

Summer 2009

# VISIONARY

THE JOURNAL OF GAY SPIRIT VISIONS

Volume 15, Number 2

**TURNING  
CHALLENGES  
INTO  
BLESSINGS**



# VISIONARY

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**Gay Spirit Visions**  
Mailing Address:

P.O. Box 339, Decatur, GA 30031-0339

**E-mail:** [info@gayspiritvisions.org](mailto:info@gayspiritvisions.org)

**Website:**  
[www.gayspiritvisions.org](http://www.gayspiritvisions.org)

## Council of Trusted Elders

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*Presiding Elder*

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*Elder of Communications*

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Al Taylor, *Editor*  
Migs Halpern, *Assistant Editor*  
Mike Goettee, *Design & Production*

## Submission Queries:

[visionary@gayspiritvisions.org](mailto:visionary@gayspiritvisions.org)

Please put "GSV Visionary"  
in the subject line.

**Address changes & advertising queries:**  
[visionary@gayspiritvisions.org](mailto:visionary@gayspiritvisions.org)

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# ELDER'S PERCH

**A**s I write this, the twentieth anniversary Gay Spirit Visions fall conference is only a few months away. Who would have thought, way back in 1990, that we'd reach this milestone?



By David Salyer

The original organizers had their work cut out for them. First task: locating a facility or retreat center in the Southeast that would welcome a diverse group of openly gay men. Turned down repeatedly, Peter Kendrick and Ron Lambe eventually found The Mountain, whose affirming Unitarian Universalist principles and hospitable staff made that first event a reality. And today, GSV is so intrinsically connected to The Mountain that many men cannot fathom the conference being anywhere else; it has truly become a spiritual home.

With a location for that first conference secured, who would be invited to speak? And for that matter, would anyone accept an invitation to the first, and not necessarily annual, conference put together by a bunch of optimistic faeries? As it turns out, three extraordinary men said yes: visionary author Andrew Ramer, poet and therapist Franklin Abbott, and Harry Hay – the gay rights pioneer and co-founder of the Radical Faeries.

The first line of Harry Hay's 1990 fall conference keynote address was, "Where have we been and where are we now?" How could the ten of us who comprise this year's Council of Gay Spirit Visions not ask ourselves the very same question as we began planning the twentieth annual event? In the last nineteen years we've celebrated the body erotic, awakened the elder within and revealed our inner fabulousity. We've walked labyrinths, gathered around sacred fires and shared countless stories in small groups and heart circles.

Now what? Though Harry Hay died in 2002, Franklin Abbott and Andrew Ramer will both be returning for presentations this fall. In addition, we're

adding a new voice to the mix – Peterson Toscano – a theatrical performance activist and survivor of the ex-gay movement. His struggle to integrate sexuality and faith is poignant and inspirational. Peterson is truly a storyteller for these times.

We're calling this twentieth anniversary celebration, "Come Tell It On The Mountain!" Why? When you consider that The Mountain Retreat & Learning Center is our ground zero and that for many men the GSV experience has been about finding their voice and telling their story, it just makes sense.

So what else can you expect? Oh, just the usual... faeries, fire, fellowship... and more fabulousity than you can shake a talking stick at!

*David Salyer is a retired journalist and HIV/AIDS educator living in Atlanta, Georgia. He has been involved with Gay Spirit Visions since 1992. Reach him at [cubscout@mindspring.com](mailto:cubscout@mindspring.com).*



## Our Mission Statement

We are committed to creating **safe, sacred space** that is open to **all spiritual paths**, wherein **loving gay men** may explore and strengthen spiritual identity.

We are committed to creating a spiritual community with the intent to **heal, nurture** our gifts and potential, and **live with integrity** in the world.

We are **committed to supporting others** in their spiritual growth by sharing experiences and insights.

To fulfill these goals we facilitate annual retreats and conferences, sponsor social events, publish a newsletter, and maintain Internet-based communications for men who love men.

Editors' Page

I am challenged every time I try to write my next Editor's Note. As I tackle the task of writing something I hope will be useful for my brothers to read, I am brought back into the spirit, energy and love that the brotherhood of GSV holds for me. This energy that showers me will help me through this writing process. Your energy is a blessing in my life.



By Al Taylor

I am also challenged every day to keep a positive attitude. As a child, I learned the thought processes that favored the glass-is-half-empty way of thinking. When things were hard and life was not going my way, I would shift into the role of the victim. I have been the victim too many times during my life. Happily, over time, I learned that my perception of things makes a big difference on how happy I

feel on this journey I call life. I can choose to see the good or choose to see the bad. I now see that changing my attitude from that of the victim to that of being grateful has been a blessing in my life.

When I first thought about the theme of "Turning Challenges Into Blessings," I believed I could come up with many examples of how I had turned a challenge into a blessing. After thinking about many challenges in my life, I realized I could have done much better had I known that I had the power to change my attitude. So I believe that the process of learning this has also been a blessing in my life. I hope that many of you will remember this when your challenges arise.

Now I have a challenge for those of you reading this. I want you to make at least one comment about *Visionary*. Your comment could be what you like or dislike about *Visionary*. Perhaps there is something you would like to see in this newsletter. Some constructive criticism

could also be valuable. I am just asking for any thoughts on how to make *Visionary* better for you. You can forward your comments via email to [visionary@gayspiritvisions.com](mailto:visionary@gayspiritvisions.com) or mail them to GSV Visionary, PO Box 339, Decatur, GA 30031-0339.

Later this year we will have our 20th fall conference. So in celebration of this I am hoping to have 20 contributors for the next issue. I am looking for one short story (around 200 words) for each past fall conference. I am also asking for volunteers to contact me if you are interested in telling a story about one of the fall conferences. My goal is to have one story for each year. I promise that the challenge of writing will be a blessing.

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*Al has been involved with the brotherhood of GSV since 1996 and considers this to be a blessing. He may be reached at [adtaccountant@yahoo.com](mailto:adtaccountant@yahoo.com).*

Assistant Editor

Turning challenges into blessings – sounds like turning life's lemons into lemonade. And, like many trite aphorisms, it's based on truth. There is much I cannot change in the world. Other people's thinking and judgments, the weather... the list goes on and on. What I can change is myself and mostly how I judge, filter, and then react to what I see happening in the world.



By Migs Halpern

And so it is with challenges. I can play the victim and hide, run away, fold, or simply stay and whine. Or, I can choose to view the challenge as an opportunity to look at who I am and how I respond in the world. I can choose to make a conscious choice to respond to the challenge in a healthful, positive, growth-producing way.

Here is an example from my recent life. For most of my life I played the victim

around my sexuality. I blamed the world for being homophobic, for teaching me I was just a "dirty faggot" or "sick queer." And I manifested this victimhood by being ashamed of who I am, deep down. I was always careful to evaluate my audience before letting people know I was gay, in case they weren't going to accept me. Then I was challenged while doing my work in the ManKind Project to look at my victimhood. What a challenge. It was so easy for me to ascribe many of my failures as being "their fault." So, when I got this challenge, I finally came to the place of being supremely tired of being that eternal, whiny victim. It was time to stand up as a proud gay man and take full responsibility for my life and all the decisions I make, and their impacts and consequences on the world.

From that day forward I have been a much happier human being. I accept that I make choices as a free and powerful man, and that there are consequences to all the choices I make. I rose to the challenge of no longer being a victim,

and I am very blessed to step into my power as a conscious human being.

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*Migs is in the process of moving to Fairview, NC, about 11 miles from Asheville, to a little private home on a private plot with mountain views. He can be reached at [oso@mhalpern.com](mailto:oso@mhalpern.com).*



# Fall Conference

October 1 - 4, 2009

(Optional Early Arrival Wednesday, 9/30)

Gay Spirit Visions

The 20th Anniversary Event

## Come Tell It On The Mountain!



Peterson Toscano

**In celebration of this milestone anniversary,** The Council of Gay Spirit Visions welcomes Peterson Toscano, an internationally recognized activist, educator and comic performer.

After spending 17 years trying to “de-gay” himself through reparative programs and exorcism, Peterson embraced his orientation and came out in 1999. Since then, he has traveled the U.S. and world delivering lively performances and lectures about the ex-gay movement and his own faith journey. Blending creative arts and personal truth, Peterson Toscano is a storyteller for our times.

Join us at The Mountain Retreat & Learning Center outside Highlands, NC, our spiritual home and the site of every fall conference since the beginning.

Visit [www.gayspiritvisions.org](http://www.gayspiritvisions.org) to view our online brochure and registration information.

# Faith and Meaning in Troubling Times

The Mountain's Annual Peace Week August 7-12

**In the nature glory that is the Mountain,** the Annual Peace Week engages people of all ages and faiths in community as they explore new ideas and gain new perspectives on faith and peacemaking. Sharing this experience with a diverse faculty and with each other, participants join in shaping a week of workshops, lively and

thoughtful dialog, music, time alone and time in nature.

Guided by the artful and gifted leadership of Rev. Marti Keller, Dr. Ken Nafziger and author **Andrew Ramer**, participants can expect to increase awareness, insight and understanding into their individual and communal roles as peacemakers.



## CALENDAR

### GSV COUNCIL MEETINGS

The GSV Council usually meets on the 4th Saturday of each month at 1151 Sheridan Road, NE in Atlanta. It begins at 10 A.M. and usually finishes before 2 P.M. Any GSV brother is welcome to attend. We also encourage our brothers to consider becoming a council member. Please contact any council member for more information.

### GSV POTLUCKS

GSV potlucks in Atlanta are held the fourth Saturday of the month at 7:30 p.m., unless otherwise noted. GSV potlucks are drug- and alcohol-free events.

Please check our site for locations: [www.gayspiritvisions.org](http://www.gayspiritvisions.org).

**Hosting a potluck is a simple and effective way to serve GSV. Please let us know if you can host.**  
Contact Kim Pittman at [service@gayspiritvisions.org](mailto:service@gayspiritvisions.org)

### GSV GATHERINGS

The dates for GSV events in 2009 have been set as follows:

Fall Conference—October 1–4, 2009  
(Optional 9/30)

*In Memoriam*

# Jeff Jacka

In addition to the memorial service here in the Atlanta area, Jeff Jacka received a true San Francisco style memorial on Saturday, April 11, 2009 when FLAGGING IN THE PARK hosted his remembrance.

Michael Sigmann and H.R. Bremner officiated the ceremony, where numerous flaggers and friends spoke of their memories of Jeff and placed flowers upon an alter featuring dozens of photos of Jeff.



# TIGRR



# TURNING CHALLENGES INTO BLESSINGS

## FROM DARKNESS INTO LIGHT

**M**y darkness was self-imposed, selfish, self-gratifying and self-destructive. Those who study addiction and recovery say I have a disease. Mine lay dormant for many years and then emerged with a vengeance. The financial losses were huge, but the greatest was a loss of my soul and conscience. I was a walking zombie. What drove me to look for a change was that I was no longer able to accept the consequences of using drugs. With this surrender came a willingness to work a rigorous 12-step program and change everything I was doing with my life. This wasn't easy at first; I had convinced myself that I was leaving behind a lot of good times. True, I once had good times; I just hadn't had any in quite a long time.

One thing I gave up was the glamorous world of professional opera. It's taken some major acceptance to recognize that working for a small church in a small town is a blessing, and I've come to that point. I enjoy teaching and charge a small-town rate for lessons. I bring all of my passion and experience to every church service I play. My children's choir is amazing. Maybe it's because I was an ornery child that I know in advance when a child is about to act up. I've found a way to bring compassion and understanding into most situations when a child misbehaves.

Another thing that continually amazes me is that people at the church ask for

my guidance. I'm always the one called upon to facilitate a meeting or seminar or deal with a tricky situation. When another staff member comes into my office and starts out, "I'm struggling with this issue," I put aside my work and listen as I am able. I feel blessed that I am able to do this today, since before it was usually that person going up to someone else with, "I'm struggling with how David treats others."

My greatest gift in recovery is my ability to tell whether a problem is yours or mine or, as I like to say "what's your crap and what's mine." If it's mine, then there is a solution to the problem, and today I am very uncomfortable staying in the problem and not getting to the solution. If it's not my problem, there is no solution for me. Yes, I still occasionally try to "fix" things, but this happens seldom, and generally I realize pretty quickly

**“ NEVER TRY TO TEACH A PIG TO SING; IT WASTES YOUR TIME AND IT ANNOYS THE PIG. ”**

—Robert Heinlein

that what I'm doing is futile. This is a great relief not having to shoulder the world's problems alone.

I still get obsessive about certain things. Last year I was subscribing to 17 magazines, most of them about current events and politics. Since I am surrounded by hordes of people who think the way certain loud-mouthed talk show hosts tell them to think and would never consider voting for a different party than the one they've always voted for, I decided it was

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By David Berger



**Darkness Into Light** Continued

my duty to inform and educate them. Let me tell you how frustrating that was. Yes, in my self-righteous mind I always bested them in arguments, but to what end? It's like the saying about trying to teach a pig to sing: it's a waste of time and it annoys the pig.

There was a common reasoning I used to have: Why are they doing this to me? It is actually a relief to find that people just do stuff. They are generally not even thinking about how it will affect me. Again, that's their stuff, how I choose to react to it is mine.

My current challenge is being a support to my ailing sister, Donna. Her whining over the years has driven her other three sisters away, and her husband is close to the end of his rope. What I try to be for her is sympathetic and a good listener, but not an enabler. When she launches into a new diatribe of illnesses, though, I find it is no longer helpful to just listen. At a family gathering a couple months, Donna cornered two people who did not know all the gory details of her trials, and she spent an hour with each being certain that they had all the sorrowful news about her. I have managed to give her "assignments" which help redirect her thinking. One was, "Each day, talk to someone for about 20 minutes and NEVER discuss your health." Another was, "Write a gratitude list, and when you start to feel sorry for yourself, pull it out and remind yourself of your many blessings." The other three sisters find it totally awesome and nearly incredible that I'm the one in this unique position of support. Frankly, I am also amazed.

I realize that I still am judgmental and arrogant, but I try to remain teachable. When I can do that, there's a good chance that I'll go throughout my day without inflicting harm on anyone. My best bet is maintaining an attitude of gratitude for how I am living my life today. I also find that when I need to, I can easily grab a tool from the 12 Step Program, ManKind Project, Landmark Education, Gay Spirit Visions, or a host of other experiences I've gained over the years.

*David Berger is a professional musician and teacher living in Troy, Ohio. He has attended 16 GSV fall conferences.*

# ALL SHALL BE WELL; AND ALL SHALL BE WELL; AND ALL MANNER OF THINGS SHALL BE WELL

—Julian of Norwich

I've had many experiences in life that I would consider to be a sort of "Dark Night of the Soul." And yet, through them all I have always had an abiding belief that all shall be well. The dark night is a necessary step on my own path toward discovery of the true nature of who I am and who I might yet become.



By Scott Dillard

When I was just finishing up my work toward a Ph.D., I took a position at Central Michigan University in their theatre department. I was officially a temporary assistant professor of theatre. I stayed there for six years in that capacity. When it looked like I might be eligible for a tenure track position, I applied for the job. However, not only did the department not hire me for the position, they didn't even interview me and then let me go from employment entirely.

I had entered into a period of great challenge and darkness. Depression swept over me as I searched for a new position. I went on interview after interview and did not get any of the jobs I sought. I was being tested in a way I had never even considered before.

As time went on I slipped further and further into the darkness and could see no possible way out. I was starting to consider that perhaps I would need to change my career or I may become unemployed altogether. There seemed to be no easy answer, and I spent day after day in deeper and deeper despair.

Then one day it hit me. I seemed to wake up. I had never believed that I would ever be totally lost in the world. So, I said a silent prayer. I asked that I be taken to a place where I was needed. I shifted the focus off of me and onto the larger world. I had things to offer and I knew that there were places where those things were needed.

As soon as I said this prayer, the world started opening up to me again. Some light started to shine through. I got a call from a friend who said that her husband could give me a part-time teaching job in Georgia. I got other calls from schools in Michigan that had some work available for me. And as soon as I started making plans to move on, I got yet another call from yet another school in Georgia offering me a tenure track position.

I leapt at the chance. I moved forward. It seemed as if I had moved away from the darkness and into the light once again. Indeed, all things shall be well.

I was wrong. The job I took tested me in ways I could never have dreamed of. Oh sure, I had been led to a place where my talents as a teacher were certainly needed, but I was also led into one of the worst work environments I had ever experienced. I was not out of the darkness yet.

But I just kept working and believing in a brighter future. I started publishing research. I honed my skills as a teacher. I tried all I could to be the best professional academic I could be.

When, after three years at this new job, the university I was working for decided that they felt that I was untenurable, I started looking for a new job. I had started to believe that maybe I wasn't good enough, but I had to try one more time. This time I believed in myself and my abilities.

I approached this job hunt very strategically. I only applied for jobs I really wanted at institutions I really thought I wanted to be at. I applied for eight positions and became a finalist for five of those jobs. I was again moving toward the light.

When Georgia College & State University offered me a position, I took it. It's a great school, and I would be able to help start a brand new program. I was thrilled. I knew I would do this job well and that I would succeed.

Continues on next page

## A DIFFERENT KIND OF OF LOVE STORY

**R**ecurring dream: Home from work, I open the front door and a little boy comes running toward me joyfully shouting, "Daddy, Daddy, Daddy." He throws his arms around my legs, and my heart opens as wide as the sky.

My mother, watching me down on the floor playing with little cousins and younger kids in the neighborhood, would always tell me that I'd make a wonderful father. My college girlfriend wanted kids as much as I did. We agreed that we would have at least three. But when I came out in my early twenties I had to give up that dream. Very few gay couples were parenting back then, and single parent gay adoption was impossibility.

Men pushing strollers turn me on, and I dated a few men who had children. But alas, the two long-term relationships of my thirties and forties were with men who didn't have kids and didn't want any. I spent time in therapy grieving this loss and the feeling of incompleteness that went with it. I tried to reroute my desire into being a surrogate uncle and godfather, but a festering ache in my chest remained. When I found myself single again at age fifty, I felt, with bone-deep sorrow, that even if I met someone new, I was too old to become a father. Life, however, had other ideas.

We talk about our GSV family and call each other brothers, so I didn't at first understand that something familial but non-fraternal was happening with David-Michael. We met at the fourth GSV conference. Over time, on and off The Mountain, through letters, phone calls, and visits, we discovered a shared love of books, nature and the Goddess, which added to the unnamed connection between us. It was David-Michael who changed that the year he sent me two birthday cards, one made out to Andrew and one to Dad. I cried reading them, awash in feelings. I may some-

times be called a GSV elder, but how could I ever be father to a grown man fifteen years my junior? Then again...

As I learned more about his father-wound and shared more with him about my childless pain, we realized that Life was inviting us to participate in the healing of each other's bruised and battered heart. Lacking role models, we've nurtured our relationship with love, mutual support, and a healthy dose of gay inventiveness. We went public about our relationship during last year's closing Heart Circle, although I did have to tell someone later, "This isn't a Daddy/Boy relationship."

After the conference ended, when almost all of our GSV brothers had driven down The Mountain, David-Michael and I stood on Meditation Rock with Dan Dewberry as our witness. The day was clear, the sun was warm, and the two of us stood side by side facing Michael Chavez, Lord Peregrine, who lovingly guided us through an adoption ritual to a place that's named and acknowledged: Father and Son.

Back in Atlanta, I met David-Michael's mother for the first time, although she and I had spoken on the phone already. The three of us were needlessly nervous. Our time together was easy and warm. When I got home I put an announcement about becoming a father in my synagogue's newsletter and sent copies of the pictures Dan took on Meditation Rock to family and friends, who were all enthusiastic. There are still times when I wonder – "Is this real?" and times when he says he's afraid I'll walk away. Then I remind him, in a caring voice that sounds fatherly to me, "This is for life. This is for good." And when he leaves a message on my answering machine: "Papa..." and when I call back and hear his voice – all of my cells start glowing. Nearing sixty, in a way that I never imagined, I am becoming the father I dreamed of being to a wise, generous, creative, and deep-hearted son who makes me laugh and evokes the best in me, as I hope I do in him. I keep a picture of us that was taken several years

ago on the deck of the Great Lodge in my wallet. I have another picture on my desk that Dan took on Meditation Rock. And I'm counting the days till my son and his new boyfriend arrive for Pride Week in San Francisco.

A friend who raised kids teased me: "You were smart, skipping diapers and teen years." I wish I'd been there with him when he was a little boy and a growing young man, to hold him and love him and teach him and cheer him on. But here we are now, blessed by our relationship because we allowed ourselves to be open to it. From that allowing has come so much healing and so many blessings. If this is possible – what else is?

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*Andrew has been involved with GSV since the first fall conference. He is an author and a teacher. He is the author of Two Flutes Playing: A Spiritual Journeybook for Gay Men. He lives in San Francisco, CA. He may be reached at (415) 864-4177.*

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### All Shall Be Well... Continued

It's been eight years since I landed this current position. Most everything has been light. I got tenured and promoted, and in another year I will be eligible for full professorship. All shall be well.

You see, as I look back on this journey, I know that each step of it was necessary in my development. I needed to know what disappointment was so that I could appreciate the times when things go the way I want them to. I need to know darkness so that I could understand what it really means to be in the light. I needed to know that although things don't always look well, all things shall be well. This I believe.

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*Rev. Dr. Scott Dillard is an Associate Professor of Rhetoric at Georgia College & State University and is an interfaith minister serving Unitarian Universalist churches in the Southeast.*



## THE ONCE DARK HOLIDAY OF FATHER'S DAY

By David-Michael Searcy

The Father's Day holiday has always been a day of many mixed emotions for me. In my years growing up, this day was a time of tears, deep feelings of rejection and abandonment. I have a wonderful mom, Glenda (Great Goddess and role model) who tried her best to fill both the roles of mother and father, but she could not fill the father void. It is funny though, I still send her Father's Day cards because she really did the best she knew how with the information she had. I also have wonderful gay parents, Duncan Teague and David Thurman, whose love has helped guide me on this Queer journey. They, too, receive Mother's day and Father's Day cards, and if you know them, I'll let you guess who gets which.

However, the little boy inside me always wanted a father to hold me and share with me the wonders of life and the wonders of my growing and changing body. I wanted a male figure to help me form a vision of what it means to become a man. I would later have the pleasure of an up-front view of my dad after my parents' divorce. My dad would allow my brother and me to stay with him for nine months while our little sister stayed with my mom. In this time, I witnessed a man who really did not want to be a father and a man who loved to

get his drink on in a very wild way. This man had no shame in sharing his sexual exploits with the door wide open for us to see things that we should have never seen at our young ages. His drinking, wild sex exploits and oh, lest I forget, the physical abuse of my older brother would help me create how I would live my life today. Sometimes the bad example is the best teacher.

The hardest part to deal with was knowing he was out there and that he really did not want any type of connection with his children. After their divorce, he clearly made the choice to disown his children. I would learn to get used to his absence and telling my friends that my father was dead, but the longing would never leave. I have had to learn things about myself and my body from friends whose fathers taught them. I get teary-eyed whenever I see a father and son spending time together. As years passed and I matured and grew, I was about the journey of life and the vocation of the Goddess. Years later, I would become connected with a group called Gay Spirit Visions that would lead me to my spirit father, the mystical Andrew Ramer, who over time would become my friend and then my Abba.

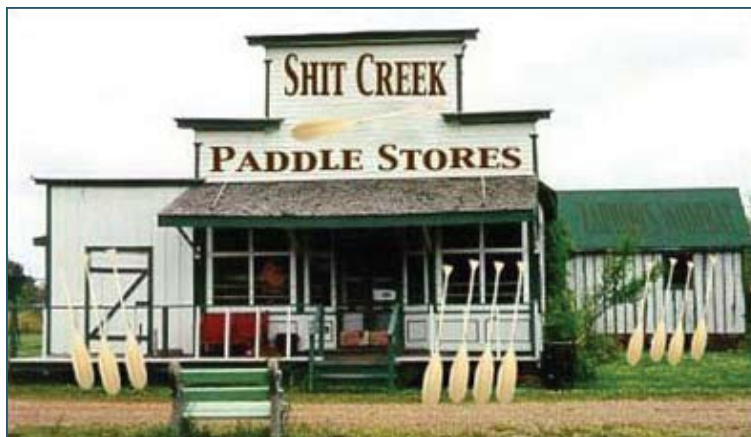
In my connection with Andrew I have

come to learn and trust the "male figure" and to allow this "person" to bring healing to old father wounds. I cannot say that it's easy opening myself up to these feelings, but it beats the many years of therapy that I have had. I now know that with my original father, whom I affectionately called the "sperm donor," I have come to make the choice to forgive and to love him, and to work on my issues with the help of wonderful therapists and a powerful spiritual community.

This new journey of having a father at the age of 43 is rewarding and comforting. Andrew will never be able to heal all the wounds, but the experience is allowing me to have something that I thought I would never have in this lifetime. I know it's the same for him. It's a wonder how order comes out of chaos, healing comes out of pain, and feelings of abandonment are filled with wholeness. I am now so much nearer to being healthy, whole, and complete. One day, I would like to add to my last name the name of the man who has brought me a true spiritual connection to a living, pulsating father figure. And who knows, maybe one day I can be a healing balm to someone else who needs me as a father figure. I am open to Spiritual Parenting.

So mote it be, and so it is!

*David-Michael is a first degree Wiccan priest with Ravenwood Coven and a science of mind practitioner. He may be reached at [devagoddess@webtv.net](mailto:devagoddess@webtv.net)*



When challenged on this waterway,  
Make a profit every day.

The 12th Annual GSV

# SPRING RETREAT

May 8-10, 2009



Photos by  
Kim Pittman



