

***Marking
Life's Stages***

***Appropriate
'Rites of Passage'
for
Men and Boys.***

Don Bowak

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*I dream of creating a vehicle,
a form, a process for the far-children
by which they and their generations
may honour each other.*

*It must be so beautiful
that they won't be able to resist it.
It must also be flawed enough
that they won't be able to keep their
hands off it.*

Don Bowak, 2006

About this book

This book was a long time in coming with ideas spanning some 20 years of writing.

It grew out of thoughts and ideas exploring the return, to modern western societies, of the practice of creating 'rites of passage' to mark life transition points for men and boys.

It explores our need for processes that mark critical changes in life that assist in the development of both personal and social identities - and how, in the absence of appropriate, socially sanctioned and supported processes, we so often see others created with negative consequences akin to those that result from military 'bastardisation' and gang or workplace 'initiations'.

It sees ritual as a powerful aid to personal change and growth; not as 'magical' thinking but as a way of embodying men's evolving intentions at critical stages and of making them 'public' thereby increasing both personal commitment and community support.

It identifies the major elements and the issues that need to be addressed in the creation of an effective ritual. It illustrates how these can be woven into practical processes with examples drawn from work with adolescent boys and older men responsible for their care, guidance and nurture as they enter this formative passage from boyhood to manhood.

It asserts that there is a deep need for connection between boys and their fathers and, equally a need for connection between these fathers and, through them, a link for their sons into a wider community of mature men including 'elders'. In

developing these linkages and appropriate rites to mark life's critical stages we are better equipped to recognise, bless and welcome boys' to a lifelong journey towards a richer and maturing masculinity.

Acknowledgements

This book originated in early work around the recovery of rites of passage for boys in 1996. That whole process was clearly driven by our own yearning for closer connections with our own fathers. I am deeply grateful for the friendships and the discussions that have informed this important exploration which, I would assert, has only just begun.

My thanks go to Dr. Tony Webb for his patience, skill and insight as editor; to my wife Mardhi for her support and feedback; to Paul Henley and Leonie Deuis, Dr. Arne Rubinstein; the Pathways Trustees and facilitators; the Traks tribe in New Zealand, and above all, the boys. Thanks especially to my sons, Simon and Fionn

The opinions offered here are my responsibility. I hope they will assist in restoring trust between young and old and healing between men. It has also been a great joy to have been joined by the women on their exploration of similar work with mothers and daughters under the aegis of the Pathways Foundation. The possibility grows now of moving this work out into the community where it has always belonged. It is my hope that we might create a forum for an expanded discussion around the possibilities of human growth and expansion, not as prescription, but as an opening to new possibilities. This is only a beginning. Succeeding generations will take what is useful and use it, bless them, so it has always been.

Don Bowak , Rosedale. June 2008

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The return of Rites of Passage

Human beings of every culture have sought to mark the great changes in life with ceremony and rituals. Occasions such as birth, marriage and death are marked both personally and collectively. Over the last twenty years there has been a growing movement exploring how we might return to creating rites of passage for adolescents. It is out of this experience that this book emerges.

What is becoming clear is that where no socially sanctioned markers are provided, young men - and I believe also young women - will create their own markers. Too often these will be clearly aimed at creating a separate cultural identity by shock tactics such as: binge drinking, drug use, 'unsafe' sexual activity and early pregnancies, gangs, fast cars or any other activity that will impress and engage their competitive peers. Their message appears to be something like "*I am no longer a child. I am powerful. I am independent and I will do as I wish rather than what I am told to do.*" Whilst these are clearly statements of independence, they are made the more satisfying if they also carry an additional layer of rejection, shock and challenge for authorities such as their parents and elders.

It has become obvious to those of us in the men's movement who have been involved with teenagers, especially 'troubled teenagers', that a better process might be to formally confront them with their freedom, to bless them and to encourage them to become positive members of society and to offer support as they face the inevitable responsibilities that come with that freedom - to acknowledge them and explore with them their current and future rights and responsibilities. In such a way, the journey is not only clearly marked but also honoured and supported.

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What follows comes out of our experience over the last fifteen years working with boys and young men.

Origins of this work

In 1995 at the fourth Australian and New Zealand Men's Leadership Gathering (ANZLMG), at Lennox Head in northern NSW, a colleague told me a story. He was visiting a young man in hospital recovering from a suicide attempt. He was explaining how final suicide was and how the young man could grow up to have a wife and children, and become a man. The young man turned to him and said,

"Who wants to grow into a man? Don't you read, or watch telly? Men are arseholes!"

Because of such stories I became increasingly interested in the recovery of 'rites of passage' where older men, more secure in their masculine identity, invite younger men to cross a number of critical stages on the journey through manhood with care and honour.

Suicide has overtaken road accidents as the major cause of death for young males in the 18-30 age group. Why has such a final solution come to seem preferable? It is futile to search for a single cause. There are many. They include low self-esteem, lack of any clearly defined future, low employment prospects, and often a lack of any clearly defined honourable model of what a man might be or become. A critical, common factor for many caught up in these life crises is the lack of any welcome to 'manhood' by older men.

Suicide has overtaken road accidents as the major cause of death for young males in the 18-30 age group

By the fifth ANZLMG gathering in Canberra in 1996, concern among the men had deepened to the point where they voted for two major projects. One was an initiative on men's health and the other was to create a process which

would encourage the initiation of boys into the masculine journey. It is one thing to approve of an idea and quite another to carry it out! This book is an attempt to begin to articulate what we are about, where we are at with the project some 10 years on, and why we think it important

Not for men only

Male and female are not mere opposites, as the old stereotypes insisted, but complementary. If you are a woman, please understand that this book is addressed specifically to men, about men and boys. One thing I have learned from the Women's Movement has been to speak out of my own experience and to avoid any assumptions about women. That said, much of what I want to say here may be relevant to women, particularly those who wish to understand something about the men in their lives and the ways they can support men in marking those key points of transition on their journey through life. The women's movement asked of men that we support women in doing their work of discovery about what it might be to be a woman unfettered by older and outdated stereotypes. We ask no less as we struggle with the challenge of building a more relevant masculine culture for men.

So, it may well be that you can change the genders as you read, and apply much of the thinking to young women. However, I ask that you do this with care. I happen to believe that young women most likely need a similar process, but one created and delivered by women. So, while many parts of this book translate readily, some will not. However, my view is that rites of passage for girls and boys should occur in 'gender ground'. That is that girls need to be welcomed and guided into the journey into womanly maturity by older women, just as boys need to be welcomed and guided by older men.

Marking the thresholds

At the psycho-social level, there is a need for some form of 'rite of passage' to overcome the gratuitous violence of unseparated men in our society, much of which is directed at themselves - whether reflected in the rise of suicide or in aggressive risk-taking behaviour with war being perhaps the worst example. But what I'm arguing for are appropriate 'rituals', thoughtfully constructed to mark the key points of transition across the whole life journey, to replace the many de-facto but often dysfunctional events and activities that mark these today.

For the young these de-facto 'initiations' include getting drunk, getting laid, getting a licence, a car, into an accident, a brush with the law, and for some incarceration and a life-long 'criminal record'. Louise Mahdi writes:

"Regardless of one's profession or age, all adults are somehow involved in initiation issues nowadays, whether we like it or not, even if only as taxpayers supporting overcrowded prisons — that is houses of failed initiation."¹

What might be needed to begin this alternative, conscious process of creating appropriate rites of passage - not merely in terms of the transition from boyhood to manhood, but identifying the principles applicable to each of the other life transitions?

¹ Mahdi (1992, p xi.)

Creating rites of passage

More than initiation rituals

Some might see this as reinventing initiation. I don't! For some cultures initiation rituals are still intact. For ours (Western, European, ex-colonial) they are not. Recovery of 'rites of passage' that mark key points in the life journey, is a conscious attempt to address a number of needs in our modern industrial societies. These needs are both psychological and social, and they are needs which have been forgotten in our fragmented modern society. An African teacher suggests that a civilisation that lacks rites of passage has a sick soul and:

“you know it is sick for three reasons: there are no elders; the young are violent; and the adults are bewildered.”²

Note that this suggests more than just a single initiation ritual for boys. It is about marking all the major transition points - including the one where the community of men may recognise those who have made the transition to 'elder'. Arnold van Gennep describes three stages found in intentional 'rites de passage' that are remarkably consistent across cultural boundaries.

- Separation from the normal world.
- Transition (Rite de passage).
- Reincorporation in the life of the community.³
-

Stages one and three indicate that this process has a social purpose. The process is important enough to retire from society for its performance, but it requires a return to the social context, and indeed the entire purpose of such rituals

² Fox M. (1994, Pg 106.)

³ Van Gennep (1909)

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was focused upon creating adults who could function usefully in the given tribal or social context.

It is in the transition stage that we seek to induce such a change. The 'intention' is to achieve a shift in the social-psychology of the individual from one stage of life development to another, not simply older but more mature stage. In the case of teenage 'initiation' rituals this is from 'dependent child' towards 'autonomous responsible adult' - from 'self-centred infant' to contributing member of society'.

This kind of transformative change the Greeks called a 'metanoia'. It signifies embracing a new set of values and ideals. The early Christian church translated this as 'conversion' but a similar, if slower, process is quite common to many institutions in our modern society, not least our universities. The whole 'ritual' of entering and studying a first year unit in most disciplines involves committing oneself intellectually and emotionally to 'the way we think, and what is acceptable as learning in this faculty'. It varies of course from 'This is the way we do science', or 'This is how we study the Law', to 'This is the only acceptable way of studying Medicine/Engineering/History/Psychology/etc'. What is being required of each student is a specific way of thinking/acting, in short a metanoia. The same occurs upon

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entering the armed services. It requires a stricter and more immediate metanoia that centres on discipline appropriate to the urgent demands of battle.

Whatever the organisation, it would help if we designed such rituals with a great deal more care and consciousness of what change it is that we are seeking. It seems that where rites are no longer socially sanctioned, then initiatory practices, especially for young men, spring up of themselves. They are driven by more than

a simple ageing process, but by needs for separation, identity and belonging - separation from childhood, and family, discovery of a new identity, and achieving a sense of belonging to the wider community.

At their worst we see 'bastardisation' rites in the army or some 'apprenticeship' rituals. Such processes are not to be left in youthful hands. We are reminded in William Golding's novel 'Lord of the Flies' how boys left to their own devices 'polarise, tribalise and ritualise' and by the time of their rescue two of them are dead.⁴ Rituals should be conducted with care and honour for the people concerned, and conducted by older, senior, responsible members of the given discipline or community. Thus, wherever it occurs, a 'rite of transition' has the intention of creating both a psychological and a social shift in the consciousness of the individual.

Natural, accidental, or consciously-chosen?

'Transitions' usually come from two sources. They come naturally from important stages in our lives, such as puberty, leaving home, marriage and the birth of children, but they also arise from sudden shocks and traumas such as a loss, a death or an accident, which can occur randomly throughout life. Such moments, we now understand, offer the opportunity for psychological expansion. Of course, we may refuse the challenge and turn such opportunities into wounds and pathologies; into bitterness and cynicism. It is far more constructive to view them as opportunities for growth and expansion, particularly when one can be supported by colleagues and by appropriate rituals. This is one of the primary reasons for the men's movement to seek to create rites or rituals to mark these transitions as well as those that occur naturally with ageing and passage through life. Men

⁴ Grimes (2000, Pg, 92.)

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can be supported in loss, failure and grief, when old structures and attitudes can be discarded, and new and more mature frameworks put in place. In these cases old patterns of adaptation have already been challenged, perhaps through divorce, illness or death. Support from their colleagues enables the proper grieving to accelerate the healing process - for these men to restructure their lives without 'avoiding' their loss.

Once a few of these natural or traumatic transitions have been faced and negotiated consciously, we can create a third category, that of chosen transition, or development. We go out to meet the challenge of making changes that lead to personal and social growth.

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It bears pointing out in this context, that when change/transition is imposed from without, people will go through five stages of grieving:

disbelief, bargaining, anger, depression and acceptance.⁵ Even when the change is chosen or we have arranged our own developmental transition, we will still face the same process, albeit much abbreviated. We will need to mourn/grieve over the loss of the familiar, or the parts of our old identity which have been sloughed off. It is proper to be aware, and to respect this process, shortened though it may be. So, even chosen growth or change may need to be supported by colleagues and by creative ritual.

Beyond stereotypes - old or new!

The primary task of the men's movement, and the most difficult one, is to articulate and model mature, non-violent,

⁵ Kubler-Ross (1969)

creative varieties of the masculine and make these visible and acceptable to the whole community. This follows on the heels of the feminist redefinitions of the new and more open possibilities for women.

The primary task of the men's movement is to articulate and model mature, non-violent, creative varieties of the masculine

One of the things I hope the men's movement can avoid is the creation of a new stereotype. We have moved beyond both 'Macho' male and 'Sensitive New Age Guy'. Neither of them satisfies us, nor will any single replacement. The problem with models is that they are not only static, but are usually idealistic. They tend to create polarised categories: normal-abnormal, acceptable-deviant etc. If we are to move away from such models we need to see some aspects of non-conformity and deviance as acceptable individuality, and even more as variety and enrichment. It also requires us to move from ideas of 'perfection' to ideas of 'wholeness' and integration. What we need to develop are masculinities which delight in their varied identities and creative energies - masculinities which embrace the world at levels beyond the merely factual, and which can recover a sense of honour in relations with others. So rather than an idealistic singular stereotype of masculinity I prefer the idea of a 'masculine field', one that embraces a wide range of masculine tendencies from straight to gay, from soft to hard, from introvert to extrovert, from intellectual to physical and so on. There is no one way to 'be' and certainly no 'right' one.

However, there are values which transcend simple preferences - values such as: integrity and honour (as opposed to simple ego gratification); the search for creative solutions to the problems of our day (rather than simplistic win/lose fights); respect for both self and 'other', whether that other be other men, women, children, or the endangered

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environment; and the treasuring of the whole range of masculine endeavour, from science to religion, from poetry to engineering, and the range of our creativity, literary, musical and artistic. The call is to become who and what we truly are, and can be.

At its core our project is one of exploring values. Anthony Stevens suggests that, in part:

*"Traditional initiatory procedures have been allowed to atrophy with disuse because our 'elders' have lost confidence in the values of which they are the custodians and no longer possess any certain knowledge as to what it may be that they are initiating young people for."*⁶

The creation of a new set of values for the field of masculinity will be the task of all men. No one man or any elite group can achieve such a thing. But each of us can say what is of value to us, and thus make our contribution to the dialogue in this most difficult and conflict-ridden field, of human values. Moore and Gillette remind us

*"...by far the most serious consequence of ceasing initiatory practices is **the loss of a periodic social forum for considering the nature of maturity.** A society has to know what maturity is before it can pass the knowledge on.A few will stumble across the destination. But most of us end up getting hopelessly lost."*⁷

Beyond 'family' values

A starting point for this values debate will be to displace our current introverted focus from the nuclear family onto the society of responsible manhood. We have begun to see the 'nuclear family' as the social '*reductio ad absurdum*' of the modern world. In these constricted families, parental neuroses are handed down pure and uncontaminated to the

⁶ Stevens (1982 Pg 159.)

⁷ Moore & Gillette (1993. Pg 28, emphasis added.)

children. Not even a slightly mad uncle or aunty gets to offer an alternative! In any case this form of 'family' is a social construction - or perhaps 'deconstruction' would be a better term. In the space of my life and the lives of many men alive today we have witnessed the breakdown of the extended family with its multigenerational links to the community, through the 'nuclear' pattern of two parents and 2.4 children to, increasingly, children raised in single parent (usually female) families. Robert Bly⁸ talks of the yet further trend today towards the 'sibling society' where our social identification is with a narrow range of people 'like us' in terms of age, status or interests - with increasing conflict between these groups, loss of unique and personal identity within many such groups, and alienation of those who are unable to find a group that 'fits'. Our experience over the last ten years has been of a 'healing' of the 'generation gap' in the respectful and caring work of fathers, sons and older men as we work towards building networks and a cooperative masculine community.

When people mourn the breakdown of the extended family, what is truly mourned is the loss of clan and community - the sense of belonging through kinship, and the social connections of our kin to a wider group on which we can rely for

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support when we need it. The nuclear family can be a truly safe place for the growing child only if the parents are healthy, growing, caring, and social human beings. However our valuing of the sanctity of the family has an entirely different effect on the children when that family is inward looking, abusive, violent, or deeply neurotic. This is not necessarily an argument for the 'authorities' to intervene in

⁸ Bly (1996)

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family life, but for us to encourage the family to open up to the noisy and healthy web of community life.

A well-constructed rite of passage is about rebuilding connection to community - for teenage boys to the community of men, for adult men to this community and to the community-wide debate about our values and how we give expression to these in daily life. Below I outline some of the principal challenges we face in this work.

Building trust

First and foremost, to begin this process we need to create a new trust between the different generations of men. This is a difficult area for men to talk about without going into some sort of 'blame' routine. To put it bluntly, many men have experienced their elders as simply absent or else critical, competitive, authoritarian, and often violent. As one man put it,

"They always told me when I was wrong, but never said anything when I was right."

Or as the common saying of the nineteen sixties had it,

'Never trust anyone over thirty!'

There is often deep mistrust between the generations of men.

It needs to be said immediately that our older generation were treated in the same fashion if not worse. For the earlier generations both mothers and fathers saw violence as a legitimate tool of control and discipline; 'Spare the rod and spoil the child' as the saying went. Youngsters do not expect older men to be either interested in their concerns, or respectful of their needs and opinions. A further cause of this mistrust lies in the lack of any mechanism for passing on the 'wisdom' of the older generation. I speak of something deeper than our opinions or bigotries. Young people don't need one set of opinions; they need many! This not only

gives them choice, but it also enables perceptive young people to gain a feel for the deeper 'wisdom' which is more likely to emerge from an aggregate of views.

Exploring 'masculinity'

As important as any ritual, and a ritual in its own right, is the process of men exploring their own masculinity, into which the boys are welcomed as partners. This involves the boys hearing the stories of the men, including their own fathers, uncles or significant other males, speaking about significant aspects of their lives - their childhood and their adult life; work, relationships, love, sexuality, marriage/family and the sense of commitment to and respect for a partner (usually female but maybe male); the birth of children and the sense of joy, responsibility and so on. In some cases this may include hearing their fathers and other men speaking about separation and divorce and the sense of loss and changing relationships with children. Invariably it includes the experience of ageing (oneself and one's family) and the normal, accidental and chosen transitions. It is here that older men model for younger men the masculine project and invite them to be partners in it.

Cooperation - groups with purpose

A properly constructed rite of passage also needs to help our young to experience achievement in the context of a group; an understanding that the co-operative group is greater than the sum of its parts. This displaces the ego from being the centre of attention, without humiliating the young person, and enables the realisation of the power of the connected and trusting group.

It should be noted that this is more than simple identification with a gang, or other group narrowly defined by place, similar interests etc. What characterises the identification is the sense

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of purpose - the sense of being part of the 'manhood' project, with responsibilities now shared with other men. An example of this can be seen in the words of one young man whose 'rite of passage' involved a 12-day wilderness experience with his uncle and three other men at the age of fourteen. He noted that his own nephew, then seven years old, would

*'... be ready for this before too long . . . hey, it'll be my job to do this won't it . . . but like you did with me I won't have to do it alone!'*⁹

Other examples, which are of quite immediate urgency, are our relation to our bodies and more especially to the earth.

*at stake here is the
birthright of our children,
our grandchildren and
those who we will never
meet - the 'far-children*

Our deeply socialised detachment from both enables us to simply use them without care or sensitivity. This is a major reason for men's earlier deaths than women, and indeed worse health outcomes at almost every stage of life. It is also a major factor in the environmental abuse that has begun to do so much damage. What is at stake here is the birthright of our children, our grandchildren and those who we will never meet. I call them the 'far-children'.

In building such rites of passage it is vital to ensure the 'affirmation' of participants rather than any form of humiliation or shaming. Central to any such ritual is a clear 'intention' which can be used to guide proceedings. Bill Plotkin, in his book *Nature & the Human Soul*¹⁰ asserts a series of stages over the lifetime of maturing human beings, both male and female, which culminate in 'elder.' He regards the introduction of 'inner' or 'soul' work in mid-life and the

⁹ Webb (2008)

¹⁰ Plotkin (2008, Pg 66.)

transition from adolescence to adulthood as the transitions most in need of ritual and community support.

All such transitions require what can only be described as a 'death' and a 'rebirth. In a society such as ours, with such a strong avoidance of even speaking about death, is it any wonder that we so frequently fail those great transitions which require a death of the old before the gift of renewal and rebirth can enter our lives? All the more reason then for the need for community recognition and support at those times of great change!

All such transitions require what can only be described as a 'death' and a 'rebirth . . . a death of the old before the gift of renewal and rebirth can enter our lives

To aid this process requires we break the 'psychic inertia' - break the 'stability' of current personal and social patterns and create movement towards new masculine identities. Sometimes we complain obsessively about (other) people's resistance to change. Herein lies a paradox. 'Resistance' frustrates our attempts to change or 'improve' others and even the institutions they inhabit, but that same 'resistance' is needed to maintain our own 'stable' personality and also our stable social institutions. Edward. C. Whitmont draws a parallel between Newton's first law and a similar law of 'psychic inertia.'

*"In the psyche, inertia is seen as a tendency towards habit formation and ritualisation . . . essential for the sense of stability and permanence which is the basis of consciousness."*¹¹

However, on the other side of the paradox:

"Every pattern of adaptation, outer and inner, is maintained in essentially the same unaltered form and anxiously defended against change until an equally strong or stronger force is able

¹¹

Whitmont (1969, p 123)

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to displace it . . . every such displacement or alteration is reacted to as a death-like threat to the ego.”¹²

Affirming the positive

We live in a society that specialises in 'bad news', from the daily media to our focus upon 'problems' and 'pathologies'. Our major focus is on the 'problems' of our young: delinquency, crime, drug-taking, and promiscuity. Youngsters who don't get 'into trouble' are, to all intents and purposes, ignored. Thus one of the corner stones of a rite of passage has to include 'blessing' or validation of the young(er) as doing their best; even doing well. Blessing occurs when an older person 'sees' us in a positive light and tells us so. Most men remember those occasions on which someone has 'blessed' them; and most of us can count those occasions on the fingers of one hand. Blessing can occur at two levels. We may be simply blessed by an older person (especially a stranger!), when they see us doing something thoughtful, kindly or creative and thus have that sort of action reinforced.

. . . a special kind of blessing occurs when an elder points to some positive aspect or potential that enables us to discover some new aspect of our 'selves'.

However, a special kind of blessing occurs at another level when an elder points to some positive aspect of one's character or potential that enables us to discover some new aspect of our 'selves'. My experience among young people is that most have been 'cursed' rather than

'blessed.' In blessing it is vital to see what is truly there. It requires more than mere compliments or vague 'affirmations' but being seen as one really is rather than as someone else would have us be. Alice Miller writes of the wound inflicted

¹² Whitmont (1969, Pg 246).

on those of us whose parents sought to turn us into something 'proper' as:

*"not to have been loved just as one truly was."*¹³

Particularly when we are young, it is important that the older person 'catch us' doing something proper or beautiful, or caring or creative - that we can value in ourselves. Even more important to have this held up to our gaze when we may have been unaware or only dimly aware of in ourselves before that moment. The idea of 'reinforcement' has a long tradition. There is an ancient psychological insight that, whatever you pay attention to, you will get more of!

Developing 'appropriate' rituals

Transformatory processes

The anthropologist, Victor Turner makes a useful distinction between ritual and ceremony. He states that:

*"Ritual is transformative, ceremony confirmatory."*¹⁴

Thus, on Turner's definition a rite of passage is a ritual, whereas a celebration is a ceremony. We create a ritual/ceremony when we bolster an idea with words and symbolic action. The concept of a ritual is not restricted to rites of passage. There are rituals of mourning; rituals of farewell; rituals of separation and incorporation, but always, it is the sense of psychic movement that underlies any ritual. Celebration and greeting can be enhanced by ceremony. If we stop to think about it, the whole routine of our working day in paid employment can be seen as a ceremony.

A rite of passage is clearly a transformatory process and this often involves the creation of appropriate ways of

¹³ Miller, (1987, p 109.)

¹⁴ Turner (in Mahdi. 1987. Pg 6)

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symbolically marking the transition - appropriate in the eyes of those older men who create the ritual with care for younger men, and appropriate in the eyes of the younger men themselves. In many ways the best rituals are co-created by both groups. However there are many who object to rituals and I understand some of their objections. Most of us working with men have found the recovery of ritual a difficult process, at least initially. In discussion with others I have found a number of reasons for this discomfort.

- First, ritual itself carries negative connotations for many people. We avoid the use of 'empty ritual' as a form of mindless activity, which at best has lost its meaning, and at worst is superstitious nonsense.
- Second, we fear that ritual is a return to 'magical thought' - the idea that the performance of a set of words and metaphoric actions will somehow influence the physical world.
- Third, those of us who have been brought up in a Christian (or other religious) milieu have imbibed a view that if a ritual is not approved by the sect we belong to, then it is not only dangerous but possibly demonic! There is of course, another religious tradition that insists that all ritual is empty posturing, and therefore tainted with the demonic!
- Fourth, ritual depends for its effectiveness on the use of metaphor, and whilst we are comfortable with metaphor

. . . ritual depends for its effectiveness on the use of metaphor

at a verbal level, we become very uncomfortable when we are required to act it out physically. This is because the split between mental and physical in our modern western societies is so deep and we are so unaware of it. We tend toward the literal in our society, and under such assumptions ritual is hard to take seriously. Edward. C. Whitmont writes:

"When it comes to the question of what makes ritual effective, we have to stop, and step out of the trap which our mental habits have created for us. The Cartesian mind-body dichotomy — the culmination of the separative trend of the late mental epoch — has brought about a split in the understanding of human activity. Physical, concrete action is reserved for the outer, 'real' world of space and physically tangible objects. Reflection belongs to the mind — that which is inner, subjective, hence not quite real..... With this mindset, mental activity is held to have no direct effect upon the world of things, except when translated into physical action. In turn, physical action — doing something with objects and things — is not expected to have a direct transforming effect on the mind except perhaps in a general way through the moral and health-improving effect of good works and exercise. In the light of this bias, any ritual activity appears senseless." ¹⁵

- Fifth, when we do wish to use ritual, we are more comfortable using one from some other source, rather than making it up or creating it ourselves. We seem to attribute a lower validity to our own creations! I believe this discomfort has to do with 'authority,' and some need for validation from external sources. To design a ritual oneself seems to claim some sort of authority to do so. I would assert that this authority belongs to all persons!
- Finally, some object to the use of rituals from other traditions as a form of 'cultural imperialism.' To this objection I might point out that never before, in human history, has such a wealth of symbolic and ritual thought been available to us through anthropological and ethnological research. Many rituals which have become available to us in the West in recent years have Oriental, Native American, African or other ethnic origins. Often these have been shared by their practitioners in

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workshops run in Australia. Where we choose to use some or part of these rituals we do so with care and respect. For example, when it comes to Aboriginal ritual, we choose not to use them unless they are authentically, deliberately and publicly given to us; and some have been given by law-men with the authority to do so.

The most powerful rituals are usually those co-created by the men involved, even if these draw on some 'template' from another culture or time. This has been my experience working with groups of men, where I ask them to create a ritual, perhaps around some transition in their lives, or to let go of some hurt, anger or bitterness. Once they get past their threshold of discomfort they can create powerful rituals with great ease, especially in a group where trust levels have been enhanced by working together. It is much more powerful to create a ritual for the occasion, within the context of that occasion, than to use some ready made ceremony. This, incidentally, helps people to regain confidence in their ability to create ritual, and encourages practice. So we are beginning to recover ritual as a means of aiding change in our internal world, not only for rites of transition, but also to aid celebration, recognition and grieving. Broadly speaking ritual and ceremony not only involve us more deeply in what is going on, but they also keep us focused on the meaning or 'intent' of what we are doing. Joseph Campbell writes,

The most powerful rituals are usually those co-created by the men involved even if these draw on some 'template' from another culture or time.

"The function of ritual, as I understand it, is to give form to human life, not in the way of a mere surface arrangement, but in depth."

Ritual is the first move in bringing thought into action. It is one thing to 'tell' a boy (or a girl) that they are 'becoming an

adult now', and must start 'taking responsibility for themselves'. It is entirely another thing to take them through a lovingly constructed 'rite of transition' and to welcome as well as invite them, openly and publicly, to enter the journey into human maturity, surrounded by the support and care of their elders and peers. It is powerful and memorable for the young men and just as surely powerful for their father and the other men involved. I cannot invite young men to take their own integrity seriously without reminding myself of the same injunction, which remains timeless.

*"this above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man."¹⁶*

Thus the conduct of such rituals has its effect upon all the participants, both young and old.

What makes for an effective ritual?

Rituals are a part of the process of marking rites of passage - all rites of passage, intentionally chosen or otherwise. In constructing any rite of passage, it is valuable to look at the social context in which it is contained. As we have seen, in Australian society today rites of passage are more accidental than intentional and often less than effective. In the case of teenage boys there is little that clearly marks the transition to manhood. In large measure there is no point at which they re-enter the community with awareness and acknowledgement of their new role and community support for the shift away from the comfortable attitudes and assumptions of dependant children to their acceptance of more adult roles.

This is not to deny that some communities do acknowledge this 'passage' for local boys and offer support. However, no

¹⁶ Shakespeare: Hamlet, Act 1, Scene 3 in Campbell (1984, Pg 43)

modern Western rite of passage has approached the levels of social support and confirmation that was achieved by the ancient tribal rites. Ronald L. Grimes comments of his own deeply involving rite of passage that it

“ . . . lodged itself deep in the bone, but left me stranded. Though sensuous and meaningful, It led to no enduring community since the community was temporary, ending when the project finished. In this respect my experience is typical of others who experiment with ritual. I know of many people initiated at weekend retreats who end up like beached whales unable to flop back into the deep waters. In my view this is the most intractable dilemma facing the inventors of rites.”¹⁷

Some contemporary rituals

Sometimes what might be effective can be seen when we look at lessons from what we have. Let us look for a moment at some contemporary rituals that our Australian society sanctions and supports.

Marriage

Regardless of the variable support for the ritual of marriage, it is and will likely remain an important rite of passage for people who wish to commit themselves to a relationship with one another. Thus the ‘intent’ of a committed relationship is clear and openly stated. The ritual process can range from a simple ceremony confirming their new status, invoking the legal necessities and performed in a registry office, to a full ritual performed in a church, or else a private ritual of their own design, again invoking legal and socially sanctioned processes. Clearly, the more deeply engaging the

¹⁷

Grimes (2000 Pg 124)

process, the more it will move from a ceremony of confirmation towards a rite of passage.

Prison

Imprisonment is also a socially sanctioned ritual. As in marriage, it is the social sanction that lends it much power. It is also surrounded by powerful ritual activity from the initial arrest through the court hearings to the imprisonment and eventual release. This is not the place to argue the utility of the process, but when we look at its 'intent' then punishment, isolation from society and deterrence would appear to be the major focus. Despite any stated objectives of rehabilitation, this would run a poor fourth. Thus we might see a problem in a confused, or at least divided 'intent.' Nonetheless the whole process is powerfully ritualised. It is a sad commentary on our modern Australian culture that among young alienated aboriginal men, serving a term of imprisonment is often regarded as a rite of passage into manhood. If such a ritual can lose its way through a confused intent, it becomes further degraded when there is virtually no social support for the 'return' to society. There is no celebration of the debt paid, no assertion of a 'clean slate' and no welcome back into community membership.

Among young alienated aboriginal men, serving a term of imprisonment is often regarded as a rite of passage into manhood

So it becomes important to pay careful attention to each step in such powerful processes. We acknowledge and support the many and various activities to remedy this, such as creating 'mentoring programs' for ex-prisoners and those at risk of incarceration - especially those developed and run by ex-prisoners themselves.

Battle

Finally let us examine active service in our armed forces. Battle has ever been one of the quintessential rites of

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passage. It commences with an extended ceremony of 'leaving'. Trainees must undergo a 'boot camp' of technical weapons training and attitudinal adjustment, learning how to kill other human beings when they have been brought up in a society with powerful taboos against such behaviour. Uniforms are used to create bonding in the group, to separate them from non-enlisted citizens and to mask individual differences. After sufficient training they are deemed ready for the extraordinary ritual of battle. In essence this is a period of time in which it becomes a matter of 'kill or be killed'. All individual identity and needs are subsumed in the needs of the group and the need to destroy the enemy. The intent is clear, singular, powerful and all-consuming. It creates an example without peer of Turner's 'liminal space'.¹⁸

It is precisely here that the return to society must be enacted, and it is here that we have failed our troops again and again. After the 1939-45 'world war' most allied troops had at least a month on board ships before they returned to our shores. Even so many were deeply marked and refused to speak of what they had seen and done. At least they were honoured and welcomed back as heroes, unlike our Vietnam veterans who were often treated as outcasts and received no such public welcome and honouring. Perhaps worse, they frequently came out of immediate battle and were flown out to 'rest and recreation' in a capital city within 48 hours. They would still be in a liminal state; no debriefing and no welcome home! Any civilian involved in a major accident or other social trauma such as earthquake, would be automatically assumed to be suffering from 'post traumatic stress' and receive debriefing and counselling as a necessity.

¹⁸

Turner (In Mahdi, 1987 Pgs 3-19.)

This may well be a substantial reason why we have lost more Vietnam veterans to post war suicide than were killed in action in the war itself. In this case there was a double failure. We failed to properly manage their debriefing and their 'return' and we also failed to offer a clear, public and social sanction and support for those who served in that conflict. Perhaps worst of all, the social and political context of that time supported their 'wounding' rather than their 'honour.' It needs to be said that such failures were not deliberate - but were nevertheless a failure to apply the fundamental principles we now know to be essential for such a major transition, in accord with our understanding of the social use of ritual.

. . . we have lost more Vietnam veterans to post war suicide than were killed in action in the war itself.

To view such activities through this lens of 'ritual' brings these facets into the foreground and makes sense of much of the difficulties of our returned troops. We have come some way in this. It was not even a hundred years ago that the onset of stress trauma on the battlefield was treated as 'cowardice' and tried accordingly. We have a long way to go and my plea is that we take this knowledge of ritual seriously and act accordingly.

Ritual in community

In these examples we see powerful reasons for containing rites of passage within local communities. Grimes suggests:

"But if we believe that rites reflect their social circumstances, then what else should we expect of rites enacted in a religiously pluralistic, highly mobile world? It is common to hear both clergy and scholars denying that peer initiations, cross-cultural initiations, and initiations without community are real rites. But excluding such practices by definition does not make them go away. These made-up, non-traditional, acultural rites

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enacted in momentary communities may not be perfect or last a lifetime, but they are real, and their way of coupling powerful gestures with intellectual cooperation and communal transience does reflect the world we live in.”¹⁹

I would go further and assert that the slow growth of such caring practices will not only enrich our society, but will also create new and extended forms of community.

As noted earlier, but it bears repeating here, where there are no socially sanctioned initiatory practices, especially for young men and young women, they seem to spring up of themselves. They are driven by more than a simple ageing process, but also by the need for separation, a new identity and a new belonging outside the nuclear family. How much better then if we were to design such rites to more effectively mark the transition, in forms that are appropriate for the 21st century but drawing on the lessons of the past.

How much better then if we were to design such rites to more effectively mark the transition, in forms that are appropriate for the 21st century

These lessons suggest some fundamental principles for social containment of the rites, in particular a three-fold structure of separation, ritual/transition and return.

Towards more effective rituals

Here I wish to highlight some of the practical elements that have been found useful in building effective rituals. Extracting key elements from the above suggests that the first requirement of any effective ritual is a clear intent and the second is a fully engaging process or ritual. For all rites

¹⁹

Grimes (2000, pp 124-5)

of passage the essence of intent is a movement from one state to another. The basic metaphor is one of death and rebirth, a journey that leaves some elements behind and takes up new and more focused responsibilities. The ritual reflects this metaphor in three key stages common to effective ritual: leaving, transition and return. In many rituals, and particularly the boyhood-manhood transition, the wider society is the external container. This we leave to enter an inner 'ritual', sometimes called 'liminal' space. Here the community of men create a 'container' or safe space within which to develop the rite of passage. Following this, we return to the wider community having left behind that which has been outgrown and carrying what we have chosen to take up as part of a more adult role.

Building the ritual community

To build the inner container as a safe space for what is frequently 'emotional work' we need to build trust in the group. This is aided by the way in which those leading or facilitating the process operate with openness and respect for the participants and one another. The immediate assertion of a 'confidentiality rule' for all personal information helps, and needs to be communally repeated from time to time during the process. In this the principle is 'what is said here, stays here!' Afterwards, outside of the process, each participant is free to share his own experience but not that of any other man. The reasons for this are twofold. First it creates safety for each participant to share what may be deep and personal experiences - for the benefit of all. The second is that, while I can interpret what I see and hear of another man's experience through what he shares, I can do so only through the lens of my own experiences. I can never fully understand what the experience is or was for him, and to attempt to do so outside the ritual process is both disrespectful and arrogant.

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A powerful technique for sharing experience which also enhances trust and the building of the ritual community is the use of 'circles'. The groups can enter a series of circles where each man speaks once, in turn, and is listened to by others. Experiences can be shared around such topics such as family, work, love, loss, change, violence, ageing and death. Sharing our stories in this way stops the participants (and the facilitators) from falling into the trap of smothering each other with advice. Again, I am often the only, and usually the best judge of what is appropriate for me. To offer 'advice' on what another should do is disrespectful, and disempowering. Sharing my story (and hearing the stories of others about how they felt, thought and acted in similar circumstances, and what they learned from this) allows me to see and hear, reflect and build my own options for tackling the situation in a way that simplistic advice never can.

The protocols for 'sitting in circle' aid the listening. As well as the sharing other protocols we have found useful include:

- ***Confidentiality.*** 'What's said here, stays here', as discussed above. It is often useful to reiterate this statement at the end of each circle.
- ***A 'Truth Stick'.*** When held, this identifies the speaker and enables him to find his own way to speak whilst the group listens. It stops interruptions and comment that may distract him while he struggles to express what may be difficult to find the words for. It also invites speakers to 'speak their own truth'. Avoid generalisations and to take personal responsibility for their stories.
- ***Respect.*** Criticism, counter-arguments and judgements are as unwelcome as 'advice'. Questions inviting the man to explain or clarify what he has said are encouraged where this helps me understand what is going on or aids the speaker to reflect more

deeply - but 'leading questions' that imply 'I know the answer' are not helpful.

Thus, the personal stories increase the richness of adult male experience for all participants - and the sharing can be deepened by facilitators modelling this process for others.

Poetry and myth

I have found that carefully selected poetry engages men at both the emotional and intellectual level. Often, men will use poetry to distil their emotions and to communicate them to others. Suffice it to say that poetry helps men and boys to contact their feelings without being overwhelmed by them, especially in the groups described here. Observe for example how the great Spanish poet Antonio Machado²⁰ evokes one of life's greatest challenges . . .

*The wind, one brilliant day, called
to my soul with an odour of jasmine,*

*In return for the odour of my jasmine,
I'd like all the odour of your roses.*

*I have no roses; all the flowers
in my garden are dead.*

*Well then, I'll take the withered petals
and the yellow leaves and the waters of the fountain.*

*The wind left. And I wept, and I said to myself:
"What have you done with the garden that
was entrusted to you?"*

The use of the great myths also helps to involve members of the group. For most men and, sadly too many boys, it has been a long time since they closed their eyes and listened to

²⁰

The Wind - Antonio Machado (Bly 1993, Pg 99)

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one of the great stories, such as Parsifal, the Odyssey or the many useful stories both from our own and other cultures. Men who work as facilitators are recovering the old skills of the 'Story Teller'.

Intention and metaphor

As noted above, 'intention' is a major ingredient of an effective ritual. It seems that it is usually the case that an 'empty ritual' has lost just that; a clear and committed intention. When constructing a transformatory ritual for boys the intention is to help/invite the young ones move onto the path into mature manhood. It is NOT to inflate the egos of the elders or impose their authority, nor is it to embed them in some sort of social hierarchy. It is constructed to benefit the young men and it must be and remain an act of service and care for those the ritual is designed and conducted for.

If this intention is held and kept clear, then the prior design of the ritual will be properly focused, and the running of the ritual will stay on track. It can even be changed in mid-action if that is appropriate to the needs of the participants. Keeping this intention alive and focused throughout the ceremony is the task of the elders and the men leading the rite of passage. I cannot overstress this point. Focus on

... the ritual activities are a metaphor for what is going on in the lives of the participants as they mark life's transitions.

intention must be brought back into awareness again and again, as we take people through their process. Whenever decisions must be made during the ritual process we start by reminding ourselves of the intention.

It is also important to remember that the activities developed as part of the ritual are a metaphor for what is going on in the real world of the lives of the participants as they mark

one (or more) of life's transitions. A powerful way to explore the essence of this transition is to create a process that mirrors this journey through the use of metaphor especially where it engages people on all levels: physical, emotional intellectual and (as appropriate for each) the spiritual.

Closing the ritual space

However, the process itself is a metaphor. I have seen some men become 'lost' in the symbolism and for this reason it is critical to 'close the circle' - to carefully plan the return phase where the men will ground their metaphoric experience in their every day reality - albeit making significant changes in their life in the process.

As we have used ritual in a broad range of activities with men's groups, especially around rites of transition with men and boys, we have come to appreciate the important distinction we referred to earlier by the anthropologist Victor Turner, that ritual is transformative whereas a ceremony is often merely confirmatory.²¹

A rite of passage constitutes a ritual whereas a graduation ceremony would be just that; a ceremony. The ritual creates what Turner describes as a 'liminal state' or an in-between state. Such a state is very fluid and participants are open to new roles and new psychosocial states. When such energies are built in an initiation, the participants become very open to one another and therefore very vulnerable. It is thus vital to have rules of confidentiality and equality during and after the ritual. However, such vulnerability can be dangerous if it is assumed it can be transferred outside the ritual. It is incumbent upon the ritual elders to help participants to restore their boundaries before they leave the site, and the formal closure of the ritual space begins this process.

²¹ Turner (In Mahdi & Foster 1987 Pgs 3-19)

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It therefore goes without saying that the facilitators must hold such processes with a very strong ethic of awareness and respect for the participants with whom they work. After perhaps five days work with other men and boys, participants move to a new place and a new relationship to one another. It is important therefore that two things happen. First, that they be confirmed in that state as properly belonging to this ritual work. Second, that the ritual space be closed and that the group be aided to recover their normal protective devices before they move back into the conventions of the everyday world.

It is important . . . the ritual space be closed and that the group be aided to recover their normal protective devices before they move back into the conventions of the everyday world.

Like other aspects of the ritual process this 'closure' can also involve creating an appropriate ritual. It may be done by simply talking with the whole group in circle about the return to 'conventional reality', by talking together about what changes in behaviour might take place or what responsibilities might be taken up. It is also proper to discuss what participants have learnt/ discovered/

seen during the experience. It may even be done by role-playing their return to family/school/ work, using their humour to ground themselves. It can also be done by ceremonially marking the transition with passage through a gateway (sometimes the one used to enter the space) or cross some threshold - anything that signifies a moment of leaving the ritual space. However it is done, it important that it is done, and done consciously and openly.

The return

Again this is a critical feature of the ritual. Participants in a rite of passage have undergone processes that mark the

letting go of elements of their past and taking up of elements of their future - things that they bring back to the community with the intention of contributing to both personal and social benefit. Designing the welcome for the return of the participants is as important a part of the ritual process as the others (thinking here, yet again, of our Vietnam veterans).

The 'shadow' side of ritual

It would be entirely remiss of me to argue for the recovery of such processes, without looking directly at the 'shadow' side of initiation and of ritual generally. Keith Thompson writes of the 'Dark Side' side of such initiatory rituals,

"We need to take hold of the idea of initiation and shake it up, make it show its ugly side. (In addition to the 'positive' initiation that comes through sharing myth, song and dance between old and young, there are many instances of predatory initiators reinforcing tribal dominance from behind their intimidating mythic masks. This sometimes takes the form of ritual beatings and sexual exploitations of initiates, the sort of behaviour we salute Alice Miller for revealing in her books about modern child-rearing practices.)

"And while I agree that men and women need different kinds of initiation, we mustn't lose sight of the absence of elder-to-youth initiation in our culture as a whole. Or the absence of initiation into the sacred leagues beyond gender".²²

In acknowledging the potential power of well constructed ritual, we must face its potential for negative results. We must examine its 'shadow' side. Earlier I noted how some rituals border on what we have called 'bastardisation' and others, created without guidance of elders or community, are

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Thomson (1989, Pg 24-5.)

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often destructive responses of the young to an inner social/psychological need in the absence of relevant and effective socially sanctioned ones. Other examples come to mind. One thinks immediately of the grand public rituals staged by the Nazi regime up to and including the Second World War, and the powerful effect that they had on a whole nation. These rituals were meant to engage the German people at a deep level, and they did so, most effectively. In this case they were designed and used by people with a simple political intent of domination and manipulation.

Manipulation always hides its real intent. Where the intent is openly stated, I use the term 'influence' which is perfectly legitimate because of its openness. A rite of passage is intended to influence its subjects, but in this case the intent is to help them enter on the path into maturity, and this intent must be clearly stated. It is, moreover, important that such rituals are entered into by choice. Again, the sort of

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confession and re-education rituals used by Communist cadres in China were quite clear about their intention, but those undergoing such a ritual were given no choice. In order to protect against this negative use of such rituals, it is clear that they must be entered into

by free choice (indeed people should be able to opt out at any point in the process) and the aim and intention of the ritual should be clearly and publicly enunciated.

A further safety lies in the involvement of numbers of men, including some elders. It becomes difficult to use a ritual for one's own selfish purposes when it must be done with mature adults present and involved in its creation and its conduct. In the case of boyhood-manhood rituals I do not recommend the involvement of the boys in creating the structure (though they can and should have input into some

of the details as they evolve). This rite of passage is a gift to the young from their caring elders. Thus, it is entirely the responsibility of their elders.

It is also important that while our rituals may have a 'traditional form' they are re-created in the moment by those involved, as culturally appropriate for the purpose of the transition, and not simply appropriated from some other culture and time. As Thompson puts it:

*"While we're at it, let's admit that the thread of initiation has for the most part been broken in post-tradition, post-modern, post-culture, post-everything America; and that like Sisyphus, we find ourselves standing at the bottom of a very steep hill, boulder at hand. To imitate initiatory practices of traditional cultures ('any roots but our own, thank you very much') won't succeed in getting the boulder to the top again. In fact it will only make our peculiar cultural predicament worse. Yet neither can we afford to completely disregard the structures and functions of traditional initiation ceremonies, for as we go about creating initiatory mechanisms to meet our unique cultural needs, there is doubtless much value to be found in cross-cultural, 'archetypal' initiatory practices and metaphors."*²³

Aaron Kipnis also argues for a similar balance,

*"Male initiation for our time must come to us in this fresh way, as it has for every other culture, from our own dreams and visions. We lose this possibility when we dwell too much on the rites and symbols of other cultures."*²⁴

In any such endeavour, if there is power in the action, then that power may be used for good or ill. It is my hope that by encouraging public discussion, the collective eyes of men in our society will focus upon this process. It is in secrecy that

²³ Thomson (1989, Pg 24-5.)

²⁴ Kipnis (1991, Pg 163)

evil flourishes, as the recent paedophile scandals around the world have shown. It is my belief that, by placing this issue in the public forum, the collective wisdom of care for the healthy development of a more mature masculinity might be brought to bear on the process. And this process ought to be ongoing.

Teenage ‘pathways to manhood’

At the start I noted the initiative of the Men’s leadership gathering to establish a ‘rites of passage’ program for teenage boys. This is now a fully fledged national organisation delivering programs across the country with links into schools and local communities in several States.²⁵ What have we learned from these about creating opportunities to assist young men and their families negotiate the transition from Boyhood to Manhood? Many of the principles outlined above have been drawn on and are illustrated with examples from the Pathways to Manhood programs. Below I attempt to indicate more specifically the ways that we can create rituals for this critical stage of personal and social development - for both the young men and their families. What might be the key issues of consciously created rituals that mark this boy to man transition?

Honouring masculine natures

I have pointed out that most ‘initiations’ in our society have been limited to the brutal ceremonies of gangs, boarding schools, some trade apprenticeships, and our military colleges, and they have been appropriately labelled ‘bastardisation’. These so-called initiations have been run by

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Pathways Foundation (2008)

older boys and they have usually merely confirmed some adolescent hierarchy of power and seniority. Where they have been supported by adults, the major justification has usually been to teach youngsters to take their place in some sort of hierarchy of obedience.

The rites of passage we propose are not used for these purposes. I see rebuilding appropriate rites of passage for the boy-man transition as an opportunity to honour the youngsters and their growing masculinity. I see it as marking the first move away from childhood towards manhood. Its focus is on the needs of the boys themselves and of the society which they are about to enter as responsible members. This rite is not for the older men to reinforce their privileges or their control.

However, when older men honour the growth of boys and remind them of the responsibilities of the mature masculine, they also reaffirm those values in their own lives. There has been much shaming of the 'masculine' in our society. Men must understand that honour is generated from within, and comes from living up to high but achievable standards. This is why the affirmation must be realistic and must create values that can be lived up to in a human way. (Perfection is for flowers, clouds and trees, not for human beings!)

Steve Biddulph points out that,

"The old initiators took the boys into the forest or the desert to give them a great prize — to teach them that they were sacred beings. That's what initiation means. There was fear involved, and symbolic wounding, but this was done with great care and for important reasons. It was never meant to be sadistic. The masks, dancing, rituals, magical teaching and adoption of totems gave the young man a strong sense of

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*belonging and honour. Initiation is a welcoming into a masculine spirituality, constructed in a way that ensures that it will never be forgotten."*²⁶

And in *'The Power of Myth'*, Joseph Campbell reminds us that, *"The stages of human development are the same today as they were in ancient times. As a child, you are brought up in a world of discipline, of obedience, and you are dependent on others. All this has to be transcended when you come to maturity, so that you can live not in dependency but with self-responsible authority. If you can't cross that threshold, you have the basis for neuroses. Then comes the one after you have gained your world, of yielding it — the crisis of dismissal, disengagement And ultimately death."*²⁷

The social intention

In the case of teenage rites of transition our task is to move the boy from the model and assumptions of 'dependent child' towards those of the 'responsible, autonomous adult'. By the time we have brought a boy from birth to puberty, we tend to be ensconced in the 'parental (father or mother) archetype' and the boy in the 'child archetype'. Put another way, all our assumptions about him are childlike, and all his assumptions about us are parental. In line with the idea of 'psychic inertia' we explored above, it is appropriate for us to create an opportunity to shift those assumptions, not only for the boy, but for the parents as well.

Not only the youngsters but also their fathers, when offered the opportunity of a rite of passage, react with both fear and suspicion. Men must start to explore the origin of these fears in our personal and collective experience of 'authority' and take responsibility for healing it. It is men's duty to address this issue. Robert Bly says,

²⁶ Biddulph, (1994, p 171)

²⁷ Campbell (1988, p 70)

"It is not women's job to socialise young males. That is the job of elder men, or, from another point of view, it's the job of the entire culture."²⁸

A rite of passage into manhood, must begin the movement away from non-responsible dependent childhood, towards a responsible adult membership of the community. In ancient tribal rites the means of shaking that childish identity were powerful and very immediate. They used techniques of pain, deprivation, drugs, terror and frequently the risk of death to the participants. This was done in order to achieve movement into a new identity, that of a full and responsible membership of the tribe as immediately as possible. We have no such need of 'immediacy' in our far safer modern society, and thus we have sought to construct a 'pathway', a process which is extended over time.

However this will have implications for his parents as well. No ritual will move a boy along this path if his parents refuse to recognise his new status and continue to insist on his dependence and obedience.

No ritual will move a boy along this path if his parents refuse to recognise his new status and continue to insist on his dependence and obedience.

Personal and social growth

In some tribal societies the boy is initiated into a social role that is part of the community and has little sense of personal individuality. In our western societies I see the opposite - a strong sense of individuality but very little sense of community. I would like to see rites of passage that achieve a balance between these extremes - individuals with a strong sense of connection to a community that fosters, in turn, the growth of the individual.

²⁸

Bly (1996, p 181)

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This is a difficult time for both parents and sons. Anthony Stevens writes that success is,

*"most unlikely . . . unless some dramatic event should occur which affected them all equally. This, of course, is the event which initiation provided."*²⁹

One way to view this process is to see it as displacing the ego from the centre of the boy's universe by creating contact with a sense of other/universe /god/earth - to achieve a sense of 'awe' or 'wonder' and respect for the 'not-I'. It is a mark of the infantile ego that it deems itself the centre of all things. To this extent, the truly self-obsessed adult remains in an infantile state at the psychological level, no matter the other skills and abilities they have developed in the course of their life.

This does not mean that there are no mature men or women in our society, but it does mean that the urges and desires of the individual have been lifted to centrality; firstly by a lack of any higher focus and secondly by the self interests of the commercial world and its advertising for more and more consumption.

Moore and Gillette write about traditional initiations:

"the ego is displaced into an orbital position around a Transpersonal Other. The ego may experience this Transpersonal Other as any kind of group or task to which the individual pledges his or her life. . . . which religions of the world call God. . . . Where a powerful Transpersonal Other is missing, God is replaced by unconscious pretensions to godhood.

"An individual psyche, bloated by dangerously distorted assessments of self, and others around it, . . . must pay the

²⁹ Anthony Stevens (1982. Pg149))

price for its infantilism, . . . the social and environmental devastation that always accompanies the ego inflation of the human psyche, unchecked by a sense of limits grounded in a Transpersonal Other."³⁰

Such inflation, of course was regarded as the primary sin in ancient Greek society and, as 'hubris', always earned the wrath of the gods. So too in Christian thought, such inflated pride was regarded as the prime sin. In all cases the underlying and proper fear was of the capabilities for harm of the unchecked and inflated human ego, to which much of our recorded history stands as witness.

Let us now explore in more detail how we can develop a transformatory rite where boys mark the start of their transition from boyhood to manhood. It will involve the three stages essential to all such rites: a leaving, a life-changing experience, and a return.

The leaving

This is the stage where the young man marks the leaving behind of the old - 'the child' - in preparation for taking up of 'the man'. It involves at least two steps represented by separation from both male and female parents

Separating from mother - the external 'feminine'

One of the central values to be confronted in a proper initiation of boys into manhood is that of honouring women. To separate from one's mother and to commit oneself to the world of men is not to reject or dishonour one's mother. Motherhood is, with fatherhood, to be honoured and entered into at the proper time in ones life. Because we depend upon our parents for survival, we project all the

³⁰ Moore & Gillette (1993 Pg 29 — 30),

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wisdom and the goodness of the King and Queen archetypes onto them regardless of their intrinsic qualities. As the boy grows he needs to be able to withdraw these projections. As Moore and Gillette write:

"If he does not succeed in this, he will never love his parents for the precious, flawed, and mortal people they are."³¹

Because of the deep bonds that are created at a non-verbal stage between mother and child, it is all the more important for a boy to separate from his mother in some formal way. We are beginning to understand that unseparated men have infantile connections with and dependencies on the 'feminine' which make a mature relationship with a woman difficult to achieve. In some cases this shows up as a passive dependency on their partner and in others a pathological antagonism to the feminine. Sam Keen writes, such a man

". . . will see himself and all women as if reflected in Mother's eyes. He will perform for them as he performed for her, fearing displeasure, courting approval . . . and all the while he will imagine that her judgements are those of the flesh-and-blood women in his life."³²

So, what may be just as important in this process is some formal action on his mother's part, freeing him to move into his growing masculinity. One action that could be quite important is that of teaching the boy to cook, wash and iron his clothes, and to clean his room. He must learn early that these 'maintenance tasks' are not mother's/women's work, but tasks performed by any responsible adult for themselves.

In the more primitive tribal cultures, the men raided the village and abducted the boys over the protests of the women. In the more aware tribal cultures the women

³¹ Moore and Gillette (1992, Pg 205)

³² Keen (1991, p 19)

consciously and noisily enacted their resistance for the sake of a convincing ritual. In many of these cultures a boy returned from initiation with a new name and was treated as a stranger by his birth mother.

It is not for us to simply copy ancient tribal initiations, some of which were brutal and dangerous, but we should be very aware that their basic model was that of death and rebirth: death of the boy, birth of the man.

Thus it seems, that the healthy pattern is first, separation from the 'feminine' (represented by the mother), establishment in the 'masculine', and then a re entry into a mature relationship with a woman, not treating her as a safe place, a surrogate mother or a servant, but as an equal. It is important to be clear that this type of separation has nothing to do with the old patriarchal belief that the mother's influence could 'sissify' the adolescent. On the contrary we seek a new and less dependent relationship between the boy and his mother.

As we have developed this rite, a mother brings her son to a ritual of separation, handing him over to the facilitators of the rite of passage. Later, she will receive him back in a ritual of reincorporation and celebration, still as her son, but different because of the experience. Part of this experience will be work by the boy to integrate his own inner masculine and feminine - which need to be modelled by the adult men who have done this work for themselves. I have mentioned earlier the conversations around values and how these can be extended to cover a wide range of issues around which men tell their stories and speak the truth about the inner emotional experience associated with their life stories.

*we seek a new and less
dependent relationship
between the boy and
his mother*

Differentiation from his father.

This reflects the same need referred to above with our mothers. Again, we honour the mature masculine and especially fatherhood, but boys need to withdraw their idealised projections from their fathers as well, else they will never discover them as ordinary human beings, who can be loved and who can become their friends.

As with mothers, fathers have an important role to play at this stage in their son's growth. Traditionally fathers have never initiated their sons. This has always been done by 'elders' or 'uncles.' This is because fathers are too close to their sons, but also because this is an entry into the wider life of the community and they should be welcomed and honoured by representatives of that community. Here is where the father's task becomes important. He has the opportunity, and indeed a duty, to treat the boy differently. It will be most appropriate to negotiate new responsibilities for him. I believe that the most important task in adolescence is for our parents to help us to carry an increasing responsibility for our lives.

Traditionally fathers have never initiated their sons. This has always been done by 'elders' or 'uncles.'

Currently, in the Pathways to Manhood programs we run in Australia, we encourage fathers to come with their sons to the rite of passage event, usually run over five days. In addition to the intended move by the boys into more open relationships with their fathers and the other men, an unexpected outcome of these rites has been a stronger and more open relationship between the adult men themselves. In a very real sense the whole process becomes a welcome to the evolving 'community of men'.

So the separation from our fathers remains a potential entry into a richer relationship and the ability to view our fathers

in a larger and enriched social context. There is an ability in such rites to break down that isolation, at least temporarily. But, frustratingly, this is still often only a temporary 'community of men'. We are confronted with the deeper alienation and isolation of the modern western masculine ego and ongoing work to translate what can be experienced in these processes to the wider community and society.

The ritual space

This is where the work of transformation must begin. In creating the experiences that make up the rite of transition from boyhood to manhood, we apply the principles outlined above to create a 'container' or safe space for ritual work. And we can use the tools - the circles of sharing from the heart aided by the 'truth stick', confidentiality and, especially, the modelling of mutual respect by the adult men present.

For the boys, the use of 'story' is especially important. Story is wonderfully democratic. Men and boys sharing their stories and discussing what this evokes in each of us after the telling, allows individual meanings and insights to be shared without being imposed. The use of the 'circles' becomes a wonderful way of deepening trust as the men share their stories of how they coped and failed to cope with their boyhood to manhood and other related transitions. Topics such as falling in love, first job, failure and success and dealing with parents can be explored with humour and honesty. And where the men stay close to their stories as they experienced them, they are enabled to avoid 'preaching' and advice.

Metaphors for manhood

The choice of the physical metaphors which will carry the ritual is important. There are two aspects to this. The first is the clarity of the physical metaphor which is used to create

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the action of the ritual. This is why a twenty first birthday party, generally does not carry much power to shift attitudes or consciousness. The metaphor is clearly one of celebration, but not of a passage to any clear demands of manhood.

The use of actions such as climbing a mountain, keeping a fire going overnight, or a vigil, have all been used at various times to symbolise the challenge and endurance needed for the masculine journey.

Grounding metaphors of letting go and taking up of responsibility are also important. We may require the giving away/burying/burning of some symbol such as a childhood toy or a drawing of some dependant situation.

At some point in the ritual we might require a commitment to action in the form of new behaviours, a taking up of new responsibility for our own care. For example: a commitment to tidy his own room from now on, do his own washing or ironing, and learn to cook. The maintenance tasks of life need to be taken on, though not necessarily all at once! Thus (on the return) the mother is no longer carer/servant/slave, and as a consequence such childish dependencies will fade and not be expected from a future partner.

In this regard we have learned to stop requiring 'help' from the boys on the Pathways camps. Help implies a secondary position or merely doing as you are told. We ask them to 'take their part' in the work of the camp as well as the day to day work of family life. It may be hoped that this will lead to grown men no longer needing to ask "*How can I help?*"

A reinforcing ritual of separation from their dependency on their mothers may be an important part of the process. They might burn or bury some symbol of that dependency. Also at this point it is important to emphasise honour and respect

for the 'feminine', and to discuss standards of behaviour in relationship not only to their mothers, but also to young women of their own generation. This ritual of separation must also be accompanied by a ritual of welcome from the men. Some thought may be given to small gifts which they might wear as an indication of their initiation into self-responsibility.

*a rite of passage ritual . . .
will enhance the boys'
understanding of . . . what
is to be left behind, and
what is to be sought and
taken up.*

So the elements of a rite of passage ritual will contain a number of metaphors which will enhance the boys' understanding of the changes required: what is to be left behind, and what is to be sought and taken up.

The feat or ordeal

For a rite of passage into the 'masculine journey' we need a movement in space and time. Examples from the programs we have run for boys usually include surmounting some obstacle - crossing a river, climbing a cliff, leaping a fire-pit, making a journey, or keeping a silent vigil. The only limits are our imagination and the basic requirements of care and safety.

Initiation, in most ancient cultures, required young people to face an ordeal. For boys, circumcision was often involved in such an ordeal, but in some cultures he had to face a charging buffalo (Crow boys), do a vision quest (Cheyenne boys), or to fast for days and then climb a mountain (Washoe girls). The achievement of some difficult task - requiring effort, constancy, patience, and the confronting of their own fears - can leave a young person with a triumphant sense of achievement.³³

³³

Mahdi (1987 Pg 85)

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An important aspect of the ordeal is to ensure that failure is not shaming. In the Crow nation a boy could run from the buffalo as many times as he wished, without shame. It was when he could face the buffalo, in the trust that the men would kill that charging buffalo before it reached him, that he became an adult and a celebration was held in his honour. So there is a demand for focus and effort, where success and failure are balanced and are a reflection of the realities of adult life.

Thus, an essential requirement (on the physical side) of the ritual for boys is risk. Our society has sought to remove risk from our lives, and quite understandably from the lives of our young people, who are precious to us. The difficulty is that if we are too effective at this, then the result is boredom! Young men need risk! Watch them, they yearn for it. If we don't provide it for them, then they will provide it for themselves. Anything dangerous or illegal will do for them, and thus we have unwittingly strengthened the lure of drugs, alcohol and fast cars. Until recently, car accidents (usually at high speed) have been the major cause of death for young men between the ages of eighteen and thirty. The major cause of death in that age group is now suicide - sometimes in 'single car' accidents.

Physical risk always carries with it the possibility of injury, but when the boredom carries an increasing risk of suicide or drug dependency, then I would rather offer a risk that is genuine, but does not threaten life; in other words a 'managed risk'. This is yet another reason for not leaving the responsibility of initiation in the hands of the young. It requires the presence and care of older experienced men and it needs to be planned.

The other thing that a sense of risk achieves is to lift the energy of the ritual and to provide a sense of reality. Life is sometimes risky, and we lie to our children when we pretend otherwise. For young people anyway, it's half the fun!

There is a final aspect of The Feat that may be worth looking at. Because this passage into adulthood has both individual as well as social implications, it may be possible to tailor the feat to the needs of the individual. It could be that a lad is an outstanding athlete, and would have little difficulty with a physical feat.

*Life is sometimes risky,
and we lie to our
children when we
pretend otherwise. For
young people anyway,
it's half the fun!*

He may on the other hand be quite stretched by a mental or an emotional challenge. An old tradition amongst the Basque required an extroverted mentor for an introverted boy, and a thoughtful mentor for a lad not given to much reflection, and so on. So it may be quite proper to design the feat for the individual, to complement their natural gifts. The youngsters would then be steered toward wholeness and balance rather than a one sided excellence in a natural talent.

Needless to say similar principles of physical, emotional and mental challenge apply to rituals for other natural, accidental or freely chosen transition points on the male life-journey.

The blessing

The most powerful part of the initiation process in our experience is 'The Blessing'. This has been the culmination of the process, and appears to be the most positive part of the ritual. It is sometimes called 'The Recognition' or the 'Honouring' or the 'Affirmation' but however it is named, it involves the adults naming the skills, abilities, talents, beauties, sensitivities and strengths of each young man - as each man has seen these. Moore and Gillette remind us,

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"Having a sense of validated identity is essential to acquiring a sense of soul. A parent who has successfully imparted a soul to his child has experienced the ultimate act of parenting. This is the essence of what has historically been called blessing."³⁴

In pre-revolutionary Russia, at a certain religious festival, the whole village would sit down to a communal feast, and during this feast the older villagers would toast all of the young villagers in turn. It was considered important to toast some skill, ability or talent that the young person really did have. It was not a mere formality. Rather it was a serious acknowledgement of that young member of the village and his/her contribution to the community - a clear example of blessing both the personal and the social attributes.

Let me give an example of how this has been done in the Pathways process. At the end of a four to five days, each boy sits in front of the whole group of men and young men.

*... this remains the
culmination of the process
and it is the more
powerful, sadly, because
such honouring is so
rarely done in our society.*

Each man comes out in turn, and keeping eye contact with the youngster, tells him of the good things that he has seen in him. This sort of honouring can only be done from the heart, and it can only be done at the end of a process which has created high trust and honest

relationships, especially between the men. Needless to say, this remains the culmination of the process and it is the more powerful, sadly, because such honouring is so rarely done in our society.

³⁴

Moore & Gillette (1992, Pg 129.)

The return

After an appropriate closing and leaving the space where the ritual processes have taken place the Pathways participants celebrate a return to the other, 'real/normal' world. On their return, they are greeted by the mothers who gather with family, grandparents and friends to welcome the 'Young Men' home. There is a feast and a celebration as they return to the context of family and community.

In older tribal rites the young men were treated differently on their return to the social/tribal context, usually with new roles and with changed names. We do not rename or separate the young men in those ways, but we do encourage their families to treat them differently; to speak of them as young men and no longer as boys; to no longer ask them to 'help' around the family household but to 'take part' in the family. In the broader social context, at school and in the community, they will be treated as they always have been, but at least the young men and their families will be aware and will support a shift of self-concept and a different awareness of the possibilities of support from older men.

It is here, in the return to the community, that one becomes aware of the fragmentation of our modern society. An important part of any rite of passage is the 'social witness'. This function can be performed by the ritual community, but to 'anchor' the change it is more powerful that it be given recognition by the young man's social network. This can be done by celebrating with friends and family on the return to home. It can be further enhanced by that community's support and acceptance of the new identity or role.

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An additional and initially entirely unforeseen consequence of this work has been the powerful effect that it has had on the adults involved. The boys are moved, certainly, and this is confirmed by feedback from mothers and fathers. However, their fathers, 'uncles' and the facilitators have a longer life experience in which to locate the relevance of this work. It has been generally observed that these men are even more deeply moved than the young men and they have been a strong source for volunteers to train as facilitators.

An unforeseen consequence of this work has been the powerful effect that it has on the adults involved . . . these men are even more deeply moved than the young men

I think that the lack of community in modern Australian society referred to earlier, makes this work so unexpectedly powerful for the adults as well as the boys. Men yearn for such spaces where they can trust and rely upon one another. It also explains why men form such strong and long lasting bonds with other men with whom they have faced the mind numbing violence of active service and battle in our armed forces. It also presents us with a challenge. How might we preserve, deepen these relationships of trust and openness.

One way is through the further development of men's groups - and the invitation that programs like the Pathways project and other 'Men's movement' networks offer to the men who initially become involved because of the need of their sons.³⁵ Other pathways into this ongoing, far from finished project for men to explore more socially appropriate ways of expressing our masculinity, include many of the crisis points alluded to above - marriage, fatherhood, divorce, mid-life, ageing - all the life transition points - and

³⁵

See contacts section at the end of this book

all of which urgently need more effective ritual processes through which men can mark their transitions and grow.

But perhaps this is the start of another story; for another time and place.

New possibilities

As this work has matured over the last twelve years new possibilities have surfaced and new implications have arisen. Not least amongst these is crossing the 'gender divide' and also the old 'generation gap'. It is also possible for us to conceive of this work contributing to healing some of the damage done by narrow definitions of the stereotype of acceptable male sexuality.

What we seem to be creating is a potential forum for a discussion about the nature and the possibilities of the process of human maturation.

The poet David Whyte comments:

*. . . . I look out
at everything
growing so wild
and faithfully beneath
the sky
and wonder
why we are the one
terrible
part of creation
privileged
to refuse our flowering*³⁶

³⁶

Whyte (1997, pg 90)

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One of the most positive effects of the 'Pathways' process was the boys' improved relationships with their mothers. As more boys began to come from within a single community, we have been able to involve their mothers in the 'leaving day'. The women designed a strong ceremony of separation and this became an integral part of the total process. It was effective because it enabled the boys to return to a new and deeper relationship with their mothers. This, in turn, moved the women towards a decision to create their own rite of passage for mothers and daughters. Since 2006 the 'Women's Weaving' group have been welcome partners in the Pathways Foundation process.

It was clear from the beginning that a mature and responsible 'manhood' is not to be achieved in a single short ritual, especially when such a process has no clear and ongoing social and community support. So the question arose, how might such an on-going process be supported for the adolescents of our community?

The concept of 'mentoring' has become increasingly popular in recent years particularly in business circles. However such a function has often been seen as a form of 'coaching', or the passing on of skills and knowledge to selected junior staff. An older model of mentoring surfaced in work with boys at risk - as a caring relationship for an adolescent from a non-related adult (usually of the same sex). It required a supportive and non-judgemental relationship with contact of some three to four hours a week, and was developed by various non-profit organisations such as 'Big Brother - Big Sister' and others for young people at risk - refugees, young offenders etc. For those of us working with adolescents it was a short step to then ask, what might be available for the young people who aren't in trouble?

Once more we find ourselves facing the sole and overloaded resource of the economically and socially nomadic nuclear family. One begins to understand the impossible burden that we have imposed on the nuclear family, isolated as it has become from tribe and community. Mentoring, it seems, derives its power from its source outside the nuclear family. Hillman suggests:

As caretakers, parents cannot also be mentors. The roles and duties differ. It is enough for a parent to keep a roof over your head and food on the table and to get you up and off to school. Providing a cave of security, a place for regressions is no small job. Freed of these tasks, the mentor has only one: to recognise the invisible load you carry and to have a fantasy about it that corresponds with the image in the heart. One of the most painful errors we make is to expect from a parent a mentor's vision and blessing and strict teaching, or expecting from a mentor shelter and concern for our human life.³⁷

A family is supposed to support and care for its children. When that care and support comes as a 'blessing' from an 'outsider', it carries much more emotional weight. As outlined above, such a positive assessment has a strong effect on an adolescent. It can come at two levels. First is the simple process of seeing and affirming the positive aspects of a young person's character or activities. The second, and deeper level, is activated from a mentor who can perceive realistic potentials that have never occurred to the adolescent or their family, thus opening up and affirming new possibilities.

It has also become clear that if a rite of passage can deepen the relationship between mother and daughter, and father and son, then each of those mothers and fathers can become mentor to other adolescents outside their own family. Such

³⁷

Hillman (1996, Pg 163)

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processes require careful exploration but their potential for increasing social solidarity and support for young people through this difficult passage is obvious.

Finally, as our work with boys has spread and developed, I have watched what seems to be a 'healing' of the old competitiveness and suspicion that created what we called the 'generation gap'. This is happening at workshops and 'gatherings' in the men's movement. Not only was the concern for our boys deepening, but so was the trust and communication between the older men and the 'men in the middle' (for want of a better term). Younger men in their 30-50s honoured the older men in their 50-80s and these links between these generations have deepened over time as the older men have rediscovered their capacity for 'blessing'.

As W.B. Yeats wrote;

*My fiftieth year had come and gone,
I sat, a solitary man,
In a crowded London shop,
An open book and empty cup
On the marble table-top.*

*While on the shop and street I gazed
My body of a sudden blazed;
And twenty minutes more or less
It seemed, so great my happiness
That I was bless'ed and could bless.³⁸*

Negatives such as privilege and authority can still cling to these processes - relics from older models. To practice them in a collegiate group enables us to guard against these negatives. We develop the processes that work. We keep

³⁸

Bly (1993, Pg 507)

them open to change and social development - focused always on the needs of the younger generations. This is part of the process we have come to call 'eldering' - very different from attempts to be seen as an 'elder'.

As an older man in my seventy-fifth year I still find myself excited by the opening vista that such work has brought to many of us working in this area. Perhaps my favourite lines from T.S. Eliot are an appropriate way to point into the future:

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all of our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

...

*And the children in the apple-tree
Not known, because not looked for
But heard, half heard, in the stillness*

...

*A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything)* ³⁹

As indicated above, one way for men to explore this opening vista of masculine possibilities is the further development of men's groups. Programs like the Pathways project offer an invitation to the men who initially become involved because of the need of their sons. Other men's group work provides a refuge, challenge and opportunity for men to accept the path of change as they encounter other crises - marriage, fatherhood, divorce, mid-life, ageing and death. Often the stimulus to become involved is some aspect of relationship breakdown but any and all of the life transition points can

³⁹

Eliot (1963, Pg 222)

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serve this function. There are many pathways into this ongoing and far from finished project.⁴⁰

And all of these 'crisis points' in the masculine journey urgently need more effective ritual processes through which men can mark them and grow. The challenge is for men to explore and re-form more socially appropriate ways of expressing our masculinity.

But at this point in my journey this is something I leave to those coming behind me - those who have travelled with me this far - but the start of another story; for other men to tell in another time and place.

⁴⁰ See contacts section for access to some of these

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Manhood Online

<http://www.manhood.com.au>

Men's Advisory Network

<http://www.man.org.au>

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