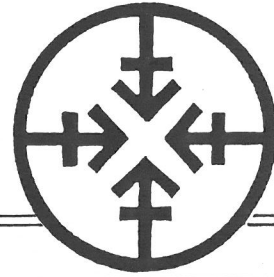


# gender quest



THE QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF KINDRED SPIRITS

SPRING 1998

## *gender quest* Resurrected!

This diverse newsletter began in 1989 under the auspices of Phoenix Transgender Support in Asheville, then went dormant a year ago. It is now being revived by the related entity of Kindred Spirits, the Retreat/Bed&Breakfast organization here in Asheville that serves the nation at large. Our editorial focus will shift into two primary areas: *transgender spirituality*, and *transgender cutting edge issues*. This is a unique focus that will distinguish us as we share and disseminate our messages. We will continue to cover local and regional issues on page 2.

This premiere issue is an invitation for you to subscribe, if you haven't already. You are also invited to submit short essays, articles, personal stories, poetry, photos, drawings, ads, and any other related materials. In addition to the authors you see here, we will be soliciting writings from the likes of Merissa Sherill Lynn, Wendy Parker, Kate Bornstein, Leslie Feinberg, Michael Young, Angela Wensley, Sandra Cole, Penny Huggins, Jessie McGowen, and a growing list of others... As kindred spirits, we will do our best to share the best of what each of *you* bring to this dialogue. This can become a networking tool, as well as a rich literary digest -- on a national level.

We will honor previous subscriptions of *gender quest* that have yet to expire. New subscribers and renewers need only send a check for \$8 payable to: Kindred Spirits, for a year's subscription to this quarterly. (See our policy statement on page 2 for submission instructions.) Count on this periodical growing, and upgrading. With your participation, we can share an amazing array of ideas, experiences, and inspiration.

**Subscribe NOW to receive the next issue!**

## Wake Up and Smell the Chocolate

by Jinx Slidell

They say some people who live in Hershey Pennsylvania don't even smell the chocolate in the air anymore. That's the nature of life - when we become habituated to something we tend to take it for granted. Sometimes that means we end up putting up with irritations that have grown on us, the limits to our behaviors that we just start to accept as always there - like the people who live by the sewage treatment plant. Sometimes that means we miss the joyous things in our life, forget to give gratitude for what we do have, the gratitude that can help us find more.

The point of any journey is to gain fresh eyes, fresh insight, fresh vision, fresh symbols to carry back into our life. A tourist wants the comforts of home away from home, but a traveler wants to see what has been previously unseen, first in the journey and then back at home. Journeys are only worthwhile when we are jarred a bit, pushed a bit out of our comfort zone, are a bit surprised and a bit enlightened.

This is true of all journeys, The spiritual journey is a key component of circling, where a group of like-minded people gather in a special place to share their own perspectives and see the world through each other's eyes. The circle forms a space for examination and expression, a place to reveal what you have been keeping quiet, to discover and celebrate hidden parts of yourself.

The journey inside takes discipline. It is easy to run from self-examination, run from taking too hard a look at what choices you make everyday that may ignore what is right in front of you. Spiritual communities, spiritual circles make this process easier in two ways. First, because the group has a discipline and honors process, we are able to focus without being distracted, able to do the work that may elude us when we are alone. Secondly, because the group is participating together, you will always be supported when going through difficult patches, have someone who understands to share your joy or your fears.

A focused, well-lead retreat can provide the space for a journey in all four realms: physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. From the tactile feel of sunlight on our bodies, to the emotional embrace of people who understand, to new tools of thought and analysis that help us change our patterns, to the spiritual awakening that we are not alone, a gathering can take us on a very special journey. The creation of safe space allows us to venture into feelings and thoughts that some might consider dangerous, that allows us to face the dark areas that we are afraid of. Safe space allows the gift of travel to the most magical place in the world, the human imagination. We enter a whole new world when we simply learn to see things in a new way, and this happens when we open our eyes.

It is the pain of opening our eyes, the overwhelming joy of seeing the beauty everywhere that we share in our circles, in our spiritual networks. Doris Lessing said "That is what learning is. You suddenly understand something you have understood all your life, but in a new way." It is when we come together that we have the opportunity and the safety to see ourselves through new eyes, and to bring that gift of new vision back to our lives.

Circles can be transformational events, and this transformation can be of many kinds. Many people fear transformation -- they are afraid that they will wake up and smell the sewage plant and have to move. However, many have found that by waking up they wake up to the full range of their lives, opening themselves to the rich sense, like chocolate, that perfumes each of our lives.

The transformation from someone who feels alienated and isolated in their life to someone who participates and delights in their life does not always mean that one has to gender-shift, but rather one has to open themselves up and more fully integrate all the parts of their life. By exploring various parts of our lives in safe space, we can often find ways to find balance by including those parts in our life without denying the parts of who we are.

This is the experience of the circle: safe space to open up your senses, feelings, sight and spirit to new ideas, and to have those new ideas suffuse and permeate your life so that it becomes more full, more complete and more joyous. It is the gathering with kindred spirits to wake to the new day, the new morning, the new sense and new sights that have both always been there and are completely new and fresh.

This is the choice that each one of us has to make: are we willing to open ourselves to happiness, to engage in exploration, play, and ritual that can help us open our lives? For me, the answer has been yes, and that personal path of exploration and the process of sharing with those who can provide insight and safety has been integral to my growth and happiness. Are you ready to wake up and smell the chocolate?

## Give Yourself Some Credit

by Callan Williams

It glows at me from high above  
80 feet wide  
20 feet tall  
sending the message  
to the elevated highway  
black on yellow  
"Give Yourself Some Credit".

I wrote that line on a brochure  
for that college  
in 1982  
so long ago.

And now it confronts me  
every day  
"Give Yourself Some Credit"  
a message from my past  
a present to my present.

How few of us  
give ourselves credit  
for the power in our hearts  
for the possibilities in our soul.

I have never given myself credit  
for gifts I saw as handicaps  
afflictions, embarrassments  
that had to be hidden  
that were debits  
in my life.

Who gives themselves credit  
for talents school says are worthless  
for gifts mother says to put in the closet  
for possibilities that take us into the unknown  
for callings that move us out of normal  
to excellence?

Who gives us credit  
for what they don't value?  
We need to give ourselves credit  
for the gifts of the heart.

Maybe that's the message  
simple and easy:  
"Give yourself some credit  
for all that is you."

## The Dahlin' Ditty

by Beth Thompson

Why does society fear me? I'm not criminal,  
I do no harm.  
I suspect it fears loss of control when someone  
does not conform.

I know the time is coming when confrontation  
will take place.  
Between those who fear, and those living  
in a loving space.

Do you fear "God", damnation from above?  
Or does the light shine and you come to "Him"  
in love.

You need to look at that "cause Dahlin", it ain't  
the same.  
Alas if you choose fear, you've got to live  
it all again.

## Sarah in a Suitcase

by Dallas Denny

Midweek, I saw her  
Reciting, joyously, a poem just written  
Of Sarah, escaped from her prison  
Tripping lightly down Commercial Street  
Shopping, dining, discovering herself  
Blossoming, growing, discovering  
Happy just to be

On Saturday night, she sat in the doorway in her pajamas  
Singing, smiling  
Still drinking in the experience  
Still wearing Sarah's face  
Until she remembered her time was short  
And collapsed, weeping, weeping  
At the thought of the morrow

On Sunday morning, she made it to brunch  
Dressed in her gorilla suit  
Her vulnerability packed away  
As carefully as her clothes  
Uncomfortable with her hugs  
Brusque, rigid  
Lest Sarah burst unbidden  
From a suitcase grown much too small

## Tense Verbs

by Carla Pridgen

I Am--  
You are--  
She is - he is - it is too!

Correct? You bet.  
So say teachers  
and preachers  
and other thought-filled creatures.

Ever wonder, when speech goes awry:  
Is the mistake verb tense,  
or the problem tense verbs --  
that is, right verb, wrong pronoun?

She am!  
He am!  
It am!  
No, I think you am!

So pretending "I am" -  
a vicarious life,  
borrowed from the pronoun of another:  
She I am,  
He I am,  
It I am and you too.

And how confusing all this  
With all the pluralities:  
We are,  
You are,  
They are?

Tense verb are is,  
when we am they  
and they am us -- you all!

The only pronoun of certain personal experience is "I",  
And I am!  
Are you?