

# The History of the CMG

by Mohabee Serrano, Former CMG Archivist and Historian

## *Preface*

The California Men's Gatherings is a thrice-annual event for men. We offer active-participation workshops, seminars, and large-group "Community Gatherings" held over a three or four-day weekend. All of the Gatherings are held in developed campgrounds near urban areas in California.

Over the years, the CMG has made the transition from being an organization which affirmed personal growth for all men, and provided education for pro-feminist men, to being an educational organization which empowers personal, spiritual, and interpersonal growth for men. Today, the CMG attracts mostly gay male attendees, but all men are welcome to the Gatherings. and to its regional local events.

The CMG is a non-profit charitable educational organization (Section 501 3C). The CMG is entirely planned, nurtured, and maintained by a dedicated group of volunteers. All of the workshop leaders, and others who help in the background, are also volunteers.

This essay is the first step in providing the history of the CMG. This is an ongoing mission, called the CMG History Project. Please contact us, if you were an attendee of an early CMG—the Archive seeks brochures, program booklets, logos, or other artifacts for the early CMGs. We welcome your comments about this essay, and any personal reflections you might have about any of the past CMGs. Write your story and [submit it to the CMG Archivist/Historian](#).

## History of the CMG

The California Men's Gatherings began with a small group of men, most of whom were heterosexual, who were exploring their own definitions of "masculinity." The Pro-feminist Men's Movement of the late 1970s became the focus of the early Gatherings. A typical early CMG was held at a State Park Group Campground. Using the rustic location as a backdrop to the event, workshops, which introduced many of the Pro-Feminist causes, were held. During these two-day Gatherings, men were invited to rethink all of their culturally-inspired conceptions of what "being a man" was. Was being competitive more "manly" than raising a family? Is "masculinity" a good cause for a man to become violent, or bigoted? Is "manhood" something only found in pornography? What can a man do to stem the violence towards women and other men? These and other questions were presented to the attendees in the first Gatherings.

The first 9 CMGs were annual events. We started holding two Gatherings per year in 1987. A third CMG per year was added in 1999.

## 1978-1982 The Early Gatherings

The first California Men's Gathering was held Columbus Day Weekend in Aptos, California (Aptos State Beach, outside of Santa Cruz). This occurred at a group campground in the State Park. According to witnesses, about 30 men attended this loosely-organized Gathering. Women and families were invited to attend to support the men at this Gathering.

The Pro-Feminist men's movement was formed to raise awareness amongst men, of the vague and often misunderstood definitions of masculinity, and how this uncertainty about men's "roles" affected a man's perception of women, and of men. The CMG's mission at this early stage was to introduce men into a safe environment where they could explore alternatives to violence, competition, exploitation, and harmful behaviors, which seemed to be prevalent amongst American men. This movement wasn't about "us vs. them" It was an effort, which

succeeded in many ways, to confront stereotypes about masculinity, and to instill a sense of peace, cooperation, and positive growth for all men.

In light of this mission, the organization had no hierarchy of leadership, and Planners of Gatherings adopted techniques, such as consensus, to make decisions. Consensus allowed every man to voice his concern, and gave each man the possibility to "block" movement of proposals, in order to speak and present an alternative viewpoint. The first Planners also adopted the unique "Circle of Concerns," which was a forum to express concern about how the Gatherings were planned and managed, and the "Plenary," which was a session in which proposals were introduced, and decisions were made.

Following this Gathering, the next two Gatherings, in 1979 and 1980, were held at unknown locations. Some think it may have been held at a college campus for both years, but other sources said there was a Gathering at another State Park in or near the Santa Cruz Mountains. There is very little information about the actual Gathering location, date, and theme of the second and third Gatherings.

The Plenary notes indicate that around this time, the traditions of inviting women to Gatherings; holding meetings (Plenaries), where issues and proposals were decided by consensus; and offering a sliding-scale fee for the Gatherings, were begun. A less-known formality, known as "crit and self-crit" was also established. Organizational meetings were begun with each attendee presenting both a critique of the last meeting, and a self-critique of whether or not he "held stuff," or had any strong feelings, about the last meeting.

Around the time of the first CMGs, a national men's organization, NOMAS (National Organization for Men Against Sexism), was founded. Many of the early CMG themes reflected this cooperative effort to organize and educate male feminists. Several CMG founders and early attendees also attended NOMAS functions. Among these men are Michael Messner, Gordon Clay, Tom Mossmiller, and Alan Acasia.



The fourth CMG, held in 1981, over Labor Day, was the first Southern California Gathering, held at Camp Hess Kramer, in Malibu, California. Women, men, and children were invited to attend. Don Cannon, one of the early CMG attendees, attended this Gathering. He indicated that this Gathering was for all men. He noted that a small number of homosexuals were in attendance, and like the other men at this Gathering, they were male feminists.

Male Feminists sought to overcome the rigid standards of American society, which discouraged men from opening up to their feminine qualities, and discouraged men from expressing themselves emotionally and even playfully.

The 5th CMG was held Columbus Day Weekend, in 1982. This was likely the first Northern CA Gathering to be held in a private campground, a YMCA camp called "Pilgrim Pines," near Santa Cruz, California. Nearly 100 men, women, and children attended. Al-Binky Hoch, a CMG Elder, attended this CMG—his third Gathering. Al-Binky notes that the workshops were oriented towards male bonding and having healthy, non-oppressive relationships with women.



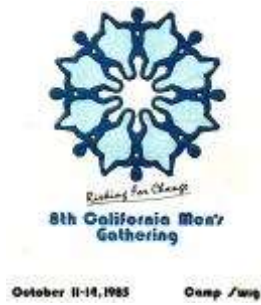
Though most of the men at this Gathering identified as "straight," there was an emerging presence of gay and bisexual men at the later Gatherings, from 1984 through 1989.

## *Later Gatherings in the 1980s*

### **1985**

The 8th Gathering was held in mid-September. This was the first Gathering held at Camp Swig near Saratoga. The camp's larger capacity was a blessing and for the first time nearly 400 men gathered. Like the previous Gatherings, women and children were present at this Gathering. Camp Swig became the northern California CMG "home," through 1996.

### **1986**



During the Labor Day Weekend, the 9th Gathering "officially" acknowledges its gay attendees and planners. Although gay men were welcome to attend Gatherings and homophobia was on the list of "oppressive behaviors" by men, this Gathering offered workshops related to being male and gay. One workshop, "Releasing Your Inner Faerie," is noted in the 9th Gathering program booklet.



The 9th Gathering was the only one where the planners attempted to continue the "flow" of one Gathering to the next Gathering. This was an attempt to "capture the CMG energy" of one Gathering, contain it in-between the Gatherings, and then repeat or continue similar workshops at the next Gathering. Apparently, this idea of holding a "continuous" Gathering didn't work out.



Those who attended both the 9th and 10th Gatherings noted that there were some similarities at both, yet many of the planners, the workshop leaders, and others, who conducted the Fall 1986 Gathering were not present for the Spring 1987 Gathering. From this point onward it was acknowledged that each Gathering would be unique from all previous Gatherings, inherently, due to the changing volunteer energy, and explicitly, for challenging men to "rethink" their masculinity and the "role" of being male (CMG Plenary, Sp. 1987).

## 1987

The first Spring Gathering was held in 1987 at Camp Swig. From 1987 through 1998 two Gatherings were held annually. The two 1987 Gatherings were held in northern California, but the next year (1988), the fall Gathering was held in the San Bernardino Mountains near Los Angeles. With the exception of 1990, all Gatherings held in-between 1987 and 1999 were held in both southern CA and northern CA, annually.

## 1988



Columbus Day Weekend (10th Anniversary), Big Bear Lake: The theme "Building Bridges" was adopted. This Gathering encouraged an open dialogue between the hetero and homosexual attendees.

What the Gathering Planners were unprepared for was an unexpected "visit" by Radical Faeries, who were attending a Faerie Gathering, which was held on an adjacent property. Al-Binky Hoch recalled that perhaps 20 Radical Faeries came to the CMG on the last day. Although many CMG attendees were offended by the late admission of the Faeries, they were greeted warmly, and in keeping with the Gathering's theme, they were invited to attend the closing ceremony of the 13th CMG.

## 1989

Camp Shalom, Labor Day Weekend: the 15th Gathering was the first one the author attended. It was the first time a Gathering was held at Camp Shalom located in the Santa Monica Mountains near Malibu. A turning point in many ways occurred during this Gathering.

At the Plenary, it was decided to invite women at every third Gathering from this point onward, but minors were still welcome at the all-men's Gatherings if they were accompanied by their father or other male legal guardian.



It was also acknowledged that about 40 percent of the male attendees identified as "gay" and about 50 percent were "straight." The remaining men didn't identify their sexual orientation. At this Gathering, 20 women and 10 minors were present. This was the first "clothing optional" Gathering—one area at the camp was so designated.

## *The '90s: Growing Pains and Maturity*

### 1990

Both Gatherings were held in the North. San Francisco men planned the Spring Gathering, while Sacramento men hosted the Fall Gathering. This was the first time men in Sacramento planned a Gathering. The Sacramento planners tried unsuccessfully to secure a camp near Yosemite; hence, both Gatherings were held at Camp Swig. At the Plenary of the 17th Gathering, it was resolved that the Spring Gatherings are held in the South, and the Summer or Fall Gatherings are held in the North.



At the 17th CMG, "Unmasking Ourselves," the only fire walking workshop was offered. Although many men signed up for this workshop, some left after the introduction and orientation. For those who attended this four-hour workshop, fire walking confronted fears, both irrational and real. The first part of the workshop allowed each participant to verbally and intentionally disclose what he was most fearful of. The second part invited each participant to walk barefooted over hot coals, to celebrate his freedom from fear and uncertainty. The author walked over the coals twice.

The 17th CMG also held a mask making workshop. Some elaborate masks, which not only were decorative, but served the purpose of showing one's "inner self" to others at the Gathering. One participant made a mask resembling a bull's face, complete with forward-facing horns and a fierce facial expression. This participant also attended the fire-walking workshop. At the time the facilitator led the fire-walkers to the bonfire, this "bull man" took off the elaborate mask, and flung it in the fire—a statement of his freedom from fear. Many of us who witnessed the "burning of the bull" remember its significance to this day.

### 1991

The 18th Gathering, themed "Dance of Manhood," was the first Spring Gathering held in southern California, at Camp Shalom. This camp has been our "spring home" from 1991 to the present. The survey for the 18th Gathering indicated that 50% of the men were "gay or bisexual." There were 10% who didn't identify and 40% said they were "straight." There were women present at this Gathering; many were wives of the men present.



During Labor Day Weekend in 1991, the 19th Gathering, at Camp Swig, presented a Gathering with the most controversial theme, "Confronting Racism." Many caucasian-identified men felt overwhelmed by the process of learning about racial discrimination. The opening ceremony was highly politically-charged. Many men, who sought comfort and support at a Gathering, instead felt invalidated. Some left the camp due to the controversial theme and its reverse-discrimination overtones. Nonetheless, this Gathering attracted many "men of color," some of whom attended forthcoming Gatherings.



### 1993

23rd Gathering, Camp Swig: "Stark Raving Men" invited men to explore their sexuality in an all-male adult environment—which may have prompted a few of the "straight" men to leave the camp. "Dr. Woof" (Jerry Zientara), a noted sex therapist and also one of the planners, led two group sex workshops, "Ceremony of the Wands," and "Ceremony of the Horns."



## 1994

The California Men's Gatherings incorporated as an Educational Non-Profit Public Benefit Charitable Corporation, section 501(c)(3). The first January Business Meeting ("members" meeting) was held at Camp Shalom. Many of its attendees recall it as the "Earthquake Gathering," since the Northridge Earthquake (nearly 7.8 on the Richter Scale) woke the entire camp, broke the water service pipes, and shut down the gas and electric service at the camp. The meeting ended early so that those who dared drive could get fellow attendees to airports and safely back to their respective communities. The day before, the members approved the first set of CMG Bylaws, and also the Operating Procedures of the CMG.

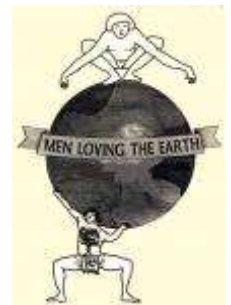


1994, 25th Gathering, "Community of the Heart," Camp Swig: Arguably the costliest Gathering to date, the talent show included professional paid musicians and had other "frills" not to be found in later Gatherings. This was a turning-point Gathering. Many of the "straight" men found themselves less attracted to the CMG. One offered a response that the original purpose of the CMG was for the attendees to become "male feminists."

According to one long-time attendee, the feminist movement and its male-counterpart movement had become less of a major political issue since women were gaining acceptance and equal rights in the workplace and politically."

## 1995

January Business Meeting, Sacramento: Concern was felt that the CMG had become a "gay male organization." Participation and interest by heterosexual men had dropped, and our attendance figures showed that more than 75% of the attendees now identified as "gay or bisexual." At this meeting, it was decided to not allow minors at a Gathering but women could be invited to attend. Other changes to the infrastructure of the California Men's Gatherings were also discussed.

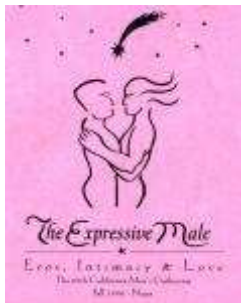


At the 27th Gathering, Camp Swig, themed "Men Loving the Earth:" Author Sam Keen, one of the original leaders of the "Mytho-poetic Men's Movement," led the Opening Ceremony. Though his ceremony was well received, and inspired many men, others felt that the Gathering worked better as a "fully volunteer" organization, and paying celebrities to lead the Community Gatherings violated the traditions of the earlier Gatherings.

## 1996

This was a "banner year" for changes at both the administrative level and in the Gatherings.

At the 1996 January Business Meeting, held at Camp Shalom, it was determined that the CMG had become a "gay-oriented" organization though all men would be welcome to attend. Workshops, Community Gatherings, and forums held during a Gathering would address the pressing issues related to being gay and male. The original statement of purpose remained though the targeted community of men changed from "straight" to "gay." An effort to bring in men from minority communities would begin, beginning with the 29th Gathering. The first CMG Newsletter was printed, in time for the Summer Gathering, and was mailed to all on the mailing list. The position of "Data Diva" was established that year, too. This Board-appointed officer would maintain the attendee address list and also became the "gate keeper" for the CMG's sought-after attendee data.



At the Spring (28th) Gathering in 1996, a new symbol, the Chiron, appears on Gathering tee shirts and program booklets. At this time, the Chiron became the logo for the California Men's Gatherings. There would be five forthcoming Gatherings which "adopted" the Chiron as the logo for those Gatherings.

To resolve the long-standing concern about sexual activity in the cabins, outdoor "pup tents" were to be erected as a private safe-sex retreat at all forthcoming Gatherings.

In 1996, the first CMG website was inaugurated. Gil Dawson, a celebrated web designer of that time, was the first CMG Webmaster. The "Webmaster" became a recognized Board Officer in 2000. What began as a simple, four page personal web address, with no photos and limited graphics, has become the sophisticated, independent website as we know it today.



In 1996, the Labor Day Gathering (29th Gathering) moved from Camp Swig to Camp Enchanted Hills, near Napa. This would be the first northern California Gathering to be held at a different location since 1985. Enchanted Hills had a lower capacity than Swig—150 versus 400. There were other minor inconveniences noted, such as a smaller kitchen, and the need to hire outside cooking staff. This was the first "no women, no minors" Gathering. Most of the men surveyed informally said they were gay or bisexual.

In 1996, the first appearance of the California Men's Gatherings at a Gay Pride celebration occurred in San Francisco and Sacramento. In 1997, the CMG had a booth in Los Angeles, as well. San Diego Pride had its first CMG booth in 2003. A CMG booth at Palm Springs Pride first appeared in 2009.

## 1997

January Business Meeting, Saratoga Springs, CA: "Community Outreach Committees" were formed, later to become "Events Committees (ECs)." The original purpose of these local committees was to continue the "flow of energy" that was begun at the Gatherings. Potlucks, group admissions to theatre events, and other possibilities were encouraged.



## 1998

EC-SF and EC-LA were formed. An EC Planners Manual was created, and has been revised since then. The CMG Board had a diversity-sensitive membership: a Black man, a Latino, and two Asian-Americans! The 20th Anniversary was celebrated, perhaps nostalgically, at Camp Swig, during the 33rd CMG.

## 1999



The third Gathering per year, was added. San Diego planners held the 36th Gathering in Julian, at Camp Marston over the Thanksgiving weekend. The theme was simple: "Thanksgiving."

An attempt to have a computerized registration was unsuccessful, but this was the opening of the possibility for the CMG to use website resources. This would improve visibility to younger men while lowering promotion and registration costs. The full-service website registration system was inaugurated for the 58th Gathering in 2007.

## *First Decade of the 21st Century*

## 2000

At the 2000 January Business Meeting in Glendale two Board officer positions were established: Archivist and Webmaster. The archivist copies, scans, and stores the documents generated by all member, Board, and committee meetings, and also serves as the CMG historian. The webmaster designs, maintains, and keeps the CMG website up-to-date. In 2000, the San Diego EC is approved. The Millennium played into the themes of the three Gatherings that year.



## 2001

Milton Markey ("Mohabee"), the newly-appointed archivist, presents the first CMG Archive Roadshow: a simple display of CMG memorabilia. The Roadshow is now seen at all three Gatherings per year and includes a logo display, tee shirts from previous Gatherings, and a photo display, as well as Gathering artifacts accumulated over the years. In addition, Mohabee and Al-Binky Hoch conduct "CMG History 101," a workshop which covers all aspects of CMG History and includes story-telling by the attendees of their experiences at Gatherings.



## 2002

The first January Business Meeting to be held in San Diego. A four-paragraph "Mission Statement" is proposed and passes. The 1994 Statement of Purpose remains active as a reference to the earlier Gatherings.

## 2003

New camps were chosen for both the Summer and Fall Gatherings: Camp Newman, for Northern California, and Camp Stevens, for San Diego. Camp Newman continues to serve the Summer Gatherings, while Camp Stevens served the CMG from '03 through '06, and from 2012 to the present. Camp Shalom began to house the spring CMG in 1991, with the 18th CMG. The CMG's first appearance at Camp Shalom was the 15th Gathering, over Labor Day, 1989.



47th CMG, Summer 2003: The 25th Anniversary is celebrated, at Camp Newman. The theme of this Gathering is "Standing Tall." A life-size cut-out of a tall man reaching up, holding his "prize," is seen in the Assembly Room, and at other venues throughout the camp. The use of cutouts for a CMG theme is seen two years later, at the "Out West" Gathering, also held at Camp Newman (56th CMG, Summer, 2005).

## 2004

JBM, San Francisco: The initial inquiry as to the purpose of the CMG is heard. Two leadership focus groups are held, after the spring and fall Gatherings, to help facilitate a proposal at the next JBM. The CMG database is to be completely "website-friendly" by the end of 2004. An EC in Sacramento is approved. The Members also approved a new Board position, the Director of Communications. This position unifies the CMG promotion, outreach, and all internal and external communications. Jack Ledbetter is selected as the first CMG Communications Director.

## 2005

Three visioning and goal-setting sessions to determine the future of the CMG occurs at the conclusion of the Spring and Summer Gatherings, and during the Fall Gathering. The result of these meetings is a new Statement of Purpose, along with a new Vision Statement.

55th California Men's Gathering



2005 was a year the CMG themes and logos became prominent. The Spring Gathering (55th Gathering, Camp Shalom) had a theme "Releasing the Giants Within." As a stage backdrop, three colorful banners, in the Assembly Hall, depicted a gigantic man (the banners were nearly 30 feet high), shown in three states of "being a self-actuated man." The theme for the 56th Gathering, at Camp Newman, was "Out West." Depictions of cowboys and other Western themes in simple cutouts made of

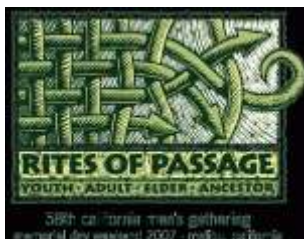
plywood were placed both indoors and outdoors at Camp Newman. Not to be outdone by the two previous Gatherings, San Diego's planners offered purple sweat shirts with a robust "Who's Your Daddy?" logo for the 58th Gathering at Camp Stevens.

## 2006

The annual January Business Meeting (JBM) held in Sacramento adopted a short and effective new Mission Statement: "Men Mentoring Men to be Men." At the same meeting, a goal to increase the number of younger men attending the Gathering is raised, and leads to the formation of the "YCMG" in 2007. An Events Committee in the Desert Cities region (Palm Springs) is founded and approved. The CMG ECs became the focus to attract more men to the California Men's Gatherings.



## 2007



At the JBM hosted by Los Angeles, a new board position, "Youth Director," is founded. The "YCMG" is established in the spring and attracts many younger men to the 58th Gathering. A parade float is approved to make the CMG more visible to gay men at the 2007 Pride Festivals in Long Beach, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Sacramento, San Diego, and Palm Springs.

The CMG Members also approved the Board Arts Coordinator position, in 2007. The Arts Coordinator is charged with using the fine and performing arts to stimulate the uncensored, spontaneous creative energy and passion from the men at Gatherings. This has taken many forms at different gatherings, depending on the needs of that gathering. Sometimes, gallery space displays art by CMG attendees, and creates a cafe atmosphere. Sometimes a choir of men has been assembled, and great music has been heard at the talent shows. Art making, in many forms, has been encouraged at workshops. The performing arts, dance, and drama, are also included, and are seen frequently. Playback theater at workshops and community gatherings provides ways for men to act out their stories for personal growth. The CMG adopted a theme song--"Home Is Where The Heart Is" with original arrangement by Ed Wahl, which we have sung since 2003. Ed Wahl was selected in 2007 to serve as the first CMG Arts Director. Ed stepped down from this position in 2013.

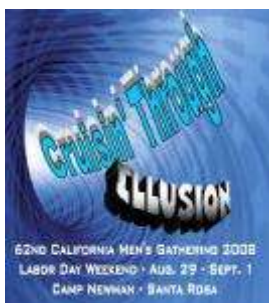


Camp Stevens suffered major damage in the summer of 2007. A forest fire burned several camp buildings making it an unsuitable venue for a Gathering. The San Diego planners for the 60th Gathering quickly located another camp near Anza, California, named Pathfinder Ranch. The Gathering (themed "Creating Our Own Realities") was held over Thanksgiving Weekend and was conducted smoothly for the 120 men attracted to attend.

## 2008: Revisiting the Vision of the CMG

As a means of moving forward, the CMG Board reviewed the status of the CMG. It was decided to amend the vision statement of 2007, so that a more active Board presence can oversee the affairs of the corporation, and instill a sense of direction for future growth.

## 30th Anniversary



2008 was the year of the CMG's 30th Anniversary. The 62nd Gathering, planned by Sacramento men, conducted the anniversary celebration over Labor Day Weekend. The other Gatherings held festive celebrations of this anniversary, too. The actual 30th "birthday" of the California Men's Gatherings occurred on October 8, 2008. The Archivist sent word to the Board and Committees to honor the CMG's 30th anniversary on that date.



## 2009: Expanding Our Outreach

The 2009 JBM was held in a new city—Palm Springs. The CMG has had a short presence in the Desert Cities since 2006 with the establishment of the EC-DC. In three short years CMG outreach grew in the desert communities and two to six dedicated men on the early EC-DC worked hard to bring about this presence. The Palm Springs Pride Festival, held in November, saw the first CMG booth at PS Pride, which was manned by members of the EC-DC.

2009 saw a discontinuation of three important areas in the internal affairs of the corporation. The YCMG was disbanded, the CMG Pride Parade float was discontinued, and the CMG website registration system was rendered unusable due to "planned obsolescence" on the part of software updates and improvements. Despite these setbacks, all Gatherings reported sell-outs (or had better than average attendance figures). The Events Committees in all regions saw increased growth and many new possibilities for local energy.

### Gathering Highlights:

The 64th Gathering attendees had to eat in a "cafeteria tent," since the old dining hall at Camp Shalom was being remodeled. As the construction workers plied their trades on one side of the construction site fence surrounding the dining hall, the 64th planners designed a unique "remembrance garden" setting on the other side. Pictures of vintage nude men graced the fence, positioned so that CMG men could view them only, providing an irony with the clothed muscular construction crew in the background! A makeshift café tent served snacks, homemade soups and confections.



The 65th Gathering, held at Camp Newman, summoned artists and men wanting to paint, draw, or sculpt. Attendees were challenged to create art and to find their "true colors" as men, through the processes of art creation.

A snowstorm and 120 brave warm hearts were present at the 66th Gathering at Pathfinder Ranch. Up to 8 inches of snow fell Friday night, making the fireplaces and the hot tub places of refuge for warmth and co-mingling. Though outdoor activities, such as the ropes course and sweat lodge, were curtailed or canceled, all attendees bundled up and were awe-struck by the unique beauty of the snow-covered landscape surrounding the camp.

## 2010: *End of the first decade for some; beginning of the second decade for others.*

With the year still young, much work had been accomplished. The Board approved a revised Mission Statement, in the spring. At the January Business Meeting, held in Sacramento, new officers were nominated to fill specific positions on the Executive Board, for President, Vice-President, Secretary, and Treasurer. Up to this time, the four officers were nominated "at large," and their positions were determined by self-selection after the election. From this point forward, according to a new policy concerning CMG acronyms, the January Business Meeting (JBM) became the "ABM," or "Annual Business Meeting," and the Events Committees became "Local Events Committees," or "LECs."



The 67th Gathering (Spring) Community Gatherings stirred up some controversy, but mostly a positive outcome is predicted for forthcoming Gatherings. The controversy involved both the 67th Gathering theme ("Tools for the Trail Ahead"), and the way the theme was presented (global warming, economies collapsing, and other threats to humanity). At the Circle of Concerns for this Gathering, some voiced support for bringing controversial topics into the forefront. Others felt the Community Gatherings at the 67th Gathering went too far, and lost some of the attendees, though none apparently left the camp. Another topic for future planners: finding a suitable camp for spring Gatherings. Camp Shalom is becoming less desirable due to poor maintenance, facility size problems, and lack of parking spaces. At the Plenary, the 70th Gathering planners are urged to look at alternative campsites in the region.

The 67th Gathering welcomed the new dining hall at Camp Shalom. Though it was the same size as its predecessor, the addition of glass walls and ceilings made the space seem larger giving trees surrounding the dining hall some outstanding grandeur. Though the renovations included a more efficient kitchen and service areas, some Gathering attendees expressed concern that the acoustics were diminished, due to the hard glassy surfaces surrounding the facility.



Bean-bag chairs, a separate café and "speak easy" tent, and other CMG-inspired facilities were present for attendee comfort and co-mingling, at the 67th Gathering. Attendees were encouraged to become interviewers and interviewees at a special tent set up to record CMG men's voices as part of a larger gay men's history project.

Sweat Lodges have been held since the earliest Gatherings. Most of the summer Gatherings, many fall Gatherings, and nearly all of the spring Gatherings offered sweat lodges as a ceremony of purification and to reverently empower the participants with the energy of fire, water, steam, and ritual. The 68th Gathering held at Camp Newman offered two sweat lodges during the Labor Day weekend. What no one expected was that this was the last time Sweat Lodges were to be held at a Gathering. Insurance concerns regarding the safety and health of the participants led the Board to ban Sweat Lodges at future Gatherings beginning with the 69th Gathering.



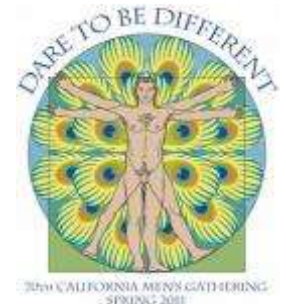
The 69th Gathering at Pathfinder Ranch held a Native American-inspired ceremony on Saturday afternoon. A large tarp was laid out in the courtyard in front of the Conference Building. On the tarp were the cardinal directions, and the spirit animals which represented each direction. The participants were led in a dance ritual, which spiraled in and out of the circle and around the altars that were set up on the tarp.

## 2011

The ABM, or Annual Business Meeting, was held in late February in West Hollywood. This was the first annual meeting to be held in February and not in January since the first Annual Business Meeting in 1994. During the 2011 ABM a Development Director was elected to oversee programs for fund raising and to manage the funding for Financial Assistance for Gathering attendees. Typically fund raising is accomplished through donations or through the silent auctions held at Gatherings.

The CMG Board of Directors held its annual Board Retreat in Indio on the last weekend of July. While the resort where the retreat was held bustled with families and people who sought refuge from the desert heat, the Board embarked upon re-defining itself. Board President Mike Fahy led an afternoon of reflection and involvement which inspired the Board to prepare the background for what might become the list of ethics for future CMG Boards to follow.

The 70th Gathering at Camp Shalom, the 71st Gathering at Camp Newman, and the 72nd Gathering at Pathfinder Ranch all reported full camps with many newcomers and all of the Gatherings instilled the CMG mission of "building community one man at a time."



At the 70th Gathering a huge puppet dubbed "Gathering Man", which is physically controlled by six volunteers, was introduced and became the mascot for this Gathering. Gathering Man inspired puppet making. Many of the puppets that were made at the Puppet Workshop could



be described as "bizarre" to "comical." At the 71st Gathering a formal dinner which featured a DJ playing soft background music had a taste of "creative rebellion." The DJ and a singer were scheduled to entertain the post-dinner crowd, but instead, another singer broke into a medley of popular rock

songs leading to an unscheduled, yet well-received, evening activity. This developed on its own as a free-form mixture of expression for everyone in attendance. Tables were moved aside and the space opened up for dancing and a sing-along. At the 72nd Gathering "Havin' Fun" was the theme. All kinds of skits, storytelling, a live game show, "Family Feud," and many hours of humor, games, and sitting around a fireplace was experienced. Gathering Man stood in the corner embracing the moment with the 72nd Gathering attendees.

One sad note: Michael Bell, who served the California Men's Gatherings as Board President (2006-2008), died peacefully at his home in Palm Springs in early October. The men of the LEC-DC, on which Michael last served as an active member, held a moving and respectful memorial service in Michael's honor.



## 2012

The Annual Business Meeting in 2012, held in San Francisco, brought about many changes to how the CMG operated. The By Laws were updated, and many changes were made to clarify the organization's direction, and its leadership. The most challenging aspect was the re-definition of "Membership," a term which up to this point, was reserved for Past Gathering Planners, who attended the Annual Meeting, paid annual dues, and voted, in accordance with the Bylaws. There was a great deal of discussion about this topic, with the outcome favoring the concept of "General Membership", which included any person who signed up for CMG electronic announcements and notifications. A committee was formed, to look into the legal aspects of such a general definition, and to report their progress in determining what to call the men interested in CMG activities, as well as men who attended Local Events and Gatherings.



In the first quarter of 2012, events occurred which essentially changed the way the Board viewed itself and how CMG men looked at the CMG, its Board of Directors, and its objectives. A conflict unfolded in March, 2012. The conflict involved the CMG Board of Directors, a former CMG Communications Director, many of the CMG's former and current subscribers to its email notifications, and supporters on both sides of the conflict.

At question was the use of an email list the Board had entrusted the former CD to use, in his duties, during his term of office. The list was not returned back to the Board, after the CD stepped down from the Board, one year and five months after his appointment. There was unofficial use of the list, to announce this person's resignation from the CMG's Los Angeles Local Events Committee, an announcement which also questioned the integrity of the Board. Some of the addressees were men who had, for one reason or another, opted off the CMG mailing lists, but the list that was used still included these recipients.

The conflict arose and escalated with angry letters to the Board, and legal papers being sent by the lawyers hired to protect the interests of the CMG Board, and its apparent detractor. Questions arose regarding membership, and how the Board could protect its interests, gain visibility to the public, and also defend itself adequately.

In the end, the former CD stopped his threat of a lawsuit as part of the resolution, while the CMG Board of Directors never filed a lawsuit. The board's only legal action of the time still stands: a permanent warning that he will not use the address list in question again, and that the CMG will take appropriate legal action against him, if he uses this list. Both parties agreed to meet in the manner established by the early CMGs, the Circle of Concerns, and another practice, offered during Gatherings, the Heart Circle. The two concepts were used separately and also combined, to become Community Tribal Circles.

During the five Tribal Circles, held in Los Angeles in April and May of 2012, the CMG Board was able to establish the truths, brought visibility to questioned practices, and examined the conflict in a manner which involved a heart-felt dialogue in restoring peace, and it set an enduring reconciliation. In the Circles, every voice counted, and no voice was neglected, minimized, or judged. Anyone who wanted to speak was heard and valued by all of the other attendees.

After the resolution of the conflict was announced, the CMG Board held four statewide Tribal Circles, later in the year, to allow feedback and to open up dialogue about the conflict, as well as membership, and other matters which could be addressed.

The three Gatherings of 2012 offered a needed respite from the conflict. Although men in the North and San Diego didn't feel the impact, the Gatherings that year showed a slower than usual pace, and attendance dropped, by one-third, for the Spring Gathering.

The CMG Board Meeting held during the 73rd Gathering admitted the first five Elders to become members of the



newly-established CMG Elders Circle. The Elders may be consulted, or may, on their own inquiry, consult with the CMG Board, CMG Members, and the general CMG population, to educate, to stimulate, to invoke peace and peaceful resolution of conflicts, and for any other purpose. In 2013, two additional Elders were confirmed and admitted to the Elder's Circle.

The 73rd Gathering challenged men to look at the possibilities of being men. The 74th CMG, was held at Camp Newman. While the conflict of the Spring was "hot" mostly in Los Angeles, men in the North weren't affected by the conflict as much as their Southern counterparts. Interest in the conflict and the negative impact to the Board and to the Spring Gathering were treated respectfully. The CMG seemed to move on, holding a Summer Gathering which actually attracted more men in the North, for the first time in many years. Nearly 190 men attended this Gathering. The 74th CMG theme, "Awakening," was really what the CMG was experiencing, coincidental, perhaps, to the activities at the Summer Gathering. The last Gathering to be held at Pathfinder Ranch was the 72nd Gathering, held in 2011. The 2012 Fall Gathering, the 75th CMG, returned to Camp Stevens, in Julian, after a six-year absence. The date was moved from



Thanksgiving Weekend to the weekend prior to Thanksgiving. The theme of the Gathering, "Phoenix Rising," alluded, perhaps by chance, to the dissipation of the conflict, which occurred earlier that year.

Camp Stevens was rebuilt, with the noted absence of the "A Frame" structures which were now gone, but replaced by yurts, as temporary indoor accommodations with bathrooms and showers, and bunk beds to accommodate 12-16 men. A second yurt was found behind the first yurt, and it was used as the Intimacy Space, "The Phoenix Nest." A third yurt, separated by a courtyard shared with the other two yurts, was used as a second sleep space. The dining hall was expanded, and this allowed for greater space for fireplace chats and workshops. A

new lodge, named Lax-Sadler Lodge, with accessible dorms and showers, was favored by attendees in wheelchairs, and those with other disabilities. Located near the Archery Field, the lodge also had a large fireplace, surrounded with sofas and space for workshops.

## 2013

The CMG Members and Board held the Annual Meeting in San Diego. The Planners of this meeting held the sessions in the banquet hall adjoining a Cuban Restaurant. The highlight of the meeting: working as a team of leaders, on the new CMG Mission Statement, and bringing the concept of "Membership" to include those who sign up to receive notifications of CMG Local Events and Gatherings, into the collective consciousness. These men would comprise the CMG "General" Members; CMG "Voting" Members would be men who served a Planning Committee and paid dues, in order to help determine the future of the organization.

The CMG Process of Reconciliation became effective in 2013, too. This policy replaces an older method of resolving conflicts, and at the same time, utilizes the CMG Tribal Circles as a means to hear out those involved in a conflict.

### The Gatherings of 2013

The three traditional Gatherings, numbered 76, 77, and 78, were held in 2013, with better attendance collectively than in 2012.

The 76th CMG, held over Memorial Day, attracted many new men, and many of these attendees brought hope and youthful energy. The 77th CMG, held at Camp Newman, boasted brand new dorms, which replaced the "Army barracks style" accommodations Camp Newman once offered. The Planners moved the stage and many activities from the Assembly Hall to the larger Dining Hall. Over 200 men attended this Gathering. The Assembly Hall was converted, for the most part, to a quiet space for small workshops and social gathering. The 78th CMG, at Camp Stevens, saw a smaller population of attendees, but offered interesting offbeat activities, such as "farm animal feeding," which occurred at the camp's pig ranch.



Notes of Passage: Tim "Timo" O'Donoghue, from San Diego, loved by many CMG men, died, shortly after his brief appearance to the 2013 ABM. Robert "Rig" Rigamonti, a renown actor, and for the CMG, the man who designed the colorful parachute for the 40th CMG, Spring, 2001, also passed away.



## 2014

The Annual Member's Meeting, held in San Mateo, hosted nearly 30 men. There were significant changes to the CMG Bylaws, and some new processes to consider. CMG Voting Membership was redefined, to include any man who attended Planning or LEC meetings in the year prior to an AMM. Those who qualify may also defer attendance to the AMM for one year, so that travel to the Annual Member's Meeting is less of an obstacle. Annual dues must be paid up, in order for any qualified Member to continue as a Voting Member. Voting Members who have been Voting Members for ten years or more, will not need to attend Planning Committee or LEC meetings in order to renew their voting status. The CMG Board Vice-President will keep track of all eligible Voting Members, and update the list of renewing Voting Members. Besides these Bylaws, the Voting Members voted in new Board Officers, for Communications, Outreach, and Development. A new Archivist was selected in 2014. After holding the position for 13 years, Mohabee Serrano stepped down, and Cat Walker was selected to fill this position. The Board also sought a new logo, calling forth a contest for submission of possible logo designs, by Gathering attendees and Local Events attendees.

[to be continued]