

Determination to Heal

By E. Daisy Anderson

My story is about my utter determination to heal spiritually and emotionally. Quakers have a strong peace testimony. We are articulate about national/international peace, about justice in the prisons, etc., yet the most difficult area of practice—our personal and interpersonal lives—receives the least attention (in Quaker literature). I believe this most delicate topic requires much more attention to prevent violence, to address that which has happened, and to assist in the healing of those violated.

I can no longer skirt over the issue: My mother hurt me, and I have lifelong issues as a result. She was a birthright Quaker, and she practiced her faith in the United Church of Canada. She kept a notebook on her faith and she hurt her daughter. How could this be?

Every aspect of my current life is limited in one way or another by the lasting effects of what has happened. For years I was unable to talk. I was frozen and silent. I have been taken as “different” or even “odd.” And I have been marginalized.

I now work very hard, 24 hours a day, to keep on an even keel. I have to maintain my focus on getting through this life as best as is possible. Yet even today, one comment, one question asked of me, and I am thrown into flashbacks, panic, fear. My heart pounds. I hold my breath. I sweat, and I ask myself: “Why should I panic? Why should I avoid meeting for worship? Why should I not say who I am?”

I have seriously considered leaving the Quakers. How could my mother, and the several others who used me, have professed the Quaker beliefs, and done what they did? Such a dichotomy. So polarized. Further, these persons seem to have no idea that someone might have been seriously hurt.

I pray. I feel the spirit within. I listen for the

message. I read and reread the Advices and Queries. I read the Faith and Practice manuals. I read testimonies. I read the Psalms. And I think. I repeatedly tell myself: “Keep focused in the spirit. Keep feeling the warmth of the light. See the goodness that comes my way.”

And I did receive an answer. Boxes of mother’s sketch books were dropped off at my door. The dusty books had been sitting in those boxes for years. I opened one box, lifted out the top book and leafed through the pages. There in all the colours, spaces, lines, shapes, notes, humour, joys, love, pain, anguish and, yes, the sickness, was the message: mother’s spirit was free, happy and wounded. It was all there.

I revisit these books. My mother had put my name on my drawings, and then glued my art in her special books. What an honour! My thoughts wandered back to long ago conversations. Mother had apologized for the suffering she had caused. My mother was sorry for her actions.

Mother has passed away now, and I continue to think of her spirit. She is peacefully listening to the beautiful singing voices that she said comforted her. I do sometimes wonder what happened to her that was so painful. Why would she choose to act the way she did? There is no answer. Mother, your salve of pens, water and colour is my healing, and I am thankful.

There are multiple corners and tangents to every relationship, and so, with my relationship with my mother. In this testimony, I talk about only one tool I used to rewrite our history together.

The result of this revised script of my story is a deeper understanding of the humanness of Quakers. Is this another angle of diversity? It certainly is a marvel of the spirit. □

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