

My Journey

By Andy Gray

Andy serves on the Illuman Board of Directors.

How and when were you introduced to male spirituality?

In 2001, my then-mother-in-law nudged me to check out something called a “Men’s Rites of Passage” that was happening in Central Oregon. (As it turned out, though I didn’t know it at the time, this was to be the first MROP somewhere other than Ghost Ranch.) I was somewhat familiar with Richard Rohr and some of his writings, but truthfully I was mostly just entertaining her suggestion—and the fact that this event was happening right here in our backyard was convenient.

I’d done a fair amount of retreat work previously, both as a participant and as a leader, and I wasn’t uncomfortable in that kind of environment. But there were some challenging aspects to this one, especially with ominous language like “rites of passage” and “initiation” in the mix.

Even more than that, the fact that this was an experience specifically for men seemed wrong somehow—isn’t that inherently sexist? Not to mention that I was a Very Important Professional in my company and had a young family (stay-at-home mom and toddlers included) to provide for, so how could I be so selfish as to leave them on their own for several days?

Somehow, the grace-filled tug of my soul overrode the chatter in my head and I soon found myself humbled and transformed in the desert, with brothers I didn’t know I had, sharing raw stories of disillusionment and success, prejudice and inclusion, rejection and acceptance. My perspective on male spirituality was completely transformed through the experience of those few days.

How has your participation in Illuman/M.A.L.Es fostered the use and development of your gifts?

It’s important that we recognize that we are all uniquely gifted, and our gifts may well show up in the world in ways that we might not expect or can easily identify when asked.

I probably wouldn’t have been able to answer this question very well a decade or two ago but, with increased consciousness about my own journey and work, in retrospect I can now more confidently identify things like:

- Providing a grounded sounding board to those that have been wrestling with challenging life choices.
- Mediating disputes between individuals and groups that previously thought they had no chance of finding common ground.
- Offering a channel for people to share their unique insights about transformation and reinvention through the *A Congruent Life* podcast.
- Leveraging my engineering and technology skills to help individuals and groups manifest their own visions into the world.

Describe a recent Illuman/M.A.L.Es event you attended. What was the impact on you?

One of my yearly community highlights is Soularize and the men's conference. The introvert in me always seems to throw up a good, resistant fight: I really can't take the time, it's expensive to travel, no one will actually miss me if I'm not there, yada yada. (Just ask Brad for confirmation.)

But while the specific flavor may differ slightly each time, the underlying richness repeats time and time again: Spending that deep time in Council with conscious men recharges my soul deeply in ways that are hard to articulate.

I'm always grateful for the rich experience and wonder about my previous resistance—and am trying to incorporate that lesson about resistance more deeply into my life experience.

What's one thing you'd recommend to a man starting on the spiritual journey?

There's nothing to worry about—you're already well into your journey! Whether you realized it or not, your spiritual journey started the day you were born. So don't worry about getting started! Everything you've experienced so far and will experience going forward is part of it. Lean into it, ask questions, and be open. (Easier said than done in practice, I know!)

What's the best thing about doing this work?

Really internalizing that our teachers are everywhere—particularly in those ragged and painful places where we least expect them to show up.