

A Man on a Mission

By Wayne Schotten

Who hasn't experienced the let down after obtaining a hard-won goal and asked, "What do I do now?" We are powerful creatures when we have a clearly defined mission, but become complacent and distracted when we have achieved some part of our objectives. That is not entirely bad, of course, since we do have a right to enjoy the benefits of our victories. Otherwise, why bother to fight battles in the first place? The purpose of life is to live and enjoy our lives. That said, we can't help but realize there is so much yet to be done. How do we refocus?

My personal history approximates the history of gay liberation. I was a child during the Eisenhower era, and I vaguely remember the newspaper pictures of White House demonstrations by business suited men and women, members of the Mattachine society, named for the Italian theater Mattachino jester, who would speak the truth to the king when no one else would. As a teen in small town Ohio, I thought I was the only boy in the world attracted to males, until Life Magazine published pictures and stories of large groups of gay men hanging out together in Greenwich Village and Hollywood. Zap!!!

I came out in Cincinnati at a

time when the novelty there was a downtown restaurant that was a gay hot spot at night. The waitresses loved us and helped us meet the new guys who walked in.

When I moved to Hollywood, while exploring my new sexual freedom with a series of lovers, I joined demonstrations supporting Willie Brown's campaign to dump the sodomy laws in California. During my years in a serious relationship with the one man I should not have let slip away, I took part in protests at the LA coroner's hearing over the cops beating a gay man to death and trying to sweep it under the rug. I walked with the first gay civil rights demonstration down Hollywood Boulevard in which skinny boys joined old queens in singing, "I'm not afraid anymore".

Though only mildly religious at the time, I helped the fledgling Metropolitan Community Church, led by Troy Perry, when it was meeting at the Encore Theater in Hollywood. With the emergence of the counter culture and its acceptance of gays and lesbians, I found I could be an openly gay cinematographer on movie sets whose producers thought counter culture equated to artistic ability.

I moved to San Francisco and

became involved in fighting the draconian Brigg's initiative that would have banned gays from teaching in California. I worked with the group starting the gay center in Berkeley. The rise of Harvey Milk and the gay community in the Castro was a heady, wonderful example of a good life for gay people.

When AIDS appeared, my personal physician, Dr. Richard Hamilton, invited me and my best friend Mike Kurtz, who later died of AIDS, to help prepare the audiovisual materials for the world's first medical profession gathering at Pacific Medical Center to address the emerging epidemic. To this day I am repelled and appalled by the response of the Reagan-appointed CDC officials who attended. I quote, "Gentlemen, don't you think you're being overdramatic?"

Every one of those actions had a clear and immediate threat to our safety and freedom. Times are different now, and I am not even sure what obstacles or what necessities younger gays are facing now. My sense is that our fight for equality today lacks the intensity engendered by an immediate threat to our well-being. It's possible we may have a huge battle thrust upon us, if the right wing wackos succeed in mounting a significant move to amend the US

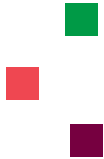
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Constitution to deprive us of first class citizenship.

Our future is a mission with three paths -- mutual support and protection, sharing our gifts with others, and empowering ourselves. Take time to volunteer and be involved in our community and the larger community in which we all live. Give yourself to concerted action for which you feel fire in your belly, whether it's marriage equality or the SPCA. Above all, define the change in the world that would compel you to engage upon a mission, then devote yourself to making it happen.

If you ponder what a mission is, you'll come to see the value of having your own personal mission. Then enjoy the good feelings that come from it. Joseph Campbell was fond of saying, "If you follow your bliss, doors will open you didn't even know existed." That is so true, my friend, so true.



Wayne Schotten was born in Youngstown, OH in 1944. He is currently developing a science fiction theatrical film featuring action, real science and a beautiful love story between the two leading young men. He can be reached at wayne@wildstrawberryfilms.com.