and two other men decided to take the matter into their own hands and announced the first Spiritual Conference for Radical Fairies. Don Kilhefner, formerly of the GLF and one of the founders of the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center, and Mitch Walker, a San Francisco writer and counselor, had also emphasized in their individual work the importance for gay men collectively to discover a way of being unique to themselves.

The site chosen to begin this exploration was a remote spot in the Arizona desert, and over two hundred gay men arrived that summer from throughout the United States and Canada. The gathering had a profound impact on many who attended, and despite personal and ideological conflicts that would split its founders a few years later, the fairie movement was born. During the next six years, over a hundred gatherings of "radical fairies" were held across the North American continent, from Key West beaches to Washington state forests, lofts in New York City to the mountains of Colorado, and up and down

the coast of California, with anywhere from two dozen to three hundred men in attendance. And, at the time of this writing, there are ongoing gatherings being planned throughout the country.

The phenomenon has spread beyond national boundaries, with gatherings reported in Europe and Australia, and a new set of values, one with its own oral and written traditions differing from mainstream gay culture, has developed. (See Michael Rumaker's *My First Satyrnalia*, San Francisco: Grey Fox Press, 1981.) For several thousand gay men, fairie gatherings have provided a unique opportunity to examine and to reclaim a part of the self previously denied, an intense experience to be digested and then used in the context of everyday life. The fairies, as a kind of constantly rejuvenating tribe (there are no leaders; each gathering is locally organized), remain anarchical in spirit. And while their gatherings are frustrating and too unfocused for some, they remain essential for others.

On the surface, it would be possible to view the fairies as part of the growing popular interest in neopaganism and Wicca—the ancient word for *witchcraft*, meaning “to bend.” (See Margot Adler's *Drawing Down the Moon*, Boston: Beacon Press, revised edition, 1986.) Or to regard their retreats as an idealistic leftover from the whole-earth, alternative-culture sentiment of the 1960s. Although the fairies have taken signals from both sources, the energy that propels their movement forward seems to come from a deep place within the gay psyche: a wounded and vulnerable place, but a place perhaps not unfamiliar to “fairies” of previous times. In so actively choosing to reinvent themselves, the radical fairies are dipping into a deep well of human myth and spiritual experience.

In saying this, I am reminded of a passage from Mircea Eliade's *The Sacred and the Profane*: “It is the specialists in ecstasy, the familiars of the fantastic universes, who nourish, increase, and elaborate the traditional mythological motifs. . . . In the last analysis, in the archaic societies as everywhere else, culture arises and is renewed through the creative experiences of a few individuals. But since archaic culture gravitates around myths, and these are constantly being studied and given new, more profound interpretations by the specialists in the sacred, it follows that society as a whole is led toward the values

and meanings discovered and conveyed by these few individuals. It is in this way that myth helps man to transcend his own limitations and conditions and stimulates him to rise to 'where the greatest are.' "

I remember these lines by Walt Whitman: "In the need of songs, philosophy, and appropriate native grand opera, shipcraft, any craft, he or she is greatest who contributes the greatest original practical example." And, finally, his declaration, "Who need be afraid of the merge."

To outsiders, the fairies often appear politically naïve, however authentic the spirit that motivates their gatherings may be. Yet, for the men who respond to its call, the fairie movement is rooted in the firm belief that the only liberation movement worth having is one that first begins inside. Personal evolution is the true agent for change: Therefore, the personal *must* be linked with the political. Too many gay people have not really confronted their own homophobia, the internalization of society's stigma, that self-hate that pollutes the soul. It is a painful realization to face; and as a result, many have projected their own feelings of negative self-worth onto others.

Still, at its core, the message of gay liberation has been one primarily of love. And—on the surface, at least—the fairies have embodied this message well, taking to heart and expanding on the most radical impulses of the early gay movement. Their first gatherings appeared like a mirage, a *fata morgana*, on an otherwise arid landscape—an original and healing journey into the pathless lands of inner knowing.

A Recollection: In the Shadow of the Red Rock, The Radical Fairies Convene

A clipping from the *Farmers' Arizonan Gazette*, Wednesday, September 5, 1979:

Benson—A series of "strange doings" were reported by local sheriff, Waldo Pruitt, at a site about ten miles west of this small desert

community. Pruitt first made his report Monday night, claiming that he had failed to locate a section of desert land after repeated investigation.

The land in question was the site of the Desert Sanctuary Foundation, also known as the Sri Ram Ashram. Locals in the area said they knew little about the activities of the sanctuary. Other sources reported yesterday, however, that a Spiritual Conference for Radical Fairies had been scheduled at the sanctuary over the Labor Day weekend. One organizer for the event was quoted as having said, "With luck we'll learn to levitate, as fairies should." No explanation was offered by the source overhearing the remark.

Pruitt first became aware of the event through reports about cattle displaying unusual behavior in the vicinity of the sanctuary. Informants also claimed that large groups of men there were engaging in orgiastic rituals.

"They said that all the animals in the area started to act real strange," the sheriff explained. "I guess I don't mind what you do as long as you don't do it in public. But when you start in on plants and animals, well, then you've gone too far."

Pruitt and three deputies drove out to the site to investigate the disturbances. He claimed that a flashing of colored lights could be seen from miles around. But when the men arrived, "The land out there had just got up and plumb disappeared. All that was left was an old Gunsmoke set a few miles down the road." Pruitt said he will continue his investigation of the incident.

I arrived at the sanctuary in the middle of the desert amid a great veil of dust. The taste of it lay choking in my mouth; fine rivulets of it slid across the hood of the car. Arizona was the final stop on a long journey that had also taken me across Europe, where I had been picking through the shards of gay heritage.

A castrated Dionysus in the Vatican, myths and legends perverted from original meanings, painters and writers censored by convention were among the relics. Only the men observed gathering night after night, usually at the site of the oldest ruins or wooded groves, offered

tangible evidence of a culture that still might survive after centuries of patriarchal, heterosexual domination.

I was tired and wanted to go home. But the sensations before me of a garden in bloom, playful laughter and a beautiful man, flower in hair and hands reached out in welcome, quickened a hope that perhaps I needn't look further. As I stepped out of the dust, I stepped out of time, was hurtled out of gravity. The fairies, at last, had reconvened.

Harry Hay had a vision over thirty years ago when he put out a call for gay men to gather together and at last discover "Who are we?" "Where have we come from?" and "What are we here for?" These questions became the spiritual basis for the early Mattachine Society, a foundation stone for our present-day liberation movement.

Hay's vision was dimmed, however, when the group lost contact with its original purpose and its members "became more interested in being respectable than self-respecting. . . . They believed we were just like everyone else."

Hay left the group profoundly disappointed but eventually met his "other," John Burnside. Together they left for New Mexico where, during the past decade, they have been quietly rearticulating the need for a "circle of loving companions."

A century before, Walt Whitman wrote, "I dream'd in a dream I saw a city invincible to the attacks of the whole of the rest of the earth, I dream'd that was the new city of Friends. . . ."

Hay began to sense the need for reasserting this dream. And so, joining together with other men, the call was put out again. Much had changed in thirty years. Whitman's "new city of Friends" had now emerged as inner city ghettos. Like many of the men drawn to the conference, I had become weary of a "culture" defined by exploitive entrepreneurs, distrustful of religious leaders using spirituality in ways that did not move me, doubtful of a community unable to see beyond the pursuit of civil rights alone.

I remember the sting of a baseball driven hard into the palm of my hand as my father worked for hours trying to "make a man of me." I remember talking to trees and of the wonderful pictures left dream'd in a dream. I came to Arizona to accept and to reclaim, to shed the

wounds of conformity as the snake drops its skin on the desert sand, to understand that variations in the human species extend past color and form and into modes of perception as well, to learn of the creative potentials still locked within my sexuality.

I came to shake the magic rattle, to roll in the dust, to take apart the pieces and reinvent myself, to be able to say finally, "I remember now what I want to become."

Come forth, o children,
 under the stars,
 And take your fill of love!
 I am above you and in you.
 My ecstasy is in yours.
 My joy is to see your joy.
 —*Aleister Crowley*,
 Quoted on the First "Call"

The tall man with the laugh in his voice slowly circled in the middle of the group. "Forget the linear associations you used to get here," he said. "Use fairie physics—turn everything inside out. Imagine, for instance, that the tops of the trees are really the roots." And then Mitch Walker sat down.

Gradually, other men stood up and presented their gifts. Actors, writers, teachers, priests, crop tillers and film directors. Gifts of movement and music, laughter and wit were all brought forth. The experience of age freely mixed with the exuberance of youth. Long-felt anxieties were exposed, tears unashamedly shed. Two hundred gay men forming an oasis in the middle of the desert, linking hands without competition and aggression, without the usual props of status and envy.

Hay had stood up the previous evening and unwrapped the gift of his insights. "We must recognize that there is a qualitative difference between hetero social consciousness and gay social consciousness," he said. "And our first responsibility must be to develop this gay consciousness to its deepest and most compassionately encompassing levels.

"Humanity must expand its experience from people thinking objectively—thinking subject-to-object; that is, in terms of opportunism, competitiveness and self-advantage—to thinking subject-to-subject, in terms of equal sharing, loving healing.

"Early on in human evolution, natural selection set into the evolving whirl a small percentage of beings who appeared to counterbalance the tendency of subject-object thinking characteristic of the emerging human conformity. Humanity would be wise to finally give consideration to these deviants in their ranks—gays—and to begin to grant us the peace and growing space we will need to display and further develop, in communicable words and actions, our gift. [It is] the gift of *analogue consciousness* by which we perceive the world through the gay window of subject-to-subject consciousness."

He continued, the night air carrying his words over the men sitting in front of him. "We must transform the experience of people viewing others as objects to be manipulated, mastered and consumed, to subjects like him/herself, to be respected and cherished.

"We must also remember that the social world we inherit, the total hetero male-oriented and -dominated world of tradition and daily environment—the sum total of our history, philosophy, psychology, culture, our very languages—are all totally subject-object in concept, definitions and evolution.

"To all of this we fairies should be essentially alien. The hetero male, incapable of conceiving the possibility of a window on the world other than his own, is equally incapable of perceiving that gay people might not fit in either of his man-woman categories, that we might turn out to be classified as something very else.

"If we, as people, will but grasp this, flesh it out and exercise this affirmatively, we will discover the lovely gay conscious 'not-man' shining underneath our disguises. We must begin gathering in circles to manifest the new dimensions of subject-subject relationships and to validate the contributions our consciousness is capable of developing within the world vision."

Hay's words for some men were comfortable and familiar; for others, new ideas full of turmoil and self-confrontation. Coming out is more

than a prescription to a contained lifestyle; it is an ongoing experience of many dimensions. As the first morning progressed, and more and more men stood up to reveal old attitudes and assumptions, the many secure places left behind outside were, indeed, being turned "inside out."

Being integrated into a world conceived by sexist heterosexual males is not the full measure of equality. The men on the grass that morning, assembled from many points thousands of miles apart, knew that they still felt sad and alienated by the paradox of a culture reaping the benefits of civil liberation but still left spiritually impoverished. As gay men, we have been denied access to the watersheds of our culture and systematically suppressed for fulfilling the roles we once naturally assumed. At one time we embodied the creatures of change in myth and folklore: shamans and ritualmakers, conveyors of spirit, carriers of seed, tenders of the sun and moon; a people encoded with the function of empathizing with the elements.

How appropriate to reclaim the distinction of *fairie*; to return to a spot on the continent that had not felt such a gathering in centuries; to honor the full sum of ourselves and the spinning, biological entity once known as Gaia—the Great Mother of us all. As the hours of this first day passed, the cocoons of many former selves could be seen shriveling under the bright midday sun. New creatures, fairies of many different hues, were emerging.

I left the luxuriant grounds of the sanctuary late that afternoon feeling cynicism encroaching upon my exhilaration. I walked several miles, past groups of men making music, making love, making conversation, to a point where the desert plains begin their sweep up into the Rincon Mountains. I took off my clothes and jumped down to the sandy bottom of a dry riverbed. I cradled myself, rocking back and forth, some part of me wanting to disbelieve the events of the day, yet feeling the invisible currents of the water that had once been there, aware of the life under the desert floor coming up through the soles of my feet.

Now I was on the inside, somehow merged with the sand, the scrub trees, even the insect sounds around me. I felt I was seeing, hearing, consciously for the first time in my life. My "objectivity" had become

unglued. Each man here was a companion to love and learn from; my ability and my need for trust was being renewed.

The cynicism sprang from my reluctance to accept yet another label, from my previous distrust of men in general. The term *fairie* seemed comforting, yet alien. I knew I often felt *fairylike*, but the word did not fully encompass the complexities of my thoughts and emotions as a *man-creature*. Still, it seemed the natural progression in the long derivation of words used to describe us: *Uranian*, *invert*, *homosexual*, *homophile*, *gay*, *queer*, *faggot* and, now, *fairie*. Each increment gets closer to the way I have always felt inside. *Fairie* is powerful and seems appropriate for these new ways of approaching ourselves and each other. It helps to define a state of inner awareness for me. *Gay* has always dealt with attitudes of lifestyle and politics.

I decided I was comfortable with the word for now, but I knew I could relinquish it as my evolution continued. If anything, fairies are flexible. Perhaps, someday, words will not be necessary.

Walking slowly back, I noticed an almost physical lightness in the air the closer I got. Entering the grounds, I saw the joy in each man's face as he connected with others and then drifted apart without pretense or stance. The day filled with music and dance.

That night, about seventy of us gathered by the edge of the large swimming pool. Murray Edelman, a group facilitator practicing in New York, arranged us in groups of six. Any clothes still remaining were dropped to the carpet of sleeping bags and blankets beneath us. Slowly, we began to explore each other's bodies—arms and feet, faces and backs. No one was too fat or thin, too perfect or old. Edelman had slipped out of view; the strong moonlight revealed a single body of men laying on hands and mouths to hardened cocks and shining bodies. We were calling forth Hermes, bringer of ecstasy; Luna, keeper of the moon.

The next morning another group of men arose early and went out to the desert, also leaving clothes behind. Buckets of water had been brought to a dry riverbed, and soon a great puddle of mud was produced. Cries for "more mud" rang across the cactus fields as each man anointed the other. Twigs and blades of dry grass were woven through hair, hands were linked and a large circle formed. Coming together,

the group lifted one man above it, arms above shoulders, silently swaying in the morning sun.

In other areas of the sanctuary, groups of men were learning that loosening our laughter is as important as setting free our sexuality—that fairies can be silly, too. Elsewhere other discussions were in progress. A ritual was also being planned.

We spent the early part of the third evening carefully dressing ourselves and painting our faces and bodies with the brightest designs imaginable. A deep-toned bell rang and we gathered to take a silent walk through the desert. One by one, in a single line, we were led through the unfamiliar terrain.

Our path was lit by an occasional candle; we stumbled as our clothes caught on the hard branches and sharp thorns. Slowly, our resistance to the desert diminished. Our silence was no longer a nervous suppression but rather a contemplative awareness of our surroundings. The environment ceased to be an obstacle; we were learning to move through it, dance with it.

After twenty minutes we approached the site of the ritual, a large cleared area on the outskirts of the sanctuary. A ring of candles had been set in the middle; a band of musicians serenaded our arrival from the half-lit perimeters. We arranged ourselves in a circle. Nearly all of us were there. A great convocation of fairies!

The music dimmed and, quietly at first, came the evocation of familiar friends and guiding spirits. "I evoke Walt Whitman," said one man. "Marilyn Monroe," the next. "The shadow of my former self." "Peter Pan." "Kali, the creator and destroyer." Then a moanful wail, a collective sigh, arose out of the circle up to the starry sky above. We began to chant, letting each note linger deep in our throats.

The circle split itself in two, and facing each other, we greeted the man in front of us. Fond embraces, tender kisses for all as the two rings intertwined and moved forward with the reverberating sounds of "fairie spirit, fairie love."

Music was heard again. A basket was produced, and each man made an offering. A feather from Woolworth's, a stone from the bank of the Ganges river, some hair, a poem. We began to dance with the music,

moving closer together, growing more excited. In the dark shadows surrounding the circle, the outline of a large, horned bull was spotted by some of the men. Normally shy, the animal was inexplicably drawn toward the center of the gathering. The hiss of a rocket being set off frightened him away. The fireworks illuminated the night with a splashy glow.

We left the ritual site and regrouped on the comfortable lawn near the sanctuary entrance. After being led in a Balinese folk dance, we passed around pitchers of clear desert water, each man inviting another to drink. The gathering drifted apart. Some men left together, others in groups; some men stayed to talk and laugh; others curled up and went to sleep, to dream. We all felt changed in ways we could scarcely begin to know.

The next morning was a time of good-byes. One man lying on the grass near his sleeping bag looked blankly up at the sky. "I feel that whole barriers inside me have crumbled," he said. Other men were expressing fears about leaving. Each one of us had come singly, but collectively we had built the nourishing, loving energy that enveloped us all now. There had been no plans beyond the first evening; there had been no messianic ego directing us along a prescribed path. Our experience of the weekend had arisen from a collective awareness, from particles released in the unconscious, from the intuitive, from dreams not remembered in the past.

Yet despite the emotional impact of the past three days, this illuminating conference hardly represented an end in itself. The event had provided a glorious experience for coming together in new ways, but few of us felt it to be an exclusive thing, or even that the word itself—*fairie*—should, or could, be taken so seriously. In a very real sense, our dance had included all other like-minded men, wherever they were, who also longed for a spiritually rooted connection. The conference was an important landmark on the path of our personal and collective unfolding, a lovely reminder of places we had all been, a touchstone for places we still hoped to arrive at.

I left wondering how I would keep my newfound awareness alive, wondering what circles I might find on my return to San Francisco.

Sitting in a car, a friend turned and looked out the rear-view mirror. The sanctuary was being erased from sight by the cloud of dust. "Just like *Brigadoon*," he laughed.

I remembered some words by Herman Hesse, who years ago had taken another *Journey to the East*: "Oh, which of us ever thought that the magic circle would break up so soon! That almost all of us—also I, even I—should again be lost in the soundless deserts of mapped-out reality. . . ."