



Yes, You Matter

And Here's Where You Can Start Feeling It

By Dick Ridington

"Suck it up." "Men muddle through alone." "That's just the way it is."

That's what I used to think—until a bunch of guys showed me what brotherhood means. Now, I'm one of them. You can be, too.

Look, I'm not gonna blow smoke up your butt: You can't just close your eyes, click your heels, and wake up in wonderland. But whether what you've been muddling through is trouble with your relationships, work, or life in general, I can promise an easier, quicker way forward. Massachusetts Men's Gathering (MMG) offers men of all stripes—regardless

of race, sexuality, or ability—unconditional acceptance and respect.

No Templates, No Dictators

This is gonna sound odd, but gatherings affirm who I am—both as completely unique (in my lifestyle and preferences) and as the same as you (in my fundamental need for respect). That magical balance is our foundation—what happens from there is entirely up to you.

Unlike the manosphere, nobody here is going to tell you what it means to be a man or how you should lead your life. We don't believe in a one-size-fits-all template for masculinity. Sample some of what you see from other attendees,

Drone Photography by Joe Turner



Your MMG Newsletter *We're trying something new; we hope you'll try it, too*

You're reading a new effort by MMG: a monthly newsletter we hope will do some important things.

1. Keep Us Connected: We hope this newsletter helps keep men who've attended a retreat more connected to one another between retreats. As you may know, we have other ways of helping men stay connected: We hold two Zoom-based check-ins, and we've recently run some Zoom-based workshops (more on those another time).

2. Help Us Grow: We want you to have something you can easily share with others who might like to know about MMG. Since we open our doors to all men, we'll keep new men in our hearts as we write. Please feel free to forward it.

3. Continue Sharing: We're aiming to share content that's both useful to men (e.g., health info), while also personal to the writer: Just as in an MMG workshop, we want you to know who's "talking" here. And, since we know many of you lead busy lives, we'll keep this concise and to-the-point.

Since we're just starting out, we're in learning mode. We'd welcome your comments!

From your newsletter team
(Rick, Stephen, and Dick)

define your own version, then try it out at a retreat.

There, you'll have the backing of a community pulling together for a common cause—men laughing with (and never at) each other, and truly listening when things get tough. While I can't fully explain the brotherhood I found at MMG, that comes close.

From Muddling through to Moving Forward

When I first showed up at a gathering, I was like everyone else their first time—curious, confused, and didn't know a soul. Since then, life hasn't stopped throwing me curveballs—including some downright hellish times. Didn't matter if

that was the loss of a loved one, the end of a cherished job, or a serious illness, among the brotherhood were men who'd been through it, could hear me talk frankly about it, could stand fast when I needed to hold on.

It might be hard to imagine that kind of impact from a group of ordinary men, but these men are committed to the extraordinary work of supporting one another. And that's exactly what I lacked before I found MMG. It wasn't that I was a total loner; it was just that when the cracks in my life showed, I always muddled through alone.

Funny how things work out, though. These days, because I lean

more on my brothers, I actually have a stronger sense of myself. I know that I matter, know I have talents to contribute, and I accomplish things I never could have pulled off solo. Frankly, I no longer see any reason to try.

Your Turn

If any of this rings a bell, start here: Register for an upcoming gathering, or simply drop us an email to ask questions or have a one-to-one chat.

Consider coming—not because MMG matters, but because you do. And if you don't quite feel that truth yet, I promise you'll begin to by the end of the weekend. Hope to see you then!

MAN TO MAN

My Family Connection

By Barry Bailey

I was clearly nervous attending my first MMG gathering. To understand why, you must understand where I came from. I grew up in the inner city of a large factory town. The men in my family were cold and far from supportive—especially my father, who delighted in upsetting, taunting and humiliating my mother, siblings and me. Men in general scared me. I experienced men as the ones who, like my dad, would taunt and tease you for their own sadistic pleasure.

Growing up, I was a loner. Throughout my public-school years, I had no best friend. I never knew another male my age who had the same interests I had until my freshman year of college. Back in public school, being the skinny, shortest boy in class got me bullied and picked on by the other boys. And I was usually that boy in gym



class who got chosen last for a team. How then, did I show up at an MMG gathering full of men?

Serendipity

One evening I was cleaning my home office and uncovered a stack of old newspapers I had saved. They were Wingspan, a men's movement publication from the 1990s. It was the first men's literature I had ever encountered. What I read had resonated with

me. I had saved several issues, some of which were as much as ten years old. I started re-reading each newspaper and discovered in every paper there was a tiny classified ad for MMG that ten years earlier I had boldly circled in bright red ink. There before me was an interest in that ad that had remained dormant for ten years! Every ad had a number to call. It was eight o'clock and I decided, I'll call the number

and see if anything happens. What can I lose?

A man answered and I told him about the MMG Wingspan ad and asked him if MMG still exists. He said he was Chris Harding, MMG's leader, and added he was the editor of Wingspan. Immediately I felt a safe-man connection to MMG. He said there was an MMG gathering happening in two weeks. I asked if there would be a sweat lodge offered. When he answered "Yes". I immediately responded, "I'll be there!". Native American culture fascinated me, and experiencing a sweat lodge was on my bucket list.

Connecting

I was the very first man to arrive at MMG's Camp Barton – it was my solution to not have to face an unknown number of strange new men all at once. I could ease into it. Had I arrived late I probably would have turned around and gone home. I looked around the camp's grounds and wandered down to the dock. I turned around and saw a lone figure coming down the hill. He was barefoot, wearing lightweight full-gathered yoga pants that billowed in the breeze, as he "floated" down the hill towards me. My immediate thought was, he looks like a dancer! That man was Jessie, who immediately warmly welcomed me to MMG.

Soon, more men arrived for the gathering. There were no sports teams to be picked for, no pecking order to climb, no clique group to get into or be left out of. I spent that weekend feeling acceptance I'd never felt until then. I went to workshops and I did the sweat lodge not once, but twice—first as the firekeeper (to check things out before doing the sweat myself), and then as a nervous man sweating with eleven other men plus Bear our Lakota-trained leader

inside the confined pitch-black steaming-hot lodge. I was together with men sharing a sacred ritual of brotherhood. I belonged immediately, even though no one knew anything of my past—my shortcomings, my fears. I was just me; that's all that mattered. I count my double sweat lodge experience as my second most cherished MMG memory, and it remarkably was my very first MMG gathering! I belonged.

My first impression of the first man I met at MMG would significantly also connect with my most cherished MMG memory. Although Jessie never claimed to be a dancer, several gatherings later he did choreograph a dance for the talent show. Russ and I were partners in what is now affectionately known as "Jessie's Dance". We performed along with five or six other pairs of men. It was an extremely powerful emotional dance exploring the relationship between two men – their lives coming together, drifting away, sharing, and at the end completely breaking apart with a final goodbye gesture. At the end of our performance some of the men in the audience were weeping. To this day that dance performance is the most significant of any of my many wonderful experiences at MMG.

Sadly, the sweat lodge is no longer an experience offered at MMG. We don't have a qualified, properly

trained leader to conduct a sweat. In its place today are other exciting offerings and workshops such as the Angel Walk, Meditation, What is Masculinity?, Aging for Dummies, and Examining Manhood. In retrospect I am grateful I was fortunate to experience the sweat while it was still being offered. It was a significant element that firmly bonded me to MMG.

Rebirth

MMG helped me release my fear of men and as a result my life changed. I learned that men can be kind, caring, non-judgmental and supportive. After a few MMG gatherings I began to lead workshops myself and I quickly became fully involved. I now serve on the Organizing Committee (OC) and as MMG historian.

MMG has become much more family to me than my biological family. I now have a wonderful collection of male support and male MMG friends -- good male friends, and some very special male friends – something I never had before.

I am grateful for the privilege of being part of today's continuation of the Men's Movement that 50 years ago reshaped how today we view men and masculinity. I'm proud to have spent all these years with a group of men who take seriously their connection and support of other men.



References and Further Readings

[The Value of Social Interaction : Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health](#)

[The importance of connections: Ways to live a longer, healthier life](#)

[Strong social connections could boost healthy aging, experts say](#)

[Mayo Clinic: A Surprising Key to Healthy Aging - Strong social connections](#)

[Dangers of Isolation and Loneliness: Center For Disease Control](#)

[Health Effects of Social Isolation and Loneliness](#)

[Social interactions with Other Generations Benefits: National Library of Medicine](#)

[The Benefits of Intergenerational Wisdom-Sharing: A Randomized Controlled Study](#)

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