Notes from the Co-Chair

As we go to print with this issue the local chapter is rushing to complete preparations for the 26th National Conference on Men & Masculinity (M&M26) and we are very excited by the quality and variety of keynotes, workshops and entertainment that we have pulled together for this first conference of our second quarter century.

MANifesting Global Justice: Creating Inclusive Communities speaks to the mandate that we created at the post-conference re-visioning held after last year’s M&M. It is time for NOMAS to engage in the global struggle for justice and equality for all people. While great deal of progress has been made in the United States over the last quarter-century, a long way is left to go. Nevertheless, the pro-feminist men’s movement cannot be constrained by national borders because the trappings of privilege and patriarchy are not limited to any single country.

M&M26 will focus on issues of globalization from the first keynote address by our own Brian Klocke to a performance by the Resurrection Dance Theater of Haiti. There will be over 30 workshops; a children’s concert provided by long-time NOMAS activist Peter Alsop; a keynote from Jackson Katz on his important media message of “Tough Guise;” and much more. We are excited by the opportunity to sponsor the M&M26 and look forward to spending time with NOMAS members, friends and co-activists.

I want to express my heartfelt appreciation to the Denver M&M Planning Committee that has worked hard to make this conference possible and a success. Kudos to: Bruce Barton, Donald Cavanaugh, PJ D’Amico, Doug Gertner, Sandra Howard, Brian Klocke and Trinidad Sànchez. Special mention also go to Curtis Hart who has helped us keep the website up-to-date with conference information and to Lonnie Smith who has worked long and hard to help us recover from some painful computer failures. Now to next year... We are in need of a host group to manage M&M27 for 2001. Volunteers are welcome.

We have had some responses to our letters. Jim Beam finally got around to writing back and essentially said that we didn’t understand the “subtleties of our humor.” Their ad is still running. We also had responses to two of the letters in the “NOMAS Activism” section of this BROTHER. Senator Wayne Allard from Colorado responded (probably because of our Colorado return address). He essentially waffled on the point we made regarding the implication of declaring a zygote a human existence for the purpose of criminal retribution. He did insist that he is an active supporter of legislation to deter violence against women. And we received an e-mail response from the “Wife Beaters” T-Shirt people suggesting that NOMAS should arrange a nationally televised debate on the issue.

There’s more to talk about but it will have to wait until the autumn edition when we will be reporting on the success of M&M26 and the summer meeting of the National Council. Until then, I hope that everyone has a wonderful summer, that those of you who joined us at M&M26 were well satisfied and rewarded and that those of you who weren’t able to be with us may be with us at M&M27.

In brotherhood,
Moshe
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"Blackfatheritis"
Vernon McClean

"Keep you hands out of your pockets. Don’t reach under your shirt. If there’s an itch, just live with it. Even if it is below zero, keep your jacket open."

Macheo, rolls his eyes, but says respectfully, “Yea, Dad. I know. ‘I’ll remember.’ But how do I get these things to register in the mind of a teenager? How do I help him grow up healthy and whole and still make him sensitive to the racial prejudice that is constantly around us?

I remember an incident of my own not too long ago. Having time to spare before attending a concert at the Beacon Theatre in New York City I entered a five-and-dime store on 72nd Street to browse through the discount products. The black Caribbean guard seemed to be staring but my gigantic ego let me think that he saw me as a role model, an academic-looking brother to be staring but my gigantic ego let me think that he saw me as a role model, an academic-looking brother who enjoys browsing in discount stores — a pastime not common among black men.

With that issue settled in my mind, I discovered a bargain: a blue chenille bathrobe for only twenty dollars. Being from the Caribbean myself I find New York winters particularly bone chilling. This would be great for winter evenings at home. I draped the bulky robe over my arm and continued perusing the merchandise. I noticed the guard’s stare persisted and I realized his attention was not flattery. I was starting to get annoyed.

Not only did he stare, but also he followed me from the main floor to an alcove where I continued to browse before paying for the robe. I angrily confronted him and asked why was he following me. Did he think I was a thief? How could I possibly conceal a bulky chenille robe? And why didn’t he follow the white people in the store? He mumbled that I must understand that it was his job to follow me.

How do I make Macheo understand this without disillusioning him?

There have been times in K-Mart, when I have had to tell him not to touch the merchandise: “Macheo!” I gasp. My son’s name falls alarmingly from my mouth. “Get your hand…”

“Okay, Dad,” he says impatiently, muttering something that seems mad and sad all at once.

“I just don’t want…”

“I know, Dad. I know. I’m sorry.”

It’s like another incident — I was awaiting the opening of a South African concert at Symphony Space on New York’s Broadway. I decided to go to a nearby greenmarket to purchase a can of soda while waiting. After browsing through the cooler I found no brands that interested me and I proceeded to walk out. On my way the Asian owner confronted me and demanded that I open my book bag. When I asked him why, he said that he saw me put something into it. A white woman who saw the entire incident told me not to open my bag. She would call a police officer to protect me. But I was just tired after a long day of teaching so, sadly, I opened my bag for inspection and left.

“Do not stay out after 9:00 PM, even when visiting your buddy across the street from home (cops have shot too many black boys in the back at night). Do not wear baggy jeans. You might be mistaken for TuPac Shakur. Always have the clerk bag your purchase, with the receipt inside the bag.” I constantly remind my son.

Why must this be? And why did I have to suffer yet another racial incident? — this time at the famed Joseph Papp theatre in New York. I was sitting in the lobby with the rest of the patrons who were awaiting the opening of the theatre. I noticed a young black guard was eyeing me. Despite past negative history, I was still naïve and thought he was marveling at a successful brother. Foolishly, I mistook his suspicious stare for veneration. Then he approached me and asked why was I sitting in the lobby. I told him that I was awaiting the performance. He demanded to see my ticket. I refused and demanded to see his superior. Again a white woman (she and I are now close friends and attend social functions together) came to my defense and told his superior that I was not doing anything to deserve harassment from this guard who, "only doing his job," still works at the Joseph Papp Theater.

As I recall these annoying incidents I am reminded of Deborah Mathis’s "Blackmotheritis," which she defines as "a nervous disorder afflicting millions of black women with adolescent children, particularly mothers of boys" (Liberal Week, September 1, 1997, p. 3). Unfortunately, this disease is not confined to black mothers. Black fathers are also afflicted.

And it is painful. And I am in pain. I am a nag. This does not fit the traditional image of a black man who is supposed to be silent and strong. But I am this way because I want my teenage son, Macheo, to stay alive, and because I love him.

From a very early age Macheo would go with me to rallies against police brutality and for civil rights in Harlem and neighboring New York communities. And, like Deborah Mathis, I had to tell him all the things not to do. Like Deborah Mathis, I consider it an infuriating condition, this "Blackfatheritis." There are times when I...
want to defy this disease: "Go ahead, son; scratch that itch, zip your coat; put your hands wherever you want. You don't have to be sorry for being a boy..."

But as I am about to speak I remember my own experiences of racial harassment, and I know that my beloved Macheo will have to encounter this all his life. When he and his older brother Maliki are not permitted into a store in the shopping mall "because an adult is not with them," they must learn to deal with it. To accept it, as a penalty for being black males in North America.

Of course, this can only make him angry. Of course, he must keep his anger locked inside him. Of course, this repressed anger will vastly increase the likelihood that he will die from hypertension and stroke many years before his white playmates. Of course that assumes he doesn't get "accidentally" killed before he even reaches full manhood.

My son. A black boy who thinks that it is his "duty" to make me laugh after a hard day's work at the university, and he usually succeeds. So, as I write this article for NOMAS, I rough up his shaved head, and wrestle with him for a few minutes. He understands my gestures and laughs. I laugh too because I do not want him to see me cry.

A version of this essay first appeared in Voice Male, the magazine of the Men's Resource Center of Western Massachusetts

The Grateful Dad Plays M&M19

Douglas M. Gertner, Ph.D.

It all began at the 19th Men & Masculinity Conference at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island in 1994. Maggie and I were just married and I was attending my sixth consecutive M&M. As it happened, it would be six years before my next one.

The theme of M&M19 was “Taking Action, Making Change,” and that’s just what I was doing in my own life. Newly married with a freshly minted degree, my next step was to get a ‘real job.’ I had recently turned down a tenure-track position at Antioch College in Ohio because, although I’m from Ohio, I didn’t want to go back there. I wanted to stay in Colorado. Maggie had a good job and we had found community and a sense of home and place. So I cut off my ponytail, bought a suit, and headed for the corporate world.

I vividly remember using a payphone at Brown to arrange an interview at Rocky Mountain Management Association (RMMA*). There, among my NOMAS brothers and sisters, I was taking action and making personal change. I was living the theme of the conference. And soon afterward I became a corporate instructor with RMMA. The learning curve was steep and I worked hard to take my university experience into the business world. I learned to deliver training on various management topics and to keep my politics and opinions to myself. While I was certainly gaining valuable new professional skills, I quickly realized that I was contorting my life for the sake of a paycheck. I was told what to wear, what to teach, and what not to teach. I had so few days off that I could not attend M&Ms during the entire time I worked there. In fact, I drifted away from my deepest values and beliefs, and did little to further the NOMAS principles that are so important to me. As uncomfortable as these convolutions became, I spent over five years with RMMA, the last two with an increasing desire to leave, and the natural fear of doing so.

During my fourth year at RMMA, my son Jordan was born. I was able to take off two-and-a-half weeks after his birth and be fully involved in every aspect of his new life. Being a dad was so important to me that I returned to RMMA on a part-time basis until logistics and finances required a return to the 40-hour grind. Maggie also had a full-time job, and Jordy had been in daycare since he was 10-weeks old. It broke my heart each morning when I left him, and each evening’s pick up was the highlight of my day. I remember one morning while standing in the shower I did the simple math and said to Maggie “We’re both working at least 40 hours per week and that leaves only 30 waking hours to spend with Jordy… I just don’t like this!” It was time again to take action and make change.

I went looking for greener pastures but what I found was more fallow fields of corporate futility. I joined the human resources department of a local software company called Quash.* In every job interview with them I stated my need for a balanced life and was assured that this was possible at Quash. Yet within months I doubted that Quash could provide an enjoyable work atmosphere or the freedom to spend more time with my family.
While at Quash, I founded a corporate university, coached and counseled managers and employees, and participated in a range of HR functions. No one could question my performance, but my ability to stay motivated began to wane. I became disenchanted with the way this “industry leader” treated its employees so I began to work on my resume.

I guess my corporate suit and tie didn’t hide my feelings because my boss, after not speaking to me for a week, said she had to let me go. I could barely contain my relief and joy as I raced to salvage my resume before my PC was shut down. Happily, the severance package I received provided just the cushion I needed to finally figure out how to really get more time with my partner and our son.

I hired an excellent personal coach who asked me powerful questions and agreed to help me hold to my agenda to work less and spend more time doing what really matters most to me. With Maggie’s support, and to Jordy’s delight at having a more constant companion, I began building a business that reflects my deepest values. Once again I was taking action and making change only this time for me and for real.

It was on a visit to the Denver Zoo that Jordy and I encountered the emu, a flightless bird, native to Australia. We learned that the male of the species is one of the animal kingdom’s most devoted fathers, so I chose this creature’s name for my consulting practice which focuses on men’s issues and fatherhood work. And while I have stayed plenty busy ever since, I finally have more time than ever for my partner, my son, and my soul.

Recently, during a Daddy-and-Jordy visit to the children’s museum we were photographed by a local newspaper crew. The reporter looked around at all of the moms and me and asked, “Why aren’t you sitting behind a desk wearing a tie?” I explained about ‘taking action and making change,’ and when our picture appeared on the cover of the features section a few weeks later, it felt great to be caught in the act of doing what I really do best.

While I was taking action and making change in my own life, NOMAS was creating a group of volunteers in the Denver area to organize M&M25. What an opportunity for me to complete my change and again take action as an activist for gender justice! My lay-off came just a week before the conference and the liberation I felt at our silver anniversary gathering mirrored the freedom, independence, and happiness I have come to enjoy in my life as a truly ‘grateful dad.’

*Company names are changed to protect us all from nonsense.*

My Experience with the National Fatherhood Initiative
Christopher Kilmartin, Ph.D.

In March of 1997, The National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI – www.fatherhood.org) did a tour through Virginia to publicize their organization and promote their message. I was asked to serve as commenter. Having never heard of them, I looked forward to the experience and was enthused that there was a national organization attempting to get men more involved with their children. However, I came away from the meeting with that enthusiasm rather dampened.

The format was as follows: economist Robert Hamrin (the founder and president of “Great Dads”) was to talk for 45 minutes, followed by a 45-minute speech by NFI president Wade Horn. Then, I had 15 minutes to comment, and Hamrin and Horn took questions (I was not invited to field questions).

Hamrin got up and spent fully one third of his time talking about himself. Then he cited research indicating that the average father spends very little time with his children, and that spending one hour a day with a child adds up to 39 days of interaction before the child leaves home. He spoke mainly about the joy of fathering and the missed opportunity for fathers who assign their parenting role a low priority.

Horn began by citing more research on the growing incidence of fatherless homes and its “impact” on children. He said that fatherless children were much more likely to be poor than children from “intact” families, and that 60% of rapists and 70% of murderers came from fatherless homes. (Although he is a psychologist, he did not acknowledge the mantra taught in General Psychology: Correlation does not imply causation. There are likely a multiplicity of reasons for these effects, including the wage gap between men and women, and the poor social and economic support that single mothers receive). The body of his speech was an accounting of the reasons why fathers are important. It was this part of the meeting that disturbed me most greatly, because he began by saying that children need fathers because fathers parent differently from mothers – that mothers are more protective and verbal, fathers more physical and challenging. Mothers comfort; fathers control. He went on to say that boys have to learn to keep their aggressive impulses in check and that they learn how to do so mainly from fathers’ modeling and the self-regulation that is taught through rough-and-tumble play.  

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THE FIRST TIME

You tell your father "I love you." is not easy. For we are taught to love women...not men. My father was the one I wanted to be near, to feel his strength, to know his passion for life. The distance between us went unnoticed until that fateful day the phone call. It would be my first airplane ride from Cincinnati to Detroit, ironically, to be with him at death. Funny, for years I saved the ticket stub not sure whether to remind me of my first flight or his death.

Standing next to him I remember being strong after all, I was his namesake and others were expecting me to be a man. The day I cried was months later, when I went to my mailbox for his weekly letters and poems. The box was empty no letter, no poems. I was so alone. Lost. Confused I had been taught about sex, but no one had explained the overwhelming sensations that arrive with the death of the man who for twenty years I called "papa".

He lay so still, properly embalmed. His amigos from the Monterrey Poolroom paid their final respects. The priest said some stupid prayers. I cursed God for the strange feeling of being a young man without a father. I wanted to hug him one last time or would it be our first? The line from the poem he wrote to me after my leaving home "It was papa who took a drink and wanted to hug you tight" floated around like a bad taste in my mouth.

Now the distance between the family has separated us to different parts of the country. Mama, lost her voice she quietly waits for your return at the Nightingale Nursing Home. She teaches us a lesson how sometimes death sneaks slowly up on you weakens you till your last breath. Now, I struggle to be father for my beautiful ten year old daughter. You are not here but I want you to know I don't blame you anymore. The poet in me wants to share a poem with you, make you smile, laugh but all I can do is tell the children "...my father was a poet." I feel so proud at the moment when I express your words with my voice but I remember too well how the first time I told my father "I love you"...was not easy.

Trinidad Sánchez, Jr. 7/26/1993

7/26/1993
Kilmartin Continued)

Moreover, fathers are more important than mothers in “building security about gender identity” and that fathers can give boys a transition experience into adulthood, a function served by organized rituals in many cultures. Boys need affirmation that they are “man enough.”

I agreed with much of the NFI literature – of course fathers need to find a better balance of work and family, spend more time with their children, and take their parenting duties seriously. But the rhetoric that day had a real subtext of reinforcing outdated masculine ideologies and disrespect of women. They seemed to be saying that alternative family arrangements are fundamentally inferior to the traditional family, and that we should expect children emerging from single parent families, gay or lesbian families, or any other different family form to be defective. The message was that children need fathers because mothers aren’t good enough, and there was no acknowledgement of the enormous efforts put forth by mothers.

In my comments, I emphasized that the main job of a father is to be a parent, and that approaches that seek to define essential differences between mothers and fathers miss the boat. We have to emphasize the similarities between mothers and fathers and encourage cooperation in parenting rather than these proposed male-and-female parallel processes. Yes, fathers need to feel more special, but they need to feel less different.

At the same time, NFI encourages healthy fathering. Their literature emphasizes listening to children, disciplining with love, showing affection to children, and respecting the child’s mother regardless of whether you are married to her or not. We should acknowledge our common ground and support the efforts that are positive. And we should remember that NFI members probably are diverse in their opinions and approaches rather than stereotyping them as all identical to people like Hamrin and Horn. I feel similarly with regard to the Promise Keepers: they encourage some positive behaviors, but within a context of exclusion and social retrogression.

It bothered me that these two men were traveling around the country talking about what great fathers they are – I presumed that their wives were at home taking care of the children. Their rhetoric was also very self-absorbed; they talked very little about their own children and not at all about their wives. Hamrin emphasized the missed opportunity of the father over that of the child. Horn is on the board of the Independent Women’s Forum (which is neither independent nor is it a forum), a back-lashing, antifeminist organization. NFI is also committed to decreasing out-of-wedlock births rather than to support people who, whether by circumstance or choice, raise children in alternative family structures. If NFI is really serious about children’s problems, they would do well to address the social conditions that give rise to these problems, which include poverty, an unequal distribution of wealth, cultural disrespect of the feminine and of women themselves, and social systems that continue to define masculinity and femininity as opposites. Boys and men will cease to worry about whether they are “man enough” when we stop believing that cultural femininity is a deficiency.

Posthumous Role Model
Matt Kailey

My father died in 1981, sixteen years before I needed a male role model. At age forty-two, when I was grappling with my first necktie, I thought, “Why isn’t my dad here to teach me this? Most guys learn to do this at ten.” Of course, when I was ten, I was wearing dresses, not ties, and it wouldn’t have occurred to my father to teach me a skill reserved for young boys. He had no way of knowing that, inside the daughter he so cherished, was a hidden son that would not take shape until long after he was gone, a son who puzzled over dressing himself in men’s clothing and who, even under duress, couldn’t change the oil in his car.

When I began my gender transition in middle age, the person I needed most to explain the simple things about being male in this culture was long gone. I spent many hours wondering what kind of person I would be if I had been raised male from birth and cursing the unfairness of losing my role model before I had a chance to find out what lessons of manhood he could teach me. But, as my transition progressed and I thought more about him as a father and as a person, I realized that he had already taught me, by example, to be the kind of man I want to be.

My father taught me that being a man meant accepting everyone as an equal. Although I grew up in a white, Anglo-Saxon, atheist home, our house was teeming with people of all races and religions. Two of my father’s best friends were African-American, another
What Does a Son Need from His Dad?

Neil Chethik

As the father of a 7-year-old boy, I would love an answer to this question. I know how my father raised me, and I’ve watched a lot of other men “commit” fatherhood. But the essence of fathering has always eluded me.

I recently published a book on how sons come to terms with the deaths of their fathers. This gave me the opportunity to interview 70 men in-depth. In the process of asking each man about the death of his father, I asked: What had the father done during his lifetime that made the son feel valued? When was the father at his best? What, ultimately, made a good father to a son?

Gradually, a consensus formed around the answers to these questions. Not an orthodoxy, nor a rulebook — fathering is too circumstantial to operate on any scheme. But a common theme emerged. What sons seem to need most from their fathers is affection.

My father taught me that being a man meant not objectifying women. When my mother bought him a subscription to *Playboy* as a gift, he thanked her and quietly let the subscription expire. He never understood all the fuss about Bo Derek. My mother and I would joke that, if he ever chose to have an affair, it would be with an extremely intelligent older woman. He would be attracted by the promise of intellectual discourse.

My father taught me that being a man meant loving and respecting your partner. My mother’s bedroom mirror and the doors of our kitchen cabinet were plastered with love notes and cards (at least those appropriate for public viewing) that he had sent her throughout their thirty-plus years of marriage. My parents were equally educated, but my mother chose not to work outside the home. My father did not believe that their jobs were equal—he thought her work was more difficult and much more important.

My father taught me that being a man meant reinforcing the strength and independence of women. He wanted me to be a lawyer, but didn’t push it when he saw that it was his desire, not mine. He did, however, frequently remind me that “you had better get a good education, because no one is going to take care of you.” My younger sister is now a pilot and flight instructor due, in part, to his influence. There was nothing in her upbringing that would cause her to question her ability to do exactly what she wanted.

My father taught me that being a man had nothing to do with money, power or appearances. We always had used cars. On the weekends he would don his usual faded blue jeans and jeans jacket. Once, going into town to purchase a gift for my mother, he wore his typical outfit. In the jewelry store, the clerk, eyeing his clothing, indiscreetly directed him towards the least expensive items and was abashed when my father pulled out cash to pay for a string of pearls.

My father was a social worker, a mental health professional and a political liberal. He taught me that we should fight for the rights of all people, that everyone has dignity and worth and that people are inherently good. When I warned him about carrying his wallet in his back pocket in the airport, fearing pickpockets, he said, “I trust people.” He tried not to judge others, as evidenced by his favorite saying, “To understand all is to forgive all.” He loved his many friends, his wife and his children, and he would love me now, even though I am no longer the daughter he once knew.

When I think back on my father’s life and what I learned from him as his daughter, I realize that, had I been born his son instead, I would probably be the same kind of person that I am now. The values he instilled in me were not gender-specific. They were values that, if lived by anyone, male or female, would produce the same result. I still don’t know how to tie a necktie but I don’t worry about it now—I just slip on my blue jeans instead.

In memory of George Robert Kailey, 1926-1981
I've been a teacher and a songwriter engaged in educational psychology and experiential therapy for a lot of years. I started down this path during the Nixon-McGovern presidential race, when George McGovern took one state and Richard Nixon took forty-nine. I knew I had to do something to address the fact that most of the country did not seem to understand how Nixon's policies were unfriendly to women, and children and old people, and men like me and my friends, who were interested in a better, healthier society. We didn't want to storm the headquarters to change the system, because we knew that until people understand that the way we change is as important as the changes we want to make, nothing meaningful and lasting can happen.

While that election was a flashpoint to my embarking on my current career, a variety of experiences and ideas coalesced for me at the same time. The world wasn't the way I'd been brought up to believe. For example, my parents taught me that the policeman on the corner was my friend, but during the '60s I saw police hitting people like me at peaceful demonstrations. What kind of friend was that? I lived with a feminist woman for five years, and she would regularly point out to me the things I was doing and I'd be busted. Actually, many of my early songs about male/female relationships were about my own personal insights. In 1975, when I discovered the men's movement, of which NOMAS was a part, I met other men and women who helped me see more clearly the way men do things.

It was clear to me that sexual politics is at the root of so many of the things we want to change. I felt that if we could straighten out sexual politics it would have to improve the way we treat one another. We would see how privilege affects those of us who have it, as well as those who don't. It would help us see commercialism for what it is, and give us more insight into the way it impacts the quality of our lives. Clarity about sexual roles and politics would help us avoid the traps of using each other which is at the root of so many problems in our social system.

It was around this time that I had kids and started writing songs about family interactions from a kid's point of view. I'd been working with sexual abuse issues, and chemical addiction and co-dependency problems, and whenever I came upon an insight or clue as to how to cope with these difficult issues in a little more balanced way, I would write a song about it. The music became a way to help kids and parents recognize what was going on in their lives and to begin talking about it. Working with kid's music was also freeing for me, as all of a sudden, there was no pressure from the music industry to categorize the kind of music I was doing. I could do reggae, rock-and-roll, dulcimer — whatever seemed to fit the message I wanted to convey — and because kid's music is considered unimportant by the industry, no one needed to classify my music — it was all kid's stuff. It was great.

Growing up, I've often felt that adults were dull and boring. I would be fooling around with my friends, and some adult would say, "Why don't you act like an adult?" Why would we want to? I now believe that adults are just little kids walking around in large size bodies. If an adult does something ridiculous your natural reaction is to think (or say) "Grow up." When we can see the little kid operating inside them, we know that they're probably just scared and responding to a situation in the only way they know how. Understanding that allows us to step back from feeling personally hurt or attacked and ask "What's the best way to deal with this?" — instead of thinking "There goes the enemy!!" We can drop our black-and-white perception of the world when we understand it's the little kid inside ourselves and others who feels needy and out of balance. Just look at George W. Bush. We can see the little boy in him. He seems so excited by all the toys he's got now. He's got other people who tell him what to do so he doesn't have to be an adult. We don't have to like what he does, but seeing him in this light, I can see our shared humanity, and I can speak and act and work more decisively without rancor to correct some of the misperceptions and unhealthy programs and ideas that come out of his office. The same is true for our interactions with just about everyone.

Many of my songs relate to both kids and adults because they're about family issues. I've never had a problem relating to children. Many children are
disenfranchised in society and need a voice. I discovered that through my music I could use humor to help people hear the voices and reality of kids (whether they are in small bodies or large ones). Rather than telling people what to do, I’ve learned that if I can get them laughing at something where they say, “I guess I do that. Maybe it’s not such a good thing to do,” that helps grown-ups make some internal changes. About 60% of my material is directed specifically at kids, but they drag their parents along to my concerts and I play songs like “Logical”, and hear kids say, “Hey Dad, that sounds like you!” The songs empower the kids and parents can pick up parenting tools if they’re willing to listen.

It was hard for some of the parents to hear that, in addition to alcohol, there are many different kinds of medicators such as smoking, eating, work, compulsive exercise, extreme religiosity and (Heaven Forbid!) sex and romance. Sometimes people who hire me to address alcohol and other drug addiction issues for youth, don’t necessarily want to talk about other ways that we humans medicate our painful feelings.

I think it’s important and appropriate to talk to teens about sex as a medicator, and about setting boundaries. We need to make safe places for kids and grown ups to build a “feelings vocabulary,” learn that sadness doesn’t last forever, and that if I’m angry and don’t express it, it comes out sideways as resentment. These are important lessons that are not taught in school. If we want kids, or anyone for that matter, to stay off drugs and other medicators, we need to help them learn how to deal with their feelings. Usually out-of-bounds behaviors reflect the out-of-balance ways that people use to deal with their feelings. Where can kids go when they feel sad? Are you a safe place for them to share their painful feelings? It’s about making safe places, and helping people understand how our behaviors are driven by our feelings. It really helps to see the bigger picture. That’s why so much of my music and work is about helping kids and adults build a healthy feelings vocabulary.

Communication between us can be so difficult. One of my favorite quotes is from Gustav Flaubert in Madame Bovary. He says, “Human speech is like a cracked kettle upon which we tap crude rhythms for bears to dance, while we long to make music that will melt the stars.” We use words to try to describe things but it never quite does justice to the reality of what we’re looking at. Let’s build our feelings vocabulary and help our kids discover their own feelings vocabulary, so the next generation and the one after that and the one after that can continue to become wiser, happier human beings.

Peter’s songs and books and videos can be found on his website at www.peteralsop.com.
(Chethik continued)

Another son remembered rolling on the bed with his dad: "On Saturday mornings, when he'd been gone all week, I'd climb into my parents' bed. He had horrible breath in the morning. We played a game where he tried to breathe on me, and I hid." This son, who later had three children of his own, quipped that since becoming a father he had "a dread fear of inflicting morning breath on my kids. As a parent, I breathe a lot through my nose."

Why do sons want this kind of physical affection? First, they get a close-up view of the being they will one day become: a man. They experience a man's strength, movements, and boundaries. And when the father's touch is playful and gentle, sons can feel safe and accepted as well.

Many sons, however, reported that their fathers were uncomfortable with physical affection, and didn't offer it. Perhaps it was alien to them because they hadn't experienced it themselves as children. Fortunately, I found, affection can be demonstrated in non-physical ways. Affection is, it seems, less about physicality than about loving attention by a father toward his child.

One 67-year-old insurance salesman said his dad gave him affection in the form of conversation. "My father retired when I was 12, so we had a lot of time together after that," this man recalled. "When he'd be doing something like fixing steps, he'd call me to be the hand-me-the-hammer, bring-me-the-saw guy. At first I thought he just wanted me to hand him things. But then I saw he wanted to talk with me... He listened to me. He respected me. We had real conversations."

A middle-aged English teacher told me that in his childhood, he and his father often sat around in the living room on weekends telling stories to each other. This was a demonstration of affection to the son. Three years after his father died, he still reflected fondly on those weekends: "I could make him laugh. I'd tell him funny stories, not jokes, but stories. He had a wonderful laugh. He'd really laugh good and loud."

A 36-year-old college professor remembered another form of affection: "My father was always playing games with me. We played chess and cribbage and bridge. We did the New York Times crossword puzzles together."

I heard about other fathers who offered affection by coaching their sons' sports teams, by taking them to amusement parks, concerts, or other events, or by helping them with homework.

A businessman who was fifteen when his father died said that his father took him to auto races and baseball games, and he recalled fondly the time his father volunteered to help at church with preparations for his Confirmation ritual. "I don't think he was a touchy-feely person," the son explained, "but he was a real loving father."

Sons who didn't get any form of affection from their fathers remembered this with distress. These sons described faraway fathers, distant dads, patriarchs who were unavailable or uninvolved. Whether the father meant it or not, the message to the son was clear: You don't matter that much.

As an avid reader I was particularly struck by a comment from a 45-year-old biologist who said, "One of the memories I carry from childhood is Dad's bookshelf. My dad read a lot. He would come home from work, sit in his chair, and read for most of the evening. Maybe it was his escape... Sometimes, I'd go to that wall of books and try to figure out what was there that was more fascinating than me." Other men expressed similar feelings of disconnect from their fathers' realities and all indicated a feeling of loss as a result.

Clearly, a father's attention is crucial to his son. But like discipline, it can be overdone. Several men spoke of fathers who were too involved — "controlling," "heavy-handed," "in my face." One man said: "If he'd had his way, I'd have been a marionette." These dads, according to their sons, seemed to have an agenda; they wanted their sons to participate in certain activities, even if the sons were not interested.

Playing sports was a central arena for this struggle. Several men told me they resented being pushed into sports, and were hurt when their fathers' reactions to their lack of athletic interest or aptitude were to anger or distancing. One 56-year-old recalled, "When I was seven years old, my father told me I threw like a girl. I still feel the wound. After that, I never wanted to play ball again." Another man, a teacher, said: "I couldn't catch a ball. My brother was the athlete in the family. So my father preferred spending time with him."

Fathers cannot, of course, be constantly attentive to their children. We have limited time and energy. But reflecting on the words and images of the many sons I interviewed, I am more aware than ever of the essence of their message: It is in the small acts of affection, in the seemingly ordinary moments, that the best of fathering can take place.

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**Did you know?** The International Association for Studies of Men (IASOM) adopted the NOMAS principles after founding members attended the 1993 M&M Conference in San Francisco. – http://www.rolstad.no/iasom/index.html
National AIDS Awareness Month

June is National AIDS Awareness Month. It has been 20 years since AIDS was first identified as a discrete illness. At that time it was named “GRID” for “Gay-Related-Immune-Deficiency” disease. Later it was discovered that it wasn’t a sexual orientation disease but a plague of global proportions. Today every demographic in society has been victimized by this disease. More than 22 million people have died and health officials estimate that over 35 million are infected right now. The futures of some African countries are seriously threatened because of the proportions of the populations that are infected. Protease inhibitors and other new drugs have slowed the death rate but may only have delayed the inevitable and the side effects of these medications are often as difficult as some of the symptoms of the disease. And many of the world’s poorest people simply cannot obtain the medications. It is time for all people to learn more about this plague and its effects around the world and to take action to help stop the disease.

NOMAS Activism

NOMAS Letters to...

NOMAS feels that it is important to make our opinion and position known on issues of concern to gender equality and equal rights for all people. An effective way of doing this is to write letters to elected officials and public persons who have taken stands that are antipathetic to the NOMAS principles. The following letters were sent in NOMAS’s name during the past quarter. Copies of the letters are emailed to the membership who are invited to add their voices to that of NOMAS. A number of members have been moved to write as well. Readers are invited to contact NOMAS with topics that they feel NOMAS should actively support or oppose. Please send your suggestions to info@nomas.org or by mail to NOMAS, PO Box 455, Louisville, CO 80027.

The April 13 letter was to the Wife Beaters website people to protest their “humorous” endorsement of domestic violence. They sent a response inviting NOMAS to arrange a nationally televised debate. Discussion among the National Council members resulted in NOMAS letting the matter stand.

The April 19 letter was sent by Phyllis Frank, co-chair of the Eliminating Racism Task Group. It went to Governor Kirk Fordice of Mississippi to register NOMAS’s concern over that state’s continued use of the Confederate battle flag, a symbol of hate to millions of Americans. No response has been received as of this date. Both Mississippi and Georgia continue to use this banner and NOMAS members are urged to write to the state governors to register protest.

The letter of April 29 was sent to all United States Senators asking them to vote against the House bill to recognize the fetus as a human being in the event of a crime against the woman carrying it. The House of Representatives passed the bill but it has not been passed in the Senate. As of this writing it has been read twice and referred to the Judiciary Committee. NOMAS will write again, if appropriate.
Wife Beater T-Shirts  
P.O. Box 59721  
Dallas, TX 75229  

April 13, 2001  

On behalf of all sensible people who abhor violence and are committed to ending men’s violence against women, The National Organization for Men Against Sexism appeals to you to stop promoting your product and website.

We cannot believe that your intent is to endorse battery in society or in the home, but please understand that the effect your “light-hearted” approach may have can far outweigh your intentions. There are too many people who believe that if something is “promoted” in public media then it’s really ok. “It’s just part of being a man; just the way things are.” Your product reinforces societal stereotypes about women and wives and loudly proclaims that women and wives are worthy of being beaten just because they are women and wives. Surely you cannot really wish to perpetuate this sort of thinking.

Violence against women is so pandemic that the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service has proposed a rule to recognize women as a victim class for the purpose of granting asylum in our country. The message you deliver is that they might as well stay in Afghanistan or wherever because violence against women in the United States is just as real but it’s treated as a joke.

Please reconsider this unworthy project.

Very truly yours,

Moshe Rozdzial  
Co-Chair, NOMAS

Governor Kirk Fordice  
State of Mississippi  
P.O. Box 139  
Jackson, MS 39205  

April 19, 2001  

Dear Governor Fordice:

On behalf of the Eliminating Racism Task Group of the National Organization for Men Against Sexism, I am writing to register our disappointment that the people of Mississippi have chosen to keep an antiquated racist symbol a part of your state’s 21st century emblems.

There is nothing to be gained by taking an indefensible stance and Mississippi’s decision to continue to flaunt a flag that has historically stood for human bondage and the enslavement of a race of people is completely indefensible. Even if it is protected by the First Amendment, hate speech in whatever form will ultimately lose in the court of public opinion.

The National Organization of Men Against Sexism endorses the position adopted by the NAACP and we will support whatever action they decide to take including a boycott against Mississippi.

Very truly yours,

Phyllis B. Frank  
Co-chair Ending Racism Task Group
April 29, 2001

Dear «ttl» «lname»:

On behalf of the National Organization for Men Against Sexism, I appeal to you to vote against the Unborn Victims of Violence Act which recently passed in the House of Representatives.

NOMAS, the oldest pro-feminist men's group in the United States, represents thousands of men and women across the country and around the world who fight for equality for all people. As such we have historically sided with a woman's right to choose the termination of an unwanted pregnancy. NOMAS believes that this is a fundamental right claimed in the Declaration of Independence and guaranteed by the Constitution and Bill of Rights. The recently passed Congressional bill to "protect" fetuses and even zygotes is a blatant step by anti-choice factions to undermine the exercise of a right which has saved countless women's lives.

We believe that citizenship should not be applied to fetal life forms that are not viable outside the womb and until such time as a fetus is capable of surviving on its own, the impregnated woman should have complete control over what is essentially a part of her body. There are ways of increasing penalties for injuries to fetuses during the commission of crimes other than granting citizens' rights to fetuses. We are certain that the Senate will find a wiser path than the one initiated in the House.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Very truly yours,

Moshe Rozdzial, PhD
Co-Chair, NOMAS

copy: NOMAS Membership
NOW National Office

GAY ISSUES

Gay Pioneers

June is National Gay Pride Month. It's the month when most of the major pride parades are held across the United States and around the world. These parades honor the June 28, 1969 Stonewall Riots which are considered the start of the gay rights movement. What many people don't realize (or remember, perhaps) is the fact that the Stonewall Riots were preceded by civil rights pickets held annually in front Independence Hall in Philadelphia starting in 1965. These pickets were the work of a small group of homosexual men and women who felt the time was right to start the foment for equal rights for homosexual citizens. Gay Pioneers is the title of a documentary film that tells the story of the brave men and women who struck the match to the tinderbox of Stonewall that flared into the conflagration now known as the gay rights movement.

Initiated by PrideFest America (www.pridefestamerica.com) in collaboration with WHYY in Philadelphia, the documentary premiered at WHYY-TV May 4, 2001 and was subsequently made available to PBS stations around the country. Two years in production, the project was coordinated by WHYY's noted documentary filmmaker, Glen Holsten and features interviews with many of the individuals who were in the forefront of the incipient movement including Frank Kameny, Barbara Gittings, Randolfe Wicker, Kay Tobin Lahusen, Nancy Tucker and NOMAS member and long-time pro-feminist and gay pioneer Jack Nichols (for a complete story on the documentary and underlying history visit GayToday at http://gaytoday.badpuppy.com/garchive/events/043001ev.htm).
I'm spending a lot of time right now trying to figure out how this assault affected me – trying to figure out how I'm explaining it to myself. When I got hit I acted like stone. I didn’t want those guys to see the whirlwind of emotions raging inside me. In the safety of my home I could feel my anger rise. It brought me back to a time when I was younger and being abused. All of the past assaults on my selfhood rose up in me and I felt a culmination of everything that ever took power over me. I remembered teachers holding me down and cutting my hair for being too feminine; white people using anti-Arab racism against me; people who had power in my life being emotionally abusive; people physically assaulting me over-and-over during my youth.

Over the next couple days I raced a mental Indy 500. From calculated complex analysis, to fear, sadness, and anger, I became a contradiction. I wanted to take care of myself and be a martyr at the same time.

I kept telling myself that I was glad it happened to me instead of anyone else because I had a good political analysis of power and oppression. I kept telling myself to stop rationalizing, minimizing and denying the powerful impact this experience had on me.

Fortunately, my attackers could not take my power because it is in my emotions – I was now expressing that. I was feeling a peak in my anger and a depth in my despair. For the next couple days I was connected to the ways in which the world seems unsafe. I was connected to the pain of being assaulted. I was healing.

As a boy I was taught to hold still and concentrate when being assailed. I was taught that the less power you give to others, the less they can take from you. I wasn’t taught, however, that power over others isn’t the only kind of power. And I wasn’t taught healthy ways to deal with the pain of the world.

If I were John Wayne or Superman, I could have won again. I could have pulled out my gun or super strength and used it to show that I have power over my attackers – in all situations.

As a mere man dealing with this experience, I held still while under attack. I didn’t validate my assailants by confirmation that what they were doing had any affect on me. I acted strongly from the lessons of my childhood. What was different this time, however, was what I did afterwards.

I let the experience sink into me and let my feelings come out. I didn’t follow my childhood lessons of squelching the pain. I didn’t pretend to be John Wayne or Superman. I didn’t try to come across as a winner and I worked hard at not using my socialization to try and one up my attackers.
This queer bashing incident has been a humbling and growth-filled experience for me. As a man involved with anti-sexist activism for 6 years now, I was able to challenge myself to be grounded. I used the skills I have learned from feminism to create a safe and healing space for myself and to connect with myself holistically.

I was learning to be real. I was learning to heal. *Outgrowing The Pain: A Book For And About Adults Abused As Children, Eliana Gil, Ph. D, Dell Publishing, 1983

**Gay Pride–The Straight View**

P.J. D’Amico

June was Gay Pride Month. Marches were held around the country to memorialize the Stonewall Riots of 1969 that marked the beginning of “gay liberation” as we know it today. Most of us in the heterosexual world didn’t know, didn’t notice, and didn’t care. I cared and Sunday, June 24th found me, a heterosexual man, celebrating alongside many of my friends – both gay and straight. Here is why I was there.

First of all Gay Pride is a bold expression of human freedom and dignity. To witness so many people willing to “come out” in a society that is still debating if gay people deserve to be protected makes me proud to be a human being. Gay Pride is ultimately an expression of the human struggle for dignity and respect that is shared by all of us. Last year on a visit to Denver, Archbishop Desmond Tutu declared, “the next human rights cause that we must fight is with our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters.”

Second, straight people can no longer afford to be silent on this issue. Mathew Shepherd was not only gay. He was our brother, our son, our friend, and our neighbor. Hate does not just happen in remote farmland in Wyoming. It happens everywhere – at our jobs, in our elementary schools, high schools, and colleges and on the streets of every city in America where “fag” is still a major fighting word. And, sadly, it happens in many of our main line churches where being gay is often taught to be an abomination. I have little concern about the spiritual salvation of gay people. God help the rest of us.

Third, I am not afraid of my own sexuality. Homophobia is rampant in the straight male community partly because so many men are afraid to examine and understand the full dimension of their sexuality. If we are seen around gay people, we are labeled queer by association. A former friend of mine once asked, “Why do you hang around so many fags?” My answer is that many of us in the straight community have much to learn from our gay allies about being real men, being emotionally available, appreciating beauty and having common interests and conversations more sophisticated than the Av’s chances in the Stanley Cup Playoffs. Try getting two straight guys in a room together to say “I love you” instead of “thanks man” or “cool dude”.

Finally, Gay Pride is a blast. As far as I am concerned gay folks still throw the best parties. If you missed this year’s fun I hope you will “come out” and join me next year.

**NOMAS Offspring (from their website):**

In 1986, in the face of the Supreme Court's Bowers vs. Hardwick decision, 1986, members of the Gay Rights and Homophobia Task Group of the National Organization for Changing Men (now NOMAS) met at the Atlanta M&M to discuss strategies for combating homophobia. They drew on their experiences as gay, bisexual, and heterosexual men confronting homophobia in their work and social lives. In 1987, the Campaign was born, with a Steering Committee composed of women and men. In 1988, the first conference on Anti-Homophobia Education was held in Washington, DC, with participants from the United States, Canada, England, and Israel

“The Campaign to End Homophobia is a not-for-profit corporation with diverse, international support. Friends include parents of lesbian and gay children, rabbis, priests, therapists, writers, community organizers, family planning staff, sexuality educators, AIDS activists, anti-oppression educators and diversity trainers, college students and their advisors, and lesbian, gay, and bisexual activists. We are a multicultural group focusing on learning about the relationships between homophobia/heterosexism and other forms of oppression and developing personal, cultural, and institutional strategies to educate ourselves and others visit www.endhomophobia.org.”
Cool Sites for Hot Issues
Gleaned from readers suggestions and the editor's surfing...

The mission of PrideFest America is to host the nation’s preeminent annual GLBT symposium and festival. Our goals are to state a high visibility forum that focuses on regional, national and international organizations and their issues; decrease external homophobia by generating understanding about our breadth, commonality, diversity and impact of homophobia on our lives; and diminish internal homophobia by addressing its causes and presenting individual and community role models. The Board of Directors believes that our civil rights movement needs an annual forum where individually and collectively we gather to consider where we’ve been, where we are now and what direction to set. We believe that PrideFest America is that forum and as such serves an important role in our emancipation.

AmfAR
The American Foundation for AIDS Research (AmfAR) is the nation’s leading nonprofit organization dedicated to the support of AIDS research, AIDS prevention, treatment education, and the advocacy of sound AIDS related public policy. www.amfar.org

Shesgothelp.com
We are proud to present this website on behalf of victims of domestic violence worldwide. Here you will find an extensive list of categorized retail affiliates. A portion of the profits made by our affiliates is sent to us to donate to women's organizations and shelters nationwide. You just visit your selected retailer using the links that we provide so the transactions are recorded as coming from us. Together we can make a difference. www.shesgothelp.com

PRIDEFEST AMERICA
www.pridefestamerica.com

9to5
9to5, National Association of Working Women is a national, grassroots membership organization that strengthens women’s ability to work for economic justice. Founded in 1973, 9to5 has activists in more than 200 cities and members in every state. www.9to5.org

COLAGE
COLAGE is the only national and international organization in the world specifically supporting young people with gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender parents. www.colage.org

No More
No More is an organization of men and women, united for the purpose of educating men about rape using the most effective methods shown by scientific research studies. Based on this principle, No More currently encourages groups including colleges, the military, local civic organizations, rape crisis centers, and other similar organizations to use The Men's Program, a one hour workshop titled "How to Help a Sexual Assault Survivor: What Men Can Do." www.nomorerape.org

GayToday
www.gaytoday.badpuppy.com — Just what it says. Edited by Jack Nichols, one of the “fathers” of gay activism, GayToday offers a broad perspective on news and issues affecting gay men and lesbians.

Contributions and suggestions are always welcome! Please forward to info@nomas.org. Editor
Editor's Note

The summer issue of BROTHER is finally getting finished! We have suffered a series of computer failures that has delayed everything. We have finally managed to reassemble material from four different machines and consolidate it onto a loaner that we hope will survive – at least until August and the post-M&M clean-up work. Automation is wonderful but when it fails we have to stand in wonder at how debilitating the failure can be. Enough on that subject!

This issue is focused on fathering with wonderful essays by Vernon McClean, Doug Gertner, Neil Chethik and others. Peter Alsop gives us an over-all view of issues relative to children and parents and the need for a feelings vocabulary to express ourselves to one another, and Trinidad Sánchez’s exquisite poem, “The First Time” must be read aloud to hear its music and feel the emotions of a son reflecting on his relationship with his father. Matt Kailey’s paean to his father offers yet another view of a father’s impact on his children.

June, however, in addition to hosting Father’s Day in mid-month, is also Gay Pride month and National AIDS Awareness month so some of the summer issue is dedicated to these topics as well. basil elias and P.J. D’Amico present two very different aspects of life in the gay experience. Both are very powerful.

We didn’t get much correspondence this quarter but hope some of you will be inspired to write and to submit material for future issues. There also wasn’t much news of a personal nature submitted for Milestones so let me share the good news that Christopher Kilmartin has been given full professorship at William and Mary. CONGRATULATIONS! Chris! Still, “Cool Websites for Hot Issues” is going strong and suggestions are welcome!

Included with the membership mailing of Summer BROTHER is a copy of the special conference edition with the abstracts from the papers presented at the 13th Annual Men’s Studies Association Meeting. Many thanks to David Greene for his fine work reviewing submissions, selecting an interesting collection of presenters and coordinating the compilation of the abstracts for this publication. Copies of the special BROTHER are distributed to conference attendees and mailed to our members.

Many thanks to everyone who contributed to this issue! And thanks for your patience with the delays and apparent fits-and-starts incurred bringing this production to life. Next month’s issue will have a less focused theme with articles on gender issues, anti-violence and perhaps another essay by a father. We also expect to have a couple of book reviews and we welcome volunteers to help with those efforts.

As always, kudos and brickbats are welcome as are submissions of essays, articles, book reviews, cartoons, photos and almost anything that can be printed. Have a happy summer! Enjoy BROTHER and pass along your copy to others who may be interested – or contact us to send a complimentary copy. Happy reading!

NOMAS

Become a member of: THE NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MEN AGAINST SEXISM

Post Office Box 455
Louisville, CO 80027-0455

Membership application form – please complete and return with your check or money order to the address indicated.

Name_________________________________________
Org___________________________________________
Address_______________________________________
City___________________________________________
Phone_________________________________________
Email_________________________________________
Areas of interest_________________________________

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