

# “Forget your perfect offering”

by Tom McGrath (MROP 03)

Two days before I left for Ghost Ranch I had a dream that put me on notice that this experience was not going to be “business as usual.” In the dream I was going somewhere important and needed to borrow a car. I asked a friend—a kind of wild guy who lives in the mountains of Montana—if I could borrow his car and he said, “Sure.” I found the car out on the highway. When I opened the driver’s side door I was astonished to see the car had no steering wheel, brakes, or gas pedal. I got in and the car took me where I needed to go. I was both frightened and excited to know that I was headed on a trek on which I was not taking the lead.

The great news about this initiation experience is that this was not a self-directed tour of what I already knew. We were being led to the wilderness—both literally and figuratively. From the start, the leaders told us we were not going to be emotionally manipulated. Instead we were being invited into the mystery that is at the heart of our existence. Through the power of rituals, story, the harsh beauty of the landscape, and our own yearning for the living God we entered into sacred time and space and energy. And though we stood shoulder to shoulder with our brothers, supporting one another with tender care and enormous respect, each man took a solitary journey where only he could go. The courage of my brothers was inspiring.

My own journey took me to despair. It was a despair I never knew I had, though when it was revealed (with the help of the rituals and a coyote I met on a pre-dawn hike) I was relieved by its unveiling. It’s been with me a long, long time. The truth was out. All my defenses had been scaled and behind the shattered walls was a cynical man whose every trick at self-redemption had failed, who now feared the worst—that he would spend the rest of his days poking around this failed and empty bag of tricks.

And in my emptiness, climbing a rocky trail in the pre-dawn shadows, I knew as I’ve never known before that I could never be a self-made saint, which has been my particular temptation, my particular folly. I arrived at the crest of Chimney Rock mesa and moved to the edge. I held my despair before me, weighing the heft of it. I turned to God and offered it. It was all I had left to give. My despair.

Just then, the sun pierced the sky above Kitchen Mesa to the east. Light flooded the valley and bushes were aflame. I prostrated myself before the sun—the earth cold on my bare chest and the sun warm on my shoulders. Everything seemed new. Into my mind came the passage, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” And I had a notion that the original Big Bang was an utterance of the Creator, a word cried out in joy and wildness, and I knew that I, too, was part of that spoken word. I am an utterance of the Creator God. Along with all of creation I flow from the heart of God in a profligate act of self-expression. My futile tricks no longer matter.

The birds sang around me then, and I shared my breakfast, a granola bar, with them. I joined their song with hymns of praise. A day of deep mourning had ended. A new life had begun in me. I try to live it graciously, by keeping my hands off the steering wheel.

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MROP experiences can be submitted to [menswork@cacradicalgrace.org](mailto:menswork@cacradicalgrace.org)

## Men’s Rites of Passage 2005 Locations

Team led by Richard Rohr, OFM, and Elders



Men As Learners and Elders (M.A.L. Es.), a subsidiary of the Center for Action and Contemplation, is pleased to offer this five-day, four night formal rites of initiation event for men. The Rites of Passage is a deeply prayerful experience that builds on the classic patterns of male

initiation through teaching and rituals that will be both simple and moving.

**April 6-10**

**Triangle Y Ranch, Oracle, AZ**  
(northeast of Tucson)

**August 3-7**

**Audubon Center of the North Woods  
Sandstone, MN**  
(approx. 1.5 hrs. north of Twin Cities)

**October 19-23**

**Whispering Winds, Julian, CA**  
(approx. 1 hr. northeast of San Diego)

*A short application is required to enable us to discern the applicant’s readiness.*

*The application is available at the M.A.L. Es. website, [www.malespirituality.org](http://www.malespirituality.org), or by calling 505-242-9588.*