

Notes from the Men's Summit in Belfast, Feb. 23, 2013

Original Agenda and Schedule:

1. History of each gathering
2. Goals and mission statements
3. Problems faced
4. Insurance issues
5. Promotion ideas
6. Working together to help solve problems
7. Sharing table space at, for example, the Common Ground Fair
8. Please send me other topics of discussion that we should take up.

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| 10:00-10:30 | Arrival and getting to know each other over coffee and donuts. |
| 10:30-11:15 | Presentations by each gathering on their history and activities over the years. |
| 11:15-12:00 | Open discussion of common problems and attempted solutions. |
| 12:00-1:00 | Lunch Break |
| 1:00-2:00 | Check-In - A chance to hear from each participant about what he is thinking. |
| 2:00-3:00 | Summary of the summit and suggestions as to where we go from here. |

History of each group

1. **First Light Men** – Presenters: Ralph Manglass and John Paynter

Ralph Manglass said that he first established the First Light Men's Gathering in 2004. The group grew from an interest by the Yarmouth Unitarian Universalist men's group, and when the group needed an insurance rider, the Yarmouth church took care of it, which was fairly easy to do. Now the sponsorship of the gathering has been taken over by the Allen Avenue UU Church. Ralph had previously attended a gathering of Granite Men, an offshoot of Mainely Men) in Tuftonboro, NH at the William Lawrence Camp and seed money was provided by the Granite Men. The group originally celebrated solstice and equinox events and they twice did rites of passage with the youth. For the first seven years,

the group utilized the venue of the Chewonki Foundation in Wiscasset, an environmental high school center, where the participants slept in yurts in February, though they could also sleep on classroom floors. One year, in 2008, they had the gathering at Camp Winona on Long Lake. Ralph created the gathering to fill in the gaps between other gatherings. The gathering is held once a year during the first weekend in February. Early on First Light would do solstice and equinox hikes up Bradbury Mountain or to Winslow Park beach to watch the sunrise, but since the members were mostly older and the hikes became more challenging for the oldest men, we stopped having them. We are still a gray-haired group for the most part.

The gathering is now held at the Darling Marine Center, a part of the University of Maine, in Walpole, ME (near Bristol). All meals and linens are provided by the Darling Marine Center staff. There is a large meeting space with a great stone fireplace, a full-service kitchen, and a dining area. An attached dormitory building has heated dormitory rooms each with two bunk beds in each room. Linens are provided. Average attendance for First Light Men has been 19-20 men.

John Paynter noted that the gathering lasts from Friday through Sunday, and between 15-25 guys usually attend, mostly from Portland, and all are welcome, a good mix of gay and straight men. There is a big fireplace, lots of circles, a talent show, and the food and dishes are all taken care of. It also offers a beautiful view of trees and water, stargazing, and marine life. The name came from the fact that Maine is the first place in the United States to see the sun. The group has a small board of three people. The workshops aren't too tight. It's a real retreat, and very laid back.

2. **GAYLA** – Presenters: John Paynter and Frets Halligan

John said that GAYLA is the oldest Gay men's gathering in Maine. It is held once a year, and this summer is the 35th gathering. It began back in 1979. The Ferry Beach Park Association board, in its wisdom and interest in civil equality and realizing the need for a safe place for Gay men to gather and hold a conference of their own, passed a resolution to sponsor a Gay Men's week. After 1981, when AIDS was first detected in the U.S., and as the AIDS epidemic increased over the years, HIV and AIDS awareness and support became an important part of GAYLA.

At peak capacity, all the bunks are filled with over 160 men, though recent gatherings have involved 80-100 men. Each week-long gathering has a theme, such as "Magic Happens", and it's a celebration and affirmation of Gay and Men's culture. There are many wonderful

workshops, and a lot of music, drag, tea dances, nude body painting, an incredible talent show, and many opportunities for personal contact and friendship.

Frets said that some consider GAYLA too expensive, but that's not necessarily true. It costs about \$700-\$800 for a full week, but it's worth it. It was started by a group of men from Cleveland who used to go to Ogunquit, an artist's haven. Most of the participants are not from Maine. It's an incredible experience: it's in July, and your dorm is right on the water. The living is carefree and the food is supplied, although you do have to bring your own bedding.

3. **Gay Men Together (GMT)** – Presenters: Dale Goodwin and Ryan Nix

Dale became president of GMT 2-3 years ago. Jack Bragdon had started it along with Ron King back in the mid-1990s. MBT was getting too full and there was a desire to form another group. It's a 3-4 day retreat held at Pilgrim Lodge in West Gardiner. It has workshops on Saturday covering any and all topics, and the talent show is interesting and creative. GMT was founded as a retreat and conference-type event for Gay men. An important function was to bridge the gap between HIV+ and HIV- Gay men who had become much separated in the beginning of the AIDS crisis. Each man has a "Post Office box" with his name and optionally a photo on it, and men can leave messages in each other's mailboxes. We're a family when we leave and we're always eager to get back. Many of us maintain contact throughout the year between retreats. Since GMT was founded, Jack Bragdon and Joe Murphy have done a lot to build it up. GMT is registered as a non-profit group. The next retreat, in May 2013, will be the 34th.

4. **Maine Coast Men (MCM)** – Presenters: Brad Purdy, Ham Niles, Lew McGregor, and Carl Stoddard

Brad says that back in 1987 there were 6-8 small men's groups in the Camden area. From 1987 to 1996, eight guys met once a week. Eight men joined Brad's men's group, and from 1993-1998 the men's group met monthly and did physical neck-down movement exercises. They also honored men that had passed on by building caskets for symbolic burial rites to honor their spirits. Then 15 guys started meeting once a month on Fridays to do movement with music, with little conversation. From 1993 to 1998, 15 guys rotated. Once a year they would do a whole weekend of movement in silence. They even got involved in handling deaths, including pushing the button at the crematorium. At one point, 40 men attended a potluck at the Grange Hall and there were discussions regarding a potential for a larger gathering. By 1991?/1997? there was a critical mass and it was decided to have a weekend event at the Tanglewood 4-H Campground in Lincolnville because Mainely Men was overbooked. There were 70 guys at the first gathering, which was oversubscribed. Now there are generally about 35 or fewer. The gatherings go from Friday to Sunday and are held

twice a year, in May and October. Occasionally, participants also have potlucks mid-season at Grange Halls. Maine Coast Men now gathers twice a year, the first weekend in May and the first weekend after Columbus Day. But by 2000, the men's groups began to fall apart.

Ham notes that each guy pays \$100 for the weekend. After all the men's stuff is over, it's about radical acceptance of all men who show up, similar to other groups. There have been as many as 70 participants, but now average attendance is down to about 25-35. The goal is to create a sacred space to explore things. Each weekend has a theme. MCM has a brochure. The board consists of 6-7 men. Each gathering begins with a 3-4 hour opening circle, and then there are workshops, a brief business meeting on Sunday morning, and a closing circle. Meal preparation, cooking and clean-up are shared by the men who attend.

Lew notes that they have recently lost many numbers. A lot of Gay guys have shown up, and they have struggled with this issue in the past. The effort is to create a "safe container". MCM does accept teenage boys.

5. **Mainly Men** (MM) – Presenters: Rudy Narvaez, Joe Minott, Don Chimera, and Ralph Manglass

Rudy says that Mainly Men has been going on for over 30 years and are held at Pilgrim Lodge, a summer camp run by the United Church of Christ in West Gardiner. It was founded in May of 1982 by Willie Ouellette whose father used to cook for Pilgrim Lodge. The next gathering is number 63. Men's groups originally started as a response to the women's movement, but by now things have changed and the participants are now mostly older men. Mainly Men welcomes men from all walks of life and provides a safe and open environment where men can make new friends, share experiences, develop trust and gain a better understanding of ourselves and others. We offer a place to recognize and celebrate our diversity as men and our uniqueness as individuals in a supportive atmosphere.

Retreats are always held at Pilgrim Lodge from Friday to Sunday the third weekend of May and from Friday to Monday on Columbus Day weekend in mid-October. A "Cultural Event" is held on Saturday evenings. Mainly Men has a six-man board which meets every other month at different places in Bath, Augusta, and Portland. It has a website, a newsletter, a Facebook page, and a booth at the Common Ground Fair. The opening and closing circles are really important. Participants must be at least 18 and all men are accepted. The critical mass needed is about 30. Mainly Men is registered as a non-profit corporation.

Mainely Men offers a half-price incentive for new men in order to help them share in the Mainely Men magic. They also sponsor the Dodd Roberts Scholarship fund, named in honor of a man whose contributions were a dynamic and driving force behind the early success of Mainely Men. The fund is used to offer men a discount off the normal cost of a weekend if they are unable to afford the entire fee. Fees are on a sliding scale according to income.

6. **Make Beautiful Tribe (MBT)** – Presenters: Wayne Smith and John Paynter

Back in the 1980's, MBT member Charles Hopkins was working at the Tanglewood 4-H Campground and he would occasionally invite groups of friends over to barbecues. The community grew in response to the need for education and information sharing among Gay and HIV+ men. In November of 1990, 16 men participated in the first formal gathering, and a counselor named Perry Sutherland was hired to make presentations on AIDS-related issues. For the first five years, the group met once a year. Then, in 1995, it started meeting twice a year under the name Penobscot Bay Gaymen's Gathering. It was about this time that Jack Bragdon split off from this group to form Gay Men Together.

Around 2002, it was decided to incorporate the group as a non-profit organization and Ron King renamed the group the Make Beautiful Tribe, although it is also officially known as the Penobscot Bay Gay Men's Health Association. MBT is loosely structured, maintaining opening and closing circles but not always a rigid workshop structure. There is a famous Talent Show on Saturday, and also a "town meeting" on Sunday morning, during which various business issues are discussed. MBT also conducts a remembrance ritual in which each man takes a rock and they all process to a secret area in the nearby forest to place his rock on a cairn, to offer up names, and to remember those who have passed.

Other gatherings we're heard about:

1. **Maine Den Men** is a bar-centered and bear-centered weekend retreat in mid-winter. There is a lot of drinking and a party atmosphere prevails. MDM was begun by Mark Nutt.
2. **Midcoast Men** although listed online, it is an apparent reference to Maine Coast Men.
3. **Mid-Coast Boys to Men** was established by Dave Miramant, also a participant in Maine Coast Men. The group has come and gone, and two women in Camden found funding for it. It was held at the Camden YMCA about five years ago, and it was a great day of activities for young men, including kayaking, cooking, and even a helicopter. It happened only once.

4. **Western Mountains Men** was patterned after MCM with people from the Farmington area. It was founded by Espahbad Dodd, but never reached critical mass.
5. The **Golden Raven Storytelling Circle** was established by Roland Watier on his farm in Union. It has a Native American spiritual style. For 15 years Roland has been involved with Men's Groups, and in the past few years, Roland has moved out into professional storytelling. The Circle is open weekends in the summer and is a great place for storytelling around a campfire. Address: 715 Sennebec Rd Union, ME 04862. Phone: 207-785-4730. Website: <http://www.watier.org/Ron/goldenraven.htm>
6. **Courageous Men's Intimacy Group**, **The Men's Resource Center of Southern Maine**, and **Inner Edge Counseling** - All three of these services were created by Stephen R. Andrew, 25 Middle Street, Portland, ME 04101. Phone: 207-518-7765 x3.
7. **Out On Mount Desert Island (OOMDI)** is a social group located in the Bar Harbor area. It was originally for both Gay men and Lesbians, but is now largely Lesbian only. <http://www.geocities.ws/oomdi/>

Other groups, both in Maine and elsewhere:

1. **Easton Mountain** – Hudson Valley, NY; eastonmountain.org
2. **Granite Men** – Tuftonboro, NH; granitemen.com
3. **Gay Guyz Group (GGG)** – holds monthly potluck dinners in the greater Hancock-Waldo county area; maineguyz.org
4. **Just Guys** – meets at the UU church in Augusta; justguys.info
5. **All About Prevention** – Lewiston-Auburn area; allaboutprevention.org
6. **Go-Portland** – founded by Mat Robedee; meets weekly. Now occasionally has special events such as dine-outs; facebook.com/thegogroups
7. **Go-Ogunquit**; facebook.com/thegogroups
8. **Go-Saco** now known as **Saco Gay Men**; facebook.com/thegogroups
9. **Men Letter** – Tim Behr – Portland – he lists all sorts of gatherings
10. **Casco Gay Men** – offshoot of Matlovich society. Held Monday night meetings and fundraisers. John Paynter coordinated it for a while. It has now folded.
11. **All About Guys** is the social arm of All About Prevention, a.k.a. Merrymeeting; formerly in the Lewiston-Auburn-Brunswick area, but now just Lewiston. Founded by David Anthony Curtis.
12. **Guys Like Us** (for ages 16-22) meets at Camp Kaev/Kieve in Nobleboro. Sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control. Run by Jason Hunt and Andrew Queer Jones.
13. **The Monday Men** is a closed group of 6-12 people which meets in Belfast; associated with Ham Niles.

14. Another group meets twice a month in Belfast; associated with Lew McGregor.
15. Many churches have men's circles (Allen Ave. UU in Portland meets once a month on Saturday mornings; Rockland UU under Frank Mundo is doing window work.)
16. **Proud Rainbow Youth of Southern Maine** (PRYSM); <https://commcc.org/our-programs/special-initiatives-community-programs/prysm/>
17. **Out! As I Want to Be** – Rockland; [facebook.com/outmaine](https://www.facebook.com/outmaine)
18. **Outright** – several branches: Lewiston-Auburn, Central Maine, Portland, Ellsworth; outrightla.org
19. A disabled man on Deer Isle, Peter Flynt, has a phone line; see FAN Newsletter
20. **Gay Men's Newsletter** – Joe Chandler.

Many of these groups have been negatively affected by the internet.

Discussion

We all agreed to provide Wayne Smith with our goal and mission statements.

At this point we decided to list some of the areas that we thought we had in common in our experience in conducting men's gatherings in Maine, and areas where we could possibly combine our resources. The list that we came up with is as follows:

1. **Finding funding sources** - Ron King is a great resource; good reason to form an umbrella organization; Gary Watson will work on it; Don Chimera knows someone; Fundraising – we could do a joint year-end appeal, spaghetti dinner, yard sale, etc. There was a proposal to form a committee to research Grant writing and possible grants. Gary Watson and Don Chimera volunteered for this, and Ron King was unanimously volunteered due to his recognized skills and non-attendance at the summit.

2. **Attendance:** MCM once had a brush with oblivion. They were down to 21 participants, so they made personal phone calls to try reaching out to men that had attended in the past to invite them back to the experience, and it made a difference. They have had a modest renaissance which hopefully will continue on. They found that press releases don't work very well. It's better to have each person bring a friend, but it's not all that easy. Homophobia is still a big issue.

Rudy says that Mainely Men has a "touch list" of people who are contacted personally by MM members via e-mail, phone, etc. First Light Men has a monthly men's breakfast at the

Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist church in Portland where they maintain regular contact. They also have a Wednesday noon lunch at 1 City Center. Usually only about 3-4 people show up, but it has been up to 15 and has been going on for ten years. This type of regular contact helps maintain numbers. GMT has been trying to revamp its evaluation process and they are considering moving to an online survey. FLM also has a survey to find out what participants liked and didn't like.

Is there a minimum number of guys required in order to make each retreat financially feasible? Gay Men Together and Mainly Men both meet at Pilgrim Lodge and each group must pay for a minimum of 65 men even if attendance is lower. So both groups try very hard to get as many men there as possible. MCM and MBT both use the Tanglewood 4-H Campground which has a fixed rate for the hall and kitchen, plus a per man/per night fee. On top of this is the cost of food and insurance.

Attracting Youth: Ryan from GMT said that younger guys are largely apathetic. As long as they have Grindr and ManHunt they're satisfied. There is a computer-centered anime-based culture, and they are satisfied with the social interaction made possible by technological advancements and they have little to no interest in seeking out a community of men. There was additional discussion by the group that maybe we should consider trying to attract men in their thirties and up, after they had more life experience.

Ralph, of First Light Men, has twin sons and they don't understand the importance of men's gatherings. They take a lot of it for granted. John Paynter asked if the 20-somethings need gatherings. Maybe not. They're freer to be themselves at an early age. But what about the 30, 40, & 50-somethings? Rudy agreed that very young people are not interested in gatherings. Dale noted that there's also a financial element related to youth participation. Ralph said that at FLM the median age is in the upper 50s.

Possible Venues:

There are 115 summer camps in Maine. Let's check out the list and see about possibilities. If necessary, we could form a group to gather information regarding availability, locations, and opportunities for alternate gathering sites. Gary Watson asked about the possibility of a gathering of groups? There was a discussion of possibly combining more than one event in one venue to save costs. It would be difficult to coordinate such an effort, but not impossible if we came to this point. It does merit further consideration dependent upon attendance.

Pilgrim Lodge in West Gardiner;

Tanglewood 4-H Campground in Lincolnville; Brad works there.

Blueberry Cove – cabins are not heated;

Bishop's Wood in Camden – a little more upscale;
Darling's Marine Center – don't have to worry about preparing and cleaning up;
Ferry Beach - We could take over one of the dorm buildings at the same time as others. They would take care of food.

Insurance issues – Are there differences in cost? Ham says MCM pays about \$200 per gathering. Dale says GMT pays \$500 per year, as does Mainely Men. Don Chimera says MBT pays \$160 per retreat. JP asked what agencies are already covering these groups. FLM is under the umbrella of the Allen Avenue UU Church. Gary Watson volunteered to work on this. Each group should report back to Wayne Smith with information about your current costs and insurance providers. This will help us to leverage and possibly combine and reduce overall event costs under a possible umbrella organization.

Food waste: Each group attempts to provide healthy food for their gatherings and to eliminate waste as much as possible. If there is leftover food at a gathering, personal experience has shown that men try to distribute the food to local food banks and to those in need. We could also sell unused food to the next group.

Scheduling conflicts – We should make more choices available. More information is needed about the timing of each gathering. Let's set up a calendar. Each group should send the dates of your events to Wayne, so that he can publish them. Some groups have solid schedules, but others don't. John Paynter mentioned that there is also the issue of regionality. People should be able to attend other groups, but there is a need to know what the schedules are.

Promotion ideas – We could put out literature about other gatherings at our own gatherings. Each group should send information about its gatherings to all the other groups, along with their mission statements and goals. A potential goal might be a combined brochure to promote all of the various groups that are sponsoring events within the state. To this end, please have each group provide Wayne Smith with your goal and mission statements.

Working together – There was a discussion about working together to help solve problems. Rudy mentioned Mainely Men's table at the Common Ground Fair. Should we all share it? Don noted that it takes several people to man it, otherwise it's just grueling. The general public doesn't understand what men's gatherings are. MM has used poster boards, etc. Is anyone else interested in sharing that space? Further discussion is welcomed on this topic as well as the issues of combined advertising and promotion. Anyone from

any group who is interested in exploring this further is encouraged to contact Don Chimera to discuss suggestions and ideas prior to the next summit meeting.

Scholarship funds – Can we collaborate on this? Don Chimera said that many people are paying too much, so scholarships are needed. There was a discussion of offering an incentive to men that were interested in attending another group but could not attend for either financial reasons or because of scheduling conflicts. Mainely Men does offer a half-price incentive for men that attend for the first time.

Forming an umbrella organization: We should make a list of all men's gatherings in Maine. John Paynter suggested that we call the umbrella organization that might be created to represent all men's gatherings The Maine Council of Men's Gatherings.

Final Comments:

- Carl stressed the importance of this being a men's issue, not just a straight or gay men's issue. Yes, differences need to be recognized, and celebrated, but we need to be unified in our purpose.
- Shall we buy land to establish a Maine Men's Conference Center? Let's see how things evolve.
- All groups seem interested in having further meetings. Let's stay in touch for now.
- Brad suggested that we have each group report back to this group after each gathering.
- Carl suggested that we prepare a survey sheet for all men to fill out at each gathering.
- Ham said we should plan another meeting after we've talked with our individual organizations.

Respectfully submitted,

Rudy Narvaez

February, 2013