

Father David Somerville is a retired U.S. Army hospital Chaplain, and has been canonically resident in the diocese of Georgia since 1996. Fr. David's home of origin is Hillsborough, New Jersey, a New York suburb. Educated at Boston University and the Philadelphia Divinity School of The Episcopal Church, he was ordained in 1969, and served for seven years in parish ministry in the Diocese of New Jersey before going into the army. He and his wife, Sherry, have made their home in the Belle Point subdivision on route 17, three miles north of Brunswick. Fr. David enjoys doing volunteer and supply work for priests when absent. For leisure he enjoys travel, creative writing and model railroading.



Father David Somerville : Reflections

Like a lot of people, I “found” the Episcopal church after yearning elsewhere for a meaningful life in an often imperfect sort of way. But my mistakes were rich with Our Heavenly Father’s compassionate instruction. But let’s not get into that just now, for to do so would be to get ahead of myself.

My setting was the year 1959. During these formative years, I lived as the middle of three brothers in a modest, but hand built, post-war house, on the corner of a piece of farm property that had belonged to my grandfather. We were located on the historic road that ran from New York to Washington’s Crossing. The choice of neighborhood churches to my limited perspective of the time were either evangelical conservative, (Calvinist) or nothing. My parents were estranged from the local community, and had drifted into agnosticism.

I enjoyed the friendship of a new neighbor, Harriett, who had moved to our country world with her husband (no children) from New York City. She was a retired burlesque dancer. We played scrabble together. Sensing the emotional wilderness of my world, Harriet suggested that I attend her Episcopal Church. So I did, and was struck by its beautiful liturgy. The people there were more involved with relationships with each other and had an active, happy social life in their “parish house”. While the evangelicals were preoccupied with their doctrine and personal salvation, the Episcopalians were engaged with each other, letting the Kingdom of God “happen” at its own pace.

I broke loose from the nuclear family that was mine, and attended Boston University in 1961. At the time of my boarding the flight to Boston, I had no idea that the trip was



an exodus, because I had no idea of what a dysfunctional and abusive “Egypt” my family of origin was, and yet, I also knew that my parents were more innocent than any pharaoh could have been. They did the best they could with what they had. I, for my part in the process, never had much interest in organized religion. My issues were loneliness, and what constitutes togetherness-in-trust.



We have all heard that God works in strange ways. It just happened that the rector of Harriet’s parish was weird enough, in the right kind of way, to form a bond of affection with my parents (whose names were Bob and Elizabeth, incidentally). It took about two years for them both to be fully confirmed communicants. My brothers were less affected.

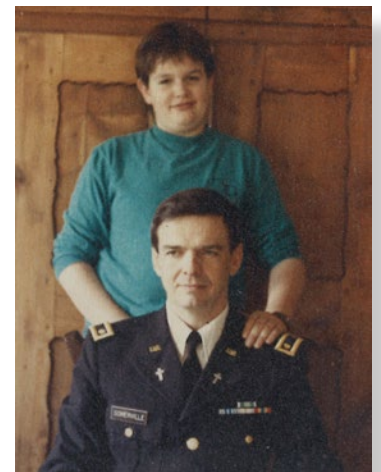


One of the first things I learned after my exodus to Boston was that to be disciplined was not the same as to be bullied and humiliated by a father, and other less innocent people. My father’s probable autism caused him to spend much of his life wondering how other people could be so stupid as rarely to see things from his point of view — especially even his own brother and sister when he was growing up. Of course, in his autism, my Dad’s point of view was the only point of view he knew. So he was as petulant and as arbitrary as anyone I ever knew could be. All of this contributed to the steep learning curve as I encountered the culture of army community. Decision-making in the army staff situation

is systematic and collaborative, not whimsically arbitrary. But in the army, time itself was (and still is) a problem. There is never enough of it.

Yet, nevertheless, I hope the promotion committee had better reasons than just a shortage of time to make a good decision over my file to move me from captain to major. In any case, I was promoted in 1981, and I felt the mixed emotions that should surprise no one when I got congratulated by a peer who was not promoted. Five years later I felt the same emotion in reverse, when I met a peer who was made a lieutenant colonel, and I was left with my regular old major’s rank.

In order for a career in a mostly peace time army to have much in the way of “highlights”, there needs to be a war, and the successful officer in the war needs to have a supportive wife. All this happened before my life with Sherry, so I had neither. I did, however, serve in a hazardous duty zone, Kuwait. The people of Kuwait were as generous as they are wealthy. After Kuwait, I was allowed to go back into my first love, hospital





work. I chose the army community hospital at Fort Stewart, Georgia. Within two years, I met Sherry Lynn Fraser, the daughter of a beloved local country doctor, Whitman Fraser, M.D. In addition to her wonderful voice, Sherry had a guitar and singing ministry at the Liberty County jail.

Sherry and I were married on the summer solstice day of 1992, and ever since I have enjoyed great freedom from the hobgoblin anxieties of my youth. How so? Sherry's values, which lead to her faithful trust in the essential goodness of a damaged world, never change. God the Father of all, who patiently waits for her to join forces in the work of the creation's restoration in his perfect freedom was a reality to Sherry's outlook that would never yield.



The wonderful thing about Sherry, was her giving me permission to do any kind of work I liked, so long as it gave me satisfaction and purpose. This included a time of small-family church work in Woodbine, an interimship at St. Paul's church, Jesup, a priest-in-charge post at Saint Athanasius' church, Brunswick, and frequent supply engagements at The Church of the Holy Nativity.

And so there it is: God's favorite tool for making us what I, for one, have become today, a priest with some wisdom, compassion, and righteousness, the products of my learning curve mistakes which have been worked over by God, and by the Holy Spirit - transformed. So should I be grateful? Yes! Proud? No way!

