

The New Warrior Training Adventure: *Finding My Place in the Circle of Men*

By Rich (Powerful Wolf) Wyler

A NARTH supporter describes the inspirational weekend that helped him break down the emotional barriers that had alienated him from other men, and fueled years of unwanted attractions.

It was clear from the moment I arrived at the New Warrior Training Adventure in a mountain camp east of Los Angeles that this was no recreational retreat. The volunteer staffers who met me at the gate of the camp that Friday afternoon in August 1998 created, from the very moment of my arrival, an environment that invited deep inner reflection. And more than a little trepidation.

Never had I thrown myself into the hands of strangers—and certainly not men—so completely, trusting blindly that this weekend experience would somehow offer me inner healing. Or, at least cause no further wounding at the hands of men.

I'd learned about New Warriors from the reparative therapist I'd been working with for more than a year. When, early in my therapy, he first raised the possibility of my attending an experiential "men's initiation" weekend, I was mildly curious but skeptical. Hadn't I seen these kinds of men's-movement retreats mocked in the national news magazines as a silly, male-angst response to the feminist movement?

Besides, it was far too afield of my comfort zone, a restricted and generally superficial zone that allowed room only for wife and children, church, work—and, until I started therapy, the promiscuous gay underground. At that time, I was just beginning to allow my therapist inside the defensive fortress I'd built around me. But to put myself in a situation to blindly trust male strangers with my emotional core? No. Men were not to be trusted. They would never accept me, and certainly never understand me.

My resistance to New Warriors fell abruptly a few months later when I saw another man from my therapy group leave for the New Warrior weekend in a near panic over the unknown, only to return the following week visibly calmer, exhilarated and empowered. I resolved immediately to go.

I sent for information and pored over it. I found the brochure frustratingly minimalist and cryptic—deliberately, I would learn, to preserve the "magic" or mystery of the weekend for "initiates." But the "identity statement" exhilarated me: "We are an order of men called to reclaim the sacred masculine for our time, through initiation, training

and action in the world."

"The sacred masculine?" I'd somehow learned growing up that masculinity was, at best, something to be trivialized and mocked and, at worst, a villainy responsible for most of the world's corruption. Clearly, New Warriors could be a safe place to heal my lifelong, love-hate struggle with maleness. Especially when I read this mission statement from The Mankind Project, the non-profit sponsor of the New Warrior Training Adventure: "Healing the world, one man at a time."

I learned, too, that the three men who co-founded New Warriors 15 years ago believed that modern men were emotionally handicapped by never having been fully initiated into an honorable and healthy masculinity and never having been mentored by other men. The weekend training was their answer to the contemporary loss of tribal community and masculine mentoring that had anchored our grandfathers for millennia.

Suddenly, the weekend training couldn't arrive soon enough.

Once there, I experienced the most powerful weekend of my life. I had been to countless religious services and conferences before. I'd been in a Twelve Step program for sex addicts. I'd been in individual and group therapy. All had helped immeasurably. But none had so quickly and deeply cut me to the emotional core and opened my heart to the brotherhood of men and to my own masculine identity and sense of masculine power.

For a full two days and two evenings, working late into the night, 35 volunteer staff led me and 30 fellow "initiates" through a series of individual, one-on-one and group processes that invited deep introspection, total honesty, and a new, breakthrough-level of trust in other men. The focus was on learning to live lives of personal integrity, mission, personal power, deliberate intention, masculine identity and emotional healing. It was on getting in touch with our emotional lives—living more from our hearts than our heads.

For me, the most powerful experience of the weekend came from seeing thirty other men share their deepest

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emotions and fears as they touched long-buried feelings about childhood hurts, bad marriages, death, addiction, even the suicide of a parent twenty years before. I felt like I was gazing for the first time in my life through a window into the souls of men—whom I'd always viewed as a mysterious, closed off and unknowable. I drank in this awe-some realization: men DO feel, men DO fear, men DO care. I saw at last that I was like other men, after all, or they were like me. I belonged.

In this "safe container," this place of remarkable authenticity, I entered a new level of trust. When my turn came, I dared to step out and enlist the support of these men in working through the two darkest "shadows" of my life—my budding recovery from a twenty-year sex addiction and double life, and the still-echoing taunts of adolescent bullies twenty years earlier. Pragmatically, I reassured myself, "If this turns out badly, I never have to see these men again!" But my fears were unfounded. Not only did they not reject me, these men honored me for stepping out into my fear and trusting them.

One of the simplest yet stunning experiences for me was quietly observing the interactions of the staff as they went about the business of the weekend. All of them had gone through the same initiation themselves and were returning for the first or tenth or fiftieth time to recreate their own weekend experience for new initiates. I was amazed at how comfortably these men expressed affection for each

other, embracing and touching as openly and naturally as young boys on the playground. These simple manifestations of true brotherhood touched a deep longing of the still-wounded little boy inside me who pined for his father's caress. Clearly, there was a brotherhood here that could provide profound healing.

I drove down from the mountain late Sunday afternoon a changed man. My whole body fairly shouted with powerful new feelings of love, peace, masculine power, inner strength, connection to God and to my brothers. In tears of joy, I thanked God for leading me to this healing place.

How could I prevent this experience from evaporating into a pleasant but impotent memory? Returning home, I was welcomed by Warrior brothers in my local community into an "integration group"—a small group of initiated men who meet weekly to continue the work they started on the mountain during their own weekend training adventures.

These men know my "shadows." They know my "gold." They help me stay accountable. They help keep me in integrity. They are my brothers. My community.

Today, at last, I am a man among men.

To contact New Warriors: <https://brothersroad.org/>
434-227-9346. Training weekends are held throughout the year at 22 different sites across the country.