

Ties That Bind Story of a Spontaneous Auction

By Lyn Hartley with Joanne Hunt
and Joyce Rankin

At the final banquet for the 2004 Summer Program, the energy of the crowd was difficult to describe – sometimes rambunctious, often boisterous, occasionally pensive, but never dull. Chris Grant, master of ceremonies for the evening, recalls, “The energy was like a bronco, bursting in many different directions at the same time. There was great diversity and breadth of energy in the room, all bubbling and boiling.”

No doubt, the one event that will stand out in everyone’s mind was the spontaneous auction which kept everyone guessing and got the room buzzing.

It all started when David Rome stepped up to the mike to let people know about ways they could support the work of the Shambhala Institute. David wasn’t far into his remarks before a table of women—from the When Women Lead From Within workshop—decided to take matters into their own hands.

The group had forged a strong bond during their pre-program workshop and had continued to get together throughout the Core Program, often eating meals together and comparing notes. At the final banquet, the group sat together for a final celebratory meal.

One of these women, Joanne Hunt, recalls, “The gaggle of gals came together for the final dinner, squeezing in one more chair at the table, and then another. Maria Dolores looked particularly fetching in her red shirt and blue jacket. When David Rome got up to speak, Joyce noticed how good his tie would look with Maria’s evening ensemble.

“In the comfort and support (and raucous taunting) of the women around that bountiful table, Joyce raised her hand, arm straightened to its limit like a kid who has the answer to the most important question in class: Pick me, pick me.

“David could not help but notice her and stopped mid-sentence. He paused. ‘Yes?’ Joyce called out, ‘How much for your tie? Would you auction it?’ And someone at our table yelled out the first bid.”

Recalling the moment, David Rome states, “I remember the women starting to chant ‘we want the tie...’ I lost track of what I was saying in the energy of the moment. It was an expensive, new tie that I liked a lot. Nonetheless, I was delighted to sacrifice it for the cause. Three years ago I gave a kidney to my older brother, so I had practice in giving up personal items. My only concern was about what they might want after the tie!”

Chris Grant’s deep voice boomed from the back of the room, “No man should have to auction his own tie,” and he strode to the podium. He quickly commanded the room and the spontaneous auction began.

Chris recalls, “The funny thing is that the Institute’s governing council had earlier raised the idea of an auction, but had then set aside the idea for various reasons. Then when the time came, given the bubbling energy – which needed expression—an auction wanted to happen!”

Joyce Rankin, the instigator of the event, continues, “The best part was when a woman on the other side of the room bid \$500 for David’s tie! Support the Shambhala Institute? You bet!”

Joyce remembers, “Chris, our delightful auctioneer, was also fetchingly attired in a checked shirt and lovely tie. He offered his tie up next. Our table chanted together, ‘Shirt! Shirt! Shirt!’ We thought his shirt would raise more money (at least from the women at our table), but no such luck.”

Though nobody knew, the tie held a deeply personal meaning for Chris. “The moment was typical of my experience at Shambhala – all the things that need to happen, happen. I had only worn the tie once before – at my mother’s funeral, earlier in the year. The theme of the week for me had been grieving. And to have the tie disappear felt really okay. Powerful and synchronistic things happen to me all the time at the Institute.”

The auction continued with Leandra, the 13-year-old daughter of one of the women at the workshop table, donating her hairpiece. Joanne quickly surveyed the table, “Is everyone willing to pitch in \$20 each and we will buy it together, so it goes for more money?” They were. And they did. They ended up bidding against each other to drive the final price to \$200.

When his tie sold for \$300, Chris was able to elegantly deflect the demands for his shirt and turn the crowd’s attention to the bright yellow football jersey that Augusto Cuginotti from Brazil volunteered.

Next, Chris inquired if there were any items to be auctioned. Meg Wheatley recalls, “I realized we could move from one tie to a full-out auction. I suggested to Steve Clorfeine that we go from table to table soliciting items. Steve looked at me and said “Meg, people in glass houses... everything you’re wearing is highly auctionable.” With that thought, Meg generously offered her silk shawl to the delight of a rambunctious crowd.

As Meg remembers, “It felt like a great opportunity to practice nonattachment, especially after everyone had said that the wrap was the most gorgeous thing I’d ever worn. I really did experience it as ‘let’s not get at-

tached to this' and that made it more fun for me." As she handed her shawl to the thrilled recipient, Meg asked the successful bidder, 'Would you like the matching necklace too?' and proceeded to remove her necklace and hand it over as well.

Later Meg told Joanne, "You were the authentic leaders tonight."

Joanne and Joyce reflect that "what started as a spontaneous, fully supported and playful query turned into a gracious and generous collective act of community! We figured that's what happens when women lead from within."

Meg agrees. "I loved the energy of that evening. Bawdy, on the edge, could have gone any way. I loved how we were all playing together, seeing where it/we/the evening wanted to go."

Altogether, the evening demonstrated the power of spontaneous leadership and the liberating energy of nonattachment – the power of ties to bind and bring a group closer together. Not only was it a lot of fun, the spontaneous auction raised close to \$10,000.