

Chapter Two

The Men's Room¹

For me there is only the travelling on paths that have heart, on any path that may have heart. There I travel, and the only worthwhile challenge is to traverse its full length. And there I travel looking, looking, breathlessly.

About ten years ago, I first realised that I needed to (re)discover what it means to be a man. I had already spent five years in Gestalt therapy, confronting the demons of a lost and lonely childhood, and I knew it was time to move on. That process had given me much and I had become increasingly aware of my confusion about male identity. I knew (or at least I thought I knew) I was a man – but what did that mean?

Tentatively at first, I began to explore this question; joining a men's group, reading, going on workshops and men's retreats. As I became more and more involved, I co-founded a collaborative inquiry into Men's Development in Organisations, wrote about the subject and was invited to speak at several conferences. In hindsight, I can frame all these activities as part of my "living inquiry" – though at the time I simply did what I was drawn to by curiosity, passion and personal necessity.

What I offer you here is a form of autoethnography, a "messy text" of epiphanal moments shaped by my desire to convey intimations of my lived experience. With Denzin, (ibid, p33) I do not assert that any text actually represents an external reality nor do I presume that any form of representation is ultimately anything other than what it is – a form of representation. I also follow his dictum (ibid, p40) that:

... [Such] a text should show, not tell. Talk about what something means to the other should be kept to a minimum. A minimalist text is saturated with theoretical understandings, but it does not announce or parade its theory.

¹ This is an intentionally ironic and provocative title reflecting my desire to redefine and reclaim legitimate spaces for men's development in contrast to the exclusive, anti-feminist *Men's Room* of old.

Last year I had a shock when a men's development workbook called *Navigator* was published. I had coached the primary author, James Traeger for about two years as he wrote the first draft of the book and had forgotten that, at some point, he had asked me to write about my own experience of men's development. The shock came as I opened *Navigator* and found what I had written offered as an example to other men under the title *Geoff Mead: A path with heart*. I shall reproduce it here verbatim because it is a succinct formulation of my views and because it contains some pretty substantial public claims about what I have learned/am learning from this inquiry. In writing the rest of this chapter (and indeed elsewhere in the thesis) I shall be offering some evidence to substantiate those claims whilst also recognising that I sometimes fall short of achieving them.

Geoff Mead: A path with heart

I am now 47 and I first got involved in personal development about 12 years ago when, whilst working as a chief superintendent in the police force, I became fascinated by interpersonal communication and relationships. Courses on facilitation, mentoring and consultancy opened up a new and sometimes confusing world of feelings. I felt that I had previously been living my life in two dimensions, in black and white.

Perhaps precipitated by this awareness, a crisis in my marriage led me into relationship counselling and then individual Gestalt therapy. Later I attended some events for men and joined a year-long men's group which met for a total of about twenty days in "wilderness" locations, far removed from everyday life. I am currently a member of another men's group. This time it is self-organising and comprises about eight men, all in our forties and early fifties. These experiences have been influential for me in a number of ways:

- To find a solid sense of my masculinity that is grounded in my own life and values, not from popular macho culture.
- To gain a new outlook on work and life based on what I truly want for myself, not based on the desire for other's approval. This is hugely empowering.
- I now relate differently to other men; more open, loving and accepting of who they are, less competitive and fearful. This includes developing a real friendship with another man for the first time in my life.

- I am less confused in my dealings with women – better able to distinguish between friendship, love, intimacy and sex, and less reliant on women for emotional and physical support.
- I now recognise and honour my own creativity in painting, poetry, prose and dance. We are all creative beings, I believe – all it takes is a little faith and courage. My living space is decorated with my own pictures and objects.
- I am living a life with more integrity and authenticity. I am developing a sense of who I am in the world, and accepting my unconditional right to be. This leads to trouble sometimes with others, such as my wife and family.
- I am opening myself more to the universe, and I am beginning to make contact with my own spiritual nature. This is a source of wonder and puzzlement as I seek a form of practice in which to enact and explore this side of my life.

I am sure there are many other ways in which my involvement with personal development and Menswork has affected me. I feel I am on a never-ending journey through my own life. I do what I must to survive and thrive. I feel that I walk with a stumbling gait, making mistakes and experimenting, learning how to walk a “path with heart” and not settle for the “famished road”

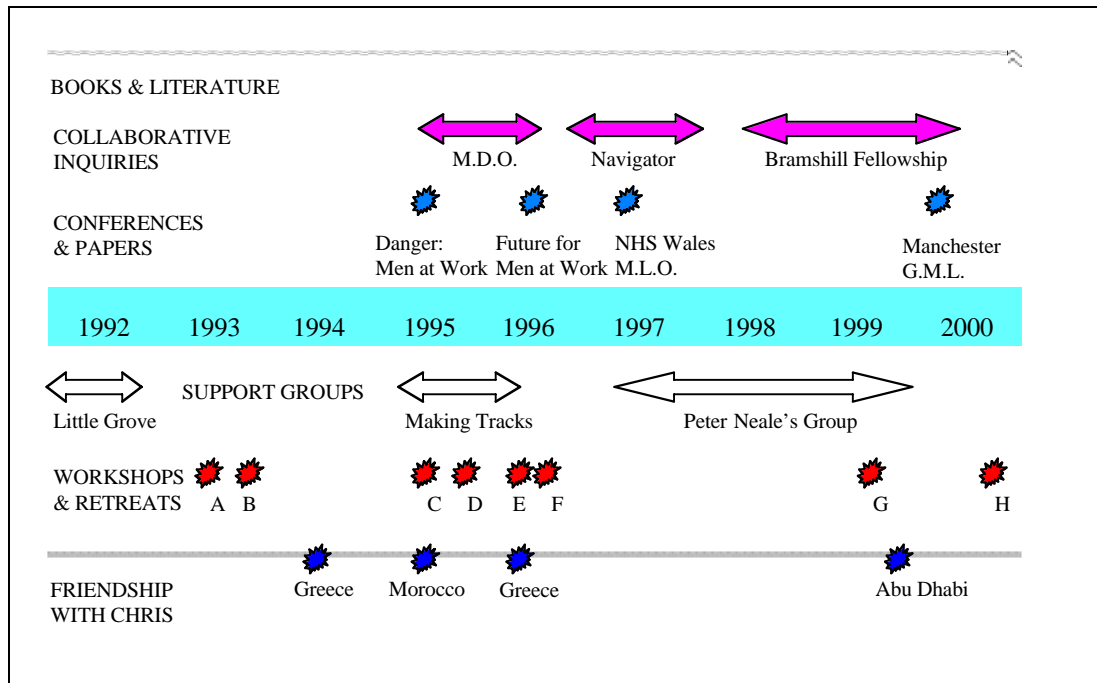
A map of my inquiry

What were these experiences that I claim to have such an influence? In the following sections I call upon a selection of them to illustrate what, in hindsight, I am claiming to be a significant personal inquiry into men and masculinity.² But before doing so I want to offer you a chronological framework laying out the various layers and elements of the inquiry – a map offering some signposts to the subsequent texts.

The diagram overleaf shows something of the complexity, depth and duration of this multi-faceted inquiry. Over time, one can see movement back and forth between the experiential, presentational, propositional and practical realms – but not in any obviously systematic or cyclical form. What I believe I have done,

² In doing so, I am aware that the luxurious logic of hindsight is often not apparent amidst the pragmatics of the moment. A remark attributed to Soren Kierkegaard expresses it better: “Life must be remembered backward, but lived forward.”

more or less, is to value and pay attention to all these aspects of inquiry, in ways that support and inform each other.



The Men's Room

KEY TO WORKSHOPS AND RETREATS

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| A – Odin and the Way of Wyrð | E – Rites of Passage |
| B – Childhood's End * | F – In Search of Spirit * |
| C – Fathers Day | G – Journeyman (Stories for men) |
| D – Meeting the Giant | H – Autumn at Hazel Hill |

Those marked thus * are referred to in this chapter

I claim to be a reflective practitioner (and practising reflector). This is a messy, inchoate business, which allows me to make rich and unexpected connections between many different elements. Donald Schon, author of *The Reflective Practitioner* puts it thus:

When a practitioner reflects in and on his [sic] practice, the possible objects of his reflection are as varied as the kinds of phenomena before him and the systems of

knowing-in-practice which he brings to them. He may reflect on the tacit norms and appreciations that underlie a judgement or on the strategies and theories implicit in a pattern of behaviour. He may reflect on the feeling for a situation that has led him to adopt a particular course of action, on the way in which he has framed the problem he is trying to solve, or on the role he has constructed for himself within a larger institutional context. p62

But even this inclusive description implies a degree of consciousness foreign to my reflective practice. I mix and mull the ingredients, allowing them to soak in my unconscious and occasionally seek to give them shape through writing and speaking at public events – in Guy Claxton's terms giving my "tortoise mind" time to process them thoroughly so that my "hare brain" can give them expression. I move between experience, reflection, proposition and practice as opportunity, time and interest dictate.

Sometimes, as in the Hertfordshire Action Inquiry Group I do engage in more systematic inquiry but, for the most part, inquiry is simply part of the flow of my life. Thus, the following texts are narratives of neither victory nor ruin but stories of living inquiry. They are partial and incomplete and the untold stories are legion. How might my ex-wife and family have written about all this gallivanting around the countryside as I went off to yet another conference or retreat, leaving them to fend for themselves? Very differently, I imagine.

I shall begin with two accounts of men's workshops and retreats – *Childhood's End* and *In Search of Spirit* – which occasioned dramatic and memorable shifts in my understanding and behaviour. I have also selected them because they gave rise to spontaneous and powerful representations in verse, prose, image and sculpture. As Elliot Eisner suggests, the evocation of such spiritual and aesthetic values requires us to go beyond conventional texts. Perhaps their "truths" can only be expressed in "artistically rendered forms" though they are "true" also in the sense that they are faithful to my recollection and perception of events themselves.

Childhood's End

In November 1993, I took part in a two-day men's workshop at Monkton Wyld, a community-run residential centre in Dorset near Lyme Regis. It was the first such event I had attended and I recall driving along the coastal road full of trepidation, not knowing what to expect and wondering whether to turn back. My fears proved groundless. I found a group of men as eager as me for a deeper, richer relationship with their peers. We shared many personal confidences in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. At dusk on the second evening we made a bonfire on the beach and burned images we had previously made of aspects of our lives that we wanted to let go of. A few days afterwards I wrote this poem, *Childhood's End*. As you read the poem and look at the picture that follows it, I invite you to judge them, not as literature or art, but as expressions of spiritual and aesthetic values. By including them in my thesis I am seeking to evidence my claim to honour my own creativity and I am struggling to convey the personal impact and imaginative qualities inherent in these forms of menswork.

Eleven men gather on the narrow strand
And walk in silence, as dusk chills the breeze
Until we (for I am one) find our sacred place
Between the crumbling cliff and the lapping waves.

For fire there, within a circle of stones,
Tumble-down branches and driftwood are stacked.
A cairn is raised at the water's edge,
Moored to the fireplace by a stone causeway.

Our altar made, it is time to prepare ourselves.
The sea draws our eyes through the gloaming.
We sit (or stand) and stare at the rising tide
Each man bowed and deep in thought.

We touch old wounds and feel their present pain.
Our stories have been told and we are living now

In this eternal moment and boundless space.
It is time to put down the burdens of the past.

I light the kindling with an elemental spark.
Flames caress the wood and leap into the sky,
A beacon of hope to men adrift on the sea of life,
Fire to warm the heart and cleanse the soul.

With trembling hands and new-remembered love
I burn the images of a lost and lonely childhood.
"Goodbye Dad - it's an old story. Let it go."
Then I watch as others take their turn.

Joy wells up from deep inside and sounds
Deep healing notes that bind us to the earth.
Our song breaks into dancing, yelling, cavorting,
Capering, running and splashing in the waves.

Yes! yes!! yes!!! I am alive. I am a man.
No longer just a boy, my father's son
And I am lighter, taller, full of me,
Passion bursting into a firework display.

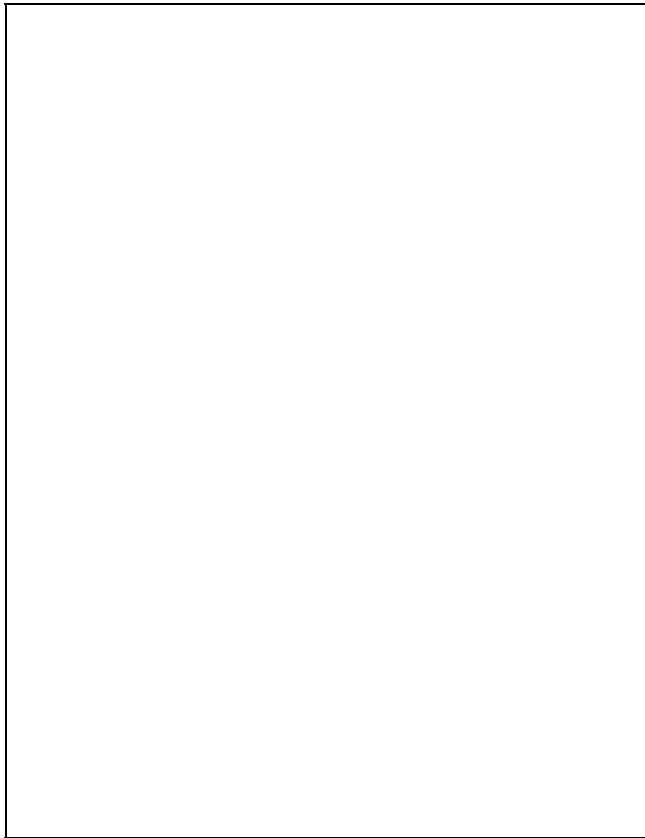
Our madness spent, we gather round the fire
In quiet comradeship and mutual respect.
This night has brought us unexpected gifts
And it is time to take them home.

We return along a different shore,
Light-hearted now and chattering
Eleven men united by an uncommon ritual
And the experience of our common humanity.

A loving presence tugs at my heartstrings
And I turn toward the now distant fire.
In the shadows I can see a twelfth man,

My long-dead father - dancing there.

A week or so later, I was seized with the desire to make a visual representation of the events and did so using pastels. It was virtually the first picture I had made since my early schooldays (I had always told myself that I could not draw) but the image of the fire ceremony demanded expression and, seven years on, I am still surprised and delighted by its quality and power. The original hangs on my wall at home and, with a turn of my head, I can see it now as I write.



In search of

spirit

A narrative this time, describing an initiatory ritual at a men's retreat at Gaunt's House in 1996. These events affected me so deeply that four years passed before I was able to write about them, other than scribbled notes in my journal at the time. The following account was written in February this year (2000) during a period of convalescence as I delved into the nature of my own spirituality and its relationship to my creativity. I will let it speak for itself.

In July 1996, my friend Richard Olivier asked me if I would like to be a mentor/small group leader on a residential men's retreat at Gaunt's House, to be lead by Michael Meade (American storyteller and group leader) and Malidoma Some (West African shaman). I was delighted and, having participated in many men's events over the previous three years, felt ready to take on a leadership role of some kind.

The group leaders and mentors came together at Gaunt's House on Wednesday in the late afternoon – some twenty-two of us. That evening we built a sweat lodge for ritual purification. After three or four rounds I came out and stayed with my friend Peter Neall who was feeling a bit ropey. The cool night air on our naked bodies was like a healing balm. A quick dip in the open air (unheated) pool shocked us back to full consciousness. We dressed and joined the others for a moonlit barbecue.

The next day we drummed and sang before choosing an element (earth, fire or water) to work with. Instinctively, I chose earth (or did she choose me?). We spent most of the day building our shrine. We heaped sieved earth into a cone shaped mound two to three feet high on a level base some eight feet by four feet. Then we decorated it with ash, some yellow leaves, an antler and some candles. Some of the men had spent the day reaching deep inside themselves to retrieve appropriate sacred language to describe the elements. This is what was written about earth.

Earth embraces life, welcoming, holding, and comforting. Fecund earth nourishes the weary soul. It is the womb of community that gives relief and offers homecoming to the battle-scarred and the outcast.

Earth accepts like a bear, loving and gentle with her cubs, but harbours a fierce strength that can shrug off opposition with ease. Earth's ever-forgiving heart heals our belonging and remembers our identity. Earth can sting, or sing of heavy places of gravity and hidden things.

Ancient earth has the capacity to contain abuse and agony, transmuting them into abundance and opportunity.

As the rest of the men (eighty-one in all) arrived for the retreat we formed clans around each shrine, further choosing, by lot, membership of a small group. The earth clan had three such groups, to the second of which Steve Banks and I were appointed as mentors/co-leaders:

Touching the ground of spirit
The longing of the outcast
The root of memory

As evening drew on, we gathered round Michael and Malidoma to meet and greet one another in song, drumming and dance. Michael told the first part of a long story, which he was to thread through the whole weekend.

The following day, Friday, followed a similar pattern... talking, drumming, dancing, listening to the story and connecting with the particular energy of our chosen element/clan. Michael lead the earth clan in an Australian Aboriginal "stomping" dance, chanting and thumping the earth with our bare feet. By nightfall, each clan had prepared a ritual based on their own element for the whole community.

First came the fire dance... the fire clan began with a whispered chant, louder... louder... LOUDER... moving gently like a candle flame, then like a crackling bonfire, then a raging inferno... They moved among the rest of us, sweeping us up into the frenzy... yelling, shouting, sweating until we could dance no longer and our energy gradually subsided into the embers of the fire, glowing with remembered passion. Without the containment of the drumbeat, such fierce male energy could easily become violent – but it did not. To feel the heat of other men... to allow oneself to burn fiercely in their company, yet to be safe, was tremendously enlivening.

After that, we were ready for the water ceremony. All the men went out into the night and were lead by members of the water clan to a bower of leaves and branches they had constructed. Each man went through alone, along a water-filled trench towards the light of a hundred candles illuminating the shrine. As we entered, our feet were bathed and dried by another member of the clan and we joined the others, sitting, kneeling and lying round the shrine, singing a

lullaby. Many of the men wept freely in each other's arms. The water seemed to cleanse us of our accumulated griefs and we encountered each other with love and compassion. How different from the fire energy... and how nourishing too, in its own way. That men can help each other find healing is a precious thing...the loving father, the good brother is present in all of us.

By this time it was getting late and, eventually, our collective energy shifted away from water towards earth... the great mother. We of the earth clan formed a human funnel leading to our shrine. We danced the "stomping" dance we had learned earlier that day and chanted together. Someone drummed the rhythm. We danced together, then each man danced his own dance, supported by the rest. Each man then took his moment to dance down the funnel towards the shrine and, as he approached, was held by two members of the earth clan, spun round and tipped over backwards, caught in mid-air and lowered headfirst to the shrine where his forehead was daubed with ash to honour the earth from which we came, to which we belong and to which we will all return. The energy was joyful... a deep contentment and a sense of connectedness to the earth, and with each other. That night I brought my bedroll down to the shrine and slept beside it, waking occasionally to pray and tend the candles.

The next day, Saturday, we gathered after breakfast to continue the story and, then, to prepare for the great ritual to follow. Michael and Malidoma (an initiated shaman of the West African Dagara people) had decided to follow the earth energy. The whole group was allocated tasks connected with their element. On a quarter-acre site within an old walled garden, the earth clan cleared waist-high nettles and thistles and then dug twenty-seven shallow graves radiating out like the blades of a Chinese fan from the great stack of logs and branches collected for the bonfire by members of the fire clan. Around the hearth an area was cleared for drumming and dancing, decorated with leaves and flowers, to contain and shelter the heart of our temporary "village". The water clan prepared the quarter-mile path from the main house, through the woods, to the ritual ground. As we walked along it later that night, each twist and turn revealed some surprising and beautiful decoration; grottoes, pools of water, intricate candlelit shrines.

The work took all afternoon and early evening. We had a late supper then, dressed for the cold of the night to come, we gathered at the edge of the wood whispering excitedly, shuffling together, nerves jangling in anticipation and (for me, at least) fear of what was to come. By 10.00 p.m. all was ready and we made our way in silence along the decorated path to the bonfire. A single match was applied and, in moments, the fire blazed, ten feet tall, with an intensity such as I have never seen. Streaks of fire flew upwards like dancing sprites... a thousand, writhing tentacles of flame shooting up into the night sky.

The drummers set up their steady beat and we sang... "Azuma - ay - oh"... (Praise be to the earth). Then, several groups of us made our way to the burial ground. Twenty-seven men were interred, heads above ground, pinned down by the weight of heaped earth, each grave sealed with a line of wood ash, each initiate accompanied by a companion who, alone, would decide when they would be released from the pit.

The makeshift cemetery soon echoed to the shouts, pleas and screams of men trying to persuade their companions to dig them out. Some joked. Some sang. Some fell into prayerful silence. Some slept in the embrace of mother earth. For the first part of the night, I kept vigil over Elmer until I judged he was ready to come out. I had no way of knowing his experience. I just waited until he stopped struggling against the weight of earth. It took hours.

Then it was my turn to go in. A man I had not previously spoken to, Charlie offered to be my companion. I stripped down to loose tracksuit bottoms and sweatshirt and lay in the grave that Elmer had vacated. Three or four men piled earth on me, heaping it on my torso and compacting it until I was held firm. Then Michael came by and sprinkled a line of wood ash on the earth from head to toe. It resonated through my body like a cell door being slammed shut and bolted.

My grave was at the apex of the fan, furthest from the village. Although I knew there were men drumming and chanting to support me, their sound faded away and my circle of awareness shrunk to my own body and the patch of black sky above me. I tried to stay calm and take shallow breaths to ease the pressure of the earth pressing down on my chest, but it was not long before my self-control

deserted me and, as the pain got steadily worse, I began to beg Charlie to get me out. "No chance, old son," he replied kindly, his face looming briefly above mine.

I cannot make much sense of the next few hours... just remember the rasping pain, panic, pleading and threatening Charlie to: "Get me the fuck out, you bastard" ... until, at my absolute nadir, the sky began to lighten and a glorious dawn broke over my head. Some words of Malidoma came to mind: "Spirit comes at the point that you admit that you cannot go on... not that you will not go on... but that you cannot go on... and you go on anyway." I had not understood him at the time, but now I was ready to understand.

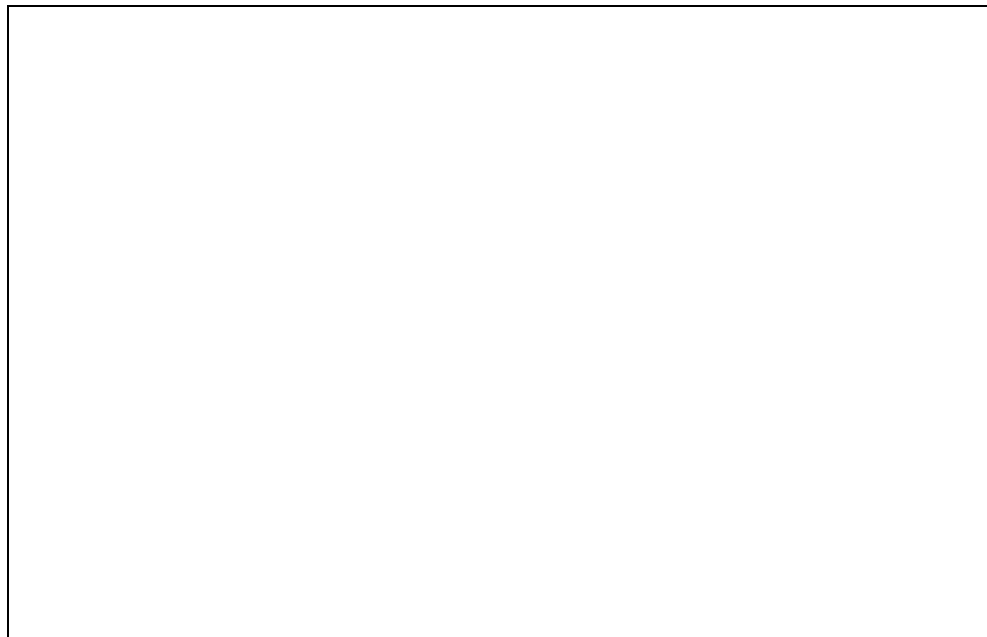
I looked up into the blue, cloud-strewn sky and called out... "God help me, I cannot do this... God help me, I cannot do this... God help me... help me," and then a point of complete release when I was ready to die... "God take me... take me... take me now." As I uttered these words, the cloud-shapes swam and three huge figures emerged... three angels, white robes swirling, one male, one female and a child reaching up to them. They covered the sky in a graceful dance and looked down on me, beckoning me to join them. My heart opened and filled with joy. Tears flowed freely, washing my face and ears (being on my back) and I called to Charlie: "Can you see them Charlie? Oh look at them. They are so beautiful." The pain vanished and I lay at peace, breathing easily and pleading with Charlie to let me stay there forever.

Well, he did not let me stay for ever, just another half an hour or so, and then several men dug me out of the ground, helped me to my feet (I could not stand), wrapped me in a blanket and helped me stumble back to the village where the fire still burned and men were still drumming and chanting "Azuma - ay - oh." A cup of hot, sweet tea was thrust into my hands - nothing, before or since, has ever tasted better - and friendly, eager men hugged me and rubbed my limbs back to life. As my strength returned, I took up the chant, dancing round the fire, occasionally looking up to see my "three strange angels" dancing across the sky.

The whole ritual lasted about ten hours, from 10.00 p.m. until about 8.00 a.m. the next day. The fire burned throughout that long night and the drummers never missed a beat. When the last man had been disinterred and "thawed out" we

brought the chant to a ringing climax, ending with great shouts of thanks and praise to the elements and the spirits. We trudged wearily back to the main house for breakfast before Michael took up the story, which ended with a splendid wedding feast. I realised that, during my time in ritual space, I had been a guest at that feast, had been witness to a sacred marriage - the *coniunctio mysterium* - that great act of alchemical soul making. As we made our farewells I begged a few moments to tell Malidoma something of what I had seen. He looked at me through the eyes of his ancestors... "I know," he said. "I can see your spirit. It is shining. You are very beautiful."

I left not knowing what to make of my experience, but knowing that it had been profoundly significant. I had been touched by the divine - or perhaps glimpsed "that of God in me", as the Quakers say. I knew that the experience would stay with me for the rest of my life and I suspected (and hoped) that it would bring about real change. Two months later, I met and fell in love with Alison, my "wild girl", and pitched headlong into the sea of troubles from which I eventually washed up here, in my flat, living alone and truly happy for the first time in my life. Only now, four years later, can I write about what happened, or depict it artistically through poetry, sculpture or painting. Revisiting it, giving it creative expression, confirms its significance and allows me to continue to draw on its power.



Enter my heart you dancing angels
Possess my house; my life is yours

I pause to re-read these accounts. Familiar as I am with them individually, bringing them together in this way prompts me to ask what they are saying collectively and how they contribute to my emerging sense of "living inquiry." As forms of representation (texts) it seems to me that they have something of the quality of "witness-writing" described by John Shotter . They are not dialogical texts but were written from within intensely dialogical "living moments." The very act of representational writing (or sculpting or painting) requires some distance from, and a strong connection with and openness to, the original events. There is an excitement – almost a possession by the creative flow - and an energy stemming from the events themselves so that the texts are both original and driven by their experiential source.

In terms of the content, I notice that each of them is grounded in a physical ritual. They begin with a different experience of being in the world. By trusting and following my own process into the abyss of unknowing, I surrender my everyday preconceptions about how things are – and allow myself to be enchanted by the "spell of the sensuous" . The doors of perception³ open wide and the barriers that keep me separate from the "more than human world" dissolve. Of course, it is possible to be sceptical; to call these epiphanal moments hallucinations (and it is true that they came out of altered states of consciousness). But I choose to trust the evidence of my senses and give credence to the tacit and embodied knowledge that, in each case, expressed itself through artistic representation.

I say "expressed itself" because that is how I experienced the creative urge to write, sculpt and paint. It was as though the words and images needed to come out. Certainly there is some craft – but my conscious mind acted in service of the deeper and more diffuse mind that is the whole of me. In *Descartes' Error*, Antonio Damasio writes of the "body-minded brain" and I take this as some scientific corroboration of my own understanding of this process.

³ I have borrowed this phrase from William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* via Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception*

These events have contributed powerfully to my "living inquiry" but, taken by

themselves, cannot be said to constitute an inquiry. They provide a solid base of experience and representation but offer little by way of propositional knowing. Other, more reflective aspects of my inquiry into manhood provided those opportunities and I shall go on now to describe some of these before considering what practical outcomes there may have been.

Ongoing support

Since 1992, I have been a member of three different men's groups and I want to write a little about each of them. I suspect (though I do not know) that the continuity and support they provided was an essential backdrop to the more intense and dramatic experiences of the workshops and retreats. They were also, I am convinced, equally valuable in their own right and thus a significant element of this multi-layered inquiry. I did not keep any systematic record of my involvement in these groups – just occasional jottings in my journal – so what follows is drawn from my present recollection.

There were five of us in the first group, all of us new to menswork. We met half a dozen times between March and December 1992, each time for half a day, at Little Grove in Buckinghamshire. It was the brainchild of a friend, Graham Stickland and friendship with him was the only common criterion for membership – though thinking about it now I realise that we were all connected with management development and organisational consultancy in some way. I guess our age range was about 35 – 45. We managed the group process collaboratively and quickly fell into a pattern of one of us telling stories of their experience of being and becoming a man. It was simple, relatively unstructured and tremendously affirming to be seen and heard lovingly by other men. We were very cautious, exchanging farewell hugs only at our last meeting. It is still hard to identify what I learned from the process – other than a dawning realisation that our different histories as men did not matter and a growing readiness to plunge in more deeply.

It was the possibility of such depth that attracted me several years later to join a programme called *Making Tracks*. This was a closed group of nine men with professional leadership by an experienced facilitator of menswork. The group met for

a total of about twenty days, taken as long weekends, over a fourteen-month period from April 1995 to May 1996. We always gathered in wilderness locations, frequently in Lancashire at Roeburndale – an isolated valley accessible only on foot. We coupled this closeness to nature with storytelling and spontaneous ritual. Four members of the group were gay (one with HIV) and we came from all sorts of backgrounds – social worker, academic, policeman, part-time gardener, librarian, artist to name but a few. Striving to meet the others on the ground of their being was sometimes challenging and always rewarding. I learned much about strength and courage, love and gentleness from straight and gay alike. I learned to trust and accept my own sexuality and to enjoy the friendship and company of men with different sexualities.

The third group was initiated in a similar way to the first; one man (in this case Peter) inviting selected friends to come together for ongoing mutual support. We began in May 1997 as Sara and I were separating and continued until January 2000 when we agreed that the time had come to move on. We rotated the meetings round our various homes on the first Monday evening of the month, taking it in turns to provide food and drink and to suggest a theme for the meeting if we wished. Our style was fairly rambling and discursive, though sometimes a clear focus emerged or one of us expressed a particular need for attention. Occasionally we would meet for a day – to walk or share stories or, perhaps, to make music and sing. Our initial membership of eight shrank to a core of six – all white, in our mid-forties to mid-fifties, all in “mainstream” professional jobs (teacher, management consultant, company director, financial adviser, economist, policeman), all married and all fathers. In those respects, it was very much a peer group. Perhaps because we could identify with each other so easily, I found the group's willingness to acknowledge without judgement – whether of condemnation or commendation – my struggles through separation and divorce a powerful and moving affirmation of my determination to “be myself.”

At the time of writing I am reading a wonderfully incisive and insightful book by David Tacey, *Remaking Men* in which he strives to create a synthesis of two major strands in the contemporary men's movement; those of pro-feminist socio-politics and Jungian mythopoetics:

Men who set out on a spiritual path frequently become anti-intellectual, aggressively opposed to "theory" and committed to a cult of "experience." The intellect and life of the mind are sometimes felt to be part of the "false self" that the male quester is leaving behind in order to achieve "authenticity." (Ibid. p11)

Whilst I acknowledge some sympathy with the "cult of experience," I also value the life of the mind and of the social activist. For me, as for Tacey, it is a question of both/and rather than either/or. In the next sections I shall draw on some of the products of my involvement in several inquiries into men's development, including conference papers and presentations. In doing so I shall consider to what extent I have been able to bring these strands together.

Men's Development in Organisations

I undoubtedly owe a debt of gratitude to Ian Gee (CARPP2) for encouraging me to turn my gaze outward and consider some of the ramifications of men's development in the workplace. Ian and I discovered our mutual interest in men's development when working together at the Office for Public Management (OPM) in late 1994. He had written a pamphlet and was looking to convene a collaborative inquiry on the subject as part of his research for the CARPP Diploma. Up to that point I had only thought of menswork as an "alternative" activity – quite separate from our day to day life in organisations. I eagerly accepted his invitation to help him get the inquiry off the ground.

We began by organising a dinner for about twenty men that we knew; some from my circle of friends in the "mythopoetic" movement, some from his world of business and consultancy, plus some "wildcards." The firm regularly used by OPM catered the meal and I recall the ripples of amusement and bewilderment we caused by insisting on male staff to wait at table. Our intention was to avoid reinforcing the stereotypical pattern of women caring for and serving men, but the message was mixed and some of the women at OPM resented this apparent male exclusivity... What could be going on that women were not allowed to witness?

Most of the dinner guests applauded the idea of a collaborative inquiry into men's development in organisations – recognising the gulf between these two worlds – but did not have the time or inclination to take part. The suggestion was made that we hold a conference with a wider audience to launch the inquiry... Which is how I found myself in June 1995 standing in front of fifty men and women at OPM, speaking on the theme: *Danger: Men at Work*.

I spoke from my own experience of growing up and working in male-dominated environments and of my disappointment with the shallowness of my relationships with other men in the workplace... "I know from my experience of men's groups and a few close friendships⁴ that men have an enormous potential to nurture each other. So why do we deprive each other of these gifts at work?" . I related contrasting experiences of "walking a path with heart" as Director of the Accelerated Promotion Scheme at Bramshill and "the famished road" I found on my return to Hertfordshire.⁵

The audience seemed to share this ambivalent view. So often, the way men behave at work is oppressive, exclusive, life-denying – yet at some time we had all glimpsed the possibility of something better when men were not afraid to express themselves lovingly, inclusively and in ways that were life-affirming. Working in small groups, the conference delegates produced montages of hopeful images, alternatives to the familiar *Danger: Men at Work* road sign.

In conclusion, I argued that improving relationships between men at work is not just a way of making men feel better about themselves but that it is an essential element of, perhaps even a precursor to, developing organisations in which diversity is welcomed and in which there is genuine equality of opportunity for all; which are ecologically aware and socially responsible – in short, places fit to house the human soul.

The article (Ibid.) that I based on that conference presentation is a good marker of my own development at that point. I knew something was wrong with men's relationships at work and I envisaged something better (two critical elements of

⁴ Eighteen months previously I had attended the workshop that gave rise to *Childhood's End* and had been sailing in Greece with my friend Chris for the first time about a year before

⁵ See *Police Stories*

action research) but I had no idea what to do about it other than monitor and modify my own behaviour. Re-reading it now, several years later, I notice how tentatively I included myself, relying heavily on the words of others, notably Roger Harrison and James Hillman to speak for me on critical issues, as though their voices would carry more weight than my own. It has more of the characteristics of "aboutness-writing" than "withness-writing". Nevertheless it was a beginning; the first time I had attempted to articulate my ideas and feelings on the subject to anyone outside my immediate circle of friends.

Following the conference, fourteen men (including Ian Gee and myself) signed up for a year-long collaborative inquiry focusing on the question: "To what extent is the future of organisational effectiveness dependant on men identifying and engaging in gender related development activities?" I did not know quite what to expect; after all, police inquiries are usually aimed at identifying and convicting the guilty party. This time, rather than providing answers, we stayed with the question.

Sometimes I found the looseness of organisation, openness of agenda and "soft-focus" frustrating. But, over time, I began to see different kinds of "product" emerging. Articles appeared in the national press; I found myself quoted admiringly in *The Observer* and gently lampooned in *Arena Magazine* as the Chief Superintendent who puts "pictures I have drawn myself" on his office walls. Several members of the inquiry wrote papers and spoke at conferences. Richard Olivier's internationally acclaimed workshops on Henry V and Leadership grew out of conversations at those meetings. We shared what we knew about organisational development and conducted a mythopoetic men's workshop in the heart of the Office for Public Management - complete with ritual purification (smudging), music, storytelling and image-work.

I could see that such activities moved our understandings of the question to deeper levels and we were conscious of trying to avoid the stereotypical male pattern of premature closure. This was my first exposure to collaborative inquiry and I was excited by the challenge to conventional professional and academic ways of working offered by such a holistic process. Indeed, a few months into the inquiry, I followed in Ian's footsteps and applied to join the CARPP programme at Bath.

In June 1996, Ian Gee and I were invited to share a “spot” on the platform at a conference organised by Richard Olivier called *Women and Men: Working Together for a Change*. We each spoke for ten minutes or so about our experiences and learning from the collaborative inquiry group. The title of our session was *The Future for Men at Work*. Ian spoke first and I followed. The session was recorded and I invite you now to listen to the tape. I believe it exemplifies that sense of “withness” propounded by Shotter and which I value so much as an authentic expression of lived experience.

Imagine yourself present in the audience of two hundred men and women in the main auditorium of the Royal Geographical Society. It is the second day of the event, after stormy scenes on the first when men and women, more or less holding their ground, had spoken to each other from the floor about their hurt and anger. I had slept badly and arrived determined to speak from the heart...

TAPE RECORDING - THE FUTURE FOR MEN AT WORK - 12 Minutes

Of course, your listening to the recording of the event (*interesting slip - I typed recoding of the event*) and my re-listening to it are not the event itself. The recording is a lively and graphic representation of the experience, but I am conscious that we are both (reader and writer) responding to what we hear now. As Denzin says:

Presence in its plenitude can never be grasped. Consequently, presence on a tape or in real life is always elusive, shifting, and indeterminate, and its meanings are never final or clear cut.” (p34)

I have listened many times to the recording since it was made a little over four years ago. I wonder what you make of it? Today I notice the nervy, slightly strained quality of my voice and recall some of the tension and excitement I felt standing at the microphone. I sense engagement with the audience, reflected in their laughter and applause, and I hear the spontaneity of freshly-coined language as I speak from a few hand-written notes, bolstered only by a single quotation from Robert Johnson and Anne Stephenson's poem. I think there is a high degree of congruence between what I am saying and the way I am saying it;

I am “showing not telling” . I am fully present and vulnerable as I describe my pain at the unspoken conflict between men and women at the conference.

In terms of the content, I am beginning to offer a few examples and suggestions for introducing men's development into the workplace – such as training and development programmes that bring together police and civilian staff, men and women, from different levels of the organisation⁶, mentoring schemes and other ways of supporting a culture of self-development. These activities are not labelled as menswork or men's development but they cut across hierarchical norms and patriarchal values. I express the hope that, by these means, men at work (and men in power at work) will re-examine and re-evaluate their (our) masculinity and the behaviours that go with it. In hindsight, I can claim that I was beginning to integrate some of my concerns about men and masculinity into my work as an educator and that this represents a turn towards the action dimension of action research.

The conference marked the end of the Men's Development in Organisations collaborative inquiry. Ian and I discussed the possibility of mounting an Open Space event on the same theme but we failed to persuade OPM to back it and our plans fizzled out. By December that year (1996) I had found another opportunity to put some energy into developing men at work. An acquaintance, James Traeger, had been commissioned by *The Springboard Consultancy*, a group specialising in women's development to write a men's development workbook as a companion volume to their very successful women's development workbook, *Springboard*.

It is ironic that an organisation founded and staffed exclusively by women should have sponsored this work – and fortunate that Jenny Daisley and Liz Willis, the owners of the company, were aware that James needed at least one male ally in this ground-

⁶ I am referring to the Management Development Programme (MDP) that I introduced into the Hertfordshire Constabulary at about this time – see *Chapter Five: Reshaping my Professional Identity*

breaking project. My offer to mentor James professionally was accepted and we worked together throughout the next year (1997) as he began to formulate his ideas for the book and to develop and pilot an in-company training course to go with it.

*Navigator*⁷ is very much James's book – though the central metaphor, for which it is named, came out of our discussions; as did some of the material in the early chapters on men, learning and organisations (which I originally developed for a seminar with the NHS Wales Equalities Unit in May 1997). Essentially, however, I saw my role as supporting James as a man in his relationships with his female co-authors. I was conscious that my reserves were low at that time; my marriage was ending, I had just begun the CARPP programme, moved house and changed jobs! But I wanted to contribute and I could summon my energy periodically to focus on James's needs. I think too that it was important that I was an older man able to “stand behind” the younger and more energetic James as he bore the brunt of the effort. The book *Navigator* is therefore, to some small degree at least, testimony to the quality of that mentoring relationship and I feel some vicarious pride in James's achievement.

An invitation to speak at the NHS Men's Development Seminar in Wales came from someone who had heard me at the *Women and Men: Working Together for a Change* conference the previous summer. I was asked to treat my presentation as an awareness raising session to guide the audience... “gently towards identifying their development needs as men beyond the framework of traditional masculine roles and expectations⁸.” With such an open brief, I decided to attempt to articulate my emerging understandings about men and masculinities, processes of learning, and the nature of organisations at the turn of the century. So, what were these “understandings” and how did I arrive at them? I can best demonstrate what they were by turning to the presentation itself. I will begin with three pairs of tables that I used to illustrate these themes. The images are an important part of what I am trying to convey.

⁷ The metaphor of men's lives as a journey is so common – whether the hero's journey of initiation or the wanderings of later life – that we thought the idea of learning to navigate life with more awareness of the territory and choice of direction would be attractive to many men.

⁸ I am quoting here from the letter (dated 2nd April 1997) from Neil Rhys Wooding, Head of the NHS Wales Equalities Unit, inviting me to speak at the seminar

Of course, I elaborated somewhat on these bald statements in the course of the presentation. They have no pretensions to being academic or scholarly in a conventional sense; instead they represent some of the possibilities I glimpsed as I reflected (rather unsystematically) on my various long-term inquiries. As far as I am aware, they are an original formulation and I prize them as hard-won personal knowledge.

It would be dishonest to undergird them now with references that I was not aware of at the time. I dislike and distrust such "intellectual sandbagging." What I can do (and what feels more authentic) is to share some recent reflections⁹ on the text of my presentation.

Men, Learning and Organisations: A Personal Perspective

The whole issue of gendered learning and development is highly emotive and I should make clear where I am coming from. As a man, speaking for myself with "universal intent", I am seeking to identify and articulate more positive and inclusive images of masculinity than those offered by patriarchal (or, indeed, feminist) stereotyping.

Organisational life is, I believe, particularly prone to glorify a narrow, oppressive and hegemonic view of masculinity. It is difficult for many men (typically white and professedly heterosexual) who wish to identify themselves as part of the "mainstream" to see beyond this point. What motivation do such men have to unearth and challenge the assumptions that underlie such a view? One could argue for equity and natural justice but I suspect that only enlightened self-interest is likely to bring about a sea change.

My own experience, and what I have learned from other men concerned with these issues, leads me to believe that it is possible to touch men's sensitivities about their masculinity without frightening them away. It requires the recognition and valuing of our uniqueness as persons as well as raising consciousness about the damaging effects of our gender conditioning and voicing some viable alternatives. The men in the group had no previous experience of men's development (and not much personal development of any kind) and, therefore, needed new language to conceptualise themselves differently.

⁹ Taken from the introduction to *Men, Learning and Organisations: A Personal Perspective*, prepared for the *Gendering Management Learning Conference* (Mead 2000)

At the heart of my talk are the three sets of tables¹⁰ offering some alternative perspectives on men, learning and organisations. In bringing them to this conference, I offer them not as definitive statements but as examples of the sort of discourse with which I believe men (and man-agers) need to engage. I guess that even suggesting this would not have been possible without the fruits of the feminist "project" and yet I do not think that men can simply pick up the baton of the women's movement. We have some basic epistemological groundwork to do for ourselves before we can claim to be on the move.

I am pleased to say that, with some amendments, the thoughts on men, learning and organisations expressed in this paper found their way into the Navigator Men's Development Workbook published by the Springboard Consultancy (which has done so much to promote and support women's development). I commend this programme (which I ruefully acknowledge to be sponsored by a women's organisation) as an excellent starting place for men embarking on their own development. Just as women have found a need to come together sometimes in single gender groups to explore issues and articulate a new position, so men, too, benefit from healthy contact and deep sharing in "men only" settings. Normalising this kind of process as part of organisational life will help to provide a proactive context for men's development. Men do not have to wait for mid-life crises in relationships, career or health to reassess the kind of masculinity they want to practise!

When I ask how I arrived at these views, the artificiality of compartmentalising my living inquiry becomes apparent – I simply don't know. I cannot trace them to immediate and particular sources. They have come out of the long, complex, multi-layered exploration of my practice and of the issues involved described above in *A Map of my Inquiry*.

Bramshill Fellowship

Excited and encouraged by these experiences of inquiry, in 1998 I decided it was time to step into the lion's den of masculinities in the police service. My occasional forays into the public domain, though worthwhile in their own right, had avoided the central issue – that of taking action where I might make a real

¹⁰ See inserted page

difference (and where I had most to lose) in my own traditionally macho profession; the police.

For years I had regarded myself as subversive of the narrow and oppressive organisational culture of the police service - yet I had also enjoyed the benefits of a successful career; promotion, status, salary. I had learned to play the game and choose my battles carefully - the very model of a "tempered radical". As I have already indicated, this was a time of great upheaval in my personal life. I had got used to taking risks and become impatient of "penny ante" change. I was determined to raise the stakes by challenging the unspoken taboos at the very heart of the police organisation. Later, Jack Whitehead showed me a quotation from Bakhtin which reinforced my belief in the need for responsible action. Speaking of the fundamental error of rationalist philosophy, Bakhtin says:

The fatal flaw is the denial of responsibility - which is to say, the crisis is at base an ethical one. It can be overcome only by an understanding of the act as a category into which cognition enters but which is radically singular and "responsible".

Intervention in my own organisation had certainly become an ethical issue for me. I could not sustain the gulf between the richer and more inclusive sense of masculinity that I embraced elsewhere and the narrow, oppressive masculinities that I witnessed (and sometimes enacted) in my professional life.

The route I chose was to frame my prospective PhD inquiry as action research into men and masculinities in the police service and to apply for a Bramshill Fellowship¹¹ to force organisational recognition of the issue. The application (which also featured in my portfolio for the CARPP Diploma/MPhil transfer process) was written towards the end of 1997 and submitted in January 1998. I prepared the ground by personal conversations with Peter Sharpe (then Chief Constable of Hertfordshire Constabulary, my home force), Richard Wells (then Chief Constable of South Yorkshire Police - an unorthodox and influential figure who I had met whilst Director of the Accelerated Promotion Course 1988-92) and

¹¹ Bramshill Fellowships are part of a national scheme to provide legitimacy and funding for independent research by UK police officers. Applicants must secure the sponsorship of their Chief Officers and persuade an examining board based at the Police Staff College, Bramshill of its academic merit.

Neil Richards (senior academic at the Police Staff College and chairman of the Bramshill Fellowship examination board).

I thought it was essential to build high level support for the project in light of some interesting and disturbing developments that threatened to scupper the ship at the dockside. My research journal for November 1997 illustrates the dangers of questioning such deeply held orthodoxies:

Judi [Marshall] pointed out that the theme of my research - masculinities in the police service - is highly political (which I take to mean - operating in the mid-ground of real world activities). She referred me to work by Rosabeth Moss Kanter on the way in which dominant groups alienate and exclude members of minorities (especially visible or identifiable ones - "The Story of O"). Despite my apparent success and high rank in the police service, I often feel quite marginal and am aware that, in my values and style, I can be quite threatening to my peers. How much more so if I direct attention to an issue that is at the root of their identity - for, almost without exception, my peers (and I) are white, middle-aged, middle-class, and male.

A week later a friend called me from Hertfordshire to tell me that rumours were rife within the Constabulary that I had "finally decided to come out of the closet as a homosexual" and I reflected in my journal:

Apart from a gloriously ironic joke, what else is going on? It seems too much of a coincidence that it should happen exactly as I am formulating my research proposal. I have spoken of my interest in men and masculinity to several people in Hertfordshire in recent weeks and I certainly have a long-standing reputation for being a bit off-the-wall. Perhaps, at a systemic level, the dominant group is already seeking to marginalise and exclude me - for that would surely be the effect of being labelled gay.

What an exquisite double bind! I cannot deny the allegation without compromising my values. I do not consider the accusation to be a slur. If I deny it, people could say: "You see. You are not really liberal and open-minded, as you claim. You are just like us." If I do not deny it, they could say: "You see. We told you so. This explains why he is so different." I shall let it ride. It seems that

I will require all the political skills I can muster if I am to get my research taken seriously.

In the event, my application for a Bramshill Fellowship was accepted in July 1998. Entitled *Policemen: Being and Becoming Men in the Police Service*, its stated objectives were:

... [to] open up and extend the debate [on equal opportunities issues in the police service] from an entirely new perspective - that of men and masculinity. Its intention is to develop and legitimise a richer and more inclusive notion of masculinity in the police service that is supportive of the cultural shift towards embracing diversity and nurturing people that the 1995 HMIC Equal Opportunities Thematic Report states is essential for improving performance.

Identifying and encouraging the positive aspects of masculinity in the police service will help to match the well-intentioned rhetoric of equal opportunities with the reality of commensurate attitudes and behaviours - decency, fairness, openness, self-respect, co-operation, learning and a genuine commitment to quality of service.

Men are in the majority (particularly in management) and men's attitudes and behaviour largely determine the prevailing culture. Creating the possibility of open debate about these issues is a pre-requisite to long term change and performance improvement.

I proposed an action research methodology with changes emerging from:

... rigorous cycles of action and reflection. Above all, it will be real people seeking to examine and improve their own practice - thus modelling the possibility of change as well as offering a deeper understanding of the issues involved.

And I envisaged a process:

... using biography and narrative techniques within a collaborative inquiry group to explore commonalities and differences in men's experience in the police service and to improve our practice.

Simple – all I had to do was implement the proposal... or so I thought. Actually, two things in particular caused me to change tack. The first of them was the reaction I experienced from several male colleagues whom I interviewed in June 1998 in a series of “conversations with cops.” I had chosen them as men who I saw to be outside the usual macho police mould and who I thought would be sympathetic to the aims of the project. Right on both counts – but the interviews left me feeling puzzled and dissatisfied. They had answered my questions; we had engaged in dialogue; we had spoken about being a man in the police service. They had interesting stories to tell and they wanted to help me with my research. And that, I realised, was the sticking point – it would always be my research. It was my inquiry, not theirs. I was asking them to meet me on my ground, not meeting them on the ground of their being. There was not going to be much life in this line of research – at least, not in the context I had framed of a group of policemen examining our collective masculine navel.

Second, in July, I met Amanda Sinclair, Professor of Management (Diversity and Change) at Melbourne Business School, at a CARPP seminar. She had just published *Doing Leadership Differently* an examination of gender, power and sexuality in a changing business culture. Her study of successful Australian executives highlighted the gendered conceptualisation and enactment of organisational leadership and identified a number of men and women who seemed to have transcended the dominant managerial masculinities¹² to “do leadership differently.” I sent her a copy of *Police Stories* about which she said:

... [It has] prompted me to reflect – spoke to me – about my choices, my defences, my pleasures and disappointments, what I have put in and leave out of the (self) authorised version of my own story. It helped me step back and see my career, “leadership” if you like, in better perspective... Reading it has given me courage to be more open about myself and to take some more risks in what I do.

¹² Sinclair (p61) quotes Collinson and Hearn's (1994) categories of managerial masculinities: traditional authoritarianism, gentleman's club, entrepreneurialism, informalism and careerist.

In turn, she inspired me to realise that focusing on leadership in the police service rather than on masculinities would both provide scope for my inquiry and be much more inclusive of others' interests and concerns. A collaborative inquiry into developing ourselves (both men and women) as leaders would be far more congruent with the type of inclusive masculinity I espouse than a group of well-intentioned men helping me with my inquiry. I decided to convene an inquiry that would embody the values by which I seek to live as a man and not merely examine them.

The result was the Hertfordshire Action Inquiry Group (AIG): *Developing Ourselves as Leaders*, comprising men and women from many parts of the organisation committed to exploring and improving our own unique and individually situated practices as leaders. Issues of gender were rarely subject to more than tangential attention but, in the very way we conducted ourselves, the group cut across the hierarchical and patriarchal norms of the organisation. I learned that the process of such a collaborative inquiry itself, rather than the findings it may produce, can be a significant organisational intervention. Experiencing this first-hand has transformed my understanding of "research" and its potential for promoting cultural change. Although not framed as Participative Action Research, I believe our inquiry was indeed an act of liberation – at least for those involved in it.¹³

Literature and other influences

As well as the writers I have already mentioned, I would like to identify two particular sources that have influenced my thinking about men and the "problematizing" of masculinity. The first is bell hooks. Her chapter *Choosing the margin as a space of radical openness* contains many insights that I find helpful. At the risk (as a white man) of "re-colonising" this territory, I claim that I and many men are, paradoxically, marginalised from our own lives by oppressive notions of masculinity - such as those I believe to prevail in the police service. She speaks of the need to "create spaces within that culture of domination if we are to survive intact" (p148) and she identifies ... "marginality as much more than a site

¹³ I write extensively about the Action Inquiry Group in *ChapterFive: Reshaping my professional identity*

of deprivation... it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance" (p149).

Collinson and Hearn, in two articles *Naming Men as Men* and *Breaking the Silence: On men, masculinities and managers* introduced me to the idea of multiple masculinities, of masculinity as something that we "do" and of... "the strange silence ... [reflecting] ... an embedded and taken-for-granted association, even conflation of men with organisational power, authority and prestige" (Ibid. p1). These ideas have contributed to my understanding of an oppressive, disembodied masculinity that, if we allow it, requires us to surrender our authentic selves and our integrity in order to "belong".

Important as these ideas have been, when I look round my bookshelves at the forty or fifty books and articles about men and masculinity, I notice that the vast majority (certainly of those I have actually read) come from very different genres. Mythopoetic works include *Iron John*, *Men and the Water of Life*, *The Hero's Journey Of Water and the Spirit*; books in the Jungian tradition such as *In Midlife*, *Absent Fathers Lost Sons*, *The Soul's Code*, *Beyond the Hero*; literary classics like *The Odyssey*, *The Iliad*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Zorba the Greek*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, and I see a few self-help books such as *Manhood* and *Navigator*.

It is to volumes such as these that I return time and again to bathe in their nourishing stories and draw strength from connection with archetypal energies. That is not to deny the importance of pro-feminist, socio-political, academic writings on masculinities, nor is it to be blind to the criticisms of mythopoetic writings, which range from "reactionary, conservative, backward-looking" to the potential fascistic dangers of an uncritical application of mythic categories to contemporary political affairs. Some rail against "essentialist" masculinism and claim that the mythopoetic men's movement represents a sexist, homophobic backlash against the advance of feminism.

I cannot deny that this may be the case in some instances but I have not once, in all the men's workshops and retreats I have attended, ever experienced any such sentiment or behaviour. Nor is that my reading of those texts. Again, I am with Tacey in valuing both the therapy culture (with its emphasis on healing men's

pain) and the academic culture (with its emphasis on redefining men's power). He expounds this beautifully in the following quotation :

Academic men's studies and the popular men's movement, however, do have more in common than either would perhaps care to realise. Both groups inhabit a post-patriarchal world, and while the therapy culture *feels* the legacy of an outworn patriarchy in the empty heart and suffering soul, academic culture *thinks* about how to overthrow the remaining structures of political patriarchy. Both cultures will have to come together in a future radicalising discourse. (p13)

I believe I have moved some way towards embracing both these cultures. But it is difficult and I have experienced the intolerance born of fear and disdain of one camp for the other and felt the tension of trying to bridge them. A cameo from a conference on Gendering Management Learning at Manchester University in March this year (2000) offers a "real life" illustration. The event was attended by about fifty participants - about twice as many women as men, virtually all academics. Despite attempts by some speakers to talk from their lived experience as gendered people, the predominant discourse was cerebral and abstract, with a strong leaning towards pro-feminist, socio-political orthodoxy. Here is an extract from the notes I wrote on the train returning from the conference, within two hours of the events they describe. My spoken words are shown in *italics*:

Gendering Management Learning

In the closing round of the day I begin to feel uncomfortable. The day's discussions have somehow missed the point. We have spoken about dichotomies and false dichotomies between masculinity and femininity, male and female, gendered subjects etc. but rarely if at all have we spoken of men and women. I do not think it is possible to separate gender entirely from biological sex, though it seems fashionable to do so. Qi Xu [one of the participants] has just given a short input on Yin and Yang and I want to respond to this.

There is something about allowing oneself to move fully into one of the dualities that can, under the right conditions, provide a portal through into the other. I am thinking of experience in men's groups such as Gaunt's House¹⁴ where expressing our aggressive

¹⁴ See *In Search of Spirit* earlier in this chapter

energy through drumming and the fire dance lead to the place of compassion and love at the water and earth shrines.

I relate this to the group, describing it as an aspect of my experience and practice. There is an immediate frisson in the room. Several women respond (angrily?), questioning me. "Is this just a single event enabling men to access this different energy, or has it made any real difference when you get back into the "real" world?" *Yes. I believe so. I cannot help but take that deeply embodied knowing with me.* "It sounds like Iron John, tree-hugging stuff" *Well, I think the stereotype is quite close to the reality.* "Is this for men only?" *Yes* "Could I come on one of these events" *No.* "I'm sorry, I can only hear the men's room here. Men have always had privileged access to this sort of space" *No reply* "Are you aware of the political dimension?" *Of course, I understand that it has political implications.*

I am feeling a bit under siege. I will stop talking soon. I wanted to raise a possibility, not defend a position. This is simply my experience – that, sometimes, by moving fully into one energy, it becomes possible to connect with its polarity. The Yin Yang model shows that energetic movement. So, too, does Gestalt – which enables some sort of dialectic between polarities, making it possible to transcend them... to move to a different position. I just want to suggest that there are other ways of trying to connect these two positions [masculine and feminine] without trying to occupy the space between them or to get stuck by trying to avoid either place. I think, maybe, that is why these energies leak out destructively in the workplace, because we don't have the means to give them healthy expression. I am struggling to find the words here; I don't have the vocabulary to explain what I mean more clearly.

This is an incomplete and pretty inaccurate record of the exchanges. Interesting, in hindsight, that no other man spoke... fear, perhaps, not wishing to be identified with what I was saying. There were many nods around the room Judi Marshall, Elena Antonacopoulou and others I cannot name. Elena supported my "speaking from the heart" and afterwards, Judi came over and said she liked the way I held my ground and dealt with the "potentially explosive" situation. "We have come a long way that we could handle that today".

I am still too close to the events to judge their significance and I think Judi is seeing more deeply and more perceptively than I am. It would be very useful to hear her considered comments about what was going on in the room. I was surprised by the vehemence of some of the questions (naïve of me). I am glad I spoke in the big group. I wanted to

claim legitimacy for my kind of inquiry and for embodied knowledge (I want to say the primacy of embodied knowledge but this would be to fall back into a hierarchical mode).

Judi Marshall who was also there (indeed she intervened at one point to calm the exchanges) later wrote to me:

So I think “the personal”, embodied, “how we live” had skated past us a bit... and into this, you spoke – clearly from your own experience about living, engendered. You did not stereotype yourself and I was shocked that people who spoke seemed to. You were, in my view, conceptual and experiential. But people did not respond to both and therefore “hear” more fully.

We have a long way to go to integrate the experiential and conceptual traditions. Indeed, as Judi also said: “Perhaps we are more unusual at Bath than I usually bother to think.”

Driftwood and Dogmeat

There is one more “tale from the men’s room” that demands to be heard; the story of *Driftwood and Dogmeat* - about my close and loving friendship with Chris Cole¹⁵ -which lies close to the heart of this long running inquiry into men and masculinity. Like Stuart Miller whose book *Men and Friendship* I read in the early 1990s, until meeting Chris I had a strong sense of a void in my life where male friendship should have been. I intend to close this chapter with an open letter to Chris, which will I think, speak for itself:

Dear Chris,

The recipe for *Pork Chops Abileke* hangs on the wall in my flat with its picture of you, beside the fire, looking short of sleep and several gin and tonics to the good. That was the penultimate evening of our sailing trip to Ithaca in 1996, and the last time we went on holiday together. God, how we laughed!

¹⁵ A fellow police officer I met at Bramshill in 1990 – see *Police Stories*

There are also two collages of photographs, one of our first sailing trip and the other of our walking holiday in Morocco. They are also on the walls but temporarily covered up with things Alison and I have made. As I write those words, their symbolism is apparent. I fear that meeting Alison and leaving Sara has preoccupied me so much recently that there has not been enough room for us?

Anyway, *Pork Chops Abileke* always make me smile with pleasure and it seems to catch the imagination of everyone who sees it. Richard (Olivier) who has done so much menswork, even written a book about it, saw it a few weeks ago and said: "That is fabulous. You know I've never done that. Never really spent that sort of time alone with another man." Looking at it now, I particularly like the fact that it acknowledges all the years of friendship that preceded that night and made it possible.

Do you remember when we first met? You came to work with me at Bramshill in 1990-91 to help develop the new-style Accelerated Promotion Course. We spent months working through the details. I could never remember the sequence and timing of the modules and would call plaintively to you every other day to come and explain them to me one more time. It took me a while to realise that I liked you as well as respecting your mind and quickness of wit. You were a great support and a valued colleague but it wasn't until later when I was preparing to leave Bramshill that it began to dawn on me how much I would miss you.

I didn't say much about it until the farewell dinner. You came over to the flat I had borrowed to help prepare the food for the meal and afterwards I gave each of you a small present (what was it? – a book I bet). I remember saying that I felt as though our relationship had been like father and son and then correcting myself and saying that, actually, you were the younger brother I never had. It felt like a risky thing to say because, despite my outward confidence, I knew that I was letting my guard down, opening my heart to you. I was not used to allowing such vulnerability (I am still not, whatever fine words to the contrary you might hear me speak).

I need not have feared. A week or so later you wrote a letter telling me what our time together had meant to you closing with an invitation I was slow to recognise "If you ever want a travelling companion to Skiathos..." and signed "From your brother-in-arms." I've probably never told you that I still have the letter, pasted in a scrapbook.

Two and a half years later, in May 1994, we flew to Preveza for the first time to pick up our yacht – the good ship *Helios* – from Lakka. I guess we met up half a dozen times or so in the interim – at Bramshill, in Hertfordshire and Devon. You came to see me a few months after leaving Bramshill. I was on my own, house-sitting in Aston near Stevenage. You walked into the kitchen, sat down and said; “Trish has left me.” I remember, now, your shock and distress and how I just sat and listened across the table when what I wanted to do was hug you. I’m sorry that I suppressed that desire. I have since learned to trust my intuition. I have also learned that men can touch men – straight or gay – without the world falling apart. You probably knew that already – but I didn’t.

I felt very privileged and touched that you shared so much with me. How open was I with you at the time? Had I told you about Margaret, for example, or was I still maintaining the fiction of a happy marriage? I can’t remember – but I do know that our friendship moved to a deeper level that day. I appreciated your honesty and, as the months passed and we spent more time together, came to admire your determination to create the life you wanted for yourself, resisting the temptation to fall into another full-time relationship with Leslie. Later, when Sara and I parted, I often drew inspiration from the way you handled the split with Trish.

A year or so passed and in May 1993 we arranged to meet in Guildford for supper. The day before, I wrote in my journal; “I am excited about seeing Chris tomorrow... could we do something together next year? Sailing? I am afraid that I would bore him or not be adventurous enough.” In the event, I said nothing about my fears and we agreed to go sailing twelve months’ later. It amuses me now to see how cautiously we manoeuvred ourselves towards that holiday. Perhaps we both sensed how important it would be – the single best week of my life!

Despite my qualms, which almost led to us going to Cortijo Romero instead (so there would be other people around), we did charter a boat to sail the Ionian Sea together, in May 1994. In front of me now, as I write, are the collage of photographs from my bedroom wall (stripped of its temporary covering) and the half shell I kept for myself when I gave you the other half at Parga on our journey back.

The memories come flooding back: the bright yellow butterflies dancing across the wave tops to flap lazily around the deck as we hove to and sunbathed ; dancing with the old Greek men in out of the way tavernas; our personal beach barbecue in Emerald Bay;

swimming naked by the light of the full moon; talking late into the night; leaping fully-clothed into the water to chase fish; capsizing the windsurfer as we tried to sail tandem; the birth of "Driftwood and Dogmeat" as we (wisely I think) opted to go behind the oil tanker; running aground and winching ourselves off; the pervasive smell of diesel below decks (urghh); the fireflies we drunkenly peed on; me asking if snorkelling was supposed to be difficult (and you removing the excess plastic moulding to create an airway and patiently explaining that it was a lot easier when breathing through something larger than a drinking straw); running before the wind and sailing at top speed into Lakka on the final day, revelling in conditions that had driven others into harbour hours before; you singing Bungalow Bill (enthusiastically if not tunefully) and me heaving on the tiller like an Olympic oarsman to keep on course.

That week, you taught me to say "Yes" to life. I discovered that the moon needs the sun, that my slower, deeper rhythms are enlivened by your brightness and warmth. You helped me find some of that solar energy inside myself, helped me become more connected to the world about us and more willing to take some of the risks demanded by life's adventure. Do you remember looking back at Lakka from the ferry as we began the journey home and seeing the sun and the full moon both high in the sky above the island? I believe that we were blessed by archetypal powers - Helios and Selene - who enabled us to transcend the bounds of friendship to find a love that is rarely enacted between men but lies dormant in all of us only wanting the courage and opportunity to emerge.

What could possibly follow that? We were probably wise to do something different the next year even though the Hotel from Hell in Marrakesh was a bit of a let down. We both had twenty-four hour stomach bugs from dodgy food and the rooms were so awful that we moved four times in a week. I still feel apologetic for having suggested it in the first place. But it was not all bad - we had some good days walking in the mountains, you taught me to haggle, and we brushed our teeth in gin and tonic for want of drinkable water. I missed the close companionship of sharing a boat - having you all to myself for a few hours each day. Time together is precious and I resented having to share you with other people.

Unlike the sailing holiday, which nourished us, I think the trip to Morocco drew on those resources to get us through with sense of humour intact. The adversity (minor I admit,

in comparison with the hardships suffered by the great Victorian explorers) seemed to temper our relationship, testing and confirming its endurance under pressure.

After that we were ready to go sailing again, this time (1996) to Ithaca. Homer's majestic tale of the wanderings of Odysseus and of his eventual return has long fascinated me as a metaphor for the journey of men in mid-life and as a parallel to my own story. You and I have both succumbed to the charms of Circe and Calypso. On the second or third day we sailed close-hauled for eight hours to Vassiliki, heeling over until the gunwales streamed with water, touching 10.5 knots as we pushed the boat to its limits. But I got dehydrated and next day the sea got up – a tricky swell – and by the time we landed at Frikes I had lost my sea legs and my nerve. We spent the next day ashore exploring the island, climbing Pilicata (Hill of Hermes) to the spot from which you can see three seas, where Odysseus' palace is reputed to have been. Ever since then, Cavafy's poem has reminded me that it is the journey to Ithaca that really matters, not the destination itself. Nevertheless, for me, making the passage to Ithaca together sealed the covenant of our friendship – not mere travellers but fellow-pilgrims.

The next morning we woke early, looked out to sea, and you declared it calm and safe to go. Hesitant, I begged another hour's sleep and returned to my cabin still nervous of the open water. I knew we could not stay in port forever and made up my mind to trust your judgement. At the appointed time, I came back on deck; we slipped our moorings and motored out of Frikes onto a virtual millpond. True friend, you did not once rebuke me or laugh at my ridiculous fears as we made our way to Abileke Bay to cook the best pork chops in the world – ever!

Then, somehow, over the next couple of years we drifted apart. I have often wondered why. Perhaps we mortals are simply not destined to do more than touch the mountain tops, living our everyday lives in the foothills and lowlands. I did not see it coming and, by the time I realised it had happened, felt powerless to do anything about it. I wrote you a couple of letters (unsent) and spoke to you once or twice, asking if everything was all right. Why couldn't I just tell you how heartsick I felt and how much I missed you?

You had your own troubles and I was pretty wrapped up in Alison and consumed by the misery of divorce and separation from the kids. I guess I was not really there for you and I should have been. So, for a time we became more distant and our friendship cooled. You refocused your life and spent increasing periods working abroad. I stayed at

Bramshill getting on with my job and putting more and more energy into my PhD. And that could well have been that, except that the flame was never entirely extinguished and we both slowly healed in our respective lairs. Is it an inevitable male characteristic, do you suppose, to lick our wounds in private?

I was a bit nervous when I first came out to Abu Dhabi in May last year to work with you on the Police Commanders Programme. I did not want to build up my hopes too high and I think we were both wary about spending too much time together. Nevertheless, it was good to see you and by the end of the week I felt much easier in your company. I flew back to England optimistic, feeling that we had turned the corner and I was delighted when, later you invited me to come back out in December to repeat my "slot" on the course.

My fiftieth birthday fell on 12th December, a couple of days after my session ended and, thinking about it over the summer, knew that I wanted to celebrate it with you. Cue for camels, Bedouin tents, the old soukh in Dubai, champagne and dinner cruise along the



Corniche at night. It was a magical time (despite the back pain and the walking stick). The years seemed to fall away as we worked and played, laughed and shared confidences once more. Changing flights so that we could fly back together not only enabled me to give you a rare drubbing at backgammon, it also seems to me symbolic of the renewal of our close and loving friendship. Driftwood and Dogmeat are back in business!

Yours ever, Geoff

2nd July 2000

I gave the letter to Chris soon after writing it. He had come round to my flat for a drink. I sat nervously while he read it. Then he stood up, stretched out his arms towards me and, as I stood in turn, embraced me. His gesture said all I needed to know.

Commentary

In this commentary on *The Men's Room*, I focus on three of the twelve distinctive standards of judgement and criteria of validity described in *Chapter One: Living Inquiry*, exemplifying their embodiment in, and emergence from, my practice of *living inquiry*. I have chosen Experiential Grounding, Self-generated Creativity and Textual Quality as particularly, though not exclusively, relevant to this chapter and I invite you to bear them in mind throughout your reading of the thesis.

Experiential Grounding: I am starting here because my commitment to anchor my *living inquiry* in the bedrock of my experience is the foundation of all that follows. In the early sections of *The Men's Room*, I describe my participation in several men's workshops and ritual retreats. In *Childhood's End* and *In Search of Spirit*, for example, I think you will recognise how I consciously chose to step into new experiences: engaging with other men at a deeper level of intimacy and, through ritual, opening myself to encounters with the spirit world. Less dramatically, but equally importantly, in later sections I describe my first involvement with collaborative inquiry in the *Men's Development in Organisations* group and the ongoing support I received during my separation and divorce as a member of Peter Neall's men's group.

I think you will also see how these experiences have influenced my growing understanding of men's development and of my own identity as a man, enabling me to speak and write authentically and authoritatively about these issues. I believe that the recording of my presentation on *The Future of Men at Work* demonstrates these embodied qualities. It was made within three weeks of meeting the "three strange angels" at Gaunt's House and I was, quite literally, inspired by that experience. The chapter closes with *Driftwood and Dogmeat*, an open letter to my best friend Chris. Here I am touching several levels of experience: the experience of our close and loving friendship and of our adventures together, that of writing and giving the letter to Chris, and that of sharing it with a wider audience. How else could I know about these things, except by doing them? As the poet Kabir says¹⁶: "If you have not lived through something it is not true".

¹⁶ The last line of *How much is not true*, translated by Robert Bly in p28

Self-generated Creativity: In my view, this attribute permeates the entire text and is apparent in many different forms. I have located this commentary here because the release of this energy seems to have been triggered by my involvement in men's work. Perhaps the most obvious forms are the stories, poems, drawings and paintings that feature in all six chapters of the thesis. I have included them where they seem to me to be integral to the inquiry process rather than to illustrate or enliven more conventional academic writing (though I think they do incidentally have that effect). For example, early in this chapter, in *Childhood's End*, I turn to poetry and painting to convey the impact of "meeting" my long-dead father during a ritual at a men's workshop. Not a natural poet or painter, I sometimes have a powerful and spontaneous urge to create "artistically rendered forms". At such times I often experience heightened emotional sensitivity, writing or painting through my tears – whether of pain or joy.

At the highest level, my self-generated creativity is expressed in the evolving form of my life as I claim the right (within bounds) to live the life I choose. Thus, in *The Men's Room*, my deepening understanding of the possibilities for male friendship is enacted in my relationship with Chris, described in *Driftwood and Dogmeat*. In such ways, through self-generated creativity, my originality of mind is demonstrated both in the text and beyond the text, in living my life of inquiry.

Textual Quality: I am particularly conscious, as I prepare this thesis for examination, of an imperative to communicate my learning effectively. From the very beginning however, writerly conceit has demanded a well-written text. In *Chapter Four: Healing Journeys* I describe how, just as the world is going digital and multi-media, I have fallen in love with writing. I am a writer (as well as an educator) and I am proud of the text I have written but you, the reader, must be the final arbiter. I can assert, for example, that *In Search of Spirit* meets my criteria of an open and accessible text in which my meanings are clear and the images rich and evocative but I cannot know – unless you tell me – whether you agree with my judgement or whether I succeed in holding your interest and attention.

I think *The Men's Room* contains a variety of excellent passages and striking images but the interplay between *mythos* and *logos* is minimal. This improves in subsequent chapters as I develop the capacity to integrate experiential narratives,

reflective and analytical writing, stories and imagery with the ideas of others to theorise about the nature of *living inquiry*. The section *Once upon a time* in *Chapter Four: Healing Journeys*, in which I develop ideas of narrative identity and mythic resonance, is a good example of such integration.