

Two Guys and a Dog
The Self-Indulgence of Soul Work

by Brian McNaught

Since childhood, I've been a spiritual seeker. My focus was very different then. It has changed as I've aged and grown wiser as to where to focus my attention. As a youngster, my spiritual goal was to be a holy person, a saint, guided by my angel. That would be achieved by perfect moral behavior. Now, the goal is to be an awakened warrior, a Snowy Owl gay elder, and my own angel, if you will. I think now not of what I'll be when I grow up. I'm grown. Now, I think of how I can let go of collected old stories that no longer serve me, and of how to move on to the next level of awareness.

My kindhearted husband has patiently supported me over the past few months, not to mention the past forty-four years, as I've plunged, literally head first, into experience after experience in search of a new consciousness.

"Formulate your question," the white witch instructed as I prepared to pull from the cloth bag three Runes for her interpretation.

"How will the divine next manifest itself through me in my service to others?" I asked after some thought.

Before I arrived at that Runes reading, I had, only a few months earlier, declared myself a Snowy Owl warrior during an intense, weekend initiation by The Mankind Project. Surrounded by straight and bisexual men, I cried, as rarely before, as I walked my eight-year-old self through his fear and confusion as a teenager, his suicide attempt and job loss at age 26, subsequent bullying, and death threats, but ultimately, I assured him, he'd experience great fulfillment and joy as a gay man. I sought that weekend to confront my suspicion of straight men as bullies, and I walked away with old storylines of abuse dropped or rewritten.

Ray was glad to have me tell him about what had happened during the ritualized initiation into manhood, and what I got out of it. "What did you learn about yourself?" was his question. I learned that I share with straight men the hunger for masculine camaraderie, for understanding, and for full support from other men of my hero's journey.

A few weeks later, I was lying on the floor of a person's home, with a dozen other souls, men and women, mostly straight, engaged in heavy-duty, tantric breathing, led by Christian de la Huerta, and focussed on a major wound of the soul. With full attention and effort, I purged as best I could every ounce of the confusion, shame, and anger that surrounded my unresolved memories of showering and napping with my father, from age eight to thirteen. "I'm sorry. I never meant to have you hurt," I clearly visioned my father now saying in tears. "I forgive you," I told him. He smiled gratefully.

"What did you learn about yourself?" Ray asked again. I learned to let go, to forgive, and to focus on the many wonderful qualities and behaviors of my father. The first story, carried to The Mankind Project, was how I had good cause to fear straight men, or did I? This story was about being sexually abused, or was I?

Why sign up for both experiences? Because, my global travel to do corporate LGBTQ diversity training had ended, by my choosing, and I now had time to figure out my next storyline. Would I start

working with dying gay and transgender people, as I imagined? Did I have gifts that had yet to be discovered? Might I be able to use my hands to heal, as I secretly fantasized doing? What is it, God, that you have in mind for me?

One very gifted spiritual guide had helped me assemble key words from my consciousness to answer my hunger for identity. With August Gold's guidance, I conjured, deleted, condensed, and ardently assembled the words, "My innocent compassion, and my grateful love, are my God nature." Perfect. But how next will I be an instrument of the Universe? What form will it take?

I began attending the Tuesday, noontime presentations by this Tao te Ching mentor, August Gold, and I joined the Center for Spiritual Living in Oakland Park, where the growth in awareness is guided by Chris Michaels. Now, I was away from home on Tuesdays, on Sunday mornings, and on whatever day I met with my new friend, an 80-year-old gay man I volunteered with SAGE to see as a "Friendly Visitor."

"What are you learning about yourself?" asked Ray. I hunger for identity, mission, and community, and I need to feel useful in service.

And then there was the intensive nine-week Jungian "rite of passage" project, during which I'd meet with the project-designing therapist, Jack Miller, on Monday afternoons and Thursday evenings, plus extra time creating bonds with the other participants. We were dedicated to healing the wounds of our souls so that we could be liberated to move forward, unencumbered by that which we might not have been able to name. In all that time, more stories were told, and in the light of scrutiny by myself, the therapist, and the group, many of the stories seemed outdated, and maybe not so accurate anymore.

"In lots of cultures, fathers and sons shower together. You were invited into the realm of the adult male," the therapist told me. "What gay boy wouldn't love that?"

"Love? What? Are you sure?"

To enter the realm of sacred time, and return to our earliest consciousness, we colored, molded Play-Doh, and built sand castles. We wrote letters and burned them. I created tributes to my deceased best friend, and to my younger brother whose close friendship, according to my old story, I had lost. I dressed up to play the role of a former gay porn star, and I sang Christmas carols in the Coral Ridge Mall, Rosie's restaurant, and the Alibi bar in mid-March. That was our Shadow Night, a group activity, scripted by Jack to release the unexpressed-selves we carried with us.

"What are you learning about yourself?" Ray asked patiently, as he watched me stick to a daily regimen of exercise, journaling, and meditation. As we processed our feelings about our earliest childhood memories, our mothers, our fathers, a death of significance, a traumatic experience, and our dreams, we were encouraged to finger paint, and pound the mattress, if necessary.

The Runes reading was quite clear. From the three Runes, drawn from the bag, and placed on the cloth from right to left, I was repeatedly referred to as a "spiritual warrior," and advised that this was my winter. "Be patient," the white witch told me. "You are where you are supposed to be. Your path will become clearer with time."

"What are you learning about yourself?"

I'm learning that I have a wonderful, very supportive husband, who respects my search for answers and guidance in these final years of my physical life. I'm also aware that my questions are my answer, that my quest is my arrival, and that me as the messenger is me as the message. My hunger for awareness is the meal itself. The form I'll next take in service to others is the form I'm now in as a 72-year-old gay man who searches for new understanding. I'm the messenger. That's the message. I'm the angel. Nothing more is required of me.

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