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### **Where have all the men gone?**

It's Wednesday night in Sandpoint. A lot of Sandpoint husbands and fathers aren't home. So where are they? Drinking? Bowling? Watching "the game"? Nope. They're gathering in houses and offices to enjoy the honor of being men.

For more than three years, a steadily-growing group of Sandpoint men have met every Wednesday night. The Sandpoint Men's Group started with twelve men who wanted to recapture the camaraderie of youth, the feeling of relating to other men in a setting outside a bar or a baseball diamond. We all remembered the boyhood excitement of hanging out with our friends—the friends we looked forward to seeing, the friends we could count on to be there when we needed them, the friends who were honest with us, even with those hard truths.

With all the pressure these days, there's not much opportunity to just be with our friends, where nothing is expected from us. We have roles to fill and responsibilities to meet for our work, our family, and even our friends. Don't get me wrong: we chose these roles, and we enjoy them. But we need a place where we don't have to perform, a place where we're the only expectation is that we'll just be ourselves.

Letting go of my roles to "just be" was hard. There were a lot of things I needed to leave at the door, like my position in the community and my mask of being a professional. At Men's Group meetings, I walk through the door simply as a man. A simple concept, but a challenging task. But in three years, I've learned to be the man I once dreamt of being.

As a kid, I imagined that a man was a person who possessed special qualities that I couldn't see having. My father and other men seemed superhuman. I wondered how these men who once were boys became men. Conception was a mystery, but manhood was *the* mystery.

For decades, I was processing a belief that I was not one those men I saw as a boy. I felt cheated that I was not anointed into manhood. But I certainly was not going to admit that I was a fraud as a man. I joined the collective agreement: don't question another man's authenticity, and he won't question mine.

But I let go of this agreement. I realized that my father and his friends were suffering the same fate I was. I understand how difficult it is to be a man. Through the pleasure of trusting them, my resentment and fear of other men transformed into compassion and empathy for them.

Men from the groups have experienced such powerful changes, their friends and family started to ask: "What have you been doing? You're happier, you're more fun to be with." These men's wives and partners wanted the same for themselves, so they started the Sandpoint Women's Group.

The Sandpoint Men's Group and the Sandpoint Women's Group both support personal evolution. We're working to evolve out of the boxes we placed ourselves in. We're learning to just be ourselves.

We're not therapy groups, and we have no religious affiliation or agenda. Participation in the groups is free. The groups meet weekly, following an agreed-upon protocol of confidentiality and honesty. But each man or woman determines his or her level of participation.

If you'd like to learn more about the groups, you, your friends and family are invited to an open house on May 14<sup>th</sup> at the Sandpoint Community Center from 6:30 to 8pm. You will meet many of the groups' members and their families, have the chance to ask questions, and enjoy some food and drinks.

To learn more about the groups view our web sites: [www.SandpointMensGroup.com](http://www.SandpointMensGroup.com) and [www.SandpointWomensGroup.com](http://www.SandpointWomensGroup.com). If you'd like to talk to someone, please call Sandpoint Men's Group at 946-4266.

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Owen Marcus is our local Rolfer and a founding member of the Sandpoint Men's Group.