

# A CONVERSATION WITH GRACE ADAMSON

## Abstract

Grace's skills as a workshop leader span 27 years. She has presented workshops and lectures on supportive care for cancer patients and their families all over the world. Australian by birth, Grace's experience as a carer of her partner diagnosed with bone cancer in 1974 was the inspiration for her work. 1976 saw her partner with extensive secondary cancer and given a two-week prognosis. Following his remission in 1978, she trained and qualified as a health professional specialising in natural therapies, counselling, supportive care and many other modalities.

She co-founded Australia's first Cancer Support Group movement in the early eighties. Grace has now worked with more than 10,000 people as they have searched for life meaning, quality of life, and to use their illness as a positive turning point in their lives.

Grace's work imparts the wisdom of life and professional experience thus helping people to live well with cancer. Her work with women with breast cancer resulted in the best selling book "Women of Silence: The Emotional Healing of Breast Cancer" (1994).

After dealing with separation and divorce in 1997, Grace began her own experience with an acquired, and at times life threatening, condition which resulted from routine surgery. Having experienced this life altering condition, which included ileostomies and colostomies, Grace teaches from a base of deep personal experience in how to effectively harness H.O.P.E - finding hope, seeking options, being practical and being empowered. She has four children between the ages of nineteen and twenty-four and has recently been happily remarried.

Ruth Benor, a member of the editorial board, recorded this conversation in January 2003.

**Ruth Benor (RB)** Grace, I've known about you for many, many years, and certainly in my work I've taken a great deal of inspiration from your book and your pioneering work. It's a personal pleasure to realise that you are now moving and coming to live in the UK and bringing all of your experience and work to be here and to share it with us. Perhaps some of the readers who are not yet familiar with your work will appreciate just knowing the background, where you have come from and how you find yourself here.

**Grace Adamson (GA)** Well, it's a long story but I'll do my best to precis it. I actually began in veterinary surgical nursing and married a vet who developed osteogenic sarcoma and had a leg amputated. I became his full time carer and live-in girl friend and he at that stage had a prognosis which might have been around about three years given the extent of the tumour. We spent eleven months really not doing a lot towards anything positive for his healing, just trying to live normally, as normally as one could when your partner has had a leg amputated.

When you live with someone who is disabled there's a part of you that can become disabled. Sometimes one stops doing things out of concern for the other's inability to join in. I used to like dancing for instance, and that was one of the things that disappeared from my life. That had rather a big impact on me. So I rekindled my love of horse-riding and started dressage lessons. Then I bought myself a horse and danced with him instead. Actually living my passion was important in my own restoration and healing process.. It's one of the things that I don't think is appreciated when you live with someone who has a disability. It is so easy to lose yourself in the pain and misfortune of the other.

Anyway, we did little towards actively assisting recovery. We didn't have any counselling, we didn't have any recommended treatments and the following eleven months, were really just an adjustment time. It was November 1975 when Ian actually developed secondaries in his inguinal lymph node, on his sternum, through the sternum and in his left lung. They were bony growths as this type of tumour is defined by bone cells growing out of control.

**RB** I've actually seen the photographs of those tumours and they were really very scary.

**GA** They grew eventually to be quite an aggressive size. In fact when the tumours were at their largest Ian was actually at his best. It's a complicated story that has never been reported in its totality. The interesting thing with Ian's healing was that from his journey dying with cancer he became a person living well with cancer even though the tumours grew to an enormous size. We started getting proactive in the early days when the secondary tumours were diagnosed; but at that time they were smaller than the photographs you mentioned. We did things like relaxation meditation (mental ataraxis) with Ainslie Meares and we explored the Gerson diet. We saw those two things as our best armoury and the things that gave us hope that there could be something else we could do; that we could participate in. No treatment was offered apart from when the tumours were painful enough to go back into hospital where they would do some radiotherapy. But they said that would be very end stage palliative treatment; no one actually believed in what we

were doing apart from the people who were putting the Gerson diet forward and of course the meditation teacher.

**RB** And was this the first encounter with such a diet and meditation? Had either of you ever had any of these sorts of things before coming into your lives?

**GA** It was rather interesting because in fact we had. Ian was always interested in meditation but had put it off to learn it one day when he had done his work, made his money and retired. At University there had been several brushes with people including Swami Muktananda who had given a lecture. He thought then that it really interested him, but put it off for another day.

For my part I had a vegetarian diet from the age of five. I had parents who were interested in the sorts of things we ate. We always had wholemeal bread, lots of fresh fruit and vegetables, cooked in stainless steel, all of those sorts of things. My uncle ran a gym, so I used to go there quite often after secondary school, spending hours in the gym and talking with people about food and nutrition. So it had always been an interest of mine. Thus we came from these two directions and put them together, forming the basis of our belief system. Ian coming from his meditation interest and myself from a dietary perspective, then we each developed an interest in each other's approach to produce our alternative package. We were fairly confident that this could really help. We had been told that the tumours would double in size every month. What happened during the next three months was that there was no growth at all. We knew we were having an impact, but we didn't know why. However, because of the Gerson diet and Ian doing far too many energetic things, like digging a vegetable garden, he lost a lot of weight and became bedridden. The tumour which was in the inguinal lymph node actually blocked off the ureter, therefore blocking off the right kidney. This swelled up and he developed hydronephrosis. This was the point when they said "well we can't operate on the kidney as, the tumour was now in his left lung."

**RB** Was he having any chemotherapy?

**GA** No, not at that point. Up to that time there was nothing that was suggested that was available. We met with Ainslie Meares and asked to try some other things. Once Ian was bed ridden the pain became the disease, to such an extent we had no energy to focus on any of the things like meditation or diet. We felt like mice going round in a wheel, just not getting anywhere. Ainslie only wanted people to do meditation and wasn't pleased we were adding the dietary approach. He was not happy if we were to add yet another therapy, but we really wanted to try acupuncture. He felt these additions interfered with the qualitative nature of his research. He told us that if we wanted to do anything else, then we could not come back to his groups.. At that point it was quite a desperate search because the intensity of the pain was the disease.

We found a Chinese western medical doctor, who also did acupuncture. He said to us "Well if it's the tumour causing the pain I don't think that acupuncture will help you, but if it's things that are peripheral to the tumour it could probably help you a great deal. Given your rapid weight loss it's highly likely the muscular loss is associated with this and you've got disc pain." This sounded very logical and we went ahead with the treatment. Sure enough in the first week with the treatment administered on most days, the pain was starting to subside. However, at the same time we had an x-ray report from our cancer hospital (which turned out to be a mistake) which said the tumour was now in the spine, in the lower vertebrae, and that the acupuncture ought to be stopped. We weren't to find out until two weeks later that they'd given us someone else's report by mistake, so we lost a lot of time and Ian was deteriorating fast. He was six and a half stone in weight and jaundiced, his skin was like parchment, and he really looked like someone dying of cancer. We went back into the mainstream system.

They gave him high rads of radiotherapy treatment that didn't do a lot for the pain either, even though they thought it might. On the way home from the last radiotherapy treatment he actually said "I think it's time we got married". This was an interesting proposal! So we went home and started ringing up our friends and asking them to come to a wedding that was more like a premature wake. We got married quite quickly. One of the people who came to our wedding

asked if we had seen anything about the healing technique being used in the Philippines. She had seen a documentary on television and wondered if we should consider going there.

**RB** How long did you think Ian had in terms of time to fulfil this?

**GA** I think it was about a week maybe two. This pain was really the issue and in retrospect was really based more around fear than actual physical pain and this was why a lot of the physical remedies were not effective .The negative placebo (via prognosis) that was targeting him at that point really wasn't helping either. One of the other things we realised in retrospect was that as a vet he had euthanased many dogs with osteogenic sarcoma. He had watched the progression of these dogs through treatment and pain and he watched them deteriorate over time. Their lungs filled up with bone. So that was an image that was in his head from his own profession and it took a long time to get that image out. At the time I didn't realise it and neither did he. So we had fear, the image problem and the negative placebo - the negative prognosis from the medical people. All that was making the pain worse.

In going to the Philippines, our main hope was alleviation of the pain. Coffee enemas were helping a little bit with the pain. We introduced them with the instigation of the Gerson diet. We also used without much success morphine capsules. We also tried Plenisol injections to stabilise the intervertebral discs with some small success. We married on 28th February and by the 8th or 10th of March we were on our way to the Philippines Ian was really, very, very ill.

**RB** Grace, do you have any memory of what was happening within yourself at a deep spiritual level. It sounds as if it was an extremely busy time, having to do so much, having to organise things. There you were, a new bride, and yet the possibility of soon becoming widowed. I wonder what you remember about what your heart and your spirit were saying.

**GA** Actually, I remember it very well. I was always positive that he could recover. I did not know how, I did not know the mechanisms but there was something within my being, within my intuition that just told me to keep going on, that

there was a solution if we just looked somewhere to find it. I was never in panic mode apart from when Ian wouldn't communicate after his amputation, when he went very quiet and he was obviously in some sort of post traumatic stress disorder. That's the only time I ever felt distressed throughout the whole scenario. The other thing about my personality though, is that I do like a challenge and it's interesting when I look back. As a young teenager, I had a belief that cancer had solutions. When elderly aunts died from it even at that early period of my life I could see the patterns in their life. In their cases it was always about unresolved grief and resentment. Later on I remembered that, so when Ian was diagnosed I wasn't at all negative or despairing. When he had the secondaries, I thought we really have to do something and so we became proactive. Then when it was felt that he had only two weeks left, and we married, somehow I still held it together and thought there still has to be a solution.

**RB** What impresses me is that amazing sense of trust. I am sure that many other people would just have given up and failed to follow that inner wisdom that said "just keep going, just keep trusting what you're seeing isn't necessarily what it is".

**GA** That's very true. If I look back even further in my childhood I used to find damaged birds and heal them and I used to use my hands a lot in that process. I'd keep them in a shoebox and let them go when they had healed. And dogs and cats, picking up strays and healing them, finding homes for them. It's as though there was destiny here, and all of these things early in my life that seemed like random events, that I never pieced together, that put me in the right place at the right time to be the right person in Ian's life to help him.

**RB** And I suppose you could say that this encounter, this time you wanted to be with him, was getting you to serve your apprenticeship. Engaging you to really actualised your healing abilities.

**GA** When we went to the Philippines we saw five particular healers. It seemed to me that although there were amazing things happening like some of the psychic surgery, what was also happening was that Ian was making a

psychological, emotional and spiritual shift. When he made that shift the pain disappeared. When the pain had disappeared, then we could concentrate on dealing with the cancer again. A positive placebo there moved Ian because people were saying yes you can get through this. It helped him make shifts in his belief system. I think that was probably the most significant part of the Philippines experience as well as being taught various aspects of healing, particularly hands on healing, and what they called "magnetic" healing. In the beginning this frightened me. Ian lost his fear and his pain was controlled, but I got my share of fear instead. One of the people who was working there put my hands on Ian and said "You know how to do this, just do it." And I thought no, I don't. But I started to feel, my hands just took over and it was like some old part of my consciousness actually knew how to do this and it really scared the socks off me. I thought, what am I getting myself involved in here? After we went home that day, I said to Ian "This is really scary I don't think I can do this," but he begged me to persevere. He said, "You really need to do this because this felt fantastic for me, I really need it." And so I gave in to it, but it wasn't easy because I had my analytical left scientific brain, and I'd done all my physics and chemistry and maths and things at school; this didn't really have a place in it. I really had a big talk with myself about opening up the other side of my brain. I had to look at it all and say either I hadn't seen all of this happen and ignore it and deny it, or if it has happened somehow I have to accommodate it into my being. Once I'd dealt with it in that way we were able to both utilise and grow from my new found ability. We stayed in the Philippines for one month, which was not bad considering he was given two weeks to live. He put on a stone in weight, he had no pain and when we went home we continued this type of healing for the next three months very intensively. I was doing five hours per day of hands on and magnetic healing in different sessions.

**RB** And how were you when you got back? There was transformation going on with you, and suddenly you are encountering some part of your being that has always been there that is just waiting to be free.

**GA** I was in a state of amazement. One of the difficult things was when we came back a lot of the people that knew us previously and even quite good friends didn't want to know us. We had gone through some sort of transformational experience and they hadn't. They'd all said good bye to Ian expecting he'd be back in a pine box. When he came back as a person living well with cancer instead of as he went as a person dying from cancer, and that was a very distinct difference. People had trouble accommodating that so any support that had been there I now had lost. People were very willing to give me their arm or their shoulder to cry on beforehand but now there was no one there to support me. Now I had to make new connections. Very few friends and very few people understood what we were doing and that was not easy. As we went along the next few months we gathered some supportive people, but the circle of friends stayed quite small. That was probably the most difficult thing that I experienced. At times it has been a lonely journey.

In doing the work with Ian, in retrospect, I realised I became so energetically involved with him and I knew nothing about boundaries in those days. We certainly merged energetically and I realised he was probably living off a good degree of my energy, there was no separation between the patient and the healer. That's something I had to learn as time went along. Fortunately I was able to recharge myself. I had my own personal practice, and I was meditating, and eating good food and doing all these things myself which I believe helped. But I don't think our relationship was healthy. In retrospect we did not ever move on from the healer-patient relationship.. As husband, wife and co workers ultimately that was not good for us which was demonstrated when our marriage failed. It was a necessary apprenticeship as you say but it was a fairly costly one.

**RB** Bring me now into the picture of how you found your way to be working particularly with women with breast cancer. I know that your book "Women of Silence" focussed on the particular needs of women, and is being reprinted this year. Why this group?

**GA** Out of our experience we formed a foundation in the Yarra Valley, Australia to assist people with cancer and their carers. (The Gawler Foundation: see Organisation Reports; Sacred

Space 2 (3) pp1-6). The aim of the work was to address the needs of all cancer patients, both male and female. We ran mixed gender groups for many years. It was during these mixed groups that women would come to me in the breaks and would ask "Can we have a little time aside with you to talk about women's issues?" It happened so often that eventually I suggested that we do gender specific groups as a part of our residential programme. So I took the women aside and Ian and the other psychologist would take the men aside, and we'd have a separate two-hour session. This was really very enlightening to me because I'd heard the women in the mixed group talk about their life story. Yet when they talked about their life story in the women-only group I heard a very different one. A lot of the women who came to these groups happened to be women with breast cancer. They seemed to be a genre of women who actually chose to come to residential programmes and to cancer support groups, much more than the women, say, who had bowel cancer or brain tumours or lung tumours or ovarian tumours. The women with breast cancer by coincidence became the dominant group that we worked with.

So I started learning even more about women with breast cancer. I realised the stories they told had so many common denominators. I realised that there was really nothing on the bookshelves written for women about the emotional healing of breast cancer. There was nothing said about the post traumatic stress disorder caused by their diagnosis. Nothing was available which described how the emotional impact of the diagnosis affected them in their pursuit of healing. The groups around this theme became more and more successful and I began a practice completely focussed upon women with breast cancer. I offered residential programmes, one to one counselling and one day workshops. Addressing these emotional issues for women made such a huge impact on the quality of healing, the quality of life and the quantity of life for them. I found that very, very inspiring. Furthermore I found that women who were addressing these emotional and spiritual dimensions were responding better to the conventional treatments. We have collated some of the best statistics, as Prof. Candace Pert has commented, anywhere in the world on long term survivors and quality of life for women with breast cancer. I knew that I was on to something

very important. The emotional side is not addressed nearly enough. People talk about mind/body/spirit; don't talk about mind/body/emotion/ spirit. Yes, they are inter-related. Men I think heal differently to women, emotionally it's different for women. As a complement I'd like to see many more gender specific groups for men developed all over the world. I think it's important to have someone who relates to you as woman to woman, and man to man. It gives you the opportunity to hear the man's story, to hear the woman's story and to acknowledge the story and then to find solutions and to empower people as to how they can work to heal their life. It all becomes about healing your life much more than just healing the cancer. In fact when people heal their lives amazing things happen, such as spontaneous or unexpected remissions.

**RB** Or healing unto death.

**GA** Or healing unto death - it works both ways. It's a win/win situation so people live well and they die well when their time comes around.

**RB** From my own experiencing of working with women with breast cancer, what I came to realise was that they are very unaccustomed to talking about their emotions. They find it easy to describe what is happening to them, they find it easy to describe how its affected their family and they can even talk about their fears, of receiving a diagnosis where they automatically hear a death sentence. The psychological aspects of breast cancer are certainly written about, spoken about and even taught about but the emotional, and spiritual, including death is really rarely addressed. We need to help them to look at this, and it's beyond counselling

**GA** It's beyond therapy.

**RB** It's beyond therapy because it's that intrinsic relationship with their inner self. Very often they've never allowed that deep inner personal relationship to develop because of the demands on modern life. It's almost as though they're working at only one or two of a potential three or four dimensions, and I see the emotional damage which prevents this deeper intra personal relationship.

**GA** I think that's very true. I wondered why people have done so well with my work. Firstly I think it's because I've had experience as a carer and then trained as a health professional and

many other different approaches. And then I've had experience as a patient, that really puts the cream on the cake for me; having that trilogy of experiences. People can relate to my story and that helps trust to be established. When they talk with me it's not with a therapist, it's with someone who has shared their experience. It's soul to soul. As therapists we can get caught too much in the therapy and forget about that soul interaction. It's much deeper and it seems to be the magical process that really helps people to move forward. I've tried to express all this in the poem that's at the front of my book. It sums up the experience of twenty years of women with breast cancer who number in their thousands who all came with a similar story. It's about repression, the inability to really express their emotions on a deep level, it's not the superficial emotions and hence that's why the book was called "Women of Silence". The poem itself speaks a lot to women and they all say that when they read it. They know that I know, and in that knowing it helps them to trust in me as a practitioner and to really share their story, whether it be in a group or whether it be a one to one.

### Women of Silence

*Women of silence gentle and strong,  
tell me your path , where it first went wrong.  
Tell me your story, How you coped with your life  
Tell me about all the trouble and the strife.  
I see how you've coped, withholding your pain  
And I feel your soul weeping and yet you refrain  
From sharing your losses ,  
your griefs and your fears  
But you know they multiply over the years  
Until one day your inner wisdom says no more.  
You develop an illness, a fiery core that's fuelled  
by a lifestyle out of control.  
Too much held too often has taken its toll.  
So it's time to rethink, to re-assess how it's been  
and develop a strategy previously unseen.  
For there is a way to heal  
with heart and great passion  
And let go of withholding  
that was always your fashion  
Nurture yourself and make yourself whole.  
Live your life fully and realise your goals.  
Women of Silence gentle and strong  
Find the courage to heal  
and to sing your heart's song.*

From Women of Silence.  
(Grace Gawler- now Adamson)

**RB** We share a number of things in our personal and professional lives but the one thing that we share that's of a very personal nature is that we have both lost sisters to cancer. In your book you ask the question "when did you lose your dream?". As I reflect on the experience of caring for my own sister during her treatments and then her dying, and as I have witnessed and worked with women within my practice and the women who have generously given to my PhD research, the theme of losing the dream resonated all the time. I feel very strongly that the loss of that dream leads to disease and illness. At the very worst core of it, it leads to that path of self-destruction of disconnection. Jung said that we are born whole but we learn to become unwhole.

**GA** Losing of the dream is really like losing the passion for life, the passion for many things and it happens over many, many, many years. The passion just gets frittered away. Like Jung, Robert Bly says in his book "The Human Shadow", that we are born a 360 person and we actually lose degrees as we get older and the thing called the mid-life crisis is pulling back of those degrees to actually make ourselves whole again. Somewhere in all that maybe it is a similar story for people with cancer. Maybe disease can be something that gives us an opportunity, like the mid-life crisis, to rethink your life, to re-engage your passion. Losing a life in order to gain a life. Although my early training has been in physical medicine, now I see the psychological, the emotional, as pivotal. The healing starts here and from that point people can make empowered choices then about their nutrition, about their vitamins, about the other practices and practitioners. So I see this now as really the first port of call. I remember a client who had been an opera singer. In her mid forties she developed breast cancer. She hadn't sung since she got married. I asked her the question "Why haven't you been singing ? She said: "Well I guess I became somebody's wife and I became a mother and the little bird stopped singing." Re-engaging our passion, the emotional healing, underpins all else.

**RB** Yes, and I have just been reading John O'Donoghue's book "Eternal Echoes". He quotes

from a tombstone from one of the London cemeteries where it said "John Brown, born a man but died a grocer" and I think that's what we find, that we relate to an identity that has been brought to us and given to us. I know in the case of my own sister, her dream was lost many, many years before her cancer came. She said to me that she knew the day that she decided that she needed a legitimate way to die because her spirit had died within her. Her passion had gone.

**GA** That's really very potent and I can see that within my own sister's process of living and dying as well. When that passion starts to be frittered away, starts to disappear, a mask has to go on to pretend that life is other than it is. And the more passion disappears the more the different masks go on. When an illness is eventually diagnosed you can find you have lost touch with who you are because there are so many layers and so many masks. To be able to reconnect with the original passion that is lost is the secret. In my sister's case in fact she actually recognised that she had lost that passion in so many places and she had worn so many masks. She chose her time to think about it in healing and she also chose her time to die. And in her choosing to die she actually made up her mind and said this is the only decision that I have ever made for myself and I am going to make it. Which for me as a healer was very hard when it was my own sister, but I recognised her empowerment came from that choice, her conscious choice, she died very quickly within a few days of her decision.

One of the things that has been the most helpful to my understanding, particularly of women with breast cancer, has been the fact of dealing with the shadow and allowing women to go into the depth, allowing them to actually feel their feelings and express rather than suppress their difficulties. To take off the mask and to be with people in that experience is a really very important process. People come to integrate the shadow rather than have to wear it as a mask. I believe people aren't paying enough attention to that.

**RB** So, Grace, you have talked about the three things that have helped you to come to this place where you are now as you develop your

work. You have talked about your place as the carer. You have talked of your place as the healer and health professional and you mentioned earlier your case as a patient. I just wondered if you could say some more about that and how that has contributed to where you see things are now for yourself and your future work.

**GA** Being a carer and health professional has been important in the development of my work, but actually being a patient myself over the last five years has probably been the most profound learning that I have experienced. I have really understood what it is like to be in the shoes of the patient, and it's helped me to walk my talk in a way that I wouldn't have done if I had not had that experience. As with most things that happen to us in life, it came from left-field, it was uninvited change. It was a total uterine prolapse that was my problem and really this was a metaphor for what was happening in my own emotional life as it occurred 3 days after my marriage separation. During the reparative surgery I sustained major damage to the branches of my sacral nerves. Over several years it went undiagnosed in spite of the fact that I was trying to find solutions to it. Eventually I had to have most of my large colon removed due to massive obstructions caused by the rectal paralysis. I have had several ileostomies and colostomies. So here I am, this healthy person who has been a carer and a health professional. As a person who has been a vegetarian since five and eating all the right things and doing all the right things, I found myself in the position of the patient. There is a lesson here, because life crises strike a lot of people as uninvited change and importantly it is not only disease that can turn our life upside down, but all sorts of situations that test our mettle. I realised that all the things that I had been doing had given me a large credit in my mental, physical, psychological, spiritual "bank account." I could afford to make a lot of withdrawals because I had a lot in credit. Many of the people that I had been dealing with over many years didn't have that luxury. They were physically, psychologically, emotionally, spiritually bankrupt quite often by the time they had reached the process of having something called a disease/dis-ease. It was a really valuable insight.

People can also become overloaded because there are so many choices now of treatment options including all the complementary therapies. If the patient is already mentally stretched and emotionally bankrupt, it's the worst possible time to be loading people with a lot more "to do's". This was my really big 'aha' - I have a strong insight that we need to be able to make this whole process so much more simple and so much more attainable. They need help first and foremost to be empowered and find their peace of mind. They need to trust their intuition and their instinct - to start to live their life as a "martial artist" as I call it, and to develop some sort of spiritual resilience in doing that. Then they will make better and empowered choices knowing and believing in what they are going to do. Giving people too much too soon just overloads them when they are already diseased. People then get stressed trying to get distressed.

The second level of my learning was what it is like to be without support in the early stages. To be in a socio-economically and emotionally deprived situation (I was bankrupt at that point since our marriage ended) adds more difficulties such as how I am going to manage without support and without the money to buy the things I need. It is so very important to our healing process to be in a relationship with another and actually have that close support. Not everyone has the luxury of that.

**RB** I know that from my own experience that people often come to find themselves ill and without the resources either within themselves or around them. You mention the word bankrupt, I see that and I also feel that they can be compromised by not having had the practice to really know who they are as people. Sometimes illness is the first encounter with their real selves. They come into finding themselves through illness but it is probably the first time for many, that they actually sit in the quietness and stillness of their own being and so it takes a time for them to adjust to that place. I really understand what you are saying about when a diagnosis is given they are often thrown into a state of immediate stress, compounding the stressful state of the illness. The stress of having to suddenly make

everything right, in many instances going through fairly vigorous and quite gruelling treatments in the orthodox medical world, but trying to also interface that with learning techniques and approaches through complementary therapies so that they are almost overdosed. They are in overload, overwhelmed, on top of everything else. I know that you said that you felt that you were in good credit with yourself, but were there times when even the choices to be made felt like too much to bear on your own?

**GA** Absolutely, it was a really, really difficult time and that is the time when I appreciated what it felt like for many people that I had actually dealt with. When you feel hopeless or helpless, its very hard to go to the other extreme to muster the fighting spirit that research shows is so much a part of successful recovery. I can really understand how people can give up. It's just all too hard. But something that was within me (thank God) it just came through at the end of the day but here it was very real. I suppose this experience was my dark night of the soul. I think it's a good thing not to deny going through the dark night of the soul, it is necessary, but you need the help of someone, a good therapist or partner for example, to make sure you come out of the tunnel as intact as possible. Real healing takes time, patience, perseverance and commitment to task.

**RB** It's learning a whole set of life skills, isn't? It's learning to ask for your needs to be met, but first and foremost it is about understanding what your needs are. If one's life is being given over to the service of others, whether its been as a parent or as a child, or as a professional, or whatever member of the community very often they have placed themselves second. So to learn to take the chance to ask to have needs met can be a great challenge, and we can help them to do that. But it is overcoming their feelings about not deserving to have their needs met that is probably the place we need to start.

**GA** I certainly agree with that. I had three teenage children at the time when I was dealing with this. They were dealing with my trauma and of course we were all dealing with

the trauma of the marriage separation. For many months I was so ill that even finding the energy to pick up a phone and ask for help was beyond my capability. I discovered later on that friends were actually not contacting me because they thought my retreat was associated somehow with the marriage break up. They were unaware of my pre and post surgical problems. People kept a healthy distance from me for the right reason. They wanted to give me space. As it turned out that wasn't a very helpful thing for me. I almost had too much space to deal with.

**RB** As a result of your own experience how has your practice changed? How is your work being influenced?

**GA** It has deepened my empathy and compassion. And I now look much more to giving people very simple steps. Providing exercises that give little tastes of what relaxation and meditation is like, for example, rather than suggesting people sit down for half an hour and have 27 minutes of frustrations and 3 minutes of something that is not too bad. In the past I might have said just persevere but I realise now that people have another life and that their healing life doesn't always need to be separate from their usual life. They have a life with their family, a life with their children, a life maybe with elderly parents, a life in the community. I believe people need to get to the heart of the practice, utilising simple and effective methods, particularly if their life is on the line. I am more aware of the need to keep things in balance, in perspective, my own experience has shifted the way I look at things and inform people of their choices.

**RB** So it is about helping them to find the right choices, the healthy choices. So that they are not in conflict with whatever else they may be involved in?

**GA** That's right. If they are pro-life and they are re-empowered, the illness has served as a vehicle to wake them up in whatever way. They lose their life to find their life and then they will make choices that are appropriate to them because they are empowered. They are making the right choices for them. That turns their whole life right around. This is my definition of a life healed.

Spirituality is the thread that binds it all together and if people can identify a meaning and purpose in life and they can identify a personal spirituality, it actually gives them a firm foundation to work from. They can develop spiritual resilience and they tend to re-engage in the passion of their life again. I think that is the most we can hope for anybody, so that they live well and die well whenever that time might be.

Indigenous people cross-culturally have a great saying "in order to heal you need to be present" and that presence is what I think we are aiming for, both for ourselves and our patients. To help people achieve a state of presence and alignment or balance. Not only in the consulting room or in a seminar room where these principals can be learned but, they are going to take that presence into their life and be proactive in bringing back the lost pieces of their spirit and integrate their whole experience in body/mind/emotion and spirit. This is holistic healing.

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Photograph Courtesy of Caroline Jones

The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you may murder the liar but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth. Through violence you murder the hater, but you do not murder hate..... Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.

*Martin Luther King*