

Bay Area Journal/Randy Shilts

## GO EST YOUNG MAN

“... It was the psycho-sexual union of the decade: The human potential and gay rights movements married in a simple ceremony...”

“Please place your consciousness in your buttocks. Focus all your awareness in your buttocks—experience your buttocks.”

Only the slight rustle of consciousness settling into the molded plastic chairs disturbs the near-perfect silence in the large hotel conference room in San Francisco. The largely male audience of 100 now concentrates on its buttocks and waits impatiently.

“Let your buttocks *relax*. Feel the tension escape.” The Facilitator pauses. He feels the anticipation building, even as his audience slips into a deeper trance. He savors the suspense, knowing he’s the man in control. “Now your buttocks are relaxed.” Pause. “Good. Now place your consciousness in your abdomen. . . .”

Dozens of alligators on dozens of young men’s sport shirts move more slowly now, as the initiates breathe more deeply. The scene is similar to an Actualizations Seminar being held down the hall. Like the Actualizations’ students, this group has been promised an Experience. But the air of expectancy over this crowd does not derive merely from the promise of another est/Esalen/Gestalt growth-group weekend of parlor hypnosis and Consciousness III jargon.

“Now become aware that you are a sexual being—experience yourself as a sexual being.” The Facilitator’s delivery is curiously wooden. The Facilitator is reading from a blue loose-leaf notebook by his side. His words now probe further into the psyches of his audience, feeling for buttons long unpushed.

“Now that you are completely relaxed, get in touch with your attitudes about being gay. What emotions do you feel now? What do you like about being

gay?”

They’re gay—get it? Gay and okay. Not only okay—but *terrific*. This is all part of a new and different phenomenon that is, it is promised, happening here first. All sense that a piece of California cultural history is in the making—something of an ultimate California event. Imagine the announcement: The psycho-sexual union of the decade was consummated in mid-March when the Human Potential Movement married the Gay

human-potential trend, and his wife, Dulce, sat on the board of advisers for the two-day seminar. It had the support of est guru Werner Erhard. Beyond this was talk that even grander ambitions were the ultimate, intended offspring of this marriage.

Criticism from gay leftists only excited curiosity about the event long before the participants assembled in the hotel conference room for this “preview experience.” To radicals, the gay-est merger smacked somehow of the cult of personality. The two-day workshop was led by David B. Goodstein, undoubtedly the most controversial figure on the national gay scene. Also at issue was the involvement of Goodstein’s plain-brown-wrapped tabloid, *The Advocate*, a paper that has managed to mix some of the most conservative middle-class thought in gay America with some of the raunchiest advertising to be found this side of a bathroom wall. The seminar doesn’t play down this connection, however; it is unashamedly called “The Advocate Experience.”

My invitation to the weekend comes because of my long stint as an *Advocate* staff writer. Though my work as a KQED reporter and freelance writer has drawn me away from work on gay publications, the excitement building among *Advocate* staffers was enough to entice me to the Jack Tar Hotel for the



Citizen Goodstein: Critics alleged his aim was not transformation, but control.

Rights Movement in a simple but chic ceremony in the—gasp!—Jack Tar Hotel in San Francisco.

Gay gossip mills had been buzzing for months as rumors flew about this last word in equal-enlightenment organizations. From the start, this weekend had promised to be a momentous occasion. For example, Michael Murphy, founder of Esalen and granddaddy of the whole

weekend.

When the weekend opens, many of the California gay scene’s elite are sitting silently in the audience. Along with *The Advocate* staff and its guests are such gay luminaries as Armistead Maupin, columnist-turned-personality; Newt Dieter, the Los Angeles-based director of the Gay Media Task Force, who gives out what amounts to the Gay House-

“... We gasp as Goodstein rips off the paper from the blackboard and reveals the word that tells us where we're coming from: 'TOILET' ...”

keeping Seal of Approval to gay-related scripts for network television: Zohn Artman, an est devotee and top lieutenant to rock-promoter Bill Graham; Nancy Roth, president of San Francisco's Save Our Human Rights Foundation, perhaps the best-bankrolled gay group in the United States; and Ken Maley, a publicist and political consultant. One successful businessman flew in from Manhattan to see if The Advocate experience would be marketable in the Northeast.

The deputy Facilitator opens the weekend, laying out the “agreements” that are to be the ground rules for the weekend. They are similar to est's: no alcohol, marijuana, gum, wristwatches or impromptu exits. We are to surrender control to the senior Facilitator.

Then senior Facilitator David Goodstein strides to his director's chair at the front of the room. For the next two days, Goodstein will guide us through lectures, exercises and encounter groups in which we will take “risks,” be “open,” “get it,” “trust,” “acknowledge,” “share,” be “okay,” feel *terrific*, undergo catharsis and do all those *vulnerable* things people do in the Human Potential Movement. Beyond all else, we will Experience—capital “E”—our guilt, Experience our fear, our anger, our repression, our freedom and—why the hell not?—our buttocks.

When Goodstein starts talking, we listen and wonder: Will The Advocate Experience offer the beautiful gay people of California the way to “clear” lives?

Will David Goodstein emerge as our guru?

Everybody in est is an Asshole. We all know that by now. Werner Erhard says so. Hell, even *Werner* is an Asshole. And David Goodstein, by his own admission, used to be a “quartermaster Asshole” in the Army. So what does that make us Advocate Experiencers?

“Probably cornholes,” mutters a female staffer, as Goodstein approaches a blackboard that is swathed in a plain brown wrapper.

The audience gasps as Goodstein rips off the paper like Louise Nevelson unveiling a sculpture, and reveals the single word that tells us where we are coming from: “TOILET.”

“TOILET” means the second-class citizenship gays long have accepted, Goodstein explains. It means second-class bars, second-class restaurants, second-class self-images and second-class leadership. “This all is TOILET,” Goodstein shouts. “And we don't have to live this way.”

Goodstein will talk a lot about TOILET during these opening hours of The Experience. In four simple steps, he will teach us how to confront TOILET in our lives, how to deal with it, take risks with it and walk away from it—forever!

Step one is, “I'm okay.”

must participate. We are partitioned into “families” of eight, matched with partners, but cautioned to exclude any “lover, friend, or anyone you trick with regularly.”

Early on, we will have an Experience that will teach trust. To learn trust for my partner, I am told to lie on the floor, with my partner kneeling behind my shoulders, holding my head. “Let your neck muscles relax,” says the Facilitator.

There. That, I am told, is an Experience in trust. Presumably, if my partner doesn't drop my head to the floor like a sack of potatoes, I can trust my partner.

Now we learn trust in the group. In this Experience, I lie on the floor and let the other seven lift me over their heads. Then they put me down.

There. That, we are told, is another Experience in trust. Presumably, if my group doesn't hurl me seven feet to the floor, I can trust my group.

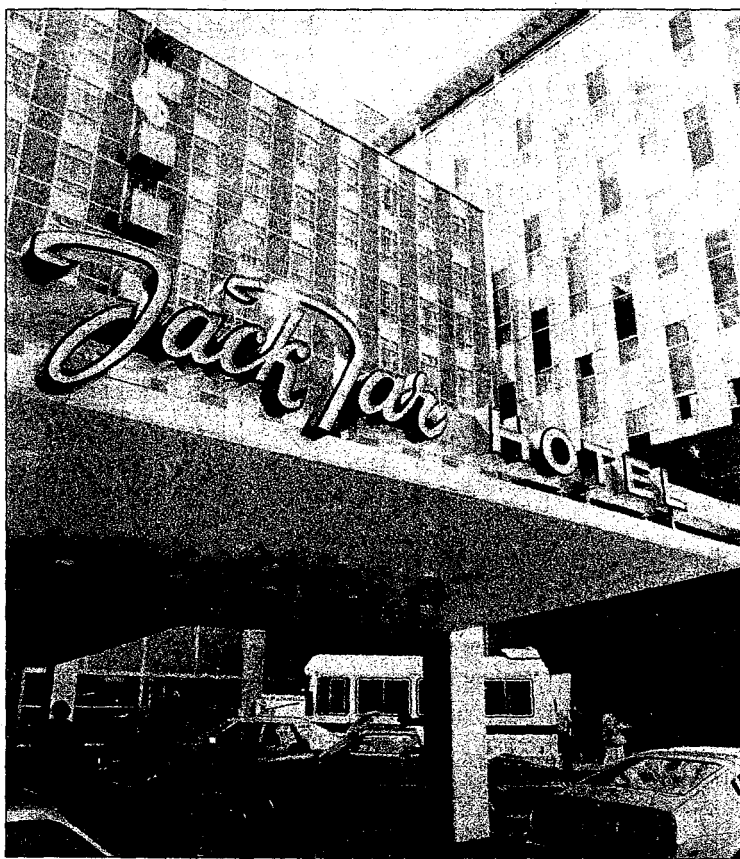
The exercises seem borrowed from a ten-year-old Esalen handbook, but this doesn't mar the hours of “sharing” that follow each and every Experience. Before long, the sensitivity bandwagon starts rolling, leaving behind an endless trail of confessions.

“I've never been in a group of gay people that I so totally trust as this one,” says a man in a red LaCoste shirt. Everybody claps.

“I've Experienced that everyone in my group is beautiful,” says another. Everybody claps for him too, but louder than before. He is cuter than the other man.

Soon everyone is wallowing in his Vulnerability, rolling in his Okayness and, most of all, jumping at the chance to tell everyone about it. Countless neuroses are confessed, old hurts exhumed, new comfort found.

All of this is punctuated by applause which, in human-potential jargon, is known as “Acknowledgment.” Every “sharing” is Acknowledged, as if the entire weekend were one big Art Linkletter show with an applause track to keep the production moving. I wait for the accordion player to break in and carry us into a commercial.



**Jack Tar:** If it's good enough for est, it's okay for The Advocate Experience.

Step two is, “You're okay.”

Step three is, “We're okay.”

Step four is trickier. It's called: “Being responsible for how we are perceived and how we live.” Nobody's quite sure what that means yet, but surely we'll “get it” by the end of the course.

Now the focus shifts to the “processes,” the term used to describe the prefabricated Experiences in which we

No commercials come, just regularly scheduled breaks. Unlike est, the breaks are timed to make sure nobody gets uncomfortable, because, Goodstein confides, "I've got the world's tiniest bladder."

During the first break, I go to the hotel basement and discover I'm not the only hopeless cynic who finds the entire affair foolish. A prominent figure in California entertainment circles is passing a joint of what he says is paraquat-free Colombian to fellow tokers Armistead Maupin, Ken Maley and my mild-mannered roommate, Daniel. We titillate one another with gossip that behind the human-potential façade of the weekend is a plan to remake the gay community.

Maley, meanwhile, says he won't stay because the endless confessionals remind him too much of his childhood, spent in the pews of the Fire Baptized Holiness Church in his home town of Cherryvale, Kansas.

The Prominent Entertainment Figure (PEF) doesn't care about any political or religious implications. A faithful est graduate, he says he is genuinely moved by it all. But he apparently is not moved to the point that he surrenders marijuana for the weekend or gives up the watch that he has surreptitiously slipped around his genitals.

Daniel is reserving judgment, though he so far thinks the processes are pretty silly. "I didn't find it that remarkable that my group didn't throw me on the floor," he draws.

The PEF unfastens his drawstring pants and looks down at his watch. The break is over and everyone starts moving toward the elevator, fearful he will break still another agreement by being late.

When we return, a beaming Goodstein says he has chosen the Jack Tar—site of the early est seminars—because he wants to show that The Advocate Experience is "as classy as est." That draws titters from the crowd, many of whom have spent the morning break ridiculing the hotel's legendary kitsch design of beige, rust and powder-blue plastic exterior panels.

Processes start again and so do the dramas. I look at a young man sitting next to me during a particularly tough process. Tears stream down his face. Facilitator Goodstein purposefully stands behind the shy, stricken social worker, signaling to an Experience staffer to bring the young man Kleenex. Everyone sensitively nods as Goodstein firmly but silently keeps his paternal hand on the man's shoulder.

This young man is no phony and I admonish myself for being cynical when such sensitive people as he undergo bona fide catharsis. The tears pass and Goodstein walks away. I later ask him

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"... When gay leaders suggested changes in his plan, Goodstein said, in effect, either you do things my way, or I'll destroy you . . ."

what caused the tears. "I had some dust in my contact lens," he explains. "I still can't figure out why Goodstein came over."

The Experience, however, is winning many converts. Early in the group "sharing," the same female staffer who made the cornhole comment takes to the floor to share that her partner is *terrific*, her "family" is *terrific*, everybody there is *terrific*.

It is only toward the end of the processing that it becomes apparent that The Experience can be more than just a nostalgic rehash of human-potential gimmickry—and that powerful forces are at work within the psyches of the participants. These forces become most evident in the processes, which were created with the gay audience specifically in mind.

In one exercise we are told to write a letter to someone to whom we never have confided our homosexuality. The stories that emerge are devastating. A successful 35-year-old professional writes his parents that he worries they will die without ever knowing who he, their son, really is.

A normally staid business executive in his fifties breaks into tears, as, for the first time, he broaches telling his father about the part of his life that he has long hidden in shame. He says he regrets the decades of dishonesty, but after his tears he adds that he feels he's finally resolved much of his guilt over never reaching out to his father, who died twelve years ago.

These are by far the most moving moments of The Experience. Later on, I talk to one *Advocate* advertising employee who recounts how four of his group's eight members wept during the letter-writing session. The only trouble, he adds, is that no one in his group actually intends to send the letters. I ask around and find that only one in three participants say they will send their letters.

This makes a certain amount of sense. All day, people have contrived Experiences to simulate feelings about which they can have synthesized interactions for which they are rewarded with mechanical applause. It doesn't matter that the letters won't be sent or the Agreements won't be kept—we are just exhorted to get into the drama, the *feeling* of it all.

This sense of theater dominates the proceedings right up to the close of the first day, when Goodstein pulls the assembly back into a hypnotic trance. As all relax, soft music starts playing in the

background. The lyrics are meant to be moving, even profound, as if it were a Hollywood movie score: "... *You are yourself, like everybody else. . . . When you realize we're just the same then you'll be free. . . . Just close your eyes and maybe you can see yourself and you're okay. . . .*"

All we have to do is tap our heels together three times, like Dorothy, and we can be okay. Is that all there is to enlightenment?

### **The Grande Faerie And the Gay ROTC**

All the sharing, acknowledging and risking has been building up to something, we are told—a climax that will explain the meaning of all the Okayness we've been talking about. The answer comes during the final hours of The Experience, as Goodstein starts explaining "being responsible for how we are perceived and how we live," the fourth step away from TOILET.

Goodstein glances at his notebook and sips from his mug. It's Perrier—after all, he confides, "this is a *classy* affair."

"What do you think the gay community needs?" Goodstein asks. The audience's suggestions are chalked up on the blackboards that are flanking his chair. A number of suggestions from high-echelon *Advocate* staffers get underlined. Goodstein stops taking ideas, then enthusiastically starts describing a number of future projects in which we can participate, projects which, coincidentally, are those already underlined on the blackboard.

We can, for instance, participate in "The Advocate Game," but we are deprived of details about the game. Instead, we are asked to contemplate plans for something grander than anything the gay community has ever seen.

Imagine it: A host of gays channeling thousands of dollars into the campaign treasuries of friendly legislators, thereby purchasing clout for gay causes on a national level. Think of all the remarkable things we could do with, say, a tax-exempt foundation to research things like venereal disease. Beyond this, we could help spawn a program urging gays to affirm, once and for all, that they're not merely okay, but downright *terrific*.

It all comes out as beautiful fantasies that we can create. What we are being asked to contemplate is, in fact, already a fait accompli. Almost all of the programs that Goodstein is offhandedly suggesting have been mapped out for months under

a master plan, which is code-named "Project Pouf" by those who developed it.

The stated goals call for nothing less than purging society of the notion that there is anything negative involved with homosexuality. This transformation would be a cultural revolution, but it may not stop there.

Even before The Experience started, critics alleged that Goodstein's aim was not transformation, but control. Goodstein's past offers plenty of fodder for such speculation. After all, The Advocate Experience is not the first master plan that Goodstein has launched in the gay community, just the most ambitious. His past plans have aroused suspicions that Goodstein harbors hidden agendas. It doesn't help that he has a penchant for citing Machiavelli's *The Prince* as one of his major intellectual sources.

Goodstein also makes no secret of his ruling-class credentials. Reportedly a millionaire many times over, the rotund, bearded, 46-year-old publisher has kept a Mercedes in the driveway of his mansion in Atherton. He also keeps his own stable of show horses. A Rembrandt still-life hangs in a hallway of his home.

Such accoutrements are a natural outgrowth of Goodstein's background. He made his mark as a rising young Wall Street investment counselor who, during the go-go sixties, introduced computers to the statistical analysis of stocks. His political work then was for such candidates as Nelson Rockefeller. A major California bank lured Goodstein to San Francisco to become a high officer and then promptly fired him because of his homosexuality.

The dismissal marked Goodstein's entry into gay politics. His first project involved the field he knew best: finance. He set up the Whitman-Radcliffe Foundation to offer rich gays and straights the chance to donate money for gay efforts through tax-deductible channels. But the millions never came. The political context of the times just wasn't suited for gay millionaires stepping forward and donating their money, no matter how discreetly.

So Goodstein bought *The Advocate* and set about to change the political context of the times with a vengeance. The sweeping scope of all of his plans has earned him a nickname of which he is proud—The Grande Faerie. He even keeps this appellation on a nameplate on his desk, as if to reaffirm that he is the gay leader willing to be grand, willing to be classy. But Goodstein's intertwined roles as publisher and behind-the-scenes politician have caused detractors to dub him

with another nickname, "Citizen Goodstein."

Goodstein once took to the pages of *The Advocate* to condemn such detractors as "gay spoiler," and at an *Advocate* invitational conference that he called in Chicago two years ago, Goodstein studiously prepared an agenda that was intended to keep such spoilers from interfering. Even with such tight control, he still threatened to shut down the conference within hours of its commencement because a floor vote was going against him.

His most celebrated threat, however, came at a meeting of California gay leaders he called last September, when he devised a master plan for fighting an antigay initiative sponsored by right-wing State Senator John Briggs. When the conference members suggested various changes in Goodstein's plan—including more time to discuss the strategy—the publisher reportedly shouted that he would schedule another meeting just before *The Advocate's* next deadline. He said he would return with two manuscripts—one lauding any efforts the group undertook, the other damning those who did not follow his plans. Either do things my way, Goodstein in effect told the unbelieving audience, or I'll destroy you.

At the next meeting, Goodstein returned. The opening remarks made by assembly whip Art Agnos indicated opposition to the publisher's fiat, and Goodstein left the meeting shortly afterward, slamming the door behind him. The publisher subsequently made no mention of the confrontation in his paper. Shortly thereafter, however, plans for the massive Project Pouf began circulating in *The Advocate's* San Mateo offices.

Now, seven months later, David Goodstein is standing in the Jack Tar Hotel, explaining to his first class of *Advocate* Experience graduates about a program that sounds grander than the one he mapped out last year to the unwilling California gay leaders, and more awesome than any other attempt at organization in the gay community because it seeks not only to reach into politics and pocketbooks, but into people's minds as well.

This *Advocate* Experience session is just the start, we are told. The Experience is to become a roadshow, barnstorming the United States. Some 2,000 Experience graduates are expected to pay their \$150 fees and be inducted by the end of the year. A series of graduate seminars on everything from gay sexual dysfunctions to gay political organizing will soon be available, Goodstein explains to us.

In fact, he says, we can help fix up the San Francisco and Los Angeles Advo-

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cate Experience centers. Furthermore, if all goes according to Hoyle, a New York Experience facility will open next spring, with centers in Chicago and Houston open by 1980. This nationwide scope is unprecedented by anything in the gay community.

The goal is to manufacture more Advocate Experience graduates who, like us, will staff centers to coordinate the efforts of the newly formed Advocate Research and Education Fund (AREF) and the Advocate Political Action Fund (APAF). Current plans have AREF launching its first fund drive around a plan to find a VD vaccine. A headline-grabbing "win" here could prove a master stroke of public relations for both the gay community and AREF.

From there, it can turn into a self-fulfilling circle of success. The AREF wins can bolster the credibility of APAF, which can help create the political context in which gays can use the foundation to score still more wins.

At the center of all this will be The Advocate Experience, whose graduates will form the core of participants in Project Pouf. In this sense, The Experience could be as much a gay ROTC as a gay est. From the ranks of Experience graduates will come the lieutenants to work for the research and political wins—a classy army of chic gay volunteers that can do unimaginable good for the gay community.

All of this seems downright inspiring to most of the 100 assembled. Such wonderful things can be done! Goodstein, however, spares us details about structure and officers in the group. For example, it is never shared that David Goodstein not only is senior Facilitator of The Advocate Experience, but chairman of the board of directors for the Advocate Research and Education Fund as well as treasurer of the Advocate Political Action Fund. In essence, he will be in control of every facet of Project Pouf.

Goodstein's defenders argue that this will keep his plans from straying into irresponsible hands. It also will give him immense power—and the context in which to make that power work. Through APAF, he will have at his command the two basic catalysts of all political power—money and volunteers. As a foundation magnate, he also will have at his disposal money to research any problem he chooses. The nationwide presence of his Experience centers can give him a nearly omnipotent status among gay leaders. As publisher of the only nationally distributed gay newspaper, he can largely control the flow of information about himself—and any adversaries. All of this, in turn, can draw thousands more of the weak, the huddled, and the

tired gays, who are looking for a little Okayness.

As Goodstein explains his plan, I think of the hundreds of handsome young men who at this moment are streaming for the bustling Sunday afternoon beer fest in the gay bars of San Francisco's Castro Street and Los Angeles's Santa Monica Boulevard. I think of the haunting emptiness in their eyes. They've come to the sexually liberated gay ghettos of San Francisco and Los Angeles to find something; what they're offered is an endless merry-go-round of bars, baths and anonymous sex. Something is missing in it all—and The Advocate Experience seems designed to fulfill their need for self-esteem, for the sense of Okayness, that these handsome young men so frequently lack.

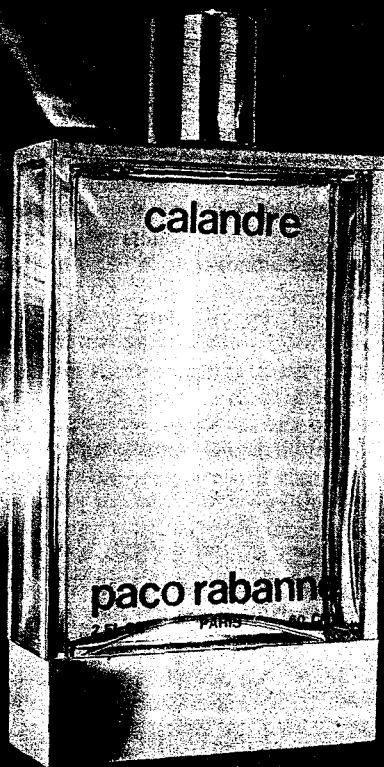
Indeed, something like an Advocate Experience could be a tremendous success in the gay community. As the experience edges toward its conclusion, however, I sense that this won't be the experience that finds such success. There are too many incongruities. David Goodstein doesn't seem like a man who has "got it." Moreover, when the gay people of the new California finally opt for enlightenment, they probably won't be buying it in *The Advocate's* plain brown wrapper.

In the closing minutes of The Experience, we are briefed like a group of fleece-collared fighter pilots assembled for a mission. It is volunteer time. "Under your chairs are pencils and information sheets," says Goodstein. "You'll notice there are places you can mark off what you want to work on."

We are told our first mission will be social—a party in the newly opened Advocate Experience's San Francisco headquarters. We are told to give names and addresses of other people who might want to share in this fun Experience. We are inspired by the exhortation: "After all, gay people always know how to throw the best parties."

It is both exhilarating and frightening—the twin attractions of power. There is the promise of collective action and the potential for abuse of personal power. There is a pervasive fear of the latter. During an early process in The Experience, the inductees were given a list of statements and were instructed to signal agreement or disagreement by raising their hands up or keeping them down.

Following one question, a large number of us stood facing David Goodstein, signaling agreement—our arms rigid, our hands aloft, palms toward our leader. "Oh no," whispered one participant, who was struck by a certain familiarity in the salute. "I was afraid that it would come to this."



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