

gender quest



THE QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF KINDRED SPIRITS

AUTUMN 2000

You Are Not Your Gender by Zantui Rose *[her keynote address at Southern Comfort 2000]*

I stand here in front of you with deep gratitude. Since January I've known about this gift and I've ruminated countless hours trying to figure out what *must* be said, what burns in my heart. How to say what comes from my Spirit. Some of you may not appreciate all that I'm going to say, some may have trouble understanding parts of it. But my hope is that most of you will find a sense of relief in yourself as I choose to speak my truth. And if my message *does* disturb you, that's probably a good thing, as we all need shaking up from time to time.

I am speaking to every one of you. If you are in this room, then I believe you are meant to hear what I have to say. Partners, caregivers, waitstaff, all manner of gender definitions — I am speaking to you. I am involved in this community because you and I are a powerful bunch of people. We are movers and shakers, pioneers, shapeshifters. We are here on planet Earth at this time to move evolution ahead. In order to do this most important work, we have to be awake. Now I am not a TG person. I do not pretend to know what that experience is, and I respect whatever road that part of the journey takes you on. I believe my gift to you is to show you the next step — the one beyond gender — to help you transcend gender. This is a wake-up call for you to come to full consciousness about your being.

I am here to tell you there are not two genders, and your identity is not your gender. Over and over I hear TG people say "I just want to be me". Your quest to actualize yourself is Truth, but this ache will not be eliminated by thinking you are switching genders. I ask you to consider this: your quest, the haunting discomfort inside you, is about waking up to the *full* potential of who you are — the *deepest* knowing that you are Spirit.

We all feel there is something missing inside. We feel the void, the hole, the loneliness of the lost Self. But this loneliness is deeper than gender. I understand how tough it is to let go of the belief that your thoughts, your body form, and your gender are the total substance of you. *All* of us feel fear as we touch the possibility of going beyond bi-polar gender, beyond form, of *truly* being whole. It is this fear that keeps us stuck in

gender duality. I am asking for a big stretch here, but I am also here to tell you there is tremendous freedom in this letting go. So I will say this as many times as necessary to wake you up. *You are not your gender.* Wake up!

At our core we are Spirit, Spirit first — Spirit manifest in form — nothing else is as important to remember as this piece of information. Before form you are Spirit. During form you are Spirit, and after form you are Spirit. In this social game of life (that we think is our identity), someone a very long time ago decided to give the form two genders. Gender has become a mask that we put on that covers the Soul, our Spirit essence. Life in form is Spirit's giant sandbox, and we are here to play. To play is to be spontaneous. Play helps us accept that life is about change, process, growth. If we think of ourselves as a gender, we become an "end result", we become a stagnant "product". The body has been given to us as a gift to experience all the gifts around us. Bi-polar gender has given us rules to live by that restrict our breath, restrict our play, restrict our Spirit.

If you are in this room, I think it is safe to say that at some point in this life form, maybe still, you have become disillusioned with gender. This is good because it means you are waking up out of the dream that was handed to you. Bi-polar gender is an illusion and must be recognized as just that — an illusion. Right now in this moment, give yourself the vision of no gender, a world without gender. Imagine yourself and everyone around you, free to play, to express, to adorn yourself, to love whomever, to create over and over, every moment — a new expression of Spirit in form. Imagine giving yourself the permission to shapeshift into *all* the possibilities. This is what life in form was meant to be — a creation with no boundaries, no end to the creation. If you can come to the game of gender with a consciousness of the play, it opens up a whole new field of expression, it allows you real freedom to create yourself as the Creator intended — to finally *be* who you truly are. There are no gender rules here, not in Spirit's playground. The rules we live by are made up by the culture and have *created* bi-polar gender, which has cost us tremendously. We have wife beating, raping, violence between genders that can only happen in a dominant/submissive society. *No one* can become fully themselves when gender division and stereotypes

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UPCOMING KINDRED SPIRITS EVENTS at the BodhiTree House in Black Mountain, NC

November 23 - 26 (Thurs. - Sunday)

ALE-HELP'STI

For this feast of thanksgiving, we use the Cherokee word for "gratitude", honoring the core of their spiritual teaching in this, their ancestral home. No place at the table with blood kin? Count your blessings with us.

December 29 - Jan. 1 (Fri. - Monday)

WINTER CIRCLE

After the fever pitch of commercialized holidays, you are invited to retreat in quiet reverence with kindred spirits. Bring a log for our mountaintop bonfire under the waxing moon, and start your year in Yule Circle.

Dates to be announced for the following:

PARTNERS RETREAT

A powerful opportunity for partners of transgendered people to have personal, otherwise neglected, issues addressed in safe space, and to honor their own part in furthering the evolution of gender. Led by Zantui Rose.

SEEKERS JOURNEY

Involves fasting, sweat lodge, meditation, drumming, dancing, journeying, and vision seeking. Culminating with a rite of passage and "break-fast". A strong prerequisite for any shamanic work. Led by Marc [REDACTED].

MOUNTAIN MAN WEEKEND

Four days for male-identified FTM's to socialize, discuss issues, hike, fish, river raft -- whatever. A safe space to explore yourself with others in a spirit of "brotherhood". Lots to do and see, or simply sit back and be. Facilitated by Marc [REDACTED].

MEDITATION RETREAT

Silent Zen-style sitting, walking, working outdoors, evening discussions and nourishing meals. A nurturing space to find both your questions and your answers. A way to do the real inner work. Led by Zantui Rose.

April 13 - 16 (Fri. - Monday)

SPRING CIRCLE

Scheduled over Easter, this gathering will celebrate an Appalachian Spring, combining elements of Equinox ritual and Beltane frolic. One of our four major Holydays, this is a time for blossoming. Come and play...

The BodhiTree House is available for you to come and host your own retreat any time. Traditional Vision Quests can also be arranged at Dixon Mountain.

New Kindred Spirits Circle in California reported by Dana [REDACTED]

Kindred Spirits has now danced under the redwoods! Our first gathering, entitled a "Circle of Change" met on Nov. 11 in the Santa Cruz Mountains just a few miles from the Pacific Ocean in a majestic stand of redwoods. Nine of us became closer to Spirit and each other as we shared, chanted, danced and sang around a cozy campfire. We celebrated as the full moon cleared the horizon and shone through the trees. After we cooked and shared dinner, a few of us braved the chilly night and slept under the canopy of branches, awakened by a clear sky and warm rising sun.

Our altar held two leather circles, carried from the Hot Springs Circle. This signified the east and west coast expanse of our even-widening energy. At the end of the day, these two symbols were placed one on the other to signify the Oneness that is ours. Also on the altar were two stones, one a piece of quartz gathered on our rainy walk that day at Hot Springs along the little river we swam in. The other was gathered from the BodhiTree House grounds. You, all of you, were there in spirit.

It was decided that we would try to meet once each quarter, and that next time, each member of the circle would seek one new kindred spirit to join us. I am already looking forward to that time. For Joy-Vanelia, who danced and sang and shared many oral traditions with us, and the rest of us, we offer blessings and warmth to all our sisters, brothers, and friends.

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Kindred Spirits Retreats & Guesthouse

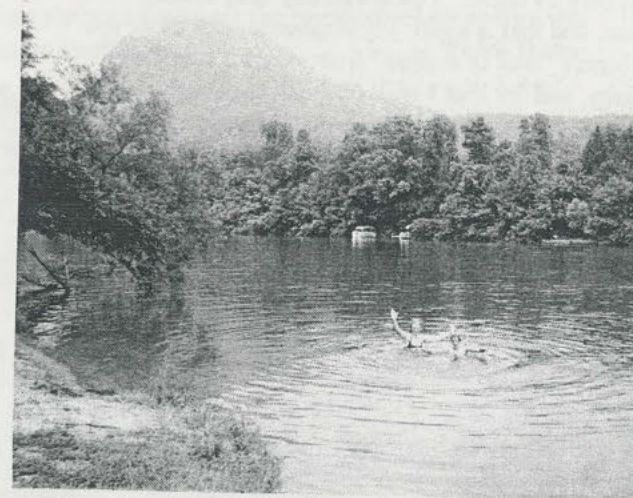
Founded in 1993, and dedicated to the spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physical well-being of all transgendered people. We address these concerns through regional gatherings, guest facilities, a traveling medicine show, electronic and print media. Submissions to this newsletter are always welcome. Send simple text (no attachments) to: [REDACTED]@juno.com, or hard copy to: Kindred Spirits, c/o 395 Lakey Gap Acres, Black Mountain, NC 28711-9558. Any issues to which you have contributed will be free of charge. A year's subscription to *gender quest* (4 issues) costs \$8. Make check or money order payable to: Kindred Spirits. For more information, you may phone: 828-669-3889 (9:00am - 9:00pm) or visit our website at: www.TranSpirits.org.

Autumn Circle at the BodhiTree House

Our first Autumn Circle over Labor Day weekend was attended by nine people from places as diverse as Florida, Massachusetts, West Virginia, Georgia and of course NC. The seasonal theme was that of reflection, nostalgia, and enjoying the last pleasures of summer.

Personal healing issues were addressed in a series of circles. We also utilized some art therapy by painting our life stories on boards, patterned after an Aboriginal practice, and sharing them with each other. Despite some intermittent rain, we managed to do all of our planned outdoor activities. We picnicked and swam at scenic Lake Lure, drummed in the surreal acoustics of the geodesic The Light Center sanctuary, and skinny-dipped in a nearby creek.

One night, we were joined by another dozen kindred spirits who live locally for a festive soiree with feasting and some fabulous drumming -- thank you Kara and Ruby for leading us! Overall, there was celebration, but also some good and necessary healing work, and of course the joy of getting to know new kindred spirits.



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8th Annual Circle in Hot Springs

I am amazed at how quickly I became comfortable sharing with you all. I am not shy by nature (no snickering), but I rarely offer up my inner self without first making sure that I am in a safe place. It did not take long to find that I was going to be nurtured and protected with you all around me. You heard and felt parts of me that needed to be expressed. Thank you for that.

Walking in the rain, sitting in the creek naked, sharing hot tubs, eating together, sharing a room, talking like teenagers on my bed, dancing through the house with only my sarong around my waist...these memories are etched in my being. I spend so much time around people who want something from me...it was nice to share space and time with souls who enjoyed life for life's sake, without need for reciprocation.

I find that the two spirits who joined our circle at Max Patch are more mysterious than I first imagined. I truly believe that they were angels [sent] so that we might see that sharing ourselves is not something to be feared. Rather... that ours is a message of love and compassion which transcends culture, gender, society, and offers hope to all who would listen.

You are my teachers, mentors, and guides... I have so much to learn. I want to dance more and sing more and share the music inside me more. You have inspired me to pick up my dusty guitar case, and to finish my search for a native flute which sings my song.

Lastly, you gave me gobs of laughter and joy, which I surely needed. How we made fun and told silly jokes and tweaked the world's nose! — Dana [redacted]



I found the sharing each of you brought to the circles and the dinner table most stimulating. The meals were most refreshing for me since my busy life as a single person doesn't offer sit-down meals with friends or extended family very often. Dining with different mixes of you all was most refreshing, and left me aching for that family closeness after returning home. The sharing of your spirit and visions in sacred circle, touched me deeply and I am honored that you all opened up to say what needed to be said.

Edgar Allan Poe said, "All that you see or seem, is but a dream within a dream. They who dream by day are cognizant of many things which escape those who dream only by night." You are all day time dream walkers, and that is a gift. My weekends with all of you have been a "well of dreams" from which I renew my creativity, and for that I wish to thank each and every one of you for being real during these events.

— Cheryl [redacted]

After an opportunity for personal sharing of what brought us to the mountain, we did a naming ceremony that was partly traditional and partly innovative. Two people had already arranged to be named by one of our elders in what seemed a very traditional ceremony. We all had the chance to ceremoniously greet them and call them by their new names. Then we innovated. Anyone who did not already have a "name" was invited to take turns standing in the center of our circle and let the entire group suggest names that seemed appropriate. The person to be named was then free to either adopt one of the suggested names or to stand aside and take time to muse on these gifts and see if any fit. If and when a person accepted a given name, we then did the ceremonial greeting, and were then blessed by our elder.

But what happened Saturday night has most profoundly changed me... one of us was asked if she would like some "energy work". She accepted and the rest of us watched. Afterwards when she finally succeeded in moving to a sitting position, it was obvious that something wondrous had happened. Another person with sciatica went next, and she also expressed her amazement at how much better she felt afterwards. When it was my turn, I stepped forward eagerly. I still feel chills running up and down my spine whenever I stop and remember the feeling of all those hands sending such healing power rippling through me. All the way home, I kept feeling those chills up and down. Our dear sister's adjustment (or rewiring) of my energy was just incredible.

— Petra [redacted]

That last night, we listened to live music -- piano and violin. I was thinking, then, about the quietness of the place, and about how the house didn't have a television. I'm quite fascinated by turn-of-the-century dinner parties, and the sorts of entertainments that they had. I think that I could become drunk on the sort of entertainment that we had there -- drama, discussion, poetry and music. Sweet, heady stuff.

— B.C. [redacted]

A steady drumbeat

... moves along the passage to the underneath.
An ancient gong invites all to break fast and feast.

A gentle purr reveals this to be the place.
Violin, piano, a single voice raises the spirit.

The patter of rain between the thunder clap,
A swim ends, a rain walk begins.

Footfalls plop, slop, and slip. A memory from a puddle,
distant, real, another life.

When the hot gush of mother earth reaches the top, the
burst of jets begin.

The whirl of water soaks the weary flesh.

Soft creak as the pendulum swings

accompanied by the story of life shared.

The Drums calling. A gentle march to sacred ground.

The welcome echo across the mountain morning.

Calling the day, welcoming home.

The power of the voice -- directions for the day,
whispers for the soul,

Laughter at the 'duct tape, slippery bits, and
dysFUNCTIONal.'

Bringing orgasm from organism!

Chills up the spine, "Good to see you again."

Gentle sobs as the spirit finds solace.

The sound and power of a name.

The beats of the drums, my heart, are one.

— Stephanie [redacted]



New Medicine Show at Southern Comfort

Kindred Spirits' Traveling Medicine Show performed a new piece at its *Gathering of the Trans Clans* venue entitled, "Refashioning Gender". Billed as "a different kind of fashion show", the audience was treated to a wild and colorful display of gender presentations beyond that of man or woman, in contrast to a straight-looking couple dressed in black & white, planted in the audience as a foil for the MC.

Twenty performers from all over the continent made up the cast, which included three musicians playing original music. In addition to a Muse and Spirit Guides, there were nine models: Amazon Warrior, Elfin Satyr, Monk/Nun, Glam Biker, Queer Bubba, Radical Faery, Techno-Geek, Waltzing Goth, and an Extra-Terrestrial. Each of the models created their own character.

As the show comes to a close, the couple has a surprise revelation. The audience, whose imaginations have been stretched past old stereotypes, are invited to strut their own genders on the runway. Next year's Southern Comfort promises an even bigger venue. Meanwhile, new ideas, performers and venues are always welcome. We intend to tour the college circuits before long.



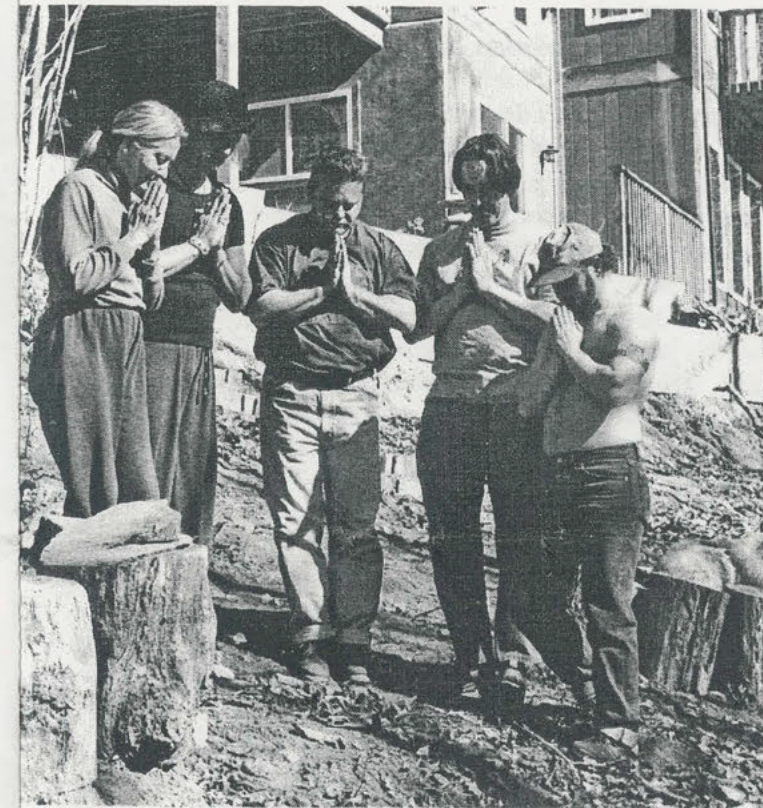
Photo by Mariette Puffy Allen

Silent Meditation Retreat

Silence is healing, it allows the mind to open, so fresh Truth can arise. This awareness was felt by the attendees of the first Kindred Spirits three-day silent meditation retreat, held Nov. 3-5. The BodhiTree House was a perfect setting for the quiet, slow pace necessary to drop down into oneself, away from the distractions of everyday life.

We spent time sitting for half-hour intervals on our meditation cushions, walking slowly in meditation, taking peaceful walks through the woods, and we ate *incredibly* well. During the day, hours of sitting were broken up by physical work on the grounds of the BodhiTree House. We prepared an area for both a fire circle and a sweat lodge. For an hour in the evening, we broke silence to share our progress and ask questions. In the silence of working together, we still found opportunities to laugh, to love, to know each other in a way that only meditating together invites.

If this sounds intriguing to you, please note that this type of Kindred Spirits retreat will be offered twice each year. Both novices and practitioners will be accommodated. Let us know if you are interested.



Are We the Gatekeepers?

by Lynn René

In a recent article for *Parabola Magazine*, Randy P.L. Conner, co-author of Cassell's *Encyclopedia of Queer Myth, Symbol and Spirit*, wrote of "Men-Women, Gatekeepers and Fairy Mounds." This article combined several true stories and myths about "men-women", or transgendered people, from various cultures: Native American, Indian, Greek, Roman, Celtic, African and pre-modern Europe. Many of these stories were familiar to me from my other readings; some of them were not. Yet in most of them, Conner asserted that transgendered folk were destined by birth to be gatekeepers for their various races/tribes/cultures, beings who helped their non-transgendered brothers and sisters "across the threshold."

Sometimes, Conner explained, that "threshold" is a physical one, a geographic location more congenial and fruitful than the tribe/culture's present location. But, more often than not, the threshold is on a spiritual or metaphysical plane. In *The Fruitful Darkness*, Joan Halifax de-scribed the threshold as a place "where the boundaries of the self are tested... In the Threshold we

experience ourselves as multiplex. We are both mortal and god, human and creature, wild and cultivated, male and female." African writers Malidoma and Sobonfu Somé have defined gatekeepers as beings bridging "this world and the other world", who "experience a state of vibrational consciousness which is far higher, and far different, from the one that a normal person would experience." They "have access to other-dimensional beings... who are very magical and knowledgeable." Threshold persons are usually given names or descriptions expressing their gender liminality, what Conner calls their "betwixt-and-between" identities. And this description defines both "men-women" and "women-men", though in the context of my experience (and this article) I can only speak for MtF transpeople.

This description of the threshold makes perfect sense to me as an intersexed transsexual. In my life, at various stages of it, I have felt this conflict within me and, though I have yet to fully reconcile my "human and creature" aspects, I have managed to integrate the other dualities within myself. My "wild" side is expressed by my crazy sense of humor and my wholehearted enjoyment of drumming, as contrasted by my lifelong passions for poetry, literature, classical music and jazz. I have come to accept myself as both mortal and god through my Zen meditations, my earth-spirit rituals, and my studies in Unitarian Universalism, where I have found both a real and a spiritual home.

Yet this leaves, for me, two unanswered questions. 1) Can we truly bring other, non-transgendered individuals to a full and true absorption of these qualities? and 2) Do we really have an obligation—not merely moral but karmic — to act as gatekeepers? Conner quotes Malidoma Somé as saying, "You decide that you will be a gatekeeper before you are born... So when you arrive here, you begin to vibrate in a way that Elders can detect as meaning that you are connected with a gateway somewhere."

The problems I have with this are not moral or metaphysical, but unfortunately mundane and grounded in reality. The plain fact is that we live in a culture that not only does not want us as gatekeepers, but actively despises, demeans, degrades and marginalizes us. Whether or not we are able to "experience a state of vibrational consciousness which is far higher, and far different", is beside the point. To our society, we are laughable freaks, and that's that.

Of course, the longer we exist and the larger our numbers grow -- and they are growing -- the greater our chance, however slight, of making an impact. But it

(Bailey cont'd.)

will be slow going. Though I fully expect that gays and lesbians will be fully accepted as normal, productive members of society within the next fifty years, I believe that it will take at least twice that long for us to be

In the meantime, however, we must come to understand, as one Unitarian minister put it to me, that "one cannot separate a religious, 'mystical' form of gatekeeping and the willingness to change society from within. The one is the other; they are interconnected issues." To that extent, we need to try and transmute the spirituality of our peers by changing their social outlook on themselves and others. Perhaps, for instance, the FtMs could help work on the male segment of society by altering their belief that the possession of a penis is related to power and the superiority of intelligence. They might also transmogrify genetic males by developing intuition and increasing sensitivity to women's health issues.

On the other hand, I believe that MtFs owe it to ourselves, others like ourselves, and women in general to be as open as we dare, as good at our various occupations as we can, and as defiant of the homophobic and transphobic patriarchy as we can. I believe that our way of being gatekeepers in this society should be to educate women, both gay and straight, as to the state of our inner being and the purposes of our being here. This, of course, does not mean (as I have unfortunately seen happen) that we should retain our "bad" male traits (taking charge instead of sharing, dictating terms instead of processing, being aggressive instead of compassionate, etc.), but retaining certain male traits -- and imparting these traits to the distaff community as a whole -- will empower women and facilitate the cultural and spiritual revolution we seek. Among these are high self-esteem, a strong conviction in our principles, a willingness to make our voices heard when we know we are right, and an unwillingness to be muted, marginalized, excluded or otherwise controlled and degraded by the patriarchy.

If we can accomplish these things among the larger community of women, particularly among conservative Christian, Islamic and Orthodox Jewish women who currently believe in acquiescing their lives and decisions to men, we will indeed have created a threshold of incredible depth and breadth. In that case we would not merely be gatekeepers to a better place, but transformers of the "second class" segment of society into one of equal status. When that day comes, we will not have to fight for acceptance as threshold people, we will have gained it through the willingness of others to hear us.

(Rose cont'd.)

ing are honored as the name of the game -- *no one!*

While in form, Spirit's design for us is to create -- this is our design for ourselves because *we are* Spirit. Spirit doesn't have a gender. But Spirit has creation down pat! It is time for you to create, to model this awakening of transcending gender -- the people in this room are here, right now on planet Earth, to show evolution how to be fully present. What an honor to have this job, and it is not for the weak of heart or Spirit. This is an invitation for you to step forward, accept your power, to give gratitude for such an assignment. It is time to feel blessed, to feel honored for the job of waking up evolution -- to point out the debilitating lives that bi-polar gender creates.

Please understand this: if you leave one gender and attempt to pass as the other, you help no one, you do nothing to break down the oppression of gender which suffocates both sides of the bi-polar experience. Attempting to be the other gender does nothing to eliminate the system of power and privilege, which is based on gender, and which *uses* people to exist.

The way to make a difference while living as Spirit in form is to step out of the gender binary, and to tell your sisters and brothers what you are doing and why. I am carrying this message *from* Spirit. Wake up, be proud, stretch beyond gender, have fun. Help me change the destiny of this frequency we call human life. Remember how powerful you are.

These ten minutes out of a lifetime are nothing. A lifetime is nothing when you grasp the scope, the void, the origin of *all* of life. Yet ten minutes are enough to change the course of a life form. Let me know if you find yourself *truly* shapeshifting. And now I leave you with this image... *(She changes from her tux into a rainbow being, and dances to John Lennon's song, rewritten by Holly Boswell.)*

Imagine there's no gender, it's not so hard to do.
Babies in rainbow blankets, not just pink or blue.
Imagine all the people, being free to choose...

Imagine there's no pronouns, I wonder if you can.
No such words divide us, not bound to be woman or man.
Imagine all the people, thinking past their glands...

Imagine our potential, it's easy if you try.
To claim both strength & beauty, with both our wings we fly.
Imagine all the people, free to be themselves...

You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one.
I hope some day you'll join us, and the world will be as one.