



Archangel Uriel

In the article titled “The Holy Angels,” the author Royce Anthony Gehrels calls Uriel the “Angel of Hope.” As I neared completion of this icon, I felt inspired and encouraged by the gift of hope Uriel offers, especially as we journeyed into the second year of the COVID pandemic. I sensed Uriel wanting to journey with us through this collectively challenging time.

To me, Advent is a journey into the unknown . . . the unknown regions of ourselves and life, and rest there with God and shelter in hope.

May the gift of hope be realized and embodied more deeply in all of us this Advent. ~ *Raffaella Antoinetta Dibauda Iconographer, Colorado Springs, CO*

Raffaella spent several weeks with us at Peacewhisper in 2006 and started the labyrinth. She first laid it out with branches and old logs that were soon replaced with beautiful and colorful pieces of rock broken open with Rick’s old stone mason’s hammer. The labyrinth is well-used and loved and is in close proximity to an ancient Anasazi dwelling.

Raffaella shared, “My time spent at Peacewhisper is something that I treasure. They are my fondest memories.”

Gratitude

We sincerely thank all those who visited this year. Every one of you blessed us and Peacewhisper in your own unique way. We look back over these past fifteen years with such gratitude and awe. What God has accomplished through all of us who have contributed time, energy, love, prayers, and donations still astounds us. We could not have done it without you, and we extend our deepest gratitude and prayers.



The Story Begins

As I remember, it was the 4 or 5 feet of snow still in our yard in April and May that made us look. We had camped and hiked and driven through the Four Corners region for years so *that* was where we started. I’m not sure if it was the amazing canyon geology or the Anasazi history or maybe just the red dirt and green of the juniper and pinyon trees that drew us there, but we could drive there in less than a day and it wasn’t covered in white.

A realtor in Monticello, Utah, found a couple of properties that fit our description of ‘remote.’ Only one was affordable, so in March 1996, we visited what is now Peacewhisper. This was pre-GPS, so the realtor faxed a copy of a BLM map with the perimeter of the property hand-drawn on it and said there would be ‘a big open field on the right where you turn.’ We camped there for a night and the next day headed to Comb Wash to camp for a couple of days. We decided to return and take a second look at the property.

It was an odd-shaped 320 acres. You could get lost in the density of the trees, or you could stand on the edge of a cliff and look to the horizon. We walked the entire 4-mile fence line. It was perfect. Well, not quite perfect. There wasn’t any water and electricity was 5 miles away, both problems surmountable. So on a clifftop facing Ute Mountain, we laid the first rocks of what would become the Hermitage in the autumn of 1996.

Over the years, we explored sites for our future retreat building and settled on the south rim of Lake Canyon. We began construction of the dome first in 2005 and on completion later that year, we began the main retreat building. We chose concrete slump block because it resembles the adobe bricks of the southwest, had two finished surfaces that also worked well as interior walls, and was fireproof.

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Mission Statement

The mission of Peacewhisper is to enhance spiritual growth and inner peace in an environment of simplicity and unique natural beauty through contemplative prayer and practice.

The Unfolding of Peacewhisper

After celebrating our 15th-year anniversary on June 23, 2022, we thought it might be interesting to share Peacewhisper's story. Everyone seems to ask, "Where did you find this place; how did it all begin?"

Board Members' Reflections

In the fall of 1995, Barb and I enrolled in a lay ministry program offered by the Archdiocese of Denver. It was during our 3 years together that she talked about her dream of a retreat center. Barb knew God had a plan and was certain that the name of the center had to include peace.

My first trip to Peacewhisper was over 20 years ago and I remember *not* wanting to go to the desert. I am not a desert person. But, as I turned onto the road near where Peacewhisper is now, there was a palpable feeling that this was a holy place. I only had to get out of the car to be totally impressed with the desert landscape. The view of Lake Canyon was breathtaking! The silence, however, was what impacted me the most.

Every trip to Peacewhisper brings these words to mind: "Be still and know that I am God." And from these desert experiences, I believe the following to be true. "If you cannot go into the desert, you must nonetheless make some desert in your life. Every now and then leaving . . . and looking for solitude to restore, in prolonged silence and prayer, the stuff of your soul." (Carl Carretto)

~ Chris Steuben
Glenwood Springs, CO



"At this Christmas when Christ comes, will He find a warm heart?" ~ Mother Teresa

When I think of Peacewhisper, my mind immediately sprints in several directions. I think of the gentle and loving hospitality of Barb and Rick. I think of the stillness and quiet that requires a period of adjustment for me as I escape the noise and frenzied pace of living and working in a major metropolitan area. I think of the beauty of the land and distant landscapes. I think of the journey my family has taken with Peacewhisper, the place.

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It has been nearly twenty years since first visiting this far-out place. I remember trying to understand Barb's calling and Rick's vision for a building to bring it to life. They were drawn to this land to make the retreat center a reality for others to reconnect with themselves and our Creator. In that time, I have witnessed the realization of the vision. The blooming of Peacewhisper from the seed of the mysterious to the place it is today, seems as natural as the emergence of the flower on a Prickly Pear cactus. A thing of beauty and rest in what some may consider a desolate and foreboding land.

Peacewhisper and the seemingly unending high desert that surrounds it also reminds me that we are merely visitors and caretakers of this place where the ancestors of our indigenous brothers and sisters lived, thrived, created, and became an integral part of the land. A visitor does not need to look too closely to find the reminders of their presence. Their spirits live on in pottery sherds or rocky remnants of their dwellings.

Since our first visits with our small children, our youngest just a baby, we have gotten to know and love this place. We have grown up with Peacewhisper. Over the years, we have gone from sleeping in tents, to staying in the dome, to sleeping in the comfort of the retreat center and casitas. We have developed a bond with the land that makes it easier to understand how Mother Earth is truly a member of our family. It is a connection shared by all of humanity. Fortunately, Peacewhisper is a place that gives us all an opportunity to realize it - to make a connection.

Peacewhisper provides an open invitation for us to get centered and connected in a way that only this place has to offer. Whenever I make my way to this land, I feel like I am coming up for air out of the deep water in which I am swimming. When I arrive and get out of the car, I get the red dirt beneath my feet. I see the ancient and twisted cedars, and I feel the warmth of the sun. It is then that I take a deep breath as if I have broken the surface of the ocean. I breathe it in for the duration of my visit. That deep breath will sustain me until I return to *this place*.

~ Tim Reeber, Tacoma, WA

In the twenty years since I first visited Peacewhisper it has become a familiar and very special part of my life. I remember how unfamiliar it all felt the first time I was there - this remote property Barb and Rick had recently purchased to establish a retreat center. I tried to get a sense of it as Rick led my boyfriend, Greg, and I on dirt paths, through pinyons and junipers, and along rocky ledges. We marveled at the beauty surrounding us, at the canyons and views and stillness. We were especially drawn to the rim overlooking Lake Canyon, and Greg took many photos there. Only a few years later the main retreat center would be completed, with its arched windows and rooftop deck looking out at that breathtaking view! Rick and Barb have told us that we helped plant the idea for locating it where it stands today.

It is incredible to think about what Peacewhisper has become in the years since then. Not only the structures and prayer spaces that have been built and created, but the tangible presence of something more, something very good and life-affirming, fostered by the spirit of service and openness to God's will that is at the heart of what Peacewhisper is. So many people have played a part in making it a reality and have become part of its story.

I have been a member of the Peacewhisper board since it was first formed in 2004, and am privileged to have shared in the journey with our other board members, and to enjoy retreat time with them every year or so. After our most recent retreat this past April, I wrote: *Peacewhisper is a place where I can know again that there is so much beauty in the world - in life. A place to glimpse God's unchanging goodness.*

Much has changed in the years since Peacewhisper began. In *Autumn Meditations*, by Fr. John Bartunek, I recently read how in the midst of the reality of constant change we need anchors. Among many other things, Peacewhisper is an anchor.

~ Susie Lee
Steamboat Springs, CO

“Advent is a journey toward the horizon of hope.”
~ Pope Francis

Joe was called to service to do something he would never seek out to do on his own. But God had opened his heart to say yes when Barb asked him to be on the Board and become part of Peacewhisper in 2005. He didn't know how much it would affect his spiritual journey and guide him even closer to the Lord.

I was asked to join the Board a few years later, much to my delight. I have always realized that my spiritual journey is a lifelong endeavor with its ups and downs. Peacewhisper has been a steady, calming, and peaceful force in my life. Joe and I are so grateful for the longevity of our relationship with Peacewhisper and the fact that its awesome mission is still being fulfilled.



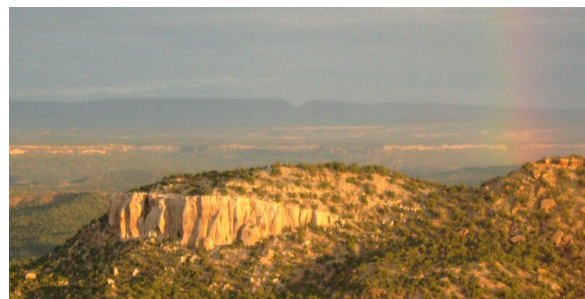
We are so grateful to and for Rick and Barb who, with God's blessing, have kept that mission alive for over 15 years. What a calling they answered that resulted in a dream come true. That dream has brought many people hope. ~ Joe and Nita Purkat
Dove Creek, CO

Other Board Members

We would like to thank Mark Fischer for his wise legal counsel and Sr. George Antoinette for her spiritual wisdom and guidance. Both were active board members for many years.

Website

Check our website for a 2023 retreat schedule and sponsorship opportunities. You may now choose to receive your newsletter via email. Please call, email, or specify on the donation form and include your email.



The Beginning of a Dream



A seed had been planted many years before Peacewhisper even became a thought. A dream and a vision began forming in my heart and my imagination. Although vague for several years, that seed put out numerous shoots within me. As each one rose to consciousness, it became a small part of the bigger picture which I could not envision at the time.

It became more and more clear that God had plans far beyond anything I could depict. Doors began to close, while others opened. I completed my education, just in case. I participated in a 3-year lay ministry program, just in case. I formed my studies to include contemplative prayer and practice, leadership, and spiritual direction, just in case.

The 'just in case' moment came in the realization that Peacewhisper was going to be. We were an incorporated non-profit and had a location for the retreat center. After 25 years of work on our 800 sq. ft. home that became 4,000 in Steamboat Springs, CO, it fully funded the retreat center when sold.

We spent years camping in various spots while building the hermitage and the dome. We lived in the dome while we built the retreat center and casitas. Two weeks before the dedication, the retreat center still lacked nearly all finishes from carpet to light fixtures. *And then*, family and friends came to help and the impossible was accomplished. The dedication date was based on when Fr. Tom Dentici could officiate and when our family could be there. Only later did we realize the significance of that particular date.

What a grand celebration the dedication day turned out to be and symbolic for two reasons. One, it was the feast of John the Baptist, a desert dweller, who prepared the way for Jesus to enter the story and begin his ministry. Secondly, it was symbolic in a personal way. Many years earlier, I shared with Fr. Tom that I thought Rick was an obstacle to my ministry. He very pointedly told me that if my ministry did not arise from within the context of my marriage, I was missing the whole point. So, what I considered a thorn in *my ministry* had now bloomed in the desert as *our* ministry, as Peacewhisper. What a splendid gift, because on that very day we also celebrated 40 years of marriage! I shared that it took the Israelites 40 years to *get out* of the desert and took us 40 years to *get to* the desert.

We pray for all those who enter this desert, that Peacewhisper will be a place that helps prepare the way for God to unfold more fully in their stories.

~ Barb Kollenkark

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Over the next year and a half, the concrete, steel, and block structure grew at the hands of our small crew, Barb and I and the masons, Grant and Roy, with other help as needed. A solar system, septic system, and water cistern were installed. We worked right up to the day of the dedication June 23, 2007.

That was over 15 years ago. I wonder how many 2-hour round trips for water to fill the cistern or 1-1/2-hour grocery runs to Cortez I've made. There are also the hours of firewood cutting, stacking, and burning, none of which seem too burdensome, because *'we get to live here.'* The operations of Peacewhisper are my part of the partnership just as Barb's is the spiritual. I even tend to find my duties somewhat contemplative. The drives are near trafficless and the countryside is beautiful. Waiting while the 500-gallon water tank fills leaves time for a short hike, to read for an hour, or even to just watch the wildlife. The birds are different near the water source than at Peacewhisper and lately I've seen large rafters (flocks) of wild turkeys, and even saw a black bear walk by the truck like I wasn't even there earlier this summer.

In addition to these routine duties we managed over the years to build a labyrinth, a stone Rosary Walk, a Stations of the Cross walk, the Rosary Garden, and finish the Hermitage. All of which were fun to build. But the real enjoyment comes from watching the retreatants as the calming effect of Peacewhisper takes hold, which is why we do this in the first place. So when it's time for them to leave, I think to myself, *'but we get to live here.'*

~ Rick Kollenkark



Peacewhisper is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization and your donation is tax deductible.

P.O. Box 595 Dove Creek, CO 81324

peacewhisper@gmail.com

www.peacewhisper.org

Contacts: Barb and Rick Kollenkark

970-846-8466