

# Interview with Dr. Michael Picucci

New York City • (Reprinted from the Healing Bridge Project web site)

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## Seed of Optimism

The first time I felt healing, or an optimism of healing, I was 21 years old and I was a policeman. I read the book *Beyond Success and Failure* by Willard and Marguerite Beecher. It showed this very naïve 21-year-old person, who grew up mostly in suburbia, that there were possibilities for other things, of feeling and living differently. That was a big seed-planter for me.

## Breaking Open

The next time was some years later, in 1975, when I did an EST seminar training. That broke me open. I was at a time in my life when I was beginning to look for change, curious, and inspired by someone who I liked who had done it. This was back in the early days of EST. Of course, I was using drugs back at that time. It was a two weekend training and there was a rule that we couldn't use drugs in between. Anyway, I did. But, the training still did open me up.

## Profound Connection

I felt I could connect with people better afterwards, and, within a very short time, I was in therapy. It took two years in therapy to break through my denial about alcoholism and drug addiction, but from therapy I went into a twelve-step program in 1978. So, I began a process of opening that got me sober.

A very powerful opening happened in 1978 right after I was sober eleven months. I went to a workshop experience in San Francisco, which grew out of the EST movement. It was kind of an offshoot that was just for gays and lesbians. I went with twelve gay men I knew from New York. We flew to California together for this workshop and there were 100 people in the workshop. As I sat in that room, the identification with 100 other people of having lives where we all shared a particular kind of secret and sense of difference growing up, was so profound to me.

There was a gay man named David Goodstein, a very wealthy man, facilitating the workshop. He was such a role model, being a powerful man, speaking his truth very clearly, very directly, of what happened to him and his process of life as a gay man, and him being so open and so out there – and holding this in the Embarcadero Hotel because he thought we deserved nothing less. At that time, the Embarcadero was brand new. He said of meeting at this fine hotel: “Because we're coming out of a toilet mentality we never should have been in, in the first place.”

## Facing Shame

Somehow, in that workshop, something happened in me. I had what could be described as a Kundalini experience, where it felt like my spine opened up and energy just poured through. I've really never been the same since regarding any kind of shame around that issue. From that point on, I negotiated who I am in that aspect of my life very, very differently.

Prior to that I considered myself being “out” gay, but I was only eight months sober. I first came out and had an adult gay experience at 22, so it had only been less than ten years. I considered myself “out” because I went to the bars in Greenwich Village, but my parents didn't know, and the world didn't know. Other gay people, in a bar that I went to after 11 o'clock at night knew! But I considered myself “out.” So it was a whole other coming out process that began.

## **Cultural Healing**

We said to David Goldstein, "You've got to bring this to New York!" He said, "Well, if you guys could enroll two weekends back to back, that would show me that there's something there and we have enough support and resources. Then I would be willing to fly everyone back and forth and do what we gotta do and maybe even set up an office there." So, we came back here, and within a month we enrolled 300 people. It functioned here for almost four years and about four or five thousand people went through it -- all of who went on to create and lead the major gay organizations which didn't exist back then.

Back then there was one gay organization, the Mattachine Society, which was kind of an underground thing that no one really knew about. The leader of The National Gay Task Force, was an *Advocate Experience* graduate. The people who started the Gay and Lesbian Community Center and the people who started Gay Men's Health Crisis were almost all graduates of the *Advocate Experience*.

There was a cultural healing process going on, a transformation within a culture that went out and out and out. Very powerful. Probably the most powerful single event that I've ever been involved with.

## **No More Withholding**

There was no question that I was going through a profound energetic experience. I felt very good about it, because I felt that I had a voice that was wider and just more "me" than ever before. I had withheld even more than I knew I was withholding. But, all of a sudden I was able to say things and see things more clearly and articulate myself. From that point until now, I wished I had the vocabulary to go with that voice because I was such a mess during high school and my early years that I didn't develop the kind of rich vocabulary that some people have.

## **Defining the Experience**

At the time I don't think I used the word healing. I don't think the word healing came to me until I was doing research in the mid-80's and it really came to me from Stephen Levine in reading one of his books on death and dying, and in one of the magazine articles he wrote in *Common Boundary*, in which he defined healing. So, once I started to find it, then it was a word that I could relate to. His definition of healing was to "revisit with awareness and compassion that which we have withdrawn from in anger, fear, or judgment." That was his definition of healing in a person. At that time that really served me well in the work I was doing with myself and beginning to do with other people.

From that point on, healing was a word in my vocabulary that I used, and felt like I experienced and understood. Then I could look back and see the experiences I'd had as healing experiences. Prior to that they were just what happened at the time, that were like, "oh, wow!" I knew I was profoundly changed by the San Francisco experience but I didn't know what to call it.

## **Issues of Grief and Guilt**

Grief was one of the first issues I faced. I was married when I was 19 and my wife died of cancer when I was 21. The only time I was sober was when I dated Sheila and was married to her. When she died, the way I dealt with the grief and confusion and all the feelings from that, was that I went back to using alcohol and drugs. Without even realizing what I was doing, that's what I did.

So, one of the first things that came up for me in that healing process, after the *Advocate Experience* and

therapy, was the grief from that, which allowed me to begin getting closer to people at intimate levels that I wasn't even aware that I wasn't able to do. The most significant part of that grief piece was feeling guilty that when she died I was glad. As sorry as I was, I was glad because it was such a painful process.

I was such a young person and it was so much more than I knew how to deal with to stay up all night with someone in pain, feeding them medication, calling the doctor in the middle of the night, "Can I give more?" carrying her to the bathroom. Doing that, and working, you know, I just couldn't help being relieved when she died. She and I could never really say goodbye or talk about it because back then you didn't talk about cancer and death. There was no support for it and I certainly had no language for it. So, I felt terrible for the incompleteness.

### **Sexual Frame of Reference**

That leads to a side story about the reason I was married, being gay. At my core, I think I'm on some continuum of bi-sexual because I do find women attractive, and I have had sex with women. But my affectional attraction, the people I really am attracted to relationally, are more powerfully men, for whatever reason.

When I was twelve years old and heard the word homosexual for the first time, and resonated with it in some way, I wasn't sure exactly what it meant. I went to the public library dictionary, on a big stand, so big that I had to reach for it. I found the word "homosexuality" and the first three words were "a mental illness." Back then, it was still a mental illness. So, I slammed the book closed, because God forbid anyone should know what page I was looking at, and I literally ran out of the library. From that point on, I just suppressed the idea, the thought. Because the only frame of reference I had for anyone with a same sex connection was "Herbie the Town Queer."

I lived on Long Island and there are all these railroad stations, and all the kids knew this old bum who hung around the railroad station who gave people blow jobs for a quarter. All the kids knew of "Herbie, the Town Queer." And, I didn't want to be Herbie. I had no other frame of reference for it but mental illness and Herbie. It wasn't until some years later that I got other frames of reference. I was very naive. So, all through my teens I dated women, was in love, and ended up getting married.

### **Emotional Turmoil**

The second issue I was faced with was coming out again. I mean really wrestling with feeling terrible about being gay -- feelings that I never had to deal with during my drinking or drugging and considering going with women again. And, there was no support for that from my gay friends. There was really no one I could talk to except the therapist, who really wasn't all that great with the issue.

It was really a year of tumult, just wrestling with who am I sexually, and how do I feel about it? And this was after getting a jolt of feeling good about being gay from the *Advocate Experience* and everything. Then, all of a sudden, this backlash of bad feelings came up, I guess from years of my own internalized homophobia that was in me somewhere.

### **The Litmus Test of Acceptance**

The clarifying agent -- I don't remember if it was something someone told me, or if I came up with it myself after wrestling with it for a good period of time, is I came up with a litmus test, that I found comfort in. The litmus test was: if I walk down Fifth Avenue or any New York Street on a spring day, who do I look at? The truth is, 99.9% of the time I look at men! So, I said, okay, well, I'm going to just accept that. After that I was done

with it – after a year of tumult, I was done with it.

In the gay community back then there wasn't a lot of openness and it just made other people nervous to talk about it. Their first thing was, "Oh God, what if that happens to me." No one wants to make a big shift like that.

### **Creating a Personal Framework**

Now, looking back, I have some grasp on healing processes and structures, but back then, I had no clue what was the next step. I found therapy very unfulfilling in that regard, because I had no idea where we were going and what the purpose was. I was in psychoanalytic psychotherapy and I had a good therapist. I'm very grateful to the therapist I had, I think she was wonderful, but, there was no understanding. I was very frustrated by the fact that I didn't know where I was going and I had no framework.

Eventually, little by little, I read as much as I could, but I still found it difficult. So, for years I've been creating my own framework and my own understanding to be able to share with other people. This is why I write, and why I do the things I do now.

### **A Releasing Voice**

The guide, or the resource I used, was my own intuition. It was a voice inside of me that I now call my *innate intelligence*. There was all the wrestling from the voices, feelings, and energies I had gotten from the world over the years about what being sexually different meant. And, after a year of allowing those to surface and acknowledging that I had them, not knowing what to do with them, finally, a voice inside of me gave me the answer. "Hey, who do you look at, boy?" Almost like, "Let's get real!" With that came just a total release and acceptance.

Before the acceptance there was tumult, despair. Coming into my sexual wholeness brought joy, absolutely. Then, I would have called it an "opening," feeling wider in myself, feeling like I had more of a voice.

### **Learning to Listen**

But now I have to change my story a little bit. I think it was back then when sex started to become my teacher. I started to follow my sex and my sexuality and where it wanted to bring me for pleasure, and learn and understand from that and grow from that, rather than denying it, or thinking I knew about it—letting it teach me.

I got very involved in community-based gay healing organizations. I was the first chairperson of The International Association of Homosexual Men and Women in **Alcoholic Anonymous**, which advises GSO (General Service Organization) on gay and lesbian issues. Also, GSO uses it as a resource when they get letters from lonely gay people who can't come out but somehow need to communicate with someone. We had a writer's committee that would write to these loners in different places, who were sexually different but couldn't bring that part into their AA group.

### **Speaking Out**

I became a voice in the gay and lesbian community. It was a natural, organic process, not doing it would be like shutting my mouth and stuffing it again. I didn't even know I had been doing that, but, obviously, in my former despair and tumult, I didn't have much of a voice, or a feeling of self-esteem or empowerment. Now I had empowerment, and when you have empowerment you can't sit on it. At least I can't sit on it. I have to do

something with it. Opportunities presented themselves and I said, “Yes.” It was an exciting and exhilarating time – and I was sober! That was in the early 80’s.

### **Seeking Honesty**

I’d been a policeman back in my early 20’s for six years. Being gay and using a lot of drugs is what stopped me from being a policeman. I was about to be made detective when I left. I had thirteen commendations for outstanding police work, and I was just about to be made detective, and it was crawling in on me. I was almost 27 years old, and I was living with a man. Back in the late sixties, the only other two gay cops I knew of both committed suicide, with their own guns. It was not a place to be gay.

I had the same patrol partner for five years. I went to his wedding, I went to the christening of his daughter, all his family functions. Whenever I got in the car with him I had to lie about where I was the night before. It wasn’t pleasant and I couldn’t do it anymore.

### **Seeking Approval**

I’d had some advertising and printing experience in my teens, I sort of took a vocational track in high school and printing was the thing. By 1983, around the time I got sober I went into an advertising business partnership. I had proven myself in that business and someone who was wealthy, who owned an advertising firm, wanted my energy. I did that for five years and it gave me an opportunity to live out some stuff, in a way. One of the reasons I worked so hard in that field was because I wanted to get wealthy, and I wanted to somehow show my father. The image of driving to his house on Long Island in a Cadillac...

I was in that business about five years. We moved and expanded, opening beautiful offices overlooking Union Square Park. We really created this wonderful environment and I invited my father up for lunch one day to see the place. He came and looked around, and then we went out to lunch. While we were eating, I heard him mutter something. I heard him mumble, “I’m proud of you.” But, I could barely hear it. So, I said, “What did you say, Dad?” He said, “Well, after seeing that place, and realizing that you’re an owner of it, I’m proud of you.” My reaction was, the feeling in my body was, I wanted to kick him under the table and say, “Say it again!” I also realized that he did say it as best he could.

### **Something Started to Shift**

After that something else started to shift inside of me. I no longer wanted to do it. So, here I am, five years sober. I have this very successful business that, if I’d stayed with it, could have made me a multi-millionaire, because we were doing very well. And I decided that’s not where I wanted to be. So, I worked out a difficult arrangement. My partner did not want me to leave, plus he had to pay me out a lot of money because I now owned half the business. That gave me a nest egg that I could go back to school with, and do other things. I wasn’t sure what I was going to do, but I knew I wanted to work with people. When my business partner and I reached an agreement through lawyers and all that, it was like a divorce, very stressful.

### **Serious Illness**

Around that time, I was diagnosed with Burkitt’s lymphoma. That was 1983. It was a rare, very serious, very aggressive fast-growing cancer. I signed the papers on the closing of the business, and the following day went into the hospital to start chemotherapy. That began a two-year period of being seriously ill.

### **A Loving Angel**

I had a life partner, his name was Gil Ruben, who carried me through that time. Gil came into my life just as

I was diagnosed with cancer. The first night we spent together was the night my hair started falling out. We got up in the morning and laughed because there was hair all over the pillow, from chemotherapy. Honestly, I felt inside that the Universe, or God, put Gil in my life, almost as repayment for me carrying my wife Sheila through it in my teens. Gil was so good at it. He had nursed his dying grandmother, so he knew how to be there for someone who was ill. He knew how to cut your food into small pieces when you had no appetite, so that you could get a little bit in at a time. During that time I had great difficulty eating. He knew how to do that kind of thing. It all came very naturally to him. So, I felt very blessed. It was like this angel had come into my life and carried me through this.

### **Beginning a New Life**

After the two years of chemotherapy, and depression, and many complications, going back to school was my lifesaver. There was a lot of uncertainty, because I just didn't have the strength or the focus after being sick for so long. And I had no career to define me anymore. Fortunately, I had a little money in the bank from the sale of the business that carried me through that time, so I felt very blessed for that.

I was able to, little by little, get back to school, get my credentials for counseling, go into addictions counseling, and continue on from there. At the same time, I had to nurse Gil, who had carried me, through AIDS and through three years of his illness, until he died in 1988. I was establishing myself in the field of addictions therapy as a career, at the same time as I was losing my partner. There was a lot of spirituality in that, actually.

### **Finding Completion**

My spiritual awareness was awakened, shortly after EST, through another experience when I got involved with a psychic named Ron Portante. We became friends and I first went to him for a reading. The reading impressed me and I decided to join a group with him. This was just around the time I was getting sober. He led a weekly group, six of us would get together, and he would basically teach us how to find the psychic ability in ourselves. We would do group regressions, which is very powerful, because, for one thing, it's validated by someone else--a very interesting process.

I had another **Kundalini** experience during that time. Each night at least one person would take what we called "the hot seat," which means the rest of the group would focus on them, and read them. During my reading, Ron said to me, "Who's name starts with an 'S'? There's someone in the room." I said, "It's Sheila." He said, "Who is Sheila?" They didn't know Sheila was my wife who had died. Her spirit came into the room. They all felt it. It was a very awesome experience for the whole group to have. During that experience, Ron led me in a process of communicating with Sheila. He said, "Is there anything you need to say to her?" And I was able to share with her how sorry I was that I wasn't able to talk to her or say goodbye to her, or go through the dying process with her, because we were keeping it a secret. Ron led me in a whole completion process with her, which again, gave me the experience of my vertebrae opening up very wide and energy gushing through me.

### **Hidden realities**

I began to believe in, what I now call, invisible, or unseen, realities. To me, all of spirituality in some mysterious way is hidden in these invisible realities, which are senior to physical realities for me now. Before they were these strange little phenomena, but now I trust them more. They are more important to me than the physical realities are.

## **Being Whole Without Shame**

From the *Advocate Experience*, and the little rough spot I had after it, I really came to terms with some of the deeper negative feelings I had in myself about being gay. As they surfaced and I came out of that, and made this little litmus test for myself, spirituality came from a part of me that I've really come to trust, that innate intelligence.

From that point on, I no longer felt ashamed of being sexually different. What has followed from that is taking shame off of sexuality in all its dimensions. Not that I'm quite done with that, I'm sure there may be more, because I keep growing and finding all kinds of hidden valleys and tunnels in myself. But, the more I can take shame off a pleasurable desire, or a sexual experience, the more whole I feel.

## **Peeks of Higher Consciousness**

This is a very weird, strange, and potentially controversial part. During the beginning of opening up spiritually and psychologically after EST, just prior to the *Advocate Experience*, I was using a lot of drugs. The drugs dis-inhibited me sexually. I'm not the first one to have that experience, I'm sure. It gave me peeks into doorways that I may never have had before.

Experimenting with LSD and mescaline, and other drugs, also gave me experiences of higher consciousness that were profound. I've never forgot them. They've also remained, in a way, teachers to me, because they have, in some ways, validated, or been companions on my path to higher consciousness because I've been there before. I've been in a place where all my defenses were gone for at least moments, maybe even longer, and I had this rare connection with the universe. At one point I even understood Einstein's theory of relativity, I mean, I got it! – which was my last trip before I got sober!

## **Natural, Archetypal Fantasies**

All these doorways had been opened. It meant that I'd had sexual experiences that were transcendent. Of course, today this is not uncommon, but, if we go back some years, we didn't talk about these things as much. There may be cultural judgments on them. Some of them may not even be places I would necessarily go--some of them might even be illegal. But even having the fantasy of them, I'm not ashamed of.

I know as a therapist, that some people come in with tons of shame about fantasies they have. But, I now have understandings, or experiences myself, where I feel like I have an intuitive and intellectual understanding of how these things come through us in an archetypal kind of way that is so natural, so beautiful, so okay. Whether we act on them or not has a lot to do with the culture we are living in and how acceptable they are, how not acceptable, how safe it is, or not safe. But, there's nothing wrong with them being there. Some border on being prehistoric, you know. We carry these cells for many centuries.

## **Sex, Intimacy, and Spirituality**

Let me go back to another pivotal point. I recovered from the cancer, not even realizing or having it clarified that it was HIV related, but I stabilized health-wise. I've gone back to school, I'm a counselor, and I'm invited to lead a retreat on Spirituality in Recovery at a rehab for its alumni. This was around 1985. In the opening Friday night of the retreat I said, "I have an agenda, but if there's any place the group wants to go, I'm open to it. I like taking risks and so forth." Some wise guy in the group says, "Let's talk about sex." I said, "Well, this is 'Spirituality in Recovery,' I'm not sure how to talk about sex and stay within the context of what we're doing, but, let me think about it and let's come back to it on Saturday afternoon, how's that?" I was co-leading this retreat with a nun, who was an addictions counselor.

That Saturday afternoon I had decided that the way I would conduct the afternoon was to share some of my recent experiences having to do with sex and intimacy and what I considered spirituality. At that point I had defined spirituality as love. To me, energetically, the closest thing I can come to spirituality, is the word “love” and the experience of one person loving another. When I feel the most spiritual is when I’m being loved or loving someone or something. So, I decided I’d use my experience as a jumping-off board for the group and just see where we go.

### **Relational Struggles**

I shared with them that I was having a particular struggle. I could date someone for three months and it would go great, but, after three or four months, all of a sudden their nose started to get too big, or I would start finding flaws in them. But, the truth was, I was finding flaws in them because the sexuality wasn’t working anymore. After three months with having sex with someone I wanted them out of my life. Or, as I had done in several previous relationships, I continued a relationship with them and it either became a sexless relationship, or it became doing sex as a duty, like doing the laundry. You know, you try to squeeze it in every two or three weeks just to say we did it and we’re still a couple.

### **Comforting Epiphany**

So, that was what I was up against. I shared with them that I felt like I was finally having some success in moving beyond it since I was able to identify it and talk about it. Then I asked, “Does anyone identify with that?” All forty-five hands in the room went way up. Even the nun! (To this day, I don’t completely understand that one!) But, that moment, when all the hands in the room didn’t just go up, they went enthusiastically way up, that was like an epiphany for me because two things happened inside of me. One is I was greatly comforted. I really thought it was just me--that this was a unique flaw. I had brought it to at least three or four therapists already. They didn’t tell me that it was common. And here’s 45 people, recovering people, (so maybe it’s a recovery thing, I thought), who were telling me that I’m not unique.

### **Empowered by Anger**

I said, “Well, if that’s true, that I’m not unique and everyone here has that experience, why aren’t we healing it? We know how to heal alcoholism, something that the medical journals still have no cure for, we’ve been able to heal it in spiritual community. Why aren’t we healing this?” And I got angry that here’s a reality as big as day being presented to me and we’re not doing anything about it. We’re not acknowledging it. And there’s a bunch of other lonely people banging their heads around, just as I have been, and if they don’t have to be, why should they be?

That kind of anger fueled my empowerment to do the research and the work I’ve been doing ever since. That’s what has made the sexual piece a core of the work I do. It all comes from that. It really energized me. There’s a passion in that, and that’s when I really consciously started to learn from sex, as well.

### **Dissecting the Problem**

At that retreat, I led these people through an exercise where I put on the blackboard, “Intimacy, Sensuality, and Sex”, then drew lines down, so each had a column. And I said, let’s dissect them. So, then they gave me a bunch of words for intimacy: “communication, warmth, understanding”, things like that. Then we went to sensuality and they gave me words like, “candlelight, music, touch, tickle, smile.” Then we went to “sex” and little by little, out of the room came, “fuck”. The nun yelled “penis”, actually she yelled “orgasm,”! We got those words down.

Then I walked the board from one side to the other to see where the defenses come up when they enter a relationship. If you go in through intimacy and you meet the person and they're nice and it's warm, when do the defenses come up? A lot of us recovering people are accustomed to coming in through sex, at least that was my experience. You meet someone, you have sex.

I said, let's do it both ways. So, we walked the board going from intimacy: you meet someone, you get to know them a little bit, there's communication, there's warmth, you go to a movie, maybe you touch a little in the movie, maybe hold hands a little bit, start the sensuality going, right? Then there's some sensuality — you might have dinner with some candles, nice music, and eventually, after three or four dates, you might head towards sex.

As I started walking the board I said, "Raise your hand if you begin to feel uncomfortable in your body, as your body defenses come up." And, sure enough, when I got to the sex part, every hand in the room was up. Then, I walked the board the other way. I said, "Now, let's go in through sex, (which is the way I always did when I was drinking and drugging) and the same thing happened. By the time I got to the other side, all the hands were up.

### **A Sexual-Spiritual Split**

So, we realized we had a dilemma. And that's when I coined the term. I said, what this tells me is that we have a sexual-spiritual split. I said, "the loving, the warmth, the connection, over here, and the sex over here--we can't bring them together," probably for deep, unconscious psychological reasons or early programming. It's not too difficult to look at the kind of program that we received, that deep in the unconscious it's as if they can't fit together. So, until we heal that schism, there isn't any chance. And, I felt like I was just beginning the process of healing it myself, even though I hadn't named it yet. I named it at that retreat.

### **Moving Beyond the Barriers**

After that, whether a relationship was for a short period of time or a longer period of time, I brought in both my love and warmth and the sexuality, and I noticed where the barriers were--where it wanted to stop. Then, at those barriers, I used communication skills to move beyond them. I had to stay awake to what was going on in my body. I didn't always realize it then, but I now realize that when the barriers surfaced, that true intimacy meant bringing the barriers out in the open through communication, not running away.

Now that I realized that there was something at play here, I was determined that this was an area that I wanted to get to the other side of. I made a commitment, especially from that retreat, a decision that this was what I was going to do with my life.

### **Removing Judgment**

So many beliefs that I had were starting to be challenged and reconstructed. Some I don't know that I would talk about because other people still have them as really strong beliefs. They might hear what I'm saying in a linear fashion and think that I'm endorsing something that I'm not really endorsing--I'm just taking judgment off. Unfortunately, people get hurt in a culture that has such judgment and such shame around sex in general. Those kinds of things are gigantic shifts from someone who once thought very differently.

### **Energetic Manifestations**

I can accept more of other people in the world around me as just what is so, and just individual manifestations of what I consider a spiritual creation. We are all just manifestations of an energy. We're 99.9% space,

you know. We're atoms and subatomic particles bouncing around. The more I can respect each person to be their own unique manifestation of that, the more I can accept myself as such. The more I can accept myself as such, what a delight! This is also true of organizations, they are vortexes of energy. The realization of this and the varied forms of Energy Psychology we now have available to us, make real transformation possible.

### **Inner Conflict**

I still have some struggles, especially in the area of work. Being committed and passionate about things, I overwhelm myself with doing more than I really can handle, biting off more than I can chew, if you will. Over the last ten years, if there was a personal, psychological struggle, that has been my primary one. It's not that I can't accept it, it's that I don't always want it to be that way. In fact, I want more peace. I want to walk in the woods and I want to play the flute. I don't want to have writing deadlines. I don't want to be preparing for a workshop next weekend. But, there's also the other truth that I do want to be preparing for the workshop. I do want to do the writing. So it's an inner paradox that I'm yet to resolve or come to total peace with. But, I feel closer to third possibility of a sort, which is emerging from the energy of paradox that I write about in *Ritual as Resource*.

Creativity is hard. Exposure is hard. And everything I do has to do with creativity and exposure. That's why I have great respect for artists who struggle with their painting or music because, in that sense, I have to see myself as an artist. I may be a cultural artist, I don't know exactly what you would call it. I'm struggling to create and doing so is always exposing. And with exposure is always anxiety in our culture. Anxiety, and a sense of risk. Sometimes I just get tired of it--but I wouldn't trade my life for any one in the world!

### **Living the Question**

To me, this particular conflict I'm sharing with you, this kind of ten-year-old conflict, it's an interesting one. I saw on the Healing Bridge material, the **Rilke quote** about living the question. That's what I'm doing, I'm living the question with it. What is it all about? Why aren't I playing the flute, or even learning the flute? The truth is, at the moment I don't really know, and that's okay. I'm just going to keep living the question for now.

But, I'm curious, and I'm observing myself as I go through this process because I know a lot about healing and I know a lot about fusing opposites and polarities within oneself and within others, and within organizations. In this particular case, I have had fusion, I've had levels of fusion. And obviously, there's more to go.

### **Not Having the Answers**

I can remember one. I was doing a **Wave Work** session with a woman named Dayashakti (now deceased), who I really had a lot of respect for and write about in the book. In this energy work session I was under intense pressure about all the commitments and so forth. At the time, I was running an Institute. Doing the Wave Work, as the energy moved through my body, a voice came from inside, "I don't have to know the answers." Because I had taken on this responsibility, and because I had these people looking to me, I was feeling, in some kind of transferential way, that I'm supposed to have the answers to where to go next, what they should be doing, what I should be doing.

It was such a great relief to know that I don't have to have the answers. That has stayed with me since. I don't have the answers. I don't know where I'm going, where my work is going. I honestly don't know. I have visions of where I'd like it to go to help me move in that direction, so I stay true to them, but I'm willing to shift to where ever the universe shifts them and me.

That's when the business structure that I had at that time, of people working together for a common purpose, began to disintegrate. They wanted me to "know," and I was no longer in a position to, or wanted to, have answers for things. So, it transmuted. It still exists, I'm still doing a job, but in a different way. And I don't have to have the answers.

### **Nurturing Inner Wisdom**

This gives me almost a better seat to listen, because I'm not always trying to figure out what I'm supposed to know. There's more peace, so I can hear that inner voice make suggestions to me, or create visions as to where I want to move next.

I nurture my innate intelligence by living a very busy life within a structure that resources it. My clinical therapy practice is four days a week, so I'm not responsible to see clients the other three days. The other three days I can work on my other areas of interest, like research, writing, consulting, and creating workshops and so forth. But, I can do it in a mountain setting, away from the city, much more relaxed, working for half a day, then relaxing by the fireplace, or reading, or being with my partner and spending quality time and having nice meals, the other half of the day. And doing whatever spiritual practices I may be doing at a given time. That's how I handle it. By creating a structure that works. Sometimes I adjust that structure by going to the gym and working out three days a week, for health reasons, as well as psychological reasons. And, just showing up for life. I'm always working with individuals, and we're always having inspired conversations. I spend all day long having inspired conversations with wonderful people.

### **A Time of Challenge**

There have been so many difficult and challenging times. Probably five, six years ago now, I had the heart attack and triple bypass surgery. I couldn't work, although I think I made it back to work in record time. That was a very interesting process.

On some levels I was in despair, having been through as much as I've been through with illness over the years, and holding other people's hand through illness and death. I wasn't afraid. When it looked life threatening, I can remember coming to terms with myself, and realizing there was only one little piece of my life that I would feel undone with if I went. It wasn't that significant, so I was okay with it. But the recovery was slow and painful, and put my partner through great discomfort, which I had to watch.

Some of the most difficult parts, both of going through the heart attack and going through the cancer and chemotherapy stuff, was really seeing the reflection in my helper's eyes of what I was putting other people through. I didn't want to be that kind of burden on someone. I don't like it, it's just not my nature, and I'm not accustomed to it.

### **A Lonely Process**

Recovery from any serious illness or loss is a very lonely process. No matter how resourced we are. It can be great to have good friends, or good therapists, all that helps by all means, but it's still a lonely process. Yet, it's like creativity.

I'm glad that I don't live in a linear world anymore, that I can accept the contradictions and live with them. I'm so blessed that I live with my partner Elias, that I have someone who loves me, someone I love. We have mutual respect, we want to help each other. It's a blessing that we have each other to lean on and to support.

At the same time, I can feel enormously lonely. Whatever my life choices are, whatever is crystallizing inside of me, and whatever my inner struggles, I'm sure would be much worse if I didn't have such good friends. I'm blessed that I do. But, that doesn't mean we don't have our very lonely moments.

I learned from a Catholic priest author, Eugene Kennedy, a new understanding of loneliness. He defined loneliness as a continuum in the human condition — that there is no way to not be lonely. We are lonely to the extent that we can't share our inner processes with another human being.

### **Accepting Loneliness**

The reality is that most of us, on some level, have something going on that isn't even crystallized enough to share, or that we are not prepared to share. So, loneliness is just part of the human condition. I've come to accept it as such. It's okay. That doesn't mean it feels good, but it makes sense to me because it's my experience that what he says is correct. I'm as lonely as the amount of things that I can't share with another human being. Particularly if I feel shameful for them and can't share them for that reason, that just makes the loneliness worse, and erodes my self esteem at the same time. Fortunately, there isn't much of that in my life.

It's a daily practice of remembering that what is, **IS**, and its okay. It has become easier and easier, but a daily practice, is still practice. We live in a culture that is so opposite than the real issues of life, and you can't help feeling the energy of the culture and getting caught up in it.

### **Depression and Pain**

The most severe experience of extreme loneliness was after my cancer treatment, and also after a near-death experience that was part of my cancer treatment. This is going back to 1984. I dropped into such an immobilizing depression. It was the blackest hole I had ever seen and it lasted for close to a year. What I put my partner through for that year was really terrible. What eventually got me out of it was an anti-depressant medication. That's what got me going back to school and got me out of that depression. And I was so against it, being a rigid person in recovery. I was so against taking any kind of medication. I had burned out three therapists because after awhile I'd see the look in their eyes, I'd see how helpless they were in trying to help me, and I couldn't go back to them.

I was in such pain. I was like a little old man. I prayed that some day I would have the strength to do the laundry. That was the prayer, that I could just be normal enough to do the laundry.

I came out of that, little by little, in going back to school. I did a lot of prayer during my chemotherapy treatment. I designed a whole meditation for myself, which I still have and share with people, based on various principles that I believed in at that time, and still believe in. It was enormously helpful to me.

### **Inability to Pray**

During the darkest times of this depression, I couldn't pray. The voice that would go on in my head said, "Well, if you can't pray, there is no way out of this." I just couldn't do it. I was too debilitated to even pray. From the minute I woke up in the morning I couldn't wait until nighttime when I could take the sleeping pills so I could go to sleep again. To live through the day was torture. I had to be rushed to the psychiatric emergency room at my cancer hospital. Gil was afraid I was going to jump out the window. They pumped me full of Thorazine and just put me to sleep for four days to give my system a rest.

As I came out of that, and as the cancer appeared to be in remission, and I started going back to school, I had a really deep connection for that little story of ***Footprints in the Sand***. That was a time that I didn't be-

lieve there was a God. When I couldn't pray, it felt like there was no God. Then, when I came out of it and my cancer went into remission, I truly felt carried.

## **A New Understanding**

I got enormous respect for anti-depressant medication, which I've become quite an expert on over the years for myself, and for other people, as to how to use it in meaningful ways, and take the judgment off of it, and so forth. That was a real learning lesson. Also there was the realization that one can go through periods like that. I can go through them, other people can go through them. I can see others going through them and know that there's a possibility that they're going to come out the other end — that this is a period when they can't connect with God, and it's okay. It gave me an understanding of a realm of existence that I would never have known without going through that.

## **Opening**

I would define true healing as an inner feeling of openness. My experience of healing is that it's always accompanied by an inner experience of feeling a little more whole, of feeling a little more open to connection, to the universe, to the trees, to people. In its simplicity, that's the best I could say, that whenever healing happens, so does openness.

For someone who is highly developed intellectually, openness may sound like just a word. When I say openness, I'm saying almost a feeling of a current going through you that nourishes you and makes you feel more alive. It's like a wider bandwidth, in internet terminology.

In my work, I incorporate my understanding of the healing process by being real, by being in the moment, by being with what is, by doing my best to erase judgment of what is. My experience is that this creates a really wonderful environment that is conducive to healing happening organically.

## **Teachers**

My clients have been my teachers in helping me to continue to learn new skills, to deal with the "what is" that they present. When I keep growing in terms of being able to accept more "what is, is," and be present for that, I expand along with whatever new client comes in, with the new thing that I haven't experienced before. They've kind of encouraged me to keep learning new skills, to make it tangible and to facilitate the openings occurring, and to facilitate the fusions of energy when we have polarities going on that are painful.

I have to keep in the creative process of exposing myself every day, and listening to that inner voice in myself so I can be responsive and meet my clients where they are in an expansive way. It is a very exciting process to be engaged in because it's not something that I'm intellectually or consciously doing. It's being present, and allowing for it to take place through me, if you will.

## **Fusing Sexuality and Love**

More than anything else, I think the fusion between our sexuality and our spirituality needs healing in the world. Or, if spirituality is too hard a word for people to digest, or it confuses them, our sexuality and our loving self. The fusion between our sexuality, our sexual urges, our pleasure urges around that, and our loving self. Culturally, I really believe and experience that there is a great schism there that is at the root of much of the world suffering.

To someone who is challenged with this schism, I would share with them a little bit about my own experience,

having worked with it both within myself and with many, many individuals and couples over the years. I've seen it enough to know the reality of it, in both invisible and visible realities. I can share enough with them to help them begin to normalize and accept where they are and where their struggle is in the process for themselves. Perhaps begin to point a way to what the next step might be in moving out of a process of shame-based sexuality, and the inability to fuse the two, to give them a vision to move towards that's realistic to them and their experience.

### **What Most Needs Healing**

It's cultural. One of the first things I do is explain what a cultural challenge it is and that at least they are bringing it out in the open. I really think it's at the bottom of all these religious wars, and what we are experiencing in the world today. I don't think that would exist without this schism between sexuality and spirituality. It wasn't always there. I've got wonderful references of a time before that existed.

### **An Invitation**

I can get kind of corny, being interviewed by the Healing Bridge Project. The enthusiastic part of me wants people to heal along with me. I want to say, "Come on the Bridge! The Bridge is safe, come on! You'll find a lot of traveling companions."