gender quest

THE QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF KINDRED SPIRITS SUMMER 1999

A POSTCARD FROM HOME

By Penny Huggins

Wending my way into the bowels of the Western North Carolina mountains, I think I am lost. I should have been there by now. The last time I came here I was a passenger, and that was a few years ago. I am looking for Hot Springs. Every time I come here for a Kindred Spirits retreat, I get something different. It's never what I expect, but always seems to fit just what I need. I have learned not to come with expectations. These mountains talk to me, and I need to be willing to listen.

I have never been able to sleep soundly when I know I'll be driving into these ancient mountains the very next day. Winding south through Tennessee and into North Carolina, I come in through the back door of this state down a twisting two-lane road that has some steep grades. The dilapidated wooden structures with tin roofs that line the highway are snug against the road, with nothing behind them but vertical mountain. This back door opens to a tiny valley, nudged up against the Great Smoky Mountains. I am grateful to arrive safely after only four hours sleep the night before.

I have come to the Sunnybank Inn at Hot Springs before. I have been drawn, like so many others, by some vague sense of having to be here, having to enter this cradle of old traditions and the primordial energy that radiates so subtly from these oldest of mountains on the face of the earth. I have come due to some kind of yearning, some kind of calling that can only be felt in one's bones.

Pulling up the drive of the old Inn, one gets the first real look at the large, two-story structure nestled among stately trees. The formal white of the painted wood, the gingerbread trimmed porches, and tall, slender windows greet one in grand old southern style.

First arrivals at this retreat are invited to help show newcomers to their rooms. The person who showed me to mine could not have known that I slept in the very same bed only three years ago, which is unusual considering the size of this old Inn. The place is reminiscent of a grand old Civil War era hotel, with long rambling porches upstairs and down. The rooms are large, with windows almost as tall as the high ceilings. The fading wallpaper and gold-leaf picture mouldings are original, as all the delicious old smells of the place attest. There are still wood-stoves in most rooms, providing the only heat in winter. The only concession to Twentieth Century convenience is electricity, and a large gas cook-stove in the old kitchen. There's even a ghost of a young girl, to add to the charm.

One of the first residents of Hot Springs I encountered was the calico cat. She could be found throughout the weekend keeping sentry from her vantage point on the steps, stretched lazily on the sidewalk to the kitchen, or under the trees in the driveway. With an air that only a country cat can cultivate, she was eager to cuddle with anyone willing to take the time to be with her n the porch steps.

This Inn has been a fitting womb for the gestation of Kindred Spirits. The tiny town has been reknowned for centuries for its natural hot mineral springs. People have long traveled to this remote valley for their healing and nurturing powers. One can soak in the churning hot mineral water while gazing at the vast milky way of stars overhead, far from any intrusive city lights. The river nearby caresses one's ears with the constant sound of rolling water. We always spend one of our evenings in the tubs.

A few of us took a walk through the dusty streets of Hot Springs later in the afternoon of our first day. A wide variety of ill-matched buildings, representing different eras of the town's history, snuggle up close to the street on either side. The Appalachian Trail crosses the street here for a brief urban stroll through the heart of town. We only had to walk a block or so to reach the "old" part of town. The Park Service has a field office there, since most of the surround- ing forest is National Park land.

We walked on. We were on a mission. My companions and I were on a quest for some old cast-iron ware, for use in ceremony. We found that Hot Springs was home to no less than three hardware stores. The first two were a bust. The last and oldest was "Ponder and Ponder" hardware. Marvel- ous name -- for something other than a hardware store. A fiting place to end our search that would yield some sage advice, but no cast-iron.

I swung open one of the two tall doors of the old store. The wooden floor creaked as the smell of fertilizer and seed filled our nostrils. Two men sat, leaning on the back two legs of weathered chairs, their backs against the wall, their feet on the counter. We were soon informed that we were in the presence of the Mayor of Hot Springs After giving a look of appropriate awe, I described to these two distinguished gentlemen what I was looking for . Said they couldn't help me with old cast-iron, but proceeded to give me a good recipe for cooking bear over a fire in a Dutch oven. The Mayor then dug into a trash can and plucked out

cont'd. on last page

Phoenix Transgender Support
Meetings in 1999
1/23. 3/13, 5/8, 7/17, 9/18, 11/13

7th Annual Circle -- August 19-22

Even as you read this, there is probably a bed still waiting for you at the Inn. Considering the colorful array of *spirits* already signed up -- from veterans to new initiates, musicians to playwrights, budding shamans, all -- this year will no doubt open a new chapter in our history. We are told that even the stars portend great new things.

Check-in at the Sunnybank Inn in Hot Springs, NC begins at 2:00 Thursday. Our Opening Circle will be at 6:00. We will adjourn Sunday noon, after a Closing Circle and brunch. An information packet will be mailed to you after you send your deposit of half the fee: $200/person, $385/couple. First come, first served. (Partial scholarships are available.)

Contact Holly at 828-669-3889/hollyfaery@juno.com

BodhiTree House Progress Report

Oats, corn, wine, incense and prayers were offered at the site as we made the first cut. And as these very words are being typed, a bulldozer can be heard cutting the road to what turned out to be a higher, more preferable site than the one we had chosen.

Our house plans, too, have changed from the round house to a design that incorporates passive solar heating, and is better suited to the site, still fulfilling all the functional requirements. A transgender architect donated her time and talent to drawing up the blueprints.

By Aug. 1, we should have the road gravelled, the site graded, the septic system and water line installed. The foundation, slab and block walls should be completed by late August. A transgender plumber and two transgender electricians are also donating time and talent to the cause. We have a wonderful builder standing by to get us dried in before winter, and several *kindred spirits* have offered to help with construction, making this a true family affair.

Kindred Spirits Traveling Medicine Show

Over the years, especially at our gatherings, we have hit on the notion of pooling our artistic & healing talents in some way -- hosting an arts festival, for instance -- drawing on our *berdache* talents and traditions. Plans are already in the works to host a week-long Kindred Spirits collaboration of diverse artists, which would culminate in a public performance.

Recently, Yvonne Cook proposed that we send small groups and solo acts out on tour around the country, and offered to act as business manager. Almost simultaneously, Kara Squires decided to reorganize her musical ensemble with *trans* talent, and plans to tour. This year's Circle will incorporate her musical leadership, as well as group readings of K.S.-inspired plays by Tashi (Cheryl Costa).

Clearly, the muse is stirring and we may soon embark on new projects that enable us to take our magic out into the world. If this interests you, please contribute your ideas and visions, and how you see yourself participating. Our contact info appears below. We may soon start running a column in this newsletter devoted to developing these sorts of endeavors.

New Ceremony at Southern Comfort '99

As most of you know, *kindred spirits* have been hosting circles at major transgender conferences around the country for a number of years now. This all began at Southern Comfort in '91. These have been well received by the two dozen or so who usually attend. But where have you ever seen a ritual event that includes the entire conference? (Southern Comfort expects up to 700 this September.)

This year, Zantui Rose felt the time had come, and the S.C. organizers agreed. Several *kindred spirits* will present and lead a specially designed event that will include all attendees at one place, Friday before dinner. Curious? Come and join us.

Circle at IFGE 2000 in DC

Plans for IFGE's annual convention next March in Washington DC are already underway. *Kindred Spirits* will be hosting the Circle at that event, which means *you* are invited to come and help facilitate. Also, if you would like to present a seminar, contact Alison Laing at a.l.@lng.com, or to help in some other way: skristine@aol.com/610-759-1761.

Kindred Spirits Retreats & Guest House
Founded in 1993, and dedicated to the spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physical well-being of all transgendered people. We address these concerns through regional retreats and other gatherings at our guest house, and this newsletter. Submissions to this newsletter are always welcome. Send hard copy to: Kindred Spirits, c/o 395 Lakey Gap Acres, Black Mountain, NC 28711-9558. Any issues to which you have contributed will be free of charge. A year's subscription to *gender quest* (4 issues) costs $8. Make check or money order payable to: Kindred Spirits. For more information, you may phone: 828-669-3889 (9:00am - 9:00pm)

SPIRIT COMPANION, HUMAN LOVER

by Suzanne Kilkus

Over two years ago, my husband of 29 years told me that he did not want to deny his desire to crossdress any longer. He told me that his work at addressing his compulsive behavior around it had not dampened his desire to express himself by dressing in feminine clothes. He wanted to step into who he was fully—a man who desires to wear women's clothing.

There was much that I did not understand about this—that I hadn't let myself be informed about, out of fear of our marriage ending and of disapproval by the people around us. I used the old idea that if I just denied something it would go away—at least something like this that I could not understand. I told myself that I would only accept his crossdressing if I could understand it. Having to understand something in order to accept it, however, wasn't the way I approached everything else in my life. I accept that there is hate and violence in the world, and I don't understand it. I don't understand how people can commit heinous acts against others, yet I accept that they do.

So even though my husband was telling me something that was a reality for him, I didn't want to acknowledge that it was so. I wanted to argue and deny, I wanted to convince him that there was something underneath his desire to crossdress that was fueling it, such as something unresolved about his mother, and that if he'd just figure it out, his desire to crossdress would disappear. I wanted to make his reality a pathological problem that needed healing. Also, I didn't want to be married to a crossdresser. I didn't want to think that I was connected to this in any way at all.

Over the last two years, all of this has changed. As I look back now, I can identify some significant and unusual experiences that have been at the crux of my transformation. First of all, I needed to decide if I was going to use what was real—that I was in a marriage with a transgendered man—as an opportunity for my own personal growth. And, if I was willing to do that, could I then look at all the possibilities that opened up. Approaching my relationship from the traditional perspective, that each gender has specific rules and roles that guide choices and behaviors, did not fit.

Fortunately, we had done a great deal of work in resolving the relational issues of our respective childhood histories, so we did not feel bound by traditional roles, rules, and the unexpressed feelings that kept those in place. We were committed to relating with complete truth, openness, and honoring of our feelings, and equal responsibility for the experience of our relationship. As I acknowledged my intention to continue to live from these principles, I realized that I was faced with the possibility that my relationship with my transgendered, crossdressing husband was a critical part of my spiritual path. That by engaging in unrestrained openness and willingness, I would connect with the deepest part of myself and experience my longed-for unity with universal love and spirit.

I reminded myself that for a long time I had experienced a connection with my husband that was older than our marriage, that we were in this life to do something with and for each other. The first time this came to me was about ten years ago, when we were addressing some difficult personal and marital issues that helped resolve childhood abuse. I woke up one morning with the awareness that we were sent to each other as gifts to learn something—that he had been given to me so that I would learn how to discipline my mind and thought for creative outlets, and I was given to him so that he could learn how to be with and express his emotions for a deeper, richer life. I experienced this thought as making contact with the higher spiritual purpose for our lives together. It healed a deep doubt in me, and continues to bring a sense of peace and balance.

Through these last two years, I have opened to this deepening knowledge of myself as the path to knowing infinite intelligence, which is my experience of God. It became clear to me that I have always had some sense that I hadn't ever allowed myself to be fully present in this life—that I had always held a part of myself back—as an observer from a distance, never a full participant. Sometimes I even felt angry for being here. But a transcendent experience during a meditative activity gave me a perspective on this. It came in the form of this story experience:
As a spirit, I came into this world from a group of feminine spirits, a group that I felt deeply nourished and nurtured by. When it was my time to reenter this realm, I resisted because I didn't want to leave such love and care. I came, nonetheless, and have lived as well as I could, but with a sense of looking back, holding back, and resistance to what is.

This experience spoke to and affected me deeply. Then recently, I was discussing my marriage with an advisor and told her about the above experience. She wondered out loud if I had ever considered that my husband's spirit was also feminine, and that he had been a member of the same spirit circle and had been sent here to be my partner to help me resolve my resistances, and grow into the potential wisdom of all feminine spirits. She suggested that his crossdressing was the expression of his feminine spiritual reality, and that his presense here is a gift to me for my human and spiritual growth.

I experienced a deep resolve in my heart. When these stories, or myths as I prefer to call them, were offered to me as an explanation for my experiences of resistance to what is, and withholding of myself, I accepted them, because from the moment I experienced them, I changed The withholding of my fullest presense dropped away, and whatever remaining resistance I felt to accepting my husband's experience melted. These myths spoke to something very deep in me that I was never able to access before, and that is all that matters to me.

I do not know the truth of the spirit realm, but I do know what is true inside of me, what speaks truth and gives me freedom to grow. My relationship is one with my spiritual path. Through it, I experience myself and others fully. My husband is a gift for my growth into unity with all of life. Occasionally, I still stumble along this path, but I am now firmly and clearly traveling the journey that is mine to enjoy.

Time For Us All To Come Out

Joanna Macy and Susan Moon interview Caitriona Reed

Caitriona (formerly Christopher) Reed is a Dharma teacher in Thich Nhat Hanh's Order of Interbeing, and a long-time BPF member. She and her partner Michele Benzamin-Masuda are the founders and directors of Manzanita Village, a Buddhist retreat center in Southern California.

Joanna Macy is a BPF mentor and guide, a teacher, author, and activist doing anti-nuclear and deep ecology work worldwide. Her most recent book, Coming Back to Life, *is reviewed on page 45 of this issue.*

Together with Susan Moon, editor of TW, *they talked in Joanna Macy's Berkeley living room, in June, 1998.*

MACY: Caitriona, would you like to tell us a little bit about your life story?

REED: Just over a year ago I made it known that I am transsexual, and I started living as a woman. I have been practicing the dharma for over 20 years, and teaching since the early '80s. At the time I was convinced that I would be out of a job and out of a sangha, and that my teachers would really no longer have anything to say to me. But far from being defiled and rejected, I—so far, touch wood—seem to be accepted and acknowledged.

Caitriona puts lipstick on Joanna.

MACY: Before you came out, I knew that she—Caitriona—was there, and I asked you when I would meet her. I felt grief coming up that I might never know her. And you said not to worry; she'd come visit me sometime. But when you called to say you had actually done it, I shook with joy, but also felt profoundly challenged. I said to you, "Now we're all going to need to come out." I remember walking to my study that day, stopping in my tracks, and thinking, "How dare I do anything that doesn't answer my deepest joy."

REED: It's as if the fruits of 28 years of practice have fallen upon me all at once. I've known since childhood that there was some gender dissonance, but for years I also felt that there was probably nothing I could do about it and still maintain my credibility. Then, when I took that risk, what fell into place—or what fell away, I should say—was years of shame and conflict.

MOON: How did your practice help you to come out?

REED: My practice helped me to let go of my fear of anticipated consequences, and most importantly, it helped me reach out to people in my own community, to friends and teachers, like Joanna. I found more than support; I found joyful celebration—because they trusted something which I was only just coming to trust, which is the manifestation of truth.

MACY: In other words, you did not rely on some reified concepts of what the Dharma was; you relied instead on your own experience—your experience of shame and your experience of joy, your experience of your nature. The Buddha told us never to trust somebody who takes us away from our own experience. You had the courage to take life seriously. This is awesome!

REED: Everyone is afraid. Everyone has secrets, shameful secrets that have to do with our dreams and our sexuality, with our aging and dying. And to pretend that Buddhism somehow exempts us from addressing those, because there is some transcendent realm we can enter in meditation, seems to be an insult to the Buddha, an insult to the planet, an insult to our friends and to our teachers and to everything.

MOON: In changing your gender identity, you have changed something that not many people have changed. You've crossed a line that seems like a very big line to most people. So people are fascinated by your experience because of that. I don't think it's just an obsession with sexuality. I think it's that you have crossed a boundary that seems so uncrossable. Even while we say there's no fixed self, there's nothing more fixed in our minds than people's gender identity.

> *Even while we say there's no fixed self, there's nothing more fixed in our minds than people's gender identity.*

MACY: It's the first thing we want to know when a baby is born.

MOON: It's the first thing we want to know. So by pushing that edge for people, you help us think about what, if anything, *is* fixed. What does it actually mean to say that somebody is a man or a woman?

MACY: Or how have I limited my own understanding by assuming I have a fixed definition as male or female?

REED: Although I now live as a woman, I don't have the experience of having been born a girl-child and having grown up as a woman. I am not-man, not-woman. And now many people of many genders confide in me, saying that they, too, have had a discrepancy within their own identity. It turns out that instead of a rigid polarity of two genders, there's a spectrum which we're all a part of, and yet it's been unspoken because the taboo is so great. So now we're opening up that conversation.

However, in becoming a woman, I am in the process of changing my physiology through hormones. I find myself moving from a static state of endocrinological existence to a cyclical state. I see how chemically conditioned my mind and emotions are. It has been like moving from a monochromatic world into a very technicolor and sometimes shocking world.

MACY: With the hormonal change, what has shifted in the boundary between you and the world?

REED: I am happy to make a fool of myself now, because at least it's myself as I embody it. Perhaps as a man one tends to be a little more guarded. But I have nothing to lose now.

MACY: That's a beautiful definition of the Dharma: We have nothing to lose.

MOON: But Caitriona, I don't think your understanding of that truth comes from the fact that you're living as a woman. It comes from the fact that you have made a huge transition. Because as a person who has always lived as a woman, I feel like I would lose a lot by losing that identity. I'm not talking about status or advantage; I'm talking about basic identity.

MACY: Well, I think our second-class citizenship, the fact that we are viewed as the other, that we are dismissed so consistently, all this changes our perspective. I cut out from *The New York Times* yesterday an extraordinary front page article by Barbara Crossette on the rise of the systematic use of rape as a weapon of war in the last decade. There is such vulnerability in being a woman.

REED: And an added marginalization in being a transsexual.

MOON: You already know what it's like to live as a man, and now you are living as a woman. I wonder myself, as a feminist, whether you notice that you have less credibility with people now. But you don't just come to people as an ordinary woman, so maybe that's an unfair question.

REED: The feminist movement, in America especially, has created a uniformity of expression for women—for example, the makeup that may or may not be worn. There's also a clear bias within the traditional monastic Buddhist framework that decoration is not necessary; it's a ruse, a deception. Women have come to me and thanked me for giving them permission to adorn themselves in a way that they enjoy doing, but which their feminism or their Buddhism has prevented them from doing.

MOON: That may be true of Buddhism, yes, but I wouldn't want to blame feminism. The kind of feminism I feel connected to doesn't say anything bad about makeup.

REED: But the culture discriminates between women who are to be taken seriously and women who are not, according to how they adorn themselves. It's because of our obsession with sexuality. Adornment is seen as merely putting out sexual signals. I think that's a hopeless reduction of what is a celebration of our life.

I think the puritanical impositions on Buddhism are culturally based—and especially in America—on puritanical traditions, on the denial of Eros, rather than on an authentic understanding of the teachings of emptiness. The Buddha did not, as I understand it, suggest that we get rid of desire, but said rather that desire unacknowledged leads to craving and obsessive, addictive behavior. If we deny the desire to begin with, we move into that obsessive, addictive behavior, even though it may be disguised as worthy and spiritual.

MACY: Our fear of the erotic has tinged every single religious tradition, not just Buddhism. This hierarchical view of Spirit over Matter, Mind over Flesh, Light over Dark, Male over Female has produced biopathic behavior. So the liberation of the erotic is crucially important at this point in our history. I see tremendous political relevance in what you've done, Caitriona. And I know you haven't done it for that.

REED: You can't do it for that.

MACY: I believe we're not going to save our world until we fall in love with it. And you've dared to do that.

The Dharma path strikes me as profoundly erotic. Buddhism teaches us to pay attention, and if you put your attention mindfully on anything, you find love arising for whatever it is. A piece of shit. Anything. You put your attention on it and it reveals itself to you.

REED: It's also important to pay attention to the taboos of our society, the unspoken boundaries that we set for ourselves.

MOON: Speaking of boundaries, how did the boundary dissolve for you? You must have a picked a day when the pronoun changed from "he" to "she."

REED: Well, the day picked itself. I came out verbally while on retreat at a community in Santa Monica. I said, "I need to say that I am transsexual, and I am changing my life expression to manifest myself in a way that is not acceptable for a man to do. It's not that I am a woman in a man's body, because I don't buy the simplicity of that. It's very complex."

The response I had from my community was, "Don't worry—it's fine." People said things like, "Thank you, I feel unaccountably light and free for you having said that." All this came as a surprise to me.

About a year ago I was leading a retreat in Phoenix, and I was manifesting in a manner that was, to say the least, ambiguous. And I didn't say anything. I didn't excuse myself. I just led the retreat. In a discussion on the first day someone said, "I have to thank you. I expected to see someone with a shaved head and a robe, and I found you instead, and it undermined a lot of my expectations. Then I realized that's probably your job as a teacher."

MOON: Your refusal to accept a set definition seems important to me. To say, "This does not define me," is brave. Sometimes people do not have such a happy experience when they dare to come out and express who they really are. You took a risk. Sometimes when people take the risk of expressing themselves truthfully—in more political situations perhaps—it doesn't work out so well.

REED: A teacher I have great regard for, Ruth Denison, said to me recently, "But darling, of course it would be fine for you. The Dharma is protecting you."

MACY: I would interpret her to be saying that the Dharma will protect you even if people reject you.

I'm thinking of Warren Beatty's movie, "Bullworth," about a senator who, when he expected to die, started to tell the truth. It *did* cost him his life, and yet it was enlivening for him to tell the truth.

REED: A crucial part of this has to do with my partner, with whom I've lived for 17 years. We're married.

MOON: How long have you been married?

I just put on a bit of lipstick, and there you have it. What could be easier? A couple of dollars at the drugstore and it's done!

REED: We've been living together since 1981. We were married by Thich Nhat Hanh in 1989. We are now in a same-sex marriage. As a fellow Dharma teacher, she is as comfortable, if not more comfortable, with ambiguity than I am, but as a heterosexual woman, she has had to redefine our relationship, not so much for herself as for others. People ask her, "Are you okay?" She gets exasperated with the assumption that she's unwilling to dance with ambiguity.

MOON: That's interesting. Are people saying to Michele, "Oh, so are you a lesbian now?"

REED: Yes—"Are you a lesbian?" or "I'm so sorry," or "We'll have to find a guy for you," or "When are you leaving?" It's tedious for her to have to explain what is unexplainable. But I've noticed that many people in their twenties, Buddhist or not, see this as a non-issue.

MACY: Young people are much more comfortable with androgyny, I think.

MOON: Just as your becoming transgendered shows us that these gender definitions are not so rigid after all, and that there's a continuum, so also your relationship with Michele helps us see that relationships aren't about the meeting of genitals; they're about the meeting of hearts.

MACY: And relationships *are* about change. The change in your relationship looks like a particularly big one, but all relationships are constantly changing.

REED: And in that regard, I see it as very easy. I feel lucky that my truth-telling is so easy!

MACY: I don't see it as easy!

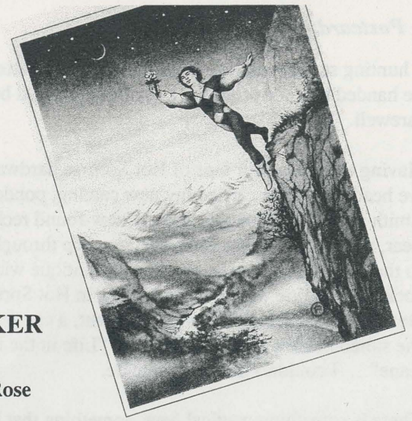
REED: I just put on a bit of lipstick, and there you have it. What could be easier? A couple of dollars at the drugstore and it's done! Would that all our liberations were so easy.

I should qualify what I mean by "liberation." I'm not speaking of an absolute liberation of any kind. I'm not speaking of enlightenment. I'm talking about what's in front of my nose. I'm talking about authenticity. Wholeness.

MOON: This brings us back to Joanna's comment to you, Caitriona: "Now we'll all have to come out."

MACY: Liberation involves coming-out. Not hiding-in. That's the great coming-forth. ❖

reprinted from Turning Wheel, Spring '99



THE JOKER IS WILD
by Zantui Rose

I have a bumper sticker on my car that says, "Fun, the Final Frontier". Being a Pisces, I am a visionary, which means I am always in search of the frontier -- checking periodically to see if I'm honoring my far-seeing nature by living on the edge. Over the years, I've dabbled at my edge on many paths, stretching like a cat out on a limb, living dangerously. The stretch has mostly meant that I lost my loved ones -- parents, siblings, children who were not able to hang at the edge with me, and became disgusted with my inability to conform to the trunk of the tree where they all live. So I've learned to accept that because of my gender queerness, my spiritual path, my lifestyle in all its varied choices, and my relationships that are at the tip of the tree of life, I must dangle there, on the edge, without the support of the loved ones that one expects to lean on.

I have reached contentment with these relationships through a process of letting go over the years -- one by one. We all have our paths. My parents, siblings, and children also have their paths. I cannot expect them to change anymore than I can expect myself to change to fit their picture of me.

So here I am at mid-life, having walked out on many extended limbs, looking now into the frontier of "fun". It is a sad commentary that fun is a *final* frontier. What have we been focusing on all this time? Certainly, fun is a frontier in which I would hope all creatures can meet. Can we meet there? If we could drop knowledge and all that it includes: our name, our labeled identity, our culturized gender, our judgment on right and wrong -- if we could drop our person- ality parts constructed by our socialization, could we all come to the innocence of fun? If we crucified the personal and resurrected the innocence, could we find fun, and could I meet my siblings, parents and children in this frontier?

Could we surround ourselves with the grace intended for us, and find this childish innocence and curiosity about the play- ground we call life? I don't know, but it seems to be a frontier for me, so I'm going for it. I believe it was Kate Bornstein, a transgendered frontier-walker, who said, "I was dealt a wild card in the game of life, and I intend to play it." I want in on that card game while I dangle here, on the edge of the limb.

Rainbow Prayer
by Holly Boswell

We love gender. We love that we can play with gender, and express ourselves through so many colors.

We hate gender. We hate that we were taught to live only masculine or feminine, and that gender is used to separate us as human beings.

We are spirit beings living in human forms. In truth, we are one in spirit.

Let us not be seduced by the illusion that we can only be a man or a woman -- that we are separate. We were meant to be much more than this. We can be anything we want to be. We are divine.

Let us heal our broken places, and come into the power of wholeness that awaits us in our true nature, as spirit in flesh.

Come, let us play in the rainbow...

Where Heartbeats Mingle
by Kristen Pifer

Love finds itself in the soul of another,
and the poet gives it wings.

Love has eyes to see beyond dreams
to the possibilities of passion.

Sigh into desire with abandon,
and love will cover you with her wings.

Where heartbeats mingle,
love has refuge and the soul a temple.

from "The Keeper of the Clocks"
by Fernando Pessoa

I have no philosophy: I have senses...

If I talk of nature, that is not because I know
what nature is, but because I love it,
and love is for this only:
for one who loves never knows what one loves
or why one loves, or what love is.

Loving is eternal innocence,
and the only innocence is not-thinking.

OBSERVATIONS ON GATHERING

by Christina C.

Kindred Spirits is about gathering together and recognizing the sacredness of space that happens as a result of that gathering. Not creating space, or sanctifying space, but recognizing space.

Kindred Spirits is not limited to transgendered souls, but it acknowledges sacred value in the transgender gifts of all souls within the space shared by its gatherings.

Kindred Spirits is about gathering in Circle, and joining in the synergistic processes possible within that powerful dynamic:
1. Rotating leadership: everyone helps the circle function by assuming small increments of leadership that carry forward the purpose.
2. Sharing responsibility: each person pays attention to the social, emotional and spiritual elements of the circle and works to sustain a respectful and nurturing environment.
3. Reliance on Spirit: commitment within the group to call upon some mysterious inner element to guide the overall intention and direction.

That said, Kindred Spirits is not limited by form. Kindred Spirits happens spontaneously. It is not built, contrived or controlled.

Kindred Spirits exists outside the corporate mission statements of a patriarchal society that has lost respect for Nature, the Earth, and the dignity of every living being. It is, in its own way, the rebirth of a matriarchy that nurtures but does not direct. A mother raises her chidren to be indepen- dent and strong willed, not blindly obedient. As Kindred Spirits, we listen to all the elements that nurture us. We exercise our free will from moment to moment.

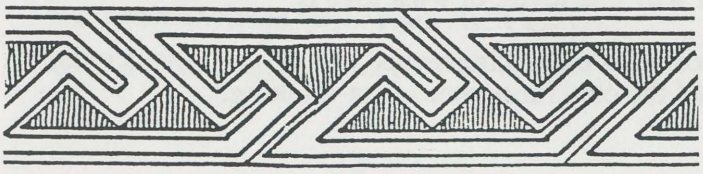
Kindred Spirits is not bounded by any body of knowledge, structure of rules, or principles of faith. It is about learning to find strength, and awaken to the Spirit that rests beyond such delusional boundaries.

Kindred Spirits is respect, trust, intuition and being fully awake to what presents itself in life.

Kindred Spirits is having a hell of a good time with friends.

Kindred Spirits is about paying attention and being free to attend to life, just as it is.

Kindred Spirits is about daring to be free of limitations, and seeing what happens.



A Postcard from Home, cont'd.

a hunting supply catalog, shaking off the cigarette ashes as he handed it to me proudly. I thanked him, and bade farewell.

Having exhausted our tour of Hot Springs hardware stores, we headed home. I carried my new catalog, pondering its Smith and Wesson pistols and my new-found recipe for bear, as we climbed the old stone steps up through the trees to the Inn. Sitting on the porch in the antique wicker rocker was a fine way to cap off a day in Hot Springs. Beyond the trees and below to the street, a car went by with the stereo blaring an old Eagles hit: "Life in the Fast Lane"... I couldn't help but chuckle.

There is something magical here, something that keeps drawing me back to this place. Hot August, deep in the heart of these mountains, something is stirring. Something is awakening. From all over North America, people are beginning to make pilgrimages here. No one can explain it. No one can lend proof to what is happening. Only the mountains and the Goddess know for sure. Western North Carolina is struggling with its new identity as a spiritual and mystical oasis in this troubled time for Mother Earth. The new identity that is emerging for this homey mountain re- treat has largely gone unnoticed by the fast-lane society of the Northeast and the West Coast. But there is a healing and spiritual oasis being born here. No one seems to know how to qualify or quantify this vauge sense that the whole area is awakening to a higher spiritual purpose and direction.

I come to Hot Springs and to nearby Ashevile to come home. I come to these mountains to hear the song of truth, the spirit of health. I come to hear the song of my own spirit.

I was born in these mountains, just a few short degrees latitude north, beyond an imaginary border that says that I was born in another state. I am at home in these mountains. I have stood on th ese ancient rocks at all points in my life, and found a timeless comfort. I can extend my arms and close my eyes. I can kiss the wind buffeting my face and
feel the ancient energy at my fingertips, and in my feet. I feel the peace and the timeless wisdom of the rolling hills. I hear the deep, heavy, and timeless whisper of the breathing of the wind through the distant old trees of these mountains, and a voice that reaches my soul.

There is a voice in these mountains that reaches across time to tell me that I am at one with my body , at one with my past, and at one with my future. Here, I can see the big picture. This body of mine is just for the moment; the song of these mountains is forever. I hear it now, as I have heard it all my life, and the song of the mountains speaks to me. The song of the mountains holds my heart in timeless stone and living wood. The energy here is different, the energy is a song that blows through me, and I breathe again. I keep coming back to these mountains. I come home to hear this song, and to breathe again.