

GIFTS OF BEING GAY

by Ed Hansen

September 3, 2010

Shame and guilt are the usual fare for those of us growing up gay. We usually yearn for the comfort of belonging, of being included and valued by our peers and admired as sterling examples of our “heterosexual species.” When we feel different and that we must hide our differentness, it is a struggle to find something to value about ourselves, let alone to identify and celebrate the special gifts that only we can offer. So I am hoping to point to gifts that can be ours as gay men and that await our discovery, our ownership and our celebration.

I start with the **gift of being part of a minority** – one that has experienced discrimination, rejection, condemnation, judgment, violence, abuse, basically told our existence is illegal. We have a **vantage point that is outside the mainstream**. Our perspective reveals aspects of life and culture not perceived by those who easily fit the mainstream. Our consciousness enables us to turn inward, to develop a deep sense of authority that comes from within. We have had to blaze our own trails and challenge the ways that have oppressed us. We have learned to question the validity of many assumptions that are uncritically accepted in the dominant culture. We have pursued ways of being that fulfilled us but were condemned by the majority. Our inner authority and outsider perspective give us wisdom to share with our own community and also with the majority.

Through finding our own way many of us have **deepened our relationship with Spirit**. Most established religions have judged and condemned us so in order to survive emotionally and spiritually we have often left organized religion and pursued various alternatives. Without the established institutions and their teachings to guide us, we have sought out life-affirming messages and drawn upon the inner spiritual resources that were guiding and sustaining. As a result, our spirituality became vital, dynamic, and alive and is now another gift we offer the world.

We are “Two Spirit” – **same-gender loving people**. Our perceptions of and feelings for persons of our same gender are different from our heterosexual brothers. We share feelings of attraction and interest that more nearly coincide with heterosexual women. So we have **both masculine and feminine dimensions, our feet planted in two genders**. From this middle place we have special gifts of empathy and understanding that may enable us to be bridge builders. We are men who can be nurturing, giving, loving, sensitive, comforting

and compassionate. Our sexual attractions toward other men can motivate us to develop habits of listening, attentiveness, and understanding that enable us to see other men as “brothers”, persons of value to be honored and respected. By embodying these qualities in ourselves we model this possibility for others in the majority culture, another gift we bring.

As “outsiders” who have become deeply aware of our differentness, we have been **confronted with the question of “Why?”**. Why am I a person who feels attractions to persons of my same gender? Why am I not like most of the others? **What am I supposed to do with this reality?** What is the purpose that this reality has for me and for my place in the world? What is our value to ourselves, to one another, to our society and to all of humankind? In answering for ourselves these questions we are pushed to grow, to gain a deeper sense of self and, if fortunate, a sense of purpose for our lives. We acquire meaning and significance that doesn’t rely on our profession or what we “do.”

An opportunity and challenge for us who have grown old as gay men is to offer the insights, wisdom, understanding, and discernment that have become ours in greater measure. Our declining levels of energy and stamina may limit our “doing.” But what we have discovered about life through all our years is a wonderful reservoir of wisdom we might humbly share. It is our truth that we are free to share without worry of negative repercussions and with the hope that it brings life to others. We can be the mentors, the supportive and understanding listeners, the compassionate healers, and the encouraging fans of those younger than ourselves. We can share our stories, offer our wisdom, and pass the torch to those ready to carry it.

These are gifts of being a gay man that I have come to know in my life. I’m sure there are more gifts yet to be discovered and embraced. What I realize is that I can be so immersed in my own life I am blind to those special qualities that make me unique and that are mine to offer the world.



www.gayeldercircle.org