

The 1993 Men's Gathering

John Rowan

The first European Men's Gathering was held in Koszeg, Hungary, in July 1993. It was organised by Frank Cardelle, who has been very active in recent years in extending men's groups and activities throughout Eastern Europe and South America. I originally met him at a European Association for Humanistic Psychology conference in Zurich in 1986.

I got to Vienna a day or two later than most people, because I had an AHPP meeting in London on the previous day, but when I got there I was welcomed by Paul and Gerhard from Vienna and Ed from Michigan. Paul then drove us the few miles across the border to Koszeg, which is a small medieval border town, exquisitely preserved, and quite a tourist attraction to people from Hungary and Austria.

On the way occurred one of those incidents which show that things are still not quite normal. Paul had a computer and printer, which he was taking to the gathering to produce an address list. The customs people in Hungary decided that this could be sold, and wanted duty paid on it as an import. So Paul had to find the



equivalent of £2,000, which he would get back on his return. This all took a great deal of negotiation and sorting out, before we could go on our way.

We got to Koszeg, and found the school where the gathering was having its main meetings. On going in, we found we were the last to arrive, and were just in time to take part in the unification ceremony. Apparently two groups had been meeting for the last day or two in two different locations, and had now come together. We had to wait in the hallway, and were each given a T-shirt: at the top it said 'European MEN'S Gathering', followed by a globe with a map of Europe on it, surrounded by the words 'BUILDING A COMMUNITY TO HEAL THE EARTH', followed by '1993 Hungary', followed by the male symbol.

When we got into the hall, we found a circle of men standing with the arms round each other's shoulders. They applauded the four of us, and welcomed us into the circle. Forty green-and-white T-shirts formed the circle. Then we carried

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out a ceremony suggested by Sol Petersen, from the Mana Retreat Centre in New Zealand, where we had to go to each man in turn, and greet him by touching forehead and nose to forehead and nose. We were told that this was a spiritual greeting. Then Jesse Morgan, a big black guy from New York told us that they had a ceremony there too: he got us into two circles, so that we could move round and slap the next man to meet us palm to palm. After a few messages and announcements, where we discovered that there were 17 countries represented, we broke for supper.

This was when the four of us found that we were in a hotel — a slightly curious hotel where the first floor was for ordinary guests, and the second floor was used as a youth hostel. We had the second floor, where I found myself in a room with four beds, all to myself. There was a basin with hot and cold water, which worked well and had a plug; the bathroom was down the corridor.

At supper we were told that the cost all-in for those from the West would be \$150, which seemed extremely reasonable. The Eastern Europeans paid much less than this.

After supper people constructed a fire, out at the back of the hotel, in a place where there had been many fires before. Music was played, and I was pleased that I had brought my bodhran, an Irish drum. One of the Slovakian men, a very impressive guy named Rudo, made a little speech about not allowing ourselves to be treated like sheep, and not to follow leaders unthinkingly — he then threw on to the fire a sheepskin, to symbolise this in ritual fashion. It was a memorable moment.

On the second day I put on my non-verbal workshop for two hours, which went very well. I also put my books and magazines out, and sold copies of *Achilles Heel* and of *The Horned God*. Another workshop that day was on the Warrior Archetype, led by Bill Kauth, a group leader and writer from Milwaukee. I liked it that he did mention patriarchy as if it mattered. He also had a book on sale, full of exercises for men's groups, and very much oriented in the direction of personal growth.

Supper was an hour late, and this was quite common for the meals there, though sometimes they were on time.

On the third day we had a very good workshop on fathers, where we just stuck to one thing — a time when our fathers had tried to make us feel ashamed. This was done in groups of four, where the protagonist chose a father from within the group, and then the other two men supported him in any way he wished as allies. This worked very well, though it was not always the father who was chosen: another authority figure would do. A workshop was also held on support groups, and how to organise one, using ideas out of Bill Kauth's book. I went to a music workshop, taking my bodhran, and enjoyed its high energy and spontaneity very much.

In the evening, round the fire, we did a ceremony for a one-year-old boy who had come with his father, making a net of men's hands, like a sort of path for him to wriggle along. As he moved along, words were said about trusting men in his life to come.

On the fourth day, there was a workshop on male sexuality, which again

stuck to just one issue — when did we first masturbate, and what was that like, and what is it like nowadays? In small groups, we shared out experiences, and some of the men had some very moving stories to relate.

We did a ritual of initiation by the elders for a young man who was leaving that day to get married. Afterwards, a number of other men said that they wanted to be initiated by the elders too, so next day — the last — we initiated over twenty of them. As one of the elders, I was quite tired by the end of the day, especially as part of the initiation involved lifting each man up above eye-level.

Through the week, I had a number of

interesting conversations with various men. Three had come from South America, and one of these edited a monthly magazine with a humanistic psychology slant, published in Argentina, Colombia and Chile. He interviewed me, and we talked about translating some articles for his magazine. Another one was involved with a humanistic newsletter called *En Contacte*: the copy I saw had a long article about a visit by Natalie Rogers, Francis Macy and Claire Fitzgerald. There was also a long article about bioenergetics as a model of holistic health.

There was a lot of warmth in the whole thing, and a strong sense of mission. I liked it.

Ethical Issues

No. 5: The Fringes of Therapeutic Groupwork

There are two ways in which you can become involved in *S&S's* Ethical Issues section. You can send us examples of issues which you would like aired, like Richard's story below (changing names and details as you feel appropriate to preserve confidentiality), and you can send us your thoughts about how the issues aired in people's stories in this and previous issues of the journal might be resolved. Please send your contributions to David Jones at the editorial address shown on the inside front cover.

Richard's Story

I'm a trainee counsellor, and in the early summer I spent two weeks on a workshop-based holiday where all sorts of skills and explorations were on offer for the hundred or so participants. Most sessions, like folk dancing and juggling, were clearly straightforward learning ex-

ercises with very little therapeutic content. One or two, such as an introduction to co-counselling, were just as clearly therapeutic, and the facilitators went out of their way to provide a safe and confidential setting. What worried, and still worries, me is one or two of the teachers