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What Canst Thou Say?

Friends • Mystical Experience • Contemplative Practice

*You will say, Christ saith this, and the apostles say this: but what canst thou say?
Art thou a child of Light and hast thou walked in the Light, and what thou speakest,
is it inwardly from God?*
—George Fox

Spiritual Healing

Joy, Intention, Prayer and Gratitude

Christine O'Brien

I got Lupus and lots of its entanglements when I was twenty-five. The doctor told my parents and me that I would probably die within the year. I am fifty-three now and have been healed many, many times but not always in the expected way.

I am very sick right now. Sometimes in the middle of the night when I am in pain and can't sleep I find my mind wandering ferociously in darkness. I know this darkness well, and yet I am always surprised by it. It carries me far from my usual equanimity into a terrible land of anger and dis-ease. Fortunately, this frustration doesn't last long with me. In a few days or weeks of illness I relax into the darkness and let it enfold me. I feel I am a boat floating high above my anchor, drifting far out one way and another with the wind and water, but anchored always.

I was resting, again, in this image last night for hours and for the first time asked myself, "What is it I am anchored to?" Strangely, I am anchored and comforted by the surety of my life's change within the continuing change of the earth, of which I am a small yet, for me, important process. I am a process in motion from birth to death. I am like

the grass, springing up at times and then laid low.

The long night is the hardest time for me. If I need something with more energy to think about, I think about colors. I think about the vivid colors that I love and I combine them with each other in ways that make me feel joy. It is a very simple practice with no real outcome except for joy. Thinking and thinking of colors is, for me, a delight.

In the daytime I move slowly from task to task if I am able. I like to work so I keep on. I give up all

things that do not feel healing to me. I simplify, with no sense of loss. Life stripped bare shows its beauty.

It is my intention to have a life separate from my illness, or in spite of it. I feel such joy that, when I am well enough, I can do work that I love. For twenty-four years, I clerked our Meeting, and continue to play a vital role in it. I organize peace festivals, do graphics for this or that good cause, and I paint. I give workshops on lots of things that are important to me. For the thirty-second year, I will again organize

From the Editor:

What Canst Thou Say? has a new look! The Editorial team is very grateful to Judith Detert-Moriarty who volunteered her time and expertise to design a beautiful new style for us.

The new style expresses the mission of WCTS as a worship-sharing group in print. Each issue is like an unprogrammed meeting for worship. Our authors write, as Friends speak in meeting, from within, sometimes very personally, and from their own experience. The new masthead with the upward dove expresses the worshipful, upward-looking spirit of the meeting for worship. The shadowed boxes reflect the presence of Light over the pages, the Spirit over all. We hope you like our new look—Please let us know what you think!

Judy Lumb
Editor for this issue

Circus McGurkis—the People’s Fair. I try to make my life a prayer—a prayer for healed societies and families and spirits.

When I’m getting too weird on my medications, or I’m too sick or tired to work, I go to bed and look at the leaves and sky outside my window. I stare intently at them and then I close my eyes and rest, turning inward toward Spirit, cradled in the “everlasting arms.” Even if this is all I can do, it is all I need to do. To hold and be held.

Gratitude is essential. Gratitude lifts my heart and helps me see the beautiful light shining above the darkness. Each of us is a beloved child of God. It is true that parts of me are ill, but all of me is held by Spirit. It is hard to remember this if I am not whole, so I work on feeling whole. I use leaves and sky a lot. I am extremely grateful that we have sky-clad leaves and an atmosphere with wandering clouds.

The leaves, besides being beautiful, remind me of the cycle of life and death. Every spring, here in Florida, the leaves fall off my trees, pushed off by the baby leaves, and for two or three weeks I see the naked sky. It shows me again that everything has its season, and I am glad to share this journey with the leaves. The clouds remind me that you just never know. There are surprises at every turn and almost anything is possible. I am comforted that nature will always work no matter what we do.

While it is true that I am “better living through chemistry” and drugs keep me alive, I believe most anything can heal you on some level. Joy, intention, prayer and gratitude are the most powerful healing agents.

Most of my life I have handled my illness on my own. Recently I

have learned to accept help from my beloved and have become brave enough to let my meeting and my friends know when I am ill. I know they hold me in the Light every day and I feel held up and supported always. I don’t go out much, but I live very happily and am highly entertained within my house and garden. I have fabulous books on many subjects and fascinating paintings and pottery, exotic seedpods and tiny animal skulls from the garden. I can wander around my home and feel as though I have visited an amazing and meaningful museum.

I have been blessed in my life, since childhood, with a continuing sense of the Presence. When I spin away from it in illness of mind or body, I must turn back to it again in the depths of my spirit. This underlying gift, always within my reach, if I am true enough, has blessed my life in every aspect. I feel certain that the Presence within has an incredible healing power. I don’t know if it heals my body, though certainly the calm stillness in my center must help. I do know I am

healed in spirit, as I turn toward the divine breathing.

My family gathered here last weekend for a reunion. The best part was when my sisters and I were singing the old hymns, holding the resonating harmonies a long, long time, really sinking into all the old chords. Feeling those chords vibrate, being in them, the voices blending as they always have, in that moment I was absolutely healed. In that moment, the wings of the Beautiful enfolded us and changed all to Light.

Christine O’Brien recently retired from being clerk of St. Petersburg Friends Meeting for 24 years. She has been an activist since she was a teenager.

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Healing Old Wounds

Judith Weir

Although my ex-husband and I were divorced, we maintained contact. I was his first wife and then, twenty years later, he was going

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through his fourth divorce. I was worried about him. He seemed depressed and I thought he might commit suicide, not directly, but perhaps by driving carelessly and getting into a serious accident. I decided to pray for him in a way I'd learned some years before in my Al-Anon group. "Pray for the bastard," they'd said. "Pray for him to have what you want for yourself." It had been a powerful prayer the first time I used it, so maybe it would work again.

I prayed for him twice a day from before Thanksgiving until Christmas. The prayer was a simple one. I wished that he would be filled with joy, that God's love would run through him and out into the world around him, that he would see the beauty of that world more clearly, and that he would deepen his appreciation and love for his neighbors, family, and friends. For the last two weeks I also added wishes that he would learn to walk through his fears and that he might open to receive and follow God's guidance.

The prayer had an effect similar to what I'd experienced before. I could feel it changing me. Whether it was affecting my ex, I had no idea. Slowly, all the anger and resentments I felt toward him were dissolving. I had not realized how strong they still were or how deeply I'd held them. Now, as my heart grew lighter, I was able to see how destructive these feelings had actually been to me.

A friend and spiritual counselor teased me, saying "You always choose such difficult things to do." He suggested I create a ceremony to mark the end of my period of praying. I decided to have the ceremony at

Christmas dinner and invited my ex to join our extended family. No one in the family knew anything about my prayer or about the ceremony I'd planned.

Between dinner and dessert I asked everyone to gather in a circle in the living room. I lit a candle in the middle of our circle and said a few words about how this was the darkest time of the year and that it was good to remember the light we each had inside ourselves and also to reach out to each other with that light. Then I brought out a small wooden mouse that had been part of a cheese board my ex and I had received as a wedding gift more than thirty years before. We had named the mouse Piff, short for epiphany, the day on which we'd been married. After explaining this I asked each person there, as a way of sharing our connections and being aware of them, to hold Piff for a short time and then pass him on to the next person in the circle. Piff was passed around the circle, even to the one- and three-year-old grandchildren. After Piff had been around I gave him to my ex, blew out the candle, and we went back in the dining room for dessert. My ex was visibly moved and held back tears as he thanked me profusely.

Several weeks later my middle daughter came to me and said, "Mom, something's changed between you and Dad and I just want you to know it makes a big difference to me."

Judith Weir is a member of Twin Cities Friends Meeting and a writer of poetry and memoir. She has followed a daily meditation practice for over thirty years.

Deciding Not to Pray

Mariellen Gilpin

For a quarter of a century I have been mentally ill. My process of healing from the mental illness has been stepwise. This is a story about one of those steps.

I thought of the hallucinatory pattern as a kind of cycle: first I would have tactile hallucinations, and shortly they intensified in what I called the unseen lover experience; shortly I began conversing with the unseen lover. Once I began hearing voices, it was an extreme effort of will, coupled with heavy medication, to return to reality. My effort for many years was simply to interrupt the cycle. By 1988 I had built up a good track record for interrupting before I heard voices. I was able to cut back on the medications.

I began to recognize I needed to stop doing things that brought on the tactile hallucinations in the first place; I needed to take my hand off the trigger. One of the most powerful triggers of hallucinations was the hardest to face: praying made hallucination almost inevitable. I tried praying less. I tried praying in the morning instead of at bedtime. I tried praying only with a partner. I tried eliminating healing prayer in favor of other kinds of prayer I thought might be safer. My husband labored patiently with me, suggesting that my trigger was like having an allergy to chicken: my task was not to eat less chicken, but to avoid chicken altogether. I resisted; after all, I was trying to build a healthy relationship with God, and prayer was essential to that. Wasn't it?

The crisis came one night when I carefully prayed only "safe" prayers

and went to sleep. About an hour later I woke in a state of high rebellion: I wanted to pray for healing, and do so at once.

I was still three-quarters asleep, but I prayed for healing. At once the tactile hallucinations began. The unseen lover experience was seconds away. I woke up fully. *Now I've done it*, I thought. I turned to God for help.

"God," I prayed, "I'm asking you to help me stop these hallucinations tonight. I admit to you I am totally responsible for being in this fix. I woke up rebellious and deliberately chose to pray for healing; I was still asleep when I prayed, but the decision was a conscious one. I have to face the fact that "safe" prayers trigger me to pray for healing, and therefore prayers of any sort trigger hallucination. This is the hardest thing I'll ever do, but I am going to have to not pray at all for a whole year, in order to give myself a chance to heal."

Five years. That was the thought that came to me. It was a thought; it didn't come from the part of my brain that I can feel when I am hallucinating. The notion of not praying for five years would never occur to me unaided; it was a completely horrid, impossible concept. I listened, and in the silence I felt rather than thought a complete point of view on my crisis of decision: I had free will; I could do whatever I wanted. A five-year commitment not to pray was what God wanted of me. My not praying would please God. What would please God was also taking care of myself. No words had been exchanged; I simply sensed an Attitude. The tactile hallucinations went on.

I believed. "Five years!" I said to God. "One year is impossible to conceive all by itself. Could I make

that a one-year commitment that I renew five times? It'd be a lot easier to face." I was bargaining; I admit it. I listened.

Five years. The thought was in my mind again. "I hear you," I prayed. "I'll do it because you asked me." I felt a need to state my agreement in its totality. "I agree not to pray to you for five years." I paused. This was the last prayer for a long time, and I wanted to say what was in my heart before I hung up the phone. "I want to dedicate every act

I learned to pray with my life, and I grew stronger and wiser day by day. I never felt alone; God walked that journey moment by moment by my side.

I do in the next five years to you. Help me pray with my life, since I won't be using words. Every time I choose not to pray is really going to be me saying, 'I love you,' because I couldn't possibly do this just because it's best for me. I'm doing this because you want me to, and I want to please you." The tactile hallucinations stopped, and I slept.

All the next day I struggled to change my mindset. I talked to my husband, who encouraged me. (Actually, he was ecstatic.) I talked to a friend, who offered to lay hands on me and pray. I don't remember a word she said, but I felt better. So it came time for bed, and I realized in my struggle to come to acceptance I had given no thought to what I was going to put in the place of my nighttime prayers. I took a deep breath and rolled over into sleep position. There would be no nighttime prayer substitute; I would simply go to sleep. In that instant, a wave of peace washed over me and saturated my

soreness and grief. I knew God was telling me I was doing the right thing, and I slept peacefully through the night.

I wish I could say I kept my word to God faithfully and didn't pray at all for five years. Actually, I made many mistakes, but prayer and hallucination became something that happened monthly rather than nightly. When I no longer had to sort out where reality was every morning, my emotional stamina grew by leaps and bounds. With my doctor's help I was able to make not one, but two

medication cuts in the next few months, and within a year eliminated one medication entirely. I learned to pray with my life, and I grew stronger and wiser day by day. I never felt alone; God walked that journey moment by moment by my side.

A year later a Bible study group of very sweet, well-meaning people told me in authoritative tones my spiritual experience was of the Devil, and of course I should be praying. I knew I was mentally ill and might well have been misled, and I deeply missed praying. It was a painful time. But I thought about all the gains I had made and remembered Jesus said to the Pharisees, *A house divided against itself cannot stand.* The devil, if devil there were, would not bring about so much good in my life in order to bring about evil in the end. *By their fruits shall ye know them.* I decided mentally ill or not, I had indeed heard the voice of God—and heard it right the first time.

A week or so later, the group told me not praying was a sin. But when I pray I hallucinate, I explained. They replied hallucinating was a sin. *Thanks a lot*, I thought—as usual, too polite to speak up. *Whether I do what you want or not, I'm sinning. That*

doesn't leave me a whole lot of choice, does it? I could not continue to associate with people having such toxic beliefs. I believed in the truth of my own experience, and I quit the Bible study.

Within six years, I was able to pray without hallucinating. Why did it take six years instead of five? I certainly don't fault God for not being able to count. A lot of changes had to take place in me before God could restore prayer. But God said five years, not forever, and God was faithful. Glory be to God!

Mariellen Gilpin is a member of Urbana-Champaign Meeting, IL. She celebrates the many ways God has helped her deal with mental illness.

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A Numinous Presence

Alison Lohans

It was early December, 1984, the eve of my fifteenth wedding anniversary. For thirteen of those years, my husband Michael and I had been enduring both the trials and the fervent, breath-holding hopes of living with his testicular cancer.

Clinically, he had two types of cancer. Mercifully, perhaps, it was the less malignant strain that kept recurring, which bought us thirteen and a half unexpected years following that first horrific exploratory surgery. During those years the cancer traveled its erratic route through his body: it claimed a kidney and two or three ribs; it lodged itself in his spine three times, made repeated visits to his lungs, and wreaked havoc when it reached his brain.

Yet over those years of surgery, radiation and chemotherapy, my husband consistently kept winning; the cancer always went into remission. And so, he completed a Ph.D. and went on to a much-longed-for university teaching position. Within these bouts of relative wellness our lives had

a semblance of normalcy, regularly punctuated by the stresses of major illness. Michael took good physical and spiritual care of himself. We knew that many people were praying for him/us.

However, there came that inevitable downward spiral. The human body and spirit can only endure so much. Likewise, a terrible toll had been exacted on our relationship. A third close call with paralysis in 1983 was remedied by reconstructive spinal surgery. Brain surgery in 1984 severed a nerve and left him unable to read. Four months later, a mechanical breakdown in his spine once again sent him to the hospital. This time surgery didn't work. The incision, made in irradiated skin, did not heal. Confined to a wheelchair, my husband lost the will to live. By December, he had pneumonia so severe he was hallucinating and unable to recognize anyone. Both of our mothers and his brother came from California and Oregon into a frigid Canadian prairie winter to be with us. We suspected it might be the end.

The eve of our anniversary found him on oxygen and talking to "people in the air." It found me terrified, emotionally raw with nerves stretched taut, and with an academic deadline that could not possibly be met. With this came an overwhelming feeling

of having been betrayed, as I confronted the reality—my husband might very likely die soon. He had not recognized me for the past few days. Recent years had been so acutely stressful that he, in his misery, had become emotionally abusive and I, the sole caretaker

outside the hospital, had become the victim. It was a scenario of anger and resentment, instead of one in which loving goodbyes could be said.

Daytime temperatures hovered at -20 °F, a potentially killing cold. Fern-like frost patterns sketched their beauty across windowpanes. The sun shone with a stark, revealing purity on the vast prairie whiteness, and ice crystals glittered in the air. In my husband's hospital room, the hissing suction drew great globs of mucus from his lungs while oxygen flowed in, and rust-brown urine filled the bag. "His kidneys have failed," the nurse told me. "He may not last the night." I told her that he only had one kidney.

We kept vigil in his room: myself, his mother, and his brother. My own mother was caring for our child in our home. One of Michael's friends (and department head) came for a visit and saw the gravity of the situation. Ernie, a devout Mennonite, offered to come back later to read from the Bible, and to pray for a gentle passing. We all thought this would be a very good thing. And so Ernie left, to return at midnight with a thermos of coffee, homemade bran muffins, and a Bible. I don't remember the verses he read; they weren't familiar to me. And then Ernie prayed, letting Michael know that if it was time, he should feel free to go, with our love and blessings.

We all felt it: the Light of that numinous Presence, that shift, that mystery.

A numinous Presence hovered in the room. There was a sense of precarious balance. And then came a *shift*, followed by a feeling of peace.

Needing to go to work later that same morning, Ernie went home. I lay in the hospital bed with my husband, exhausted and knowing this might be the end—but also feeling that if and when it happened, things would be all right. A few hours later,

Michael opened his eyes. He was lucid and wanted milk. Due to his congestion, we gave him tea instead. Later, in his feeble hand, he scrawled some thoughts he'd been having about his medications onto a paper towel. It was our fifteenth wedding anniversary.

Michael died the following July. He waited for my birthday and then, within two weeks, let go. During

those precious seven months, we caught up on all the important things that had gone unsaid. Together, we learned some wheelchair basics which allowed me to take him for drives in the car, and for overnight home visits. Love returned to our time together.

Since then paths have diverged, and I no longer see Michael's relatives or Ernie. However, in occasional phone calls and correspondence, that "visitation" is mentioned every now and then. All these years later, I am still humbled by that grace and power, and by the hugeness of that loving, healing gift.

Alison Lohans grew up in Fresno CA Meeting, and for many years has been a member of Prairie Meeting in Regina, Saskatchewan.

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About a dozen years ago I became critically ill and I have a vivid memory of looking down on my self on the bed; doctors and nurses worked on that body, and I felt held in such secureness, joy and contentment, and sense of the rightness of things....The crisis passed and I was filled with wonder at the newness of life....There were times when truly out of the depths I cried; I had no reserves of strength left, either physical, emotional or spiritual, but I never completely lost the memory of being held and the wonder at being alive. Gradually the wounds healed: old griefs as well as disease and operations.

—Jennifer Faulkner, 1982 (from *Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice*)

A Garifuna Healing

Judy Lumb

In 1987 I went to Belize for a couple of months—a complete rest—to recover from chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS). I didn't recover, but I developed an interesting life within my relatively severe limitations, centered around desktop publishing from my hammock. Eleven years later I was healed in a Garifuna dugu (an indigenous ceremony).

The Garifuna people are an Amerindian-African mix with very strong cultural traditions. I was honored to be invited to a dugu because it is a private, family affair to honor ancestors.

I went to the dugu—to Barranco, the farthest south Belizean village on

the coast—assuming that I was an objective outside observer, unrelated to the dugu. By the end of the ten-day dugu I learned that everyone present is a participant whether they want to be or not. The dugu is a family reunion where both living and dead family members are invited. The ancestral spirits (*ahari*) are invited via the drumming and dancing directed by the traditional priest (*buyei*) and a thanksgiving dinner that is prepared for the ancestors. The ahari appear by spirit possession of their living relatives. They announce themselves and give messages to their living family members, often scolding them.

Initially, although I was invited and everyone did their best to make me feel welcome, I still felt like I was intruding. I tried to blend into the woodwork to be as inconspicuous as

possible. The first hint that my attitude was changing was when I wondered if my ancestors could hear these drums. I thought of my grandmother's great grandmother (Grandma Hollenbeck). I had a connection with her because I finished a quilt that she had started around 1900. I also knew that she had a shop and smoked a pipe.

A little while later I was watching the dancing from the northeast corner of the traditional temple (*dabuyaba*) when someone pointed out there was smoke coming in, so everyone moved out of that corner. The next time I looked at that empty corner, there was an older woman sitting there smoking a pipe. Never have I seen anyone in Belize smoke a pipe! I took that as an answer to my question—indeed Grandma Hollenbeck could hear these drums. The pipe

symbol appeared again as Mimi came asking for her pipe, saying she wouldn't eat the thanksgiving dinner until she had smoked her pipe.

I truly became a participant the night that I took spirits home with me. I woke up feeling a cold, blue wind over me and I heard murmurs coming from the next room. People who have been possessed describe this cold, blue wind coming at them and then they remember nothing until they wake up again later. I wondered, was a spirit coming to possess me? After lying still for awhile, I got up and went into the next room. I saw my friend Miss Petty sitting in a chair as if she were praying. I don't know how, but I knew she wasn't real and the image was there to reassure me. The murmurs were coming from lots of puffs of smoke all around the ceiling and tops of the walls.

When they heard about my spirits, everyone was very concerned—afraid for me. They all asked me what time I left the dabuyaba that night. It seems that one is supposed to get smoked by the buyei before leaving to avoid taking the spirits with you. Of course, I didn't know that and, besides, I didn't think any of that applied to me!

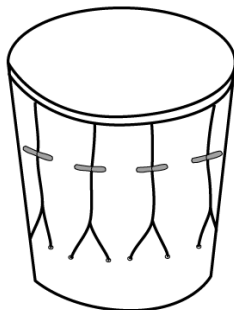
The next day I moved to a different house and the spirits moved with me. When I closed my eyes to sleep, the room opened up into the size of the dabuyaba with murmurs all around the ceiling. I opened my eyes to remind myself I was in a small bedroom, but then, when I closed them again, the room opened up again. When I reported this to my friends, they said, "Oh Judy, those spirits are going to molest you. We

will have to get rid of them. We'll smoke the house and give you a bath." The smoke was copal and the bath was a bucket with an herbal infusion that I poured over myself. From that time I have not seen the spirits. While my Garifuna friends were very afraid for me, those spirits were a great gift to me, the gift of experience.

Out of that dugu I was led to organize a work-shop. In fact I was pulled, kicking and screaming, "I cannot do that!" I could barely walk and had to spend all but about 4 hours each day in bed or hammock—how could I organize a workshop? But each day I was given another piece—the next step toward the indigenous people co-managing the adjacent Sarstoon-Temash National Park with the government.

That is another long story, but suffice it to say that I fulfilled an essential initial role and then appropriate leadership arose from that workshop. Six years later this project is in full swing with significant funding and full participation of the five communities. I follow the progress but have had no real involvement. I now believe my following that leading, however reluctantly, led to my healing two years later.

I had thought that going to a dugu was a once-in-a-lifetime event, but I was invited to a second one, and this time I came prepared to participate. I was invited four ways—in person, via telephone, via email, and from a spirit named "Tony." Tony speaks through his niece, Aura, who speaks only Garifuna and Spanish, but when she is possessed by Tony, he speaks



English to me. He told me he was very pleased with my help on another project and that he thought I needed help. He would like to help me, if I would allow it. He told Aura which herbs to give me and then said he would see me in August at the dugu.

I dragged myself to Barranco a week before the dugu was to begin, totally exhausted, and was resting in my hammock. I heard the women were going to clean the dabuyaba in preparation for the dugu that day at 4 pm—Thursday, August 6, 1998. I didn't think I could do anything, but at least I could see people because I hadn't been out at all since I arrived. I walked in and started collecting soft drink bottles, sweeping, and spreading fresh sand on the dirt floor—an hour and a half later I was still on my feet. For thirteen years I had not been able to stand and talk at the same time!

That night there was a rehearsal. When the drums started, Miss Petty and her daughter Rose said, "Come on, Judy, we're going to dance." I thought, "What, me dance?" I got up and soon got the hang of it. When my legs felt like they were going to collapse, I just said a little prayer, "Just let me get through this one dance," and the feeling went away.

Aura has had a stroke and is paralyzed, but when Tony takes over, he dances—like a man! When I encountered him at the dugu, he said, "Judy! I am dancing!" I said, "So am I, thanks to you!"

I danced throughout the whole dugu, day and night. It was a miracle! When I returned home no one recognized me because my whole countenance had changed.

“Oh, it’s you, Judy! You look so different—so light, so bright—what happened?”

It is now five years later and my reprieve continues. I go back to Barranco as often as I can to express my gratitude.

Judy Lumb is a member of Atlanta Friends Meeting, but lives in Belize, Central America, where she edits, publishes, and writes.

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The Crack Addict’s Tale

Anne C. Highland

He was trying so hard to overcome his addiction to crack cocaine. Each week we talked about his life—his present, his past. Despite some intense dramas, he became stronger as the months went by. He would give up crack; he would slip; he would tell me about it; he would try again. He stopped seeing his addict friends. He was clean for longer periods.

Then one day he phoned me, with a voice so different that at first I did not recognize him: “Someone broke into my house and stole my stamp collection. It must have been someone I know very well to know where it was and to know that it was the only valuable thing I had. He only took that; he didn’t mess up the house or anything. It had to be one of my addict friends. But which one?” He went to bed and stayed under the covers for a day and a night, feeling numb and betrayed.

When he came in for his next session he was still shaken. “I don’t like what I’m feeling,” he told me. “If I find out who did it, I’m afraid

A Physician on Healing

David Nicklin

A few years ago, I proposed to do medical research on the role of spirituality in healing from illness. I am now grateful that I didn’t get the grants to do that research. As I grow, I experience the role of the Spirit in people’s lives as having much more to do with healing, rather than curing. As such, it has much more kinship to art, than to the hard science of medicine, which is the coin of the realm where I work. Researching it: trying to attach numbers to it and pin down the ways that it changes people’s physical health, longevity, and health outcomes is like measuring the length and curvature of the smile on the Mona Lisa—a bit of an odd activity that misses the entire point.

I find increasingly that the Spirit is present whenever and wherever I can notice. But is also unspeakable, and that manifesting the Spirit through love for the patients I care for is enormously more effective and rightly ordered than talking with them about it, or trying to measure how it has changed their physical outcomes. I also think that it does not change biomedical outcomes (cures) all that much—though it makes all the difference in healing, particularly when there is suffering, and no cure. I talk (or try to make myself listen, actually) if they raise the issue of God, but mostly I try to love, and heal them, as best I can.

David Nicklin is a family practice physician and a member of Central Philadelphia Meeting.

I’m going to hurt him.” Of course we talked about alternative ways to deal with his anger, but we both knew that the code of the streets is very direct.

A couple of months later, I got another emergency call from him. “I’m doing fine,” he assured me. “But I just got a call from one of my friends. He says he’s about to commit suicide. I said I’d be right over, but I wanted to talk to you first. He’s been off crack for a few days; he’s trying to turn his life around. How do I keep him from committing suicide?”

I told him that there is nothing that is guaranteed to work, but I outlined the approach that I use with people who are at such a crossroad. I emphasized the value of his love for his friend, which can often make the difference between life and death in this situation.

He left a message for me the next morning: “My friend’s going to be okay. We’ve got a lot of things planned for the next few days.” At our next session, he told me how he had succeeded in saving his friend’s life. His eyes were soft; he liked the role of healer.

Two weeks later he told me that he had traced the sale of his stamp collection through one of the dealers he knew. The person who had sold his collection was the friend who had been suicidal. He asked me, “How can I harm someone who has shown me how deep his pain is?”

Anne C. Highland is a clinical psychologist in private practice in Philadelphia. She attends Gwynedd Meeting. She is writing a book from her experiences.

Learning, Loving, and Accepting

Linda Loftus

My mother was born with normal hearing but started losing her hearing when she was in her twenties. By the time she was in her fifties she had lost all of her hearing. When I was young, hearing loss was not understood and the current technology was not available. We rarely talked about her hearing loss and the impact it had on her life, but we could see some of the frustrations she dealt with. Three of her four children inherited her hearing loss, and only through our own experiences can we begin to understand some of her frustrations.

She wore hearing aids to get as much sound as she could, but it was not enough to carry on a conversation. At family gatherings someone would try to keep her in the conversation by writing what was being said. By the time we finished writing, the subject had changed and she was contributing comments to topics that we had finished discussing. She attended church even though she could not hear what the minister was saying. It was only in the early 80's, when a new minister gave her handwritten copies of his sermon, that she could understand the message. She attended her children's school functions, many of which were musical in nature.

When she was sixty-nine she had a cochlear implant. This opened up the world for her. She told the minister, "It was like being in a bottle and someone took the top off." She could hear in quiet situations. Now when we visited in her home we could carry on a conversation with her with little effort. She still

struggled in noisy situations, but it was so much better than before. Everyone was elated with her ability to hear again. When I was little I used to pray that there would be a cure for her hearing loss. My prayer was answered!

She continued to take advantage of technology when she started using the TTY, a telecommunications device for the deaf. My father was dying of cancer when they purchased it. She took over telephone communication. Until then, she relied on my father to make appointments with the doctors and talk with the children. After my father passed away, she moved to a senior citizen apartment complex and became fairly independent. She could not drive—that was her only dependence on others.

My older brother Jim and his wife Sondra bought my mother a computer for her 80th birthday in 1999. My niece and nephew helped her learn how to do things on her computer. She soon learned to send instant messages and birthday cards, play card games, and search the web

for information. She and Jim talked daily using instant messages. They could keep up on what was happening with each other daily. Jim said the computer brought him closer to her, and he relished the conversations they had. Sondra said many times that my mother had a wonderful sense of humor, and that it came through in their daily chats. I lived a distance away and always looked forward to seeing her email address when I turned my computer on to check my mail. The computer allowed her daily contact with her family and she loved it!

In January of 2001 she had a debilitating stroke. She was paralyzed on her right side, and her speech was difficult to understand. We made the decision to place her in a nursing home. It was difficult for all of us to see her this way, and the fact that communication was limited once again, this time due to her speech, was hard on all of us.

We missed our daily communication with her and sensed she did too. We remembered how much

Tell Us Your Stories!

What Canst Thou Say is a worship-sharing group in print. Its richness comes from the generous sharing of readers with one another. WCTS has a vision—we want to tell the world God is much more various and wonderful than our skeptical culture allows. We hope to help Friends be tender and open to the Spirit. We need your experience—it may be just what someone else needs to know!

Articles that best communicate to our readers generally focus on specific events and are written in the first person. There is a special richness when the writer goes beyond describing the experience and tells how it has changed her or his attitude or behavior.

We welcome submissions of 350-1500 words. Please send your submissions by email to m-gilpin@uiuc.edu. If unable to send by email, please send a diskette in Word or generic text format, or typewritten copy to WCTS, 818 W. Columbia, Champaign, IL 61820.

With joyous expectation we look forward to receiving your contribution to our worship-sharing group in print. —The Editorial Team of WCTS: Kathy Tapp, Pat McBee, Mariellen Gilpin, Eleanor Warnock, Judy Lumb

fun she had on her computer, so the decision was made to put her computer in her room. My younger brother, Curt, tried to write an email as she dictated, but this proved too difficult, as he could not understand what she was trying to say. Curt came in every day after work and printed her email so that she could read it. He tried to teach her how to open her email, but again this was too frustrating for her. But as time went on, she started watching my brother open email.

One day, she turned the computer on, entered her password to get online, and opened her email on her own. It took an hour or more for her to write two or three lines and send it to someone. The messages were somewhat garbled like her speech, but most of the time we could understand what she was trying to tell us.

Ten months after her stroke, she sent this email: "Hi Jim And Linda — I add not knew get Punkin Patch. I the anew I lo going go lost. To Curt get came and last lost. ..."

That day she was telling us that she did not get to go on a trip to the Pumpkin Patch with the other nursing home residents. I wish I could say that her email improved as time went on, but it didn't. She always spelled her name and her children's names correctly. I was satisfied that we could continue our communication and that we could continue to share our love for each other. I printed all the email she sent

and have many of them in a folder in my desk. They represent what she lost, but also what she accomplished. She passed away last summer, but the computer gave us the opportunity to see her tenacity for learning, loving, and accepting wherever she was in life.

I lost my job teaching students with mental disabilities this spring, in large part due to my own hearing loss. My self confidence has been shaken. But I remember my mother during family meals. She did not retreat when we were talking. She sat and tried to "listen" as best she could. Later in life, she embraced new technology. I am trying to follow her lead in learning and reaching out for new opportunities. Writing helps me to remember her and, hopefully, to educate others about hearing loss. I, like my mother, prefer to use the computer to communicate with family and friends. I feel more comfortable reading about what is happening in their lives instead of listening. Yet, I do not want to retreat and become a hermit. My mother has been an inspiration and a hero to me. It was through her tenacity, determination, and belief in God that she instilled in me the desire to make her proud. Healing has already started, because I am exploring new paths and opportunities. It is exciting!

Linda Loftus is a friend of a Friend, a member of a Presbyterian Church in Elkhart, Indiana.

Healing from Hurts

Nancy Whitt

When she was almost ten, I "lost" my niece, Ann Marie. We were soulmates from the day she was born—I walked laps around the house with her on my shoulder when she cried. I heard her say her first word ("bird"), introduced her to poetry, feminist spirituality, and to the cookie store; she introduced me to the wonders of rocks and dogwood blossoms. She and I were joint parents of Sojourner Truth, a black Chihuahua, nicknamed "Soji," whom we had rescued from animal adoption. For years we sang our special songs in the car when I picked her up from day care or school. I also sang lullabies as I rocked her for hours. Nobody else would listen to me sing, but when I tried to put Ann Marie in bed, she would say "rock-rock," asking me to continue.

At a deep level, we did not know we were not immediate family, but when Ann Marie's mother got a job in Iowa, reality struck. She said to me as she was facing the move, "You help me be my *self*." The grief for both of us, mixed with fear and anger, is impossible to describe. I know experientially what it feels like to have a child ripped away. The family dysfunction involved did not allow for open expressions of grief except with each other, and that made things worse.

Ann Marie's healing was a long, difficult process, and is her story. How did I heal? I could not have done it without Shirley, my Quaker women's group, and a nurse who used touch therapy. Shirley was a wise older counselor whose daughter

The Elizabeth Ann Bogert Memorial Fund for the Study or Practice of Christian Mysticism makes annual grants of up to \$1000. The deadline for proposals is March 1, 2004. For additional information, inquiries may be sent to the secretaries:

*Michelina and Vinton Deming
4818 Warrington Avenue
Philadelphia PA 19143*

had died at the time Ann Marie was leaving. We shared rage and grief with each other, not fearing to express whatever feelings we had, including a fantasy of machine-gunning everyone in her church on Easter Sunday. Having someone understand so deeply helped.

Shirley told me it was OK to share my grief with Ann Marie, allowing me to show her my tears without overwhelming her with the depth of my feelings. I allowed her to cry in my arms, when she was not allowed to express her sadness to anyone else.

At times, I could not go on. There's the Christian story, which had seemed sort of maudlin, about one set of footprints in the sand because Jesus was carrying the narrator of the story when she or he couldn't do it for her or himself. That's what the Birmingham Friends women's group did for me. I could let myself spiritually rest in them, as if they had formed a web with their arms that I could lie in. Meeting each Sunday night in my apartment, they were empathetic and affirming, playing the role also of my reality checks—my feelings were appropriate to the loss.

Finally, at a yearly meeting gathering, I asked the nurse Sharon Annis for a therapeutic touch session. She discovered in my throat a terribly clogged place, my grief that I couldn't let out, that would have come out in howls of anguish. Her care was soothing and healing. Later, when I was coming out of the effects of an anesthetic, the image of Sharon appeared as the Goddess looking out for me.

For me, God/dess is immanent. S/he comes through others. I'd been saved throughout childhood by always having one person, family or

not, seeing *me* alive on the planet. I've had older friends treating me with such love and care, I've had to catch my breath. I've had children to hug and be taught by and to laugh with. I've had older Quaker sisters who drew out of me strengths, talents and skills I didn't know I had. I still have elderly aunts who celebrate me as a young person (even though I've just turned 60). I have a loving daughter who is becoming a beautiful woman. I have good friends, young nephews and nieces—all who bring that of God in themselves to share with me. That's what heals my spirit and keeps it alive and joyful. I believe it also keeps my body healthy—it keeps my body needing to go where the spirit leads it.

Twelve years later, Ann Marie is a loving, creative young woman at the beginning of her adult life. She and I remain soulmates, despite large gaps

between times we've seen each other. We email and speak on the phone and she visits me each year.

There will always be part of me who lost an almost-ten-year-old girl, a "woman of sorrows acquainted with grief." While none of us seeks hardship, once the bottom of your soul has been scraped, you know how deep you go, and you use your experience when others need the benefit of it—as Shirley and I helped heal each other. I know I've been a healing presence when others have been asked to bear the unbearable. I know now that deeply living, deeply loving is both joyful and painful—I choose to dwell in that very human, very spiritual depth.

Nancy Whitt is an aunt and mother who enjoys the roles and who also enjoys writing personal essays for Friendly publications.

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February 2004

On Being Open and Tender

Editors: **Jennifer Elam**
with Patricia McBee

Sometimes when one's heart and soul are opened to Spirit, a sensitivity emerges that makes it difficult to function in mainstream culture. How do we tenderly honor our openness and sensitivity? How do we open and close in ways that help us remain functional in our world? Please share with other readers of WCTS your experiences of being open and tender and your discoveries of how to be open without being overwhelmed.

Deadline: November 15, 2003

May 2004

Guidance

Editor: **Kathy Tapp**

Guidance may be given in response to a quandary spoken or unspoken, conscious or unconscious. It may come when we haven't invited it. It may come as an inner knowing, through the words of a friend, through synchronistic events, through dreams, or through other nudges that help us know we are being led. We invite you to explore moments of guidance in your life. What has been helpful to you in seeking guidance, recognizing guidance and discerning its truth?

Deadline: February 15, 2004

August 2004

Precognition

Editor: **Mariellen Gilpin**

Foreknowledge may come as a vision, a feeling, a voice, or an inner knowing. We may feel help-less to stop a calamity, we may be anchored in deep prayer, or we may simply have more time to think how to respond in the event. What has been your experience of knowing in advance? How did it work out in the end? What has seemed to be the purpose for the foreknowing? What seems to help bring about precognition? How has precognition changed you?

Deadline: May 15, 2004



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