

# 'I AM HAVING A BLAST'

## Persistence pays off for author/motivational speaker Andy Andrews

By **BETH OSBORNE**

Correspondent

ORANGE BEACH — Author. Comedian. Motivational speaker.

These are just some of the terms that come to mind when people hear the name Andy Andrews.

His books are bestsellers, he travels the country doing seminars for major corporations, he has headlined for the likes of Joan Rivers and Kenny Rogers, and he has spoken at the request of four United States presidents.

But for the strong group of family and friends of the Orange Beach resident, the words used to describe the man they know have a different ring. Ask them about Andrews, and you'll hear the words "loyal," "humble," "persistent" and "sports enthusiast."

Andrews is an Alabama native, having lived in various places throughout the state as a youngster growing up with a pastor for a dad. While his career successes have taken Andrews throughout the United States and the world, his favorite place is still the city he's called home for more than 20 years — Orange Beach.

"There's no place we love better than here," Andrews said. "If you live in this area, you're living in the best place there is."

Andrews' wife, Polly, originally from Mississippi, agrees.

"We love living at the beach — we love the water, the sand, the fishing, the creatures in the water. We currently have a number of 'sea creatures' in the aquarium, all caught down at the dock," Polly said.

Fishing for creatures is a favorite pastime of the Andrews clan. All three boys — Andrews and his sons, Austin, 7, and Adam, 4, — love to spend time fishing. Just recently, they caught their first speckled trout of the year.

If the Andrews family isn't fishing, they might be playing a serious game of football, one of Andrews' favorite sports.

"I get out in the back yard some afternoons and throw the ball with Peyton and Eli (Manning — aka Austin and Adam), they tell me what I'm



Courtesy of Wendy Troup

**Faculty and staff at**

Fairhope Elementary listen as Andy Andrews talks about "The Lost Choice." Principal Terry Beasley chose the book for a faculty book study and invited Andrews to speak to the staff about the importance of the choices they make.



Courtesy of Andy Andrews

**Andy Andrews** kneels at the grave of an American Medal of Honor recipient who died in combat during the Battle of the Bulge.

supposed to be doing. It's great!" the Indianapolis Colts fan said.

### 'Everything is perspective'

The Andrewses have learned first-hand that living on the beach does have a downside. Their house was destroyed in Hurricane Ivan, and it was two years before they were able to finish rebuilding and move back in. During that time, they lived in three different rental houses.

"We kept remembering that we lost our house, not our home — everything is per-

spective," Andrews said. "Polly and I are very glad that our boys were young. It was a life-shaping experience for them to see how Mommy and Daddy reacted."

There have been other difficult times for the family, too, but Polly said that throughout it all, they always envisioned being close to where they are now.

"I'm not sure you can get there if you don't envision it. For the most part, a fabulous life doesn't drop out of the sky. A saying I like is, 'God feeds the birds, but he doesn't

throw the food into the nests,'" she said.

Leisure time at home with family and friends is treasured by Andrews, who spends an average of seven or eight days a month on the road. When he's not gone, he's likely to be working on an upcoming book or seminar, or talking to local school groups or businesses.

For more than 20 years, Andrews has been entertaining folks with his unique style of comedy intertwined with inspiration and learning by the examples of great figures in history.

### 'The Traveler's Gift'

The author has written numerous books, some with funny but warm stories of his growing up years, and some with serious inspirational messages built into historical fiction tales. His most well-known book, "The Traveler's Gift: Seven Decisions that Determine Personal Success," has been printed in nearly 20 different languages and in Braille, and it ranked second on the bestseller list in South Korea for almost a year.

"We couldn't knock off that little Harry Potter," Andrews joked.

The general manager of the Atlanta Braves baseball team gave everyone in the front office and on the team a copy of the book, and one person with Sonic (drive-in restaurants)

has personally given away more than 1,000 copies.

"It overwhelms me sitting here thinking about it," Andrews said.

The book's principles were the basis of a PBS special entitled "Andy Andrews: The Seven Decisions," and Andrews is currently conducting "Seven Decision Seminars" around the country for companies like Microsoft, General Motors and AT&T.

"I am having a blast. I have even done three of these events for the CIA, which is pretty funny to me," Andrews said.

### Overcoming obstacles

But the successful life didn't come easy for Andrews. By the time he was only 19 years old, he had lost his two biggest supporters — his parents — within a year of each other. His mom died of cancer, and his father died within a year in a car accident. His life took a turn for the worse.

"I made some bad decisions and was homeless before it was a word," Andrews said of those years. At one point, he was spending nights under a pier in Gulf Shores.

"I started wondering, how does one family get happiness and one end up under a pier?"

That thought put Andrews on a quest to learn how suc-

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Successful people overcame their obstacles.

He read more than 200 biographies of successful, influential and happy people and spent time talking to people

on the beach about their fortunes in life. He identified seven principles that all these people had in common — principles which later became the basis of “The Traveler’s Gift.”

“That’s what I used to yank me out of that life,” Andrews said. “They’re principles and that’s why they work. It’s like the principle of gravity — once we get it, we can harness it.”

“When you make decisions based on principles, you don’t have to depend on the luck of the draw.”

He doesn’t just talk about the concept, he lives it.

“These seven decisions are

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*Polly Andrews,  
wife of  
Andy Andrews*

key in my daily life and in everything Polly and I teach our boys,” Andrews said.

## Avid reader

The reading habit that Andrews picked up in those early days still holds true for him, and he lists a number of suggested books to read on

his Web site, [www.andyandrews.com](http://www.andyandrews.com) (free study guides for his books are also available on the site). He reads an average of two books a week, of all genres.

“I think it’s really important to read. The people who accomplish the most are readers. We read all the time with our boys, at least two books a day,” Andrews said.

Jimmy Grantham, owner and team leader of The First Team of RE/MAX of Orange Beach, met Andrews when the two were teenagers. Andrews conducts team coaching for Grantham’s staff, and Grantham said it has



Courtesy of Andy Andrews

**Andrews has shared** his motivational tips with thousands — from teachers to CIA staffers to military leaders.

**AT LEFT:** The writer poses for a photo with pilot Capt. Matt “Soju” Yeater after flying in an F-16 Fighting Falcon.

helped not only in their work life, but also in their home life.

“With Andy, it’s not all about (financial) success. These are tools that make you successful in life, period,” Grantham said.

“Andy helps you overcome the stress out there so you’re

a peaceful person and you can handle things that you think are unbearable,” Grantham said. “Knowing him and where he came from — if it can work for him, I know it will work for anyone.”

“He lives it, he believes it. ‘Persist without exception’ —

that’s one of Andy’s principles. He’s had a lot of adversity in his life but he was bound and determined to make it, and that means a lot,” Grantham said.

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deployed," Andrews said.

One organization close to Andrews' heart is the Special Operations Warrior Foundation (SOWF), which provides college assistance to the children of Special Operations personnel in all branches of the military who were killed in an operational mission or training accident.

Last year, Andrews started working with friend Glen Kaiser, of Kaiser Realty Inc., to put together a seven decisions seminar for Kaiser's staff. They wanted to invite the community, and then decided to make it an event to raise money for a worthy cause.

In November 2006, the resulting seminar raised \$10,000 for SOWF.

"Andy is a remarkable individual who is blessed in many ways," Kaiser said. "I truly believe he's been blessed with the Holy Spirit to do what he's able to do — he's getting some divine intervention."

While he has become an accomplished author, Andrews said he does not like to write. It's the finished product that

he enjoys.

"I don't like writing at all. I love having written. You don't have to like everything you do, but you have to like the result. People who can discipline themselves to do what they don't like, to get what they do like, live a whole different life," he said.

## Family Reading Night

Andrews recently took that advice to students and their families at Bay Minette Intermediate School. A friend, Susan Arnette, teaches gifted students in fourth and fifth grade, and she assigned readings from several of Andrews' books before inviting him to come speak at the school for Family Reading Night.

"We've done 'Socks for Christmas' at Christmas time for several years, and we read excerpts from 'The Traveler's Gift,'" Arnette said.

Students also read "Baseball, Boys and Bad Words," a chapter from "Tales from Saw-yerton Springs," and wrote let-

ters to the author about what they'd read.

Mary Mosley's letter captured the students' reaction: "Baseball, Boys and Bad Words' is the most funny (story) I've ever read, it put my teacher in shock, and it made me laugh until I cried."

## A look ahead

What's in the future for Andrews? He has written a non-fiction book titled "Mastering the Seven Decisions," which will come out in March 2008,

and a "story" book, "The Noticer," which will come out the following May.

Another book, "Island of Saints," is being made into a movie and has a local connection. The book's story of forgiveness is based on the German submarines in the Gulf of Mexico in World War II.

The story takes place in the Gulf Shores, Mobile Bay and Fort Morgan areas.

This fall, Andrews will lead a one-time, three-day "Guided

**"When you make decisions based on principles, you don't have to depend on the luck of the draw."**

*Andy Andrews, motivational speaker*



Courtesy of Susan Arnette

**Haley Thompson** gets an autograph from Andy Andrews during "Family Reading Night" at Bay Minette Intermediate School.

Traveler's Experience" in Orlando, designed to help a small group of people explore in detail how to put the principles in Andrews' books into daily practice for a successful, secure life. For information about the conference, check Andrews' Web site.

While in Las Vegas at The Mirage to do a seminar recent-

ly, Andrews took a trip down memory lane as he remembered being the very first performer on the stage at the hotel in 1989, when he was headlining as a comedian for the Kenny Rogers show.

"Then, I could only make them laugh," Andrews reflected. "Now, I give them something, too."