

GROUPS

**Kahunya Wario**

When I first encountered the Radical Faeries, I was almost overwhelmed by two conflicting emotions. One was intense fear, and the other I can only describe as ecstatic jubilation. On the one hand, I kept thinking, "Oh my God, these are the people my mother always warned me about!" and, on the other hand, I thought, "These are my people—why did it take me so long to find them?"

What I found when I arrived at Breitenbush Hot Springs in February 1995 for my first national gathering of Radical Faeries was for me the beginning of a profound change in the way I view the world and my place in it. I discovered a group of gay men in all shapes and sizes and from all walks of life joyously celebrating the fact of their gayness in whatever way their hearts directed.

Even though I had been out several years, I had never before experienced such jubilation regarding my sexuality. Of course there had been a sweet rebelliousness when I first realized I could go to a gay bar and dance the night away in the arms of another man. There had been moments of elation knowing there was a world of gay men out there with a subculture that I could claim as my own.

But after a few years of forays into this world, disappointment had begun to set in. I found that while I had a very good time dancing to the gay disco anthems and feeling a sense of unity and brotherhood, for me those feelings rarely lasted beyond last call and lights up. Disillusionment was all around me as the AIDS epidemic swept through the community and several people I knew were either infected or were very ill and dying.

Still under the heavy influence of my evangelical Christian upbringing, I had begun to wonder whether this wasn't a punishment from God for queer rebelliousness against nature. From some dark place the thought had begun to creep into my mind that it was only a matter of time before I too fell under the blow of "His terrible swift sword" and was banished to the fiery pit "where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth."

As a result of this turmoil I began to question my ultimate worth and usefulness as a gay man. During my early coming out years, I had associated mainly with gay men who seemed to feel we were no different from heterosexuals, except for the people with whom we chose to sleep. They approached the question of the reason for our gayness from a purely biological point of view. Somehow this failed to satisfy me on a deep level; something inside me wanted validation on a spiritual and emotional level



**Kahunya Wario, dressed in his native Kenyan clothing, displays some of the artifacts that have spiritual meaning**

too. I found the Faeries when I was at a peak in my search for this kind of validation.

The Faeries expressed a jubilant celebration of queer life in a way I had not experienced before. Through ritual, song, dance and exuberant creativity, they made a safe space for the individual and collective exploration of what it means to be gay. The whole experience seemed to focus on the questions "Who are we? Where have we come from? What are we here for?"

Many among the Faeries, myself included, feel that gay people are not an accident of nature, that we are here by some "divine" purpose, that nature gives us as a gift to the world. This concept is for me the "radical" part of the Faeries. There are clues all around and among us. I believe the fact that there are so many of us involved in healing, counseling, teaching and creative professions is one of these clues.

A major source of power and healing for many Faeries is the Heart Circle. This happens when two or more Faeries get together and each one speaks from his heart, openly expressing joys, fears, triumphs and failures in a supportive, nonjudgmental space. It is profoundly freeing to be able to speak one's thoughts freely

**From the heart**

**Three gay men share their experiences as Radical Faeries**

and without shame, and I have personally experienced the transformative power of the Heart Circle.

Gatherings also include a great amount of play and just plain frolicking. Almost every large gathering includes a fashion show featuring inspired, outlandish costumes created by gifted Faeries. There is also a "talent/no talent" show open to anyone who wishes to exhibit a particular skill—or lack thereof.

Faeries gather in a variety of ways. Heart Circles happen every day during large gatherings such as the ones held at Breitenbush. In Portland there is a Heart Circle and a potluck every full moon at the home of one of the Faeries. KoffeeKlatches are held every Saturday morning at 3 Friends Coffeehouse; this is mainly a social time and does not include a communal Heart Circle.

In the Pacific Northwest there are three large gatherings every year: winter and summer at Breitenbush and a larger gathering at Wolf Creek Sanctuary in southern Oregon. The Wolf Creek gathering is held on land that is owned by the Faeries, and there is a small community of Faeries who live there year-round caring for the land. There are also many other circles of Faeries across the United States and Canada and around the world.

The beauty of the Faeries is that each person experiences being a Faerie differently, which also makes it difficult to define what it means to be a Faerie. I've asked some of my Faerie friends to share what the experience has meant for them.

**Andre Pruitt**

I believe it was the spirit of the Radical Faeries that found me. Over a two year period I ran into people who told me bits and pieces about the Faeries. At the time, I was exploring spirituality and what it meant to be gay and how that fit in with my spirituality. During this time I met people from many spiritual paths and consistently ran into Radical Faeries who were comfortable being gay, each in their own way.

It hadn't been easy being an openly gay black man in Portland, even within the gay community. I found myself being ignored and passed over as if I didn't exist. This caused me to be unsure of myself and to wonder what was wrong with me. I picked myself apart, and the easiest target was my body image. Obviously I couldn't change the color of my skin, but I found that I could change my physique.

At about this time I met a Faerie who told me how Faeries honor who each person is as well as what they look like—all aspects of body, mind and spirit, both the feminine and masculine. Everything about each one.

He encouraged me to attend a gathering and learn more about them. It was mind-changing. At the gathering I saw men of all shapes and sizes and spiritualities honoring each other and supporting each other emotionally and spiritually. For the first time it felt good to be black and gay.

It was at this gathering that I met Griffith Black Swan, another black Faerie. (There were only two of us at that gathering.) He showed me such love, wisdom and compassion, and I felt honored and respected by him and my white brothers.

Meeting the Faeries opened me to a new way of looking at my spirituality as a gay man. I stepped out with a new sense of joy and power onto the ever-evolving path of growth.

**Joy Turtola**

In 1991, I attended a men's gathering called "Softening the Stone," which was held just outside Washington, D.C. There were both gay and straight men there, and many of the gay men were Radical Faeries. They had a Heart Circle and put on fashion and talent shows. At first I was repelled by their energy, and I said to a friend, "I could never wear a skirt." Two days later, I was frolicking through the woods naked. I had found my people.

I went to my first Faerie gathering in February 1994 at Breitenbush, and then moved to Portland the following year. For me, Faerie gatherings are a direct and immediate source of vibrant, unconditional love and acceptance, magic, and deep, soulful healing. Faerie gatherings are a place where all parts of me are welcomed and celebrated. My Faerie brothers have literally held my hand as I walked through the dark forest of my grief and danced with me as I celebrated my Joy.

■ FEY DIRT is the Portland-area Radical Faeries information line, (503) 235-0865. The national magazine is RFD, which also has an Internet site, [www.rfdmag.org](http://www.rfdmag.org), with links to much of faerieland.

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