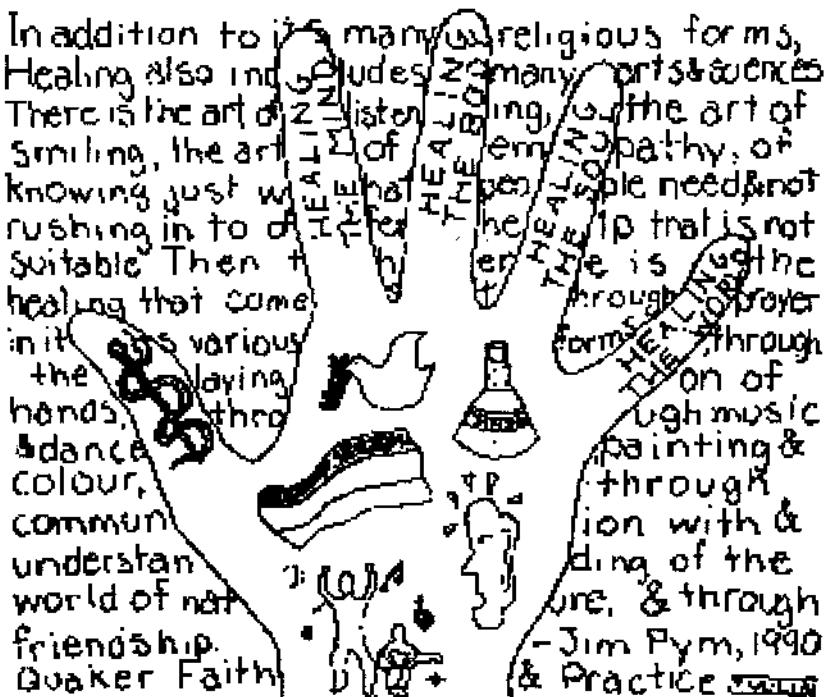


November-December 1996:

## Quakers and Healing

Healing Prayer...Susan Carnahan

Faith Community in Action...Alex Mungall, Steve Foster, Orion Smith, Phil Osborne



inside myself, knowing the medical community could go no further, and then I prayed something be done to stop her pain. She died three days later and I thanked God. Since that time there are two things I have never ceased to believe: God is loving and, prayer works. There have been many times in my life when prayer has brought strength and healing has occurred. Sometimes, when I forget about the power of prayer I get badly caught up in difficult or unhealthy situations. But, always, when I remember to take matters into conversation with God life settles. Way inevitably opens. And just as inevitably, I'm startled by the outcomes. Larry Dossey, in his book *Healing Words*, suggests prayer is probably only twenty to thirty percent effective. He points out if penicillin were to be judged by its effectiveness against all infections it would probably have a lower than twenty percent rate of effectiveness. "Therapies should be judged according to their effects in conditions in which they work, and prayer is no exception." Prayer. What is it? What is being requested? Who is asking? Why and how are they asking? These, he suggests, are some of the critical questions related to prayer. Can the person praying, and the recipient of the prayer, relinquish ego and be open to the way of the Divine? Not my will but thine. A difficult query but one all of us may have to wrestle with at some time. For me, prayer is simply talking to God within and then 'listening' for response. Prayer is giving thanks, recognizing blessings, praising God and requesting help for self, others and the natural world. I talk inside my head and often, I also use my journal as a place to write my prayer then, if I have raised a question, I settle myself and wait. A time of awareness comes and I pick up my pen and begin to write quickly and without conscious thought. Often a solution to a problem arises. New directions open; insights about others come. I know I have been connected to a force beyond myself and I know it is possible for anyone to have this same experience. Pray without ceasing is timeworn advice in many traditions. A trying task to set for oneself and extend to others, but rich in benefits when applied.

When pain, adversity and losses arise in our lives - coping is the immediate question once initial shock has lessened. Prayer for healing is comforting and supportive as circumstances bring change to our lives. Healing is often thought to be synonymous with cure; and so, when prayer is used an assumption may be made that the person involved is going to rise up healed. Sometimes a specific condition might be alleviated through prayer but I think more often prayer is involved with facilitating wellness. Think of the people we know whose spirit shines through untold affliction be it physical, emotional, psychological or spiritual. These people have found and practice A successful coping strategies.

Wellness is a state of being that coexists with adversity, handicap, chronic disease and often, is even present during a terminal illness. We seek balance in our lives and peace within ourselves and in community. Wellness is tied to the condition of one's relationships; with self, with others and with the divine and here, prayer can work miracles. Effective coping, understanding and being understood, helping one another are tasks made clearer and easier when brought into the Light.

What is my intention in intercessory or healing prayer? Unless I know a person well at the spiritual level and, with the exception of times of loss, I don't pray for another without their knowledge and acceptance. I believe, with prayer, one is taking on a responsibility to remain involved and this is not a decision to be taken lightly. There is a fine line of distinction to be made between a general request for God's presence and a specific prayer for healing. If prayer is used as a therapeutic agent then the question of informed consent is pertinent. Regardless of which level of existence pain is found on, we all seek to lessen it in others and in ourselves. The power of transformative love is the essence of healing prayer and a non-directive request is probably the most useful one we can make. "Please God, be with us at this time of need and bring what will be most useful to this situation."

In unprogrammed Quaker worship we are all charged with the task of ministry, to ourselves and to others. We have some unique tools available as resources. Meeting for Healing in the Manner of Friends is a long-standing, formalized tradition which was explored and experienced during the Ministry and Counsel Retreat at the Yearly Meeting. The number of persons involved is variable. Those prayed for may be present or absent. Meetings for Healing can take place regularly or, be called when a need is present. There are other traditional processes among Friends that are worthy of consideration under the general subject of healing and prayer - Committees of Care and sometimes, the Clearness Committee. I wonder if we have collectively given thought to this opportunity.

A Committee of Care is established " To provide help, both practical and spiritual, during times of stress in the lives of members [and attenders] of the Meeting..." The words spiritual and stress lay the process open to healing prayer. When a committee is established by the Meeting or its Ministry and Counsel the members are selected carefully and with the approval of the person seeking support. Confidentiality is assured and presumably, trust is present making it possible to more readily address matters of the spirit. If the stress is attached to matters involving relationships then examining those relationships in the presence of the Spirit with neutral listening, support and the companionship of fellow seekers is a healing experience. Coping with random physical, mental, psychological, or spiritual disorder, job loss and other distressing conditions may become lighter in the same manner. Once practical matters are addressed, the way is open to seek discernment and healing from God. My experience tells me when the entire group is able to release ego attachments, be present in faith and open to the discernment of God's transformative love, a lasting healing, undirected by human will, occurs. This healing frequently extends beyond the recipient to all involved.

We often seem to come to prayer as a last resort. Why? Our Quaker heritage is rich with examples of positive response to burdens and concerns through prayer. In our tradition, the Spirit has always been invited to participate in seeking solutions and finding inner and outer peace. The need for healing is universal; faith and the practice of prayer, in the manner of Friends is a gift. We need to unwrap it and use it generously.

Susan Carnahan

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## Faith Community in Action

Interview with Alex Mungall on healing:  
by members of his care community

**Orion:** Alex, tell me about your relationship with multiple sclerosis?

**Alex:** I remember getting it when I was younger (23). I haven't been able to walk for a long time. I'm really glad to still be able to swim. It changed my vision, it changed my fingers, how they appear, they don't seem to function like they once did--a lot quicker and with more dexterity. My legs have become unable to do quite a few things like walking. I think that spiritually I forced it to be a positive side of my life instead of being a negative side of my life. I wanted to try and live with it cause I couldn't think of any way of getting rid of it.

**Orion:** Did you emotionally struggle to accept the MS?

**Alex:** That was a long time ago. I didn't struggle that much. I didn't want to hit a negative side of it. I get kind of frustrated with it, like I can't do things like walk again. That's the most frustrating part: that I've lost the ability to run. I remember cross country skiing and running in the past.

When I was researching MS in the past, I also thought about getting married. Then I thought, "Yuck! I don't want to do that!" I couldn't imagine a woman would want to marry a guy with MS at all. Its an awful disease because of what it takes away.

**Orion:** Would you share a bit about your care community and program, Alex? How does it contribute to your health and healing?

**Alex:** I would rather have a community of care than an institution. I stay better knowing the care people and using different kinds of medicine (allopathic, homeopathic, naturopathic, Chinese, body and energy work, etc.).

The people helping me are very effective in supporting myself. One of the main things is that they are people I've gotten to know a bit through working together. They help me to survive, along with prayer, thanks to our dear God.

**Orion:** I find your relationship with healing prayer extraordinary. Would you tell me about it?

**Alex:** I don't know how much I can help my own self, physically speaking, meaning dealing with MS, living with MS. I started praying to support my own self. I think that it stabilised my own life--emotionally, physically and spiritually.

**Orion:** You spend a lot of time in prayer for others. Can you tell me about that?

**Alex:** I suppose. I pray for my mother and dad (now deceased). My mom (Connie Mungall) is very close to me. I pray for Rob, my older brother, too. I try to support his own self too since he has painful hands, arms and shoulder down to his hips and his legs and feet. That's what I try to help him get rid of, the painfulness, cause I got it when I was younger too.

**Orion:** How do you pray for Rob?

**Alex:** (laughs) My prayer is kind of complex. What I'd say is, "Please dear Mary, God and Jesus Christ and the angels in heaven, will you please help my eldest brother Rob to have his painfulness dealt with too so that he is able to continue in his own life without the painfulness at all?"

**Orion:** Often when you pray, I notice that you vary your vocal tone, so the prayer becomes almost like chant or song. This is more recent, is there any meaning behind it?

**Alex:** (guffaws loudly) That's just the way my voice goes! Up and down. It isn't under my control!

**Orion:** (smiling) Who's control is it under?

**Alex:** I think Mary, God or the angels in heaven.

**Orion:** You also constantly are praying for people you don't even know. When we are out and about in Oak Bay or Victoria, I watch you pray and send energy with your hands to people in cars or on bikes or on foot. Tell me about that.

**Alex:** I'm trying to support them to have their own lives strengthened all the more. I send them healing energy through my hands. This is the motion (Alex demonstrates: hands are clasped one on top of the other and he projects his hands towards me). I try to give them more strength.

**Orion:** Do you think it works?

**Alex:** I do because I studied different religions and worship and I think that was created to strengthen others.

**Orion:** You've studied Reiki (which is a form of healing using energy and movement) in the past few years. Do you use it to help heal others?

**Alex:** Through trying to pray for them and sometimes using Reiki with it.

**Orion:** Do you consciously try to send energy when you touch people? You know, like when you greet people at the meeting House each week?

**Alex:** (quite matter-of-factly) Yeah.

**Orion:** You have advanced MS and a lot of people might think it's you who needs the healing and perhaps wouldn't see you as a healer yourself. What do you have to say to that?

**Alex:** I kind of don't think so. Having MS doesn't stop me from healing. It's a totally different thing. Personally, I'd rather heal and help different people to live longer and stronger in their own lives. It keeps me from going downward myself.

**Orion:** I know you have a powerful healing energy, Alex. I experience it all the time in our relationship. What does being a Quaker mean to you in respect to healing work?

**Alex:** I followed my mother who became a Quaker as well. It's a stable way of praying and helping others on the positive side. I wanted to try and get some more support too. I get that from the Quaker community.

#### **Statement from Steve Foster, care giver and friend:**

Orion asked if I would be interested in writing about my experience of healing as one of Alex's care givers. Over the past ten months with Alex it has been both challenging and rewarding. Alex seems to have a tremendous love for life in all its forms. He is constantly praying for the healing of others and wending passersby healing energy. He believes profoundly in the power of prayer and is confident that divine energy will heal regardless of whether or not those prayed for are aware of it.

I was interested to read the quote in the letter Anne Marie sent about "God's healing grace" (QFP 21.73). I have just received training in Reiki after years of experience working with energy through massage. I believe that the Reiki energy is divine energy and the more I relax and open to it the more grace flows through my life.

I have seen the results of several types of therapies on Alex and believe that there is nothing which affects him more profoundly than Reiki. He can get quite tense and cantankerous sometimes but Reiki has a very calming, soothing effect. Sometimes, when I am very aggravated by things Alex is saying and doing I find it hard to remember that the same light shines within each of us. It often helps if I can take a couple of deep breaths and reconnect with the energy flowing through me, then I can see it in him too.

Each moment of anger, frustration, conflict, etc. can become an invitation to "be" more graceful. Of course, there are often times when I am overwhelmed by the emotions and not capable of fulfilling these loftier ideals.

I am learning to forgive myself and accept this part of my humanness while holding the intention to be more consistently in touch with the loving spirit of the divine.

Namaste.

**Statement from Orion Smith, caregiver and "Quaker sister":**

Alex was the first Quaker I met at Victoria MM when I moved here in 1992. I could feel his presence in the Meeting and I said to myself, "I've got to meet that guy!" And so began our relationship as friends, mentors, and care givers to each other. In 1993, I began working with Alex as a care giver; it took some time for me to feel comfortable with assisting Alex physically and also to discern what our relationship was. I was used to seeing care people in formal, warm-but-detached roles. This was not what felt right for me. Yes, I am a care person; I am also a friend. In this situation, I think friendship has strengthened the care relationship and vice versa.

In my first year with Alex, I remember many conversations about learning to "be" in the world and that this is what we are called to do along with loving. Alex has had to relinquish so many dreams and abilities; I often wonder how well I would fare in such a situation. At first, I thought this was a message for Alex in coping with not being able to "do" many things. It has been an important and valuable message for me too. Alex is, for me, a living example of the power of "being" through his profound relationship with God and his exceptional capacity to love without condition. He has helped me through his joy and humour, his inquisitiveness, his love of life, his care, and his wisdom. We mentor each other as we trek our journeys. I often refer to him as my "Quaker brother". And so he is.

It is important to share the struggles of my life with Alex so that he can support me too. I have had regular pain-filled bouts with pancreatitis. Alex has encouraged and supported me with healing touch and prayer. As well, I believe it has been good for him to see a strong woman- a "do-er"--be incapacitated and struggle with what it means to have a disabling and unpredictable condition.

Through love, the great healer, Alex and I have become very important to each other. One day at Woodbrooke last winter, I "knew" something was wrong and I emailed a friend who said he was ill and in hospital. I felt an immediate awareness that his very life was in danger. I prayed for him deeply and asked other Friends to do so too. The next week I heard he was recovering well. Only when I returned to Victoria did I find out that, indeed, it had been a life and death situation. I believe the healing power of prayer helped Alex through.

I witnessed this again this spring when Alex suddenly fell ill and I rushed him to the hospital where he fell into semi-consciousness. I put my hands on his forehead and heart and could feel how tenuous and fragile his life was, how easy it would be for him to just suddenly die. I was deeply struck by this. By the grace of God, in that moment, I had a "full being" call to be a channel for the healing energy of God. Energy travelled through my body into Alex. After about 5 minutes, Alex said, "Gee, have you ever got powerful hands." He could feel the healing and, in an hour, with the added healing gifts of Connie Mungall, Alex turned around. This is one of several such experiences I have had with Alex.

In summary, Alex and my relationship is, by nature, a healing relationship. I often feel others don't recognise it as a mutual relationship nor see the gifts that they could be privy to if they took the time to really get to know Alex. Like Steve, I get frustrated and angry with Alex and can find myself not as "present" as I need to be when with him. It is challenging and sometimes draining work. I'm grateful for being part of an amazing, loving care team. Disability can be uncomfortable to both those with disabilities and others in community; it requires finding new ways to do things and to communicate. Through Alex and my nephew Theo (who is autistic), I've learned there are other planes of communication and ways of seeing and being and amazing ways of healing. It has been a tremendous gift to me.

**Statement from Phil Osborne, supervisor of Alex's care:**

The greatest thing that I've learned in working with my friend Alex, who has MS, is the ability to remain

present in the relationship as a care giver. So much of the work I do with Alex takes the form of service in the most mundane sense, the care and handling of a person with very limited physical functioning. Feeding, dressing, and bathing another human being along with the day to day relating to of personal needs for understanding, require of me an intense level of awareness, and empathy that I practice with increasing skill the more I allow myself to be present in the moment of the act of serving.

I am not always successful at remaining in the moment. A long history of relatively boring and, to me, less meaningful work trained me in the habit of absenting myself from the situation that I was in at the very moment that I was supposed to be applying myself to the task at hand. It takes effort to remain in the moment. And that effort begins with the willingness to, in a sense, become one with the person I'm working with. This sort of action has a special quality to it that I can only describe as a feeling of rightness or goodness. I am aware in these moments that I am in tune with Alex and furthermore Alex is aware of it as well.

There is often a sort of wordless communication we share as often as not he ill thank me verbally which almost always comes as something of a surprise to me because in that moment I become aware that Alex is not acknowledging the act but the presence of the actor. I feel the subtle but oh so real sense of being in the presence of another divine soul. Effortless action in the moment of conscious service best describes this state and I have been blessed to be given the chance to offer myself to this work.

Alex has unequivocally been one of my greatest teachers in this art and I am grateful for the opportunity to feel the presence of Spirit moving in my life at such moments.

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