

# The Canadian Friend

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*From* the editor's desk ...

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Dear Friends,

It was with some surprise that I opened the file for this issue and found — almost nothing. I had thought that there would be a lot of material. Not only because there always has been an abundance of submissions for every issue, but also because I thought that “how we deal with illness, aging and death” would inspire a lot of Friends. Not so.

Katie Aven has given us a very moving and inspirational article about her experience in dealing with a family tragedy and the healing she felt at the ninth assembly of the World Council of Churches. Molly Walsh sent in an interesting little piece by Ed Abbott. And that was all there was, no matter how I shook the file and looked again in the bottom.

Well, there was one more, but I had long been reluctant to publish it, simply because I had written it myself. However, the more I considered it, the more it seemed like it would be a good piece to include now.

Following heart surgery in 2002, Susan Bax was having serious health complications. I was very fond of Susan, but far away in Connecticut, and unable to visit. She was no longer able to talk, so I couldn't phone her. I made her a card, and felt moved by the Spirit when I wrote the accompanying message, based on reading material by Henri Nouwen.

Various people told me how Susan had appreciated that message, and some people asked for copies of it. So it seems appropriate to include it now as it does speak on dealing with illness, aging, and death.

There are many inspirational writings on this theme within the Quaker tradition. For instance, I have often appreciated Margery Still's 1990 writing (*Quaker Faith and Practice* 22.81):

“... A readiness and an openness to the approach of that dark night are necessary. ... the unconscious is preparing the pit, and down into it you will eventually be driven. Better go willingly, with all your armour on. For this is in fact the training ground of your spirit, where you will learn how much, through your own pain, you have to offer to others. And so the first and greatest step out of the dark place becomes recognisable: self-absorption begins to give way to empathy with a world of suffering you previously didn't know existed. People in the first shock of grief will be drawn to you, and you, no longer a newcomer to that world, will have found your listening skills.

As to that delicious and sustaining food you were accustomed in happier times to peck at, why, there it is again, and you haven't recognised it. The former sustenance was only fit for children, and has been replaced by helpings of insight appropriate to your increased maturity.”

June-Etta Chenard