

MaleCall



Journal of the Unitarian Universalist Men's Network
UUMeN, P.O. Box 3070, Madison, Wisconsin 53704-0070
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Summer! 2004

BIRTHDAY PARTIES MAKE GOOD USE OF CHURCH SPACE

by Frank E. Robertson

Little did the Men's Group of First Parish, Plymouth, Massachusetts, realize that they were creating a great "boy-friendly" space when they set out to renovate the large downstairs room in the Parish House a few years ago. Armed with cans of paint, rollers, and toolboxes, they tackled that big job and transformed a dingy hall into a bright, cheerful, open, tile-floored space with side kitchen and restrooms.



A couple of Twelve-Step groups began to rent the space. A couch and several chairs filled in one corner; but, miraculously, the hall remained uncluttered and rarely used by the church until recently. The new Director of Religious Education, Kym Johnson, had her eye on that space and decided to rent it for her son Kevin's birthday party. From there, several ideas flowed into the planning process.

First, her spouse, Tom, is an active leader in the church and a core member of the Men's Group which had been discussing ways to encourage active positive experiences for boys at the church. Second, both Kym and Tom have been seeking ways to reach

out to new families and build up the Church School program.

Fathers - At the Movies

Father's Day (June 20) might inspire a trip to the movies (or the video store) to see a film that contributes to this annual focus on fathering. It's a very fertile field, with lots of angles for men to pursue, and sharing a provocative film experience (any time of year) can initiate much discussion that might not otherwise make it past the editing room of our hearts.

Eight members of the Unitarian Church of Evanston, IL, Men's Group went together to see the movie "Big Fish" on a winter Saturday afternoon. (From the Chicago Tribune: "In this whimsical mix of truth and tall tale, Tim Burton takes a painful subject - an estranged son's reconciliation during

After lots of preparation, the special February Saturday for Kevin's seventh birthday celebration arrived. Six boys and three girls attended. Rather than use the outside entrance to that lower level hall, Kym arranged welcome signs that led the parents and their children through the main entrance along a hallway decorated with pictures and brochures about the Church School. In that way, they were introduced to the Church School before they arrived downstairs to the party and then would learn about it as they left.

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About UUMeN

The Unitarian Universalist Men's Network is a continental membership organization for UU men (which also welcomes other gender allies). Our purpose is to build and sustain a mature, liberal religious masculinity. Our primary objectives are to: develop a continental resource network; support the personal and spiritual growth of men at the local, district and continental levels; and collaborate with other UU groups who share our interests and commitments. Members receive a quarterly newsletter, may vote at our Annual Meeting held in June at General Assembly, and are eligible for discounts on materials.

2003-2004 Steering Council

Neil Chethik (KY), president, 2004
Jim Jaeger (WI), treasurer, 2004
Bob Hospadaruk (MI), 2004
Kenneth Beldon (FL), 2005
Frank Robertson (MA), 2005
Dave Woods (IL), 2005
Drew Johnston (WA), 2006
Todd Strickland (CO), 2006
Dick Whitaker (IL), 2006

Tom Owen-Towle, President Emeritus

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organization.*

MaleCall

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Please send all submissions and concerns via e-mail (info@uumen.org) to:

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WWW.UUMEN.ORG

FROM THE PRESIDENT

I remember well my first day in a men's group.

The year was 1987, I had just turned 30 years old, and at least from the outside, my life seemed stable. I held a prestigious job at a newspaper in the San Francisco Bay Area. And I had enough confidence to have just married a woman who captivated and challenged me.



But beneath the put-together façade, I lived with a swirl of anxiety – anxiety about my career, my ability to be true to my new wife, my tendency to compromise my integrity, my habit of seeking escape when the going got tough. I knew that there was something unsustainable about the tensions that churned inside me.

So when I heard about the Berkeley men's group, I finagled an invitation and decided to show up. On a slowly darkening fall evening, I joined a circle of men for the first time. And what happened there changed me.

As we checked in to start the meeting, I sat in awe as one man after another spoke of the actual *struggles* in his life – the insecurities, fears, anger, traumas – as well as the successes. I had never before heard men speak of their trials, their troubles. Even though I knew deep down that I didn't "have it all together," I had somehow bought into the myth that other men did. On this night, for the first time, I met men who were openly complex, paradoxical, and in some measure of distress.

In short, I met men who were much like me.

I stayed in that men's group for four years. Even though we have since dispersed around the country, many of the men who participated in the group are still my close friends. A few ended up working with me to help build and sustain the UU Men's Network. Like me, they had experienced first-hand the value of men gathering with one another in a community of trust and support.

What is the value?

I can only speak for myself. In a circle of trusted men – with confidentiality assured – I can reveal my struggles as a man. I can ask for advice that only other men can offer. In the stories of my fellow participants, I can see my reflection. I can forgive other men for their foibles, and begin to forgive myself for mine. I can ask to be held accountable to my highest ideals. I can lean into the strength of men, and support others when I am strong enough.

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("From the President" Continued from page 2)

In most ways, I am still the same man I was in 1987. I have the same tendencies, and many of the same anxieties. But I am a new man too. As a father and mid-lifer, I have a new set of concerns and life challenges. And as a regular participant in men's groups ever since – I've been in my current group in Kentucky since 1996 – I no longer feel as alone as I once did. I'm still married to the same woman, but I have male friends, too. And I am a much better friend to myself.

My experience in men's groups is one of the reasons I have been so committed to UUMeN. Through this organization, I have the opportunity to help bring other UU men into a brotherhood that has been so beneficial to me.

If you desire a men's group like the one I have described, or another kind of men's group, we at UUMeN want to help you create it. Contact us at one of the numbers or addresses on the front of this newsletter. We have lots of resources, written and human, and we're ready to share them.

If you already have a men's group and would like to help others realize the benefits that you do, take out your checkbook and give us your support. Your membership (\$25 a year) or tax-deductible donation (any amount) will be used to help us pay for the resources that we offer to UU men. It will be used to spread the word that a man need not, in Thoreau's words, live a life of "quiet desperation," but can turn his life into one of passionate celebration.

In brotherhood,



From **Neil Chethik**,
Lexington, KY (nchet@aol.com)

POWERFUL GRIEVING PROCESS: A TESTIMONIAL

By Earl Kendall

A famous coach recently said, "Big boys don't cry, but men do."

A while back, after 36 years of marriage, I went through both a divorce and estrangement from my son, and while grieving these losses I discovered something that I now consider to have been absolutely vital in helping me.

The day I knew we were going to be divorced, I found myself driving around for more than an hour, listening on the CD player to the saddest songs I had and allowing myself to shed a rather constant stream of tears. Just after I arrived home, the psychologist—who had unsuccessfully tried to help us reconcile—called to see how we were doing. I distinctly recall expressing great satisfaction about what I had been doing, having found it to be such a relief.

Since then, on several occasions, I have reconfirmed the cathartic value of this process.

Now for those of you close to my age, I am not talking about the mouth-as-big-as-your-head, "Katzenjammer-kid" bawling, but rather a very focused and private experience. Some might be inclined, at first, to call this "wallowing in grief," but it is exactly the opposite when I feel the results. And it is not the same as "music therapy," in which one seeks an elevation of mood through spirited music, for example.

I sometimes describe it as simply "turning a faucet" to drain this tank full of grief. It helps (but is not necessary) to listen to songs that feel most appropriate, and for me it was two by Whitney Houston: "Didn't

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GENERAL ASSEMBLY WORKSHOPS: FOCUSING ON YOUNG ADULTS, GAY-STRAIGHT DIALOGUE

In its 10-year history, the UU Men's Network has focused a lot of attention on programs for men of, shall we say, relatively advanced age. We have also addressed how to make Religious Education programs more "boy-friendly." So at this year's UUA General Assembly in Long Beach, we'll be launching an effort to better connect UUMeN with young adults men, those 18 to 35 years old.

The Rev. Kenneth Beldon, of Hollywood, FL, will lead a workshop called "**Putting Away Childish Things? Transitioning to Young Manhood.**" Ken, who is himself a young adult, says that young manhood "is where youth, adulthood, parenthood and the search for professional identity meet. Sometimes they merge smoothly; sometimes they collide." Ken and two other men will launch a conversation on how to make these changes most effectively.

The workshop will be held on Sat., June 26, at 1:30 pm in Room 102-C at the Long Beach (CA) Convention Center. The first 100 young adults (of either gender) who show up for the workshop will receive a free one-year membership to UUMeN (a \$25 value, donated by another member).

UUMeN's second workshop at the 2004 G.A. will focus on the struggle that gay and straight men sometimes have in communicating with each other. This workshop, "**Between the Lines: Gay/Straight Men In Dialogue**" will be led by Rev. Drew Johnson (Bainbridge Island, WA), who is gay, and Todd Strickland (Golden, CO), who is straight.

Here's what they say about their workshop: "Gay and straight men...struggle with invisible barriers and questionable assumptions. Join us as we open a creative dialogue in which men of different orientations can safely share and learn from each other." This workshop will immediately follow the young adult workshop (described above). It will be held at 3:15 p.m. in 102-C at the Long Beach Convention Center.

Men, women, gay, straight and all others are welcome to both of these workshops.

("Powerful Grieving Process" Continued from page 3)

We Almost Have It All?" and "Where Do Broken Hearts Go?" I have played these songs over and over, up to 10 or 15 times at one sitting, whatever it took to drain the grief—and it always did. Gradually, both the frequency of these sessions and the repeat rate of songs decreased, and eventually were not needed at all.

Sometimes now, on the way to a party I will let a sad song "get to" me for a moment, and I feel much better when I get there than if I had "steered" myself to avoid the feelings generated by anticipation and memory.

Meanwhile, after 4 years of total alienation from my son, despite counseling, letter writing, etc., which were to no avail, I can report a breakthrough. It came through the program of the Landmark Education, also called Landmark Forum, which helped me to deal with this issue in such a way that my son and I have happily reconciled.

Earl Kendall, MD, is a Men's Group member at the Clearwater, FL, UU congregation and welcomes feedback—positive (including similar experience) and negative—at: ekendall@tampabay.rr.com. He also cites as helpful inspiration these UUMeN books: "New Men, Deeper Hungers" by Tom Owen-Towle (esp. the chapter "To Open the Tear Ducts") and "Father Loss" (about the ways men grieve) by Neil Chethik.

The **UU Men's Network** invites you to connect with our resources!

www.uumen.org

AT OUR **UUMEN** BOOTH IN THE EXHIBIT AREA:

Visit with friendly UUMeN leaders!

Look over our many handouts and materials that support UU men's programming, incl. the latest on "Boy-Friendly" Religious Ed.

View our intriguing PowerPoint presentation and traveling web site.

Find out where our UUMeN Annual Meeting will be held (Sat. breakfast), plus any special UUMeN gatherings.

CHECK OUT THESE PROGRAM EVENTS:

Putting Away Childish Things?

Transitioning to Young Manhood

Lead Presenter

Rev. Kenneth Beldon

Saturday, June 26, 1:30 p.m.

Convention Center Rm. 102C

(Free UUMeN membership to first 100 young adults who

Between the Lines:

Gay/Straight Men In Dialogue

Presenters :

Revs. Drew Johnston

and Todd Strickland

Saturday, June 26, 3:15 p.m.



UUMeN 2004 ANNUAL MEETING TO BE HELD IN LONG BEACH, CA



The UUMeN by-laws require that each year a nominating committee offer a slate of candidates to fill those Steering Council terms that will be coming to an end. The elections are held at the Annual Meeting of UUMeN during each General Assembly, this year in Long Beach, CA.

This year's slate of nominees offers these fine men, all of whom are continuing their good work on behalf of UUMeN:

Jim Jaeger, of Madison, WI

Bob Hospadaruk, of Ann Arbor, MI

Neil Chethik, of Lexington, KY

The vote on these candidates will occur at the **2004 Annual Meeting**, which will be held at **8 am on Sat., June 26, 2004**, in the Marina Room of the Westin Hotel in Long Beach. **All are invited.** Any UUMeN member may offer further nominations, in addition to those offered by the nominating committee.

At the Annual Meeting, members also will be voting on some changes to the UUMeN By-Laws that will create a vice president/secretary position. The Steering Committee has approved these changes in order to better prepare future UUMeN presidents for their leadership duties. Other updates and emerging agenda will also be considered, as we meet face-to-face once again.

For more information about the annual meeting, contact us at info@uumen.org (our new e-mail address).

(Continued from page 1)

As they entered the hall, they were greeted by the Johnsons and decorations portraying the theme their son had chosen for his party: Pokemon characters. Children went to a table and made figures out of play dough. As soon as all were there, some more active games began. The children had been alerted to dress informally and be prepared to play active running games.

For one game, Kym had taken an old sheet and cut strips of cloth to tuck into the pants of the children like long tails. The object of the game was to run after other children's tails and step on them without letting your tail get stepped on. The tails were loosely tucked in so that they fell out when stepped on and could be tucked back in to continue the play.

Soon the children were playing a version of Musical Chairs using Pokemon mats, and that was followed by a relay race where children from each of two teams ran to a box filled with plastic eggs and tried to carry one back to their team with a spoon. Lots of eggs dropped and lots were raced back to each team's container. The adults encouraged the fun of the game rather than placing stress on winners or losers. Everyone could be cheered on.

Toward the end of the series of active games, the children danced to music and ran after a laser spot moving around on the floor to the music. The party was a boy's delight and, of course, girls loved it too.

For refreshments, each child decorated cup cakes at Pokemon table settings, Later, presents were opened near the end of the two-hour party. Clean-up was a

breeze. Some of the children helped, but the long, low table and open space of the room were easy to clean compared to the average home after a party.

Two weekends later, another boy of the Church School, Adam Haughn, celebrated his sixth birthday in the same place, this time with a pirate theme. Nine boys and nine girls attended and the open space of the room was used to the hilt. The Haughns greeted their guests in pirate costume and handed out sword-like balloons to each child who then were urged to run about fencing with others. Balloon volleyball and a treasure hunt were other activities.



Adam's mother had found lots of suggestions on a web site (deadmentellnotes.com). She told an interactive story and the children made a pirate flag and played Pin the Monkey on the Palm Tree. Adam's dad is also a member of the Men's Group, and both parents were influenced by efforts to explore ways to transform the church

into a more boy-friendly place.

The Johnsons and the Haughns hope that other birthday parties will be held in that room on the lower level of the Parish House and have begun to get the word around among the families of their children's friends. They are also intentional in extending an invitation to those families to attend their Church School if they are not already involved somewhere else. They have kept the rental for such parties low at \$25 as an encouragement.

Frank Robertson is a retired minister of Religious Education, living in Plymouth, MA, and a member of the UUMeN Steering Council.

SAVE THE MALES: Changing Men Changing the World

Is the latest book by Tom Owen-Towle, president emeritus of UUMeN.

SAVE THE MALES boldly tackles urgent topics such as:

- men choosing to be brothers;
- men as religious beings;
- men joining ethics and power;
- men saying "no" to violence; and
- men graying gracefully as elders.

Thandeka, Associate Professor of Theology and Culture at Meadville Lombard Theological School, praises the book with these words: "*Owen-Towle's passion, presence and his radical attentiveness to men's stories shine from every story in this book.*"

SAVE THE MALES is available for \$14.95 plus \$2.00 (shipping/handling) directly from Tom Owen-Towle, 3303 Second Ave. San Diego CA 92103 (uutom@cox.net)



("Fathers—At the Movies" Continued from page 1)

his father's terminal illness—and weaves around it a gossamer web of artifice and private mythology.”)

As reported by UUMeN Steering Council member, Dave Woods, this film stirred them so effectively that they announced the topic for their next scheduled group session as “Father/Son Relationships,” based on “Big Fish.” But they didn't stop there. They also publicized this program widely and opened the session to all adult men of the congregation, to promote the growth of their group.

Another Steering Council member, Jim Jaeger, recommended these two films, in a similar vein:

“**Tully**” involves a father and two sons on a farm in Nebraska. It's great on both father/son and brother/brother themes.

“**The Rookie**” (about a high school baseball coach urged by his team and his young son to try out for the Big Leagues) is a true story—and the guy makes it!

2005 Sermon Award Now Open! \$500 Award

Plan to offer a sermon on men's issues during the next year—or encourage your minister to do so! Anyone (lay or clergy, any gender) can submit a sermon for the annual UUMeN sermon contest - and maybe win \$500. The sermon should explore a men's issue related to the purposes and objectives of UUMeN (see page 2). It must be delivered in a UU congregation between April 1, 2004 and March 31, 2005. The submitted text should be single-spaced and less than 2,500 words.

Mail two hard copies (with a cover letter but no identifying mentions in the sermon copies) to UUMeN, PO Box 3070, Madison, WI 53704-0070, by the deadline of April 15, 2005. Rotating men's groups (supervised by a UUMeN Steering Council member) conduct the judging process. The award winner will receive \$500 and recognition at the 2005 UUA General Assembly in Fort Worth, TX (but need not be present).

See last year's winning sermon at
www.uumen.org !

MORE FATHER FILMS

Forty-four movies in which the relationship between a father and child is a central theme (from FatherLoss: How sons of all ages come to terms with the deaths of their dads, by Neil Chethik:

A River Runs Through It
Among the Cinders
Boyz 'N the 'Hood
Braveheart
Breaking Away
A Bronx Tale
The Brothers McMullen
Cinema Paradiso
Dad
Death of a Salesman
The Emerald Forest
Field of Dreams
The Full Monty
Get On the Bus
The Godfather
The Great Santini
The Homecoming
I Never Sang for My Father
Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade
Kolya
Kramer vs. Kramer
Legends of the Fall
Life Is Beautiful
The Lion King
Mi Familia
Mrs. Doubtfire
My Life
Nobody's Fool
Nothing in Common
October Sky
Ordinary People
A Perfect World
Pop
Pushing Hands
Rebel Without a Cause
Saving Private Ryan
Searching for Bobby Fischer
Shine
Smoke Signals
Sunder
This Boy's Life
To Kill a Mockingbird
The War
The Wedding Banquet

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UUMeN Membership Application and Renewal Form

Membership is valid for twelve months following the date of dues donation. Please also consider making an additional tax-deductible gift.

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| <input type="checkbox"/> MaleCall Only or Student, \$15 | <input type="checkbox"/> Other, \$ _____ |
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Please check each category above that applies to your tax-deductible financial contribution to UUMeN, and then complete the information requested to the right.

Members receive *MaleCall*, a quarterly newsletter, may vote at the UUMeN Annual Meeting and are eligible for discounts on UUMeN materials and event registrations.

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Name and Address of Congregation: _____

I support the purpose and objectives of the UUMeN and hereby apply for UUMeN membership.

Please renew my UUMeN membership.

Make checks payable in US funds to UUMeN. Send this form together with your tax-deductible dues remittance and any supporting gift to UUMeN, P.O. Box 3070, Madison, Wisconsin 53704-0070.