

Body and Mind Come Together

To Your Health
By Craig Nelms

The AIDS epidemic has forced gay men to take a fresh look at the care they have given (or not given) their bodies and minds. A few gays have, prior to the advent of AIDS, pursued avenues often ignored by traditional medicine. The lesbian community has a long history of interest in alternative medicine and healing. AIDS, however, has forced a greater number of people to seek such sources of health. In many parts of the United States, large alternative health movements exist; in our region, the movement is smaller, but it definitely exists. This installment will feature an interview with a counselor familiar with this movement. Next month, we shall meet a medical practitioner who utilizes alternative healing methods.

Noel Stypman is a licensed social worker based here in Charlotte. His practice is called Rise Counseling Services. Stypman's background includes traditional training in psychological services, and also the techniques discussed here. Stypman called it "Wholistic Counseling." Wholistic methods aim at balancing the Body, Mind and Spirit, so that good health overall will be achieved.

The Wholistic health movement attracts all kinds of people. This is true of Rise Counseling, too. Stypman sees both men and women, and 50% of his clients are gay or lesbian. Their needs may be primarily psychological (such as depression), or they may include serious health matters, too. Cancer patients are often seen, and Stypman has worked with some clients with AIDS.

A wholistic counselor will aim at bringing the Body, Mind and Spirit into balance for all clients; each client, however, will follow a unique course designed for him/her, and he/she will be an active partner in choosing the

specific techniques used. Nutrition is an important part of the picture. Stypman also uses relaxation and breathing techniques, visualization, hypnotherapy, massage, positive reinforcement systems, and sensory deprivation in his practice.

Sensory deprivation is another technique which Stypman uses. It involves spending time in a tank of water which has Epsom salts dissolved in it, so that a person's body is totally supported. No light enters the tank. It is a totally relaxing experience which alters the brainwaves, and can greatly influence the healing process.

Stypman also encourages clients to increase the amount of physical contact they have with others. "So often we make love and just 'get to it,'" he says. "I encourage people to cuddle a lot." Touching can be very healing, according to Stypman, especially when we feel lost, isolated or abandoned. People without lovers should ask a friend to cuddle with them. "It doesn't have to be sexual," Stypman points out, "it just needs to be touch."

Stypman says the wholistic techniques are all about empowerment, "taking control of your life." Doctors cannot "fix" us, according to Stypman; we must fix ourselves. By dealing wholistically with problems, we take control and avoid the VICTIM role; we now have something we can DO. Stypman finds this aspect to be especially important for AIDS sufferers, because they often feel so hopeless and helpless. Many people with AIDS now use wholistic techniques to improve the quality of their lives, and some attain improved health. According to Stypman, "Wholistic techniques are giving AIDS sufferers HOPE."

Some important things to consider when investigating alternative therapies: First, is the therapist well-trained? Look for therapists with some traditional training and licensing in therapy; although a therapist cannot be licensed for the alternative methods

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Charlotte Women Get It Together

The Soft Spot
By Ann Michele

Happy New Year to all of you! This is the first of a monthly column for gay women, and I hope it can be a new source of information to you as well as provide a forum to discuss our lifestyle, our relationships, and, most importantly, our own personal growth.

I want to thank QCQ President, Jim Yarbrough (the publisher of Q-Notes), for recognizing the lack of print directed toward the lesbian community, and for doing something about it. Your comments/letters, information referrals, and even guest columns from those who would like to express their views/insights are welcome here.

Since coming to Charlotte six years ago, I've seen the community grow enormously. Those of you who went to see "Desert Hearts" at the Manor Theatre can attest to this. Night after night, groups of women, couples, singles — many that we've never seen out before — came to see a love story, a good story with a happy ending (for a change), a story that we could all relate to.

What am I trying to say? That we should go out and make more lesbian movies? Maybe, but there's more to it than that. We have a large community here that's pretty much closeted, and understandably so because of our jobs, our families, and "significant others" in our lives. But there is also a need for us to socialize, to meet other lesbians who share our views, and our interests, whatever they may be.

Just over a year ago, an organization was formed to try to fill the gap that existed for us between the bars and the churches. That organization was Queen City Friends (known affectionately and anonymously as QCF). To the surprise and delight of those who were instrumental in its conception, the organization has survived and grown. Its objective is very simple — to provide a non-structured, non-threatening social setting for women to meet each other. And that's happened, but additionally, it's also become an informal support group for those coming out and a place to do some much needed networking.

To me, the success of QCF says that the community is ready to open that closet door just slightly to participate in activities that meet their needs. However, QCF can't be and won't be the vehicle to satisfy everyone. I hear a lot of women saying they wish there were more activities, more places to go, more things to do in Charlotte, but right now it's just talk. It's time for those of you who want to make a difference to come forth and turn your dreams into reality; to take a little of that verbal energy and shape it into something more concrete. We've got a really neat group of women here in Charlotte, and we have reason to be proud of ourselves. Let's show our pride by becoming involved in our community. Let's make 1988 the year that the Charlotte community comes into its own!

Editor's Note: QCF is listed in the Organizations section on page 2. Contact them for more information on meeting and location.

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