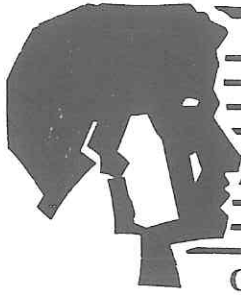


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# GFC NEWS

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## The Spirit of Christmas

By Jay Alexander

When the alarm clock began its obnoxious buzzing at 7:00 the other morning, it occurred to me that, for the first time in my life, I had to set an alarm clock for Christmas morning. I also realized that, for the first time in my life, I was greeting Christmas day alone. The six preceding Christmases I had awakened with my wife, in either our home or that of our parents and the past three of those included my son. Before that, even when I was single, I had always spent Christmas with my mom and, before they divorced, with both of my parents.

I suppose it would have been easy enough to lay there in bed and dwell on the significance of it all, but I knew that my son was probably already awake and bugging his mom to take him downstairs to see what Santa had brought. He's three now and the conspiracy of Christmas specials on videotape and TV, holiday parties at preschool and, of course, well-intentioned incitement from Mom, Dad and Grandpa, had whipped him into a frenzy of expectation over the bounty of loot beneath the tree. I got dressed, grabbed a couple of last minute gifts I'd wrapped the night before and left my austere apartment for the relative warmth of my former home in the suburbs.

The dogs met me at the door, just as they always have, tails wagging excitedly. I found my wife and my father seated at the breakfast table and my son busily playing in the playroom. If I didn't know better, the scene was really no different than if I'd simply been the last one down the stairs that morning. After kissing my son and receiving an enthusiastic, if very wet, demonstration of the nautical equivalent of a train set Santa had brought him, I helped myself to a cup of coffee and chatted with my wife. We had wrapped all of his other presents and she had insisted that everyone wait until I arrived before opening any of them. My son hadn't seemed to mind, but Grandpa, camera in hand, wasted no time trying to redirect his grandson's interest towards the unopened gifts.

As you might expect, the unwrapping of presents took little time at all. Each new toy brought an exclamation of glee from my son who usually remembered to say thank you and sometimes even punctuated it with a hug and kiss. Most of the gifts my wife and I bought for him were labeled from Santa Claus, but we did tell him that a few were from Mom and Dad. We had decided the day before, after wrapping presents together, that there was no reason to make any distinction between what each of us had purchased for him. That only made sense given our oft-stated goal of

showing our son that he still has two loving parents, even if they no longer live together and, come next Christmas will no longer be married to each other.

I ended up staying at the house through lunchtime, alternatively playing with my son, talking on the telephone with relatives and cleaning up after the festivities. Then I helped my wife load up her car so that she and my son could drive to Northern Virginia to spend the rest of the weekend with her family. I kissed them both goodbye, got in my car and headed back to the apartment, alone but for the dogs whom I'd decided to take for the weekend.

Despite the minor chaos that often reigns over large family gatherings, it really saddened me not to be joining my wife and son. I have always felt close to my in-laws, closer in some ways than to my own family, but it certainly came as no surprise that I wasn't included in their holiday plans this year. Instead, I came home and called the love of my life, who was celebrating Christmas at his mom's house over half a continent away. We fully intend to spend next Christmas with each other and talking with him and hearing about the excitement his family felt about the two of us reminded me just how incredibly fortunate I am. As if that weren't reason enough to celebrate, I joined friends

later that evening – friends I met through GFC – to toast the holiday.

Heathen that I am, I have never gotten too caught up in the beautiful religious symbolism signified by the Christmas holiday. However, while not a religious person, I do consider myself quite spiritual. For me, the spirit of the holiday season has always been about getting together with family and friends and celebrating our presence in one another's lives. The first Christmas since coming out to my wife, our families and friends, the first since the separation and the first since falling in love with a man who currently lives very far away, had all the potential of being very depressing for me. And yet it turned out to be a remarkable reminder of that spirit I hold so dear.

### Reflections

*By Bob Rodgers*

1999 begins GFC-Richmond's third year. In February, 1997; a few of us met with guys from the D.C. and Baltimore groups to get a Richmond "chapter" up and running. GFC-Richmond has made a difference in both small ways and for some of us in giant ways. This group while distinctly different from our co-groups to the north has found a niche and determined what works and doesn't work for us.

We are known in the gay community here in Richmond. We are known by counselors, attorneys and clerics for the service, support and work we do. It is because of each of you that this group is here and has survived the fickleness that can be a gay organization's destiny in this city. As one of

the original "dreamers" of GFC-Richmond, I want to thank all of you who are members, supporters and friends. It is my wish that 1999 is a year of peace, happiness, prosperity, good health and love for you. Happy New Year!!!

### Meeting Minutes

The twenty-first meeting of GFC-Richmond began at 7:40 p.m. at St. Marks Episcopal Church, 520 N. Boulevard, Richmond. Eighteen members/visitors were in attendance, with several new faces.

The meeting was opened by Chapter President Bob Greene. There being no scheduled program for the evening, those present went around the room introducing themselves and telling about their kids.

#### *General Business:*

Old –

- Minutes of the November meeting were approved.
- A reminder of the potluck dinner at Dave White's home planned for December 8 at 7:00.
- Most attending the meeting brought children's videos which will be presented to MCV's Pediatric Child Life Department. This had been approved by the membership at the November meeting.
- Gil Caldwell reminded the group to join those who have started meeting at Godfrey's on Friday nights around 10:00 p.m.

New –

- Bob Greene invited all to join the group that meets on Saturday mornings at Mongrel's. Come around

10:30 for coffee and conversation.

- "Christmas on Mars," a Theatre IV production, opens at the Empire Theater on 12/3.

*Treasurer's Report:* We currently have \$445.71 on account.

The remainder of the evening was devoted to informal discussions while enjoying refreshments. The meeting concluded at approximately 10:00 p.m.

### Calendar of Events

**Date:** Thursday, Jan. 7

**Time:** 7:30 p.m.

**Place:** St. Mark's Episcopal Church, 520 N. Boulevard

Join us for our guest speaker Robert Allen, Vice President at Scott and Stringfellow. He has over 15 years of experience helping individuals and small businesses with investment advice.

Don't forget dinner at 6:00 before the meeting. *We will be meeting at Godfrey's this month.*

### New Meeting Site To Be Considered...

St. Marks experienced a small fire the Monday evening after our last meeting. It is a suspected arson case. Although we are being allowed to stay, many other groups have been turned away from using the church's meeting rooms.

We will have to have a door monitor, however, who will be in place from 7:15 p.m. to 7:40 p.m. *After 7:45 p.m., the doors will stay locked, so please don't be late.* A decision will have to be made on whether we want to continue to meet at St. Marks or look for alternative space.