

HEALING AND WHOLENESS

Phyllis Mack Reynolds

The 2021 Jonathan Plummer Lecture

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Illinois Yearly Meeting
of the
Religious Society of Friends

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It is an honor and a privilege to introduce Phyllis Reynolds who will present the 2021 Plummer Lecture.

I first met Phyllis as a fellow team parent when our daughters ran Cross Country together and played on the High School Soccer Team. Over time we discovered that we both shared the Quaker Faith and the same health care profession. She added new words to my vocabulary: ginormous, tumultuous and intrepid. She lives her life, in the words of Arthur Larrabee, “in alignment with the Spirit.” With deep spiritual awareness her life has meaning, is full of joy and dynamic energy; making the most of her time every day. In addition to faithful service and clerking numerous committees at Evanston Friends Meeting and Illinois Yearly Meeting, she manages to find time to eagerly walk in the sun, to garden, to knit, bike ride, and attend our local farmers’ market. Phyllis also loves nature, walking in the woods, bird watching, foraying into the world of mycology, and listening to the peeping of the pond frogs at McNabb. She enthusiastically

cherishes the history, legacy and grounds of the Illinois Yearly Meeting.

Phyllis is spiritually curious, exploring in depth the faith practices of Buddhism, Judaism, Episcopalianism and Native American Traditions. A mutual friend described her as “in a word, intrepid,” and indeed whether traveling in the mountains of Peru, to Jungian seminars in Ireland, or taking a road trip to Philadelphia to the American Friends Service Committee annual meetings, Phyllis is indeed a fearless adventurer, energetically immersing herself in the culture of each experience. Phyllis is also a loving, engaged and patient listener, advocating for many, offering hospitality, and taking others into her home often on short notice.

Besides taking Osher Lifelong Learning or OLLI Classes at Northwestern, and attending the yearly marathon 4-day, 10 to 12 hour medical conference, she appreciates art, theater, and concerts often in the company of friends. In faithful service to our communities, Phyllis has eagerly participated in site preparation, organized a clerking workshop with Arthur Larrabee, most recently arranged a spiritual deepening program with Marcelle Martin as well as engaging a variety of speakers to enrich the spiritual development of Friends.

Her sense of stewardship is manifested by her keen awareness that each of us shares the world with many peoples, mindful of other gifts of creation like all flora and living creatures including the loving care of her rescue kitty, Tiger Lily.

–Introduction by Virginia Schelbert

HEALING AND WHOLENESS

I want to use this opportunity to reflect on my spiritual journey and to express my gratitude for the growth and leadings I have received from this experience. I am grateful for the support and insight from the Quaker community and for the invitation to give the Plummer lecture.

Thanksgiving morning, November 26, 2020, 9 months into the pandemic, I am preparing to join a midweek Friends Meeting. I share my reflections in this poem I wrote.

Healing

What is the gift I want? ...
To give or to receive?

Healing is my immediate response from the Spirit.

What does healing mean?

Wholeness.....

What is my source of healing?

From the sun, from the sky,

From the earth, from the Creator.

Where do I find healing?

In my breath,

In my time in the natural world,

In the seasons,

In growth and release,

In gratitude.

As I reflect on this theme, two queries come to me: What stories do I want to tell? What stories do I want to keep silent? Healing has had many different meanings and roles in my life, starting with growing up and coming of age in a medical family. At that time, in the mid-twentieth century, the doctor was considered the authority on health with all the first chosen and best answers. This was widely considered true in American culture and especially in my family, where every challenging situation was

considered from the medical perspective. Next, was my leading to go into a health care profession, becoming a nurse, in 1976, and working as a visiting nurse in Chicago and the North Shore. Graduate school in nursing, in 2004, led me to clinical experiences and also to write a thesis to explore illness and meaning. How do we understand and communicate what has happened to us, in illness narratives? I had my own experience of serious illness following heart surgery in 2012. I continue to discover new meaning in my survival.

My father attended medical school and did his residency in pediatrics at Washington University, St. Louis. My parents met and were married there. My father had a six month fellowship at the Princess Elizabeth of York Hospital in the East End of London, the location of the TV series Call the Midwife. He took his first job in Louisville, Kentucky. My mother, trained as a social worker, was director of the Red Cross in 1936 when a huge flood from the Ohio River overwhelmed Louisville. I never heard her say anything about this experience that I can remember. I wish I had had the opportunity to ask her questions.

I was born September 20, 1938 in Louisville. Three years, three months, and three days after my birth, my identical twin brothers, Dick and David, were born. Their birth was a few weeks after Pearl Harbor. Soon America joined World War II and my father enlisted as a flight surgeon in the Air Force and spent 9 months in Algeria with British forces. I do not have clear memories of my father's absence but I do remember that I could tell my brothers apart and translate their language before our parents could.

When my father returned from abroad we moved to Fairlington, Virginia, a suburb built for military families, near Washington, D.C. My father was working in the Pentagon. After the war we moved to Springfield, Illinois.

My grandparents, George and Margaret Mack, my father's parents, visited us every year on their way from Kentucky to their summer home in Wisconsin. I loved visiting them there for many years, into my college years. Here is a poem I wrote about them.

The Only Grandparents I Knew

George Mack and Margaret Keller Mack
were the parents of my father, John Keller Mack.
George was a Presbyterian minister,

Margaret's cousin was Helen Keller.
They played together as children.

Grandma and Grandpa lived in Bowling Green, Kentucky.
They came to Springfield on the way
to their cottage on Nessling Lake,
On the Chain O' Lakes,
In Waupaca, Wisconsin.

My brothers and I swam in the lake or
Paddled a small boat away from the dock.
Sometimes we walked slowly into the water.
To the sudden drop-off.
Tall, gangling plants, swayed softly in the water,
Before the lake became too deep to sustain them,

Their cottage was very simple.
The ice box was only that.
A large block of ice kept the food cool
And slowly melted before they got the next one.

My family visited every summer for several weeks.
I continued into the time I could drive independently.
The last time I visited them there was in 1963.

I overheard a conversation between them
Through the simple walls of the cottage.
"I hope we can die together."
His wish was not fulfilled.

My mother's early years in Springfield created friendships that formed the basis of her social life. Newcomers Club welcomed new residents to Springfield. Women of that group and their children were part of my life through high school and beyond. I was able to transplant an unusual variety of violets from Ruth West Benjamin's yard to my own garden and enjoy them each spring.

"When a woman marries a man, that family becomes her family." This was the opinion I remember my father stating with his firm confidence. Why was there no room for both? Many of my mother's family lived in southwestern Wisconsin, the Driftless area, where she had grown up, in Montfort. Once we went to see some of her family and I remember how happy she was to see Aunt Mae and Aunt Grace. Both of her parents and her two older brothers had died before I was born. I climbed into the attic of the barn and ran around on the farm. I experienced a new level of

happiness. Many years later I visited southwest Wisconsin and connected with members of the Dinsdale family. John Dinsdale, my mother's grandfather, had twelve children, ten daughters and two sons. He had two wives. With the second wife he had only two daughters. My mother was her only descendant. I am grateful I have an archival photograph of that family as well as several other photos of their Wisconsin homes in the late 19th century.

My earliest memory of a spiritual experience was while being at the foot of Cherry Road in Springfield, Illinois where a small creek ran under the bridge. We had moved to this area on the west side of Springfield, near Chatham Road in 1947. My father built a mail-order home on land he purchased from the Bales' farm; our land was next door to the farmhouse, in the orchard. Our yard was full of trees with apples, pears, cherries and black walnuts I had just read *The Diary of Anne Frank* and remember being on the bridge, on my way to school in fifth grade. I was moved by Anne's resilience in the face of adversity. Reading about her experiences began my lifelong interest in Judaism and in the experiences of D.P.s (Displaced Persons), who left Europe after World War II and came to America as children, some my own age.

Several themes, threads, and streams are woven together here. I felt an early and strong connection to the land. I spent much of my outside time in the fields, forests, farmlands and countryside on the edge of Springfield. Often I was alone, though sometimes running around with other kids in the neighborhood. I went to a nearby stable to take riding lessons. I patted horses across the road from our home and in the lot next door. Soon I read my favorite novel, *Mrs. Mike*, by Benedict and Nancy Freedman, described as "the heartwarming classic story of the Boston girl who married a rugged Canadian Mountie." I remember every night opening my bedroom window wide and letting all the winter air blow in. Perhaps I wanted to let Canada into my bedroom. Or maybe this created my connection to the North Country.

The only trip I made with my mother, Grace, was to New Orleans in my high school years. We traveled on the The City of New Orleans train and stayed in the French Quarter. I found a new kind of coffee I loved. I had just grown into the time of my life when I could drink coffee. We both enjoyed the experience very much. That trip began my lifelong interest in New Orleans, sustained by trips to visit my daughter Tami and her family through the years.

My pediatrician father, Keller Mack, was revered by his patients, who were children my age and younger. Sometimes I made house calls with him. I remember collecting tiny tadpole eggs from the park with him. They hatched in 1 aquariums used to nurture fish for his office waiting room. Later we returned the tadpoles to small ponds in the park before they grew into frogs.

As I was growing up on Cherry Road, in the 1950s, Mary, a woman of color came to work one day a week in our home. At that time in the 1950s, domestic work was the only employment opportunity for many women of color. Springfield was segregated. White people lived on the west side; people of color lived on the east side. Mary taught me how to use the ironing machine in the basement and I remember many experiences of pleasure with her. I followed her through her life into the 21st century, long after she had moved on from working for us. She attended my father's funeral in 2002 and I was able to attend her funeral several years later.

After I entered Springfield High School I enjoyed my classes in Latin and English literature. Fast forward to 1956, when I left for college. I remember being dropped off at my freshman dorm. My mother's eyes filled with tears as we said good bye. My father was focused on backing up the car and driving away.

My freshman year was easy and simple. My sophomore year was problematic and I was not able to return. The next plan was for me to go to the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. Academic problems recurred and the plan was for me to go to St. Louis, to see a psychiatrist. This person was recommended by one of my father's medical school classmates.

Three years of this "talk therapy" treatment, from December 1960 to 1963, did not correct my psyche or give me a sense of connection. I did find a roommate, a woman my own age, held on to my job in the hospital radiology department and even went to parties with other people my age who were graduate students. Soon I realized I was pregnant. I did not want to share this with the psychiatrist, fearing he would lead me to an abortion based on a psychiatric diagnosis. I packed up and went home to Springfield. Choosing the psychiatric path was the only one to pursue, I thought. This path was the most pain-free, for my family, without the open discussion of complex and ambiguous feelings or distress.

The plan was made: I would enter a psychiatric hospital, near Milwaukee. Because the pregnancy was "out of wed-lock,"

adoption was considered the best decision. I was admitted in February 1964 to the Milwaukee Sanitarium, a hospital for persons with mental illness, established in 1884 on 36 hilly wooded acres, in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin. A history of the Sanitarium quotes the founder, James McBride: "Open air and open country is the best medicine for mental health." Cottages were built, each one housing a different group of patients: retired seniors, teenagers, women, long time patients with a history of lobotomies, and a few others.

Healing and hope were both results of my time at the San but I did not receive them from the psychiatric staff. Other patients, mostly younger women, offered their own experiences to share and I began to learn about how other people "felt" about their lives and how they spoke of them. One young man was admitted at the same time I was. Peter (not his real name) often played in his cottage room the Delta Blues on his guitar or from his record player. I heard this music as I walked around the campus in the months to come. "How the Blues Saved my Life" was the theme of a story I wrote later. This experience made me aware of the resilience of the Black community.

My father is the only one from my family who came to visit me after the birth of my fraternal twins, a son and a daughter born June 9, 1964. When the twins were brought into my room he burst into tears. I was surprised and silent. I did not know how to pursue the path for a deeper exploration of my feelings. Helping me become a single mother was not considered. The names I gave them were Phillip and Elizabeth. Their adoptive family gave them different names.

By the summer of 1965, a year after the twins were born, I am living in an adult cottage, with Peter and Jack, (not his real name). The three of us hung out on the stairs leading to the second floor where other adults met in the living room of that cottage. We participated in the sessions from the periphery. Jack was clear and direct in expressing his feelings and perspectives about his experiences.

As the summer ended, Jack was discharged from the San. I realized I had had enough. I left the San and shared an apartment with him for a while in nearby Milwaukee. Then he left to go stay with a longtime friend in the East Village of New York. When I realized I had no life in this place I left Milwaukee, on the Greyhound bus. I went to Jack's address on the Lower East Side.

When I knocked on the door he opened it. He looked surprised but he welcomed me in. He was living with his long-time friend, Fran. He found another apartment in the same building and we moved in together.

One time we were in Fran's apartment and a group of men arrived. "The Velvet Underground," was the name of the band. Later I was told they were buying drugs but I was completely naïve about this possibility. Drugs, marijuana and LSD were an active part of life in the East Village in the 1960s, but never a significant part of my life there. Jack and I slipped away from each other, and he went to Mexico with Fran.

My Life on the Lower East Side of New York City

The next chapter of my life began with my pregnancy and birth of my daughter, Tara, born in August of 1966. I had moved into my own New York apartment on Third Street between Avenue B and C. My space was in a tenement on the fifth floor, a walkup, in the back of the building, two simple rooms. There was a small bedroom area with a large window connection to the other room which contained the kitchen structures, the sink, stove and refrigerator. The large bathtub was covered with a wooden panel, providing space for food preparation. This could be removed to bathe. A toilet was located in a tiny closet. Two windows looked out the rear of the building. I could see those who lived in nearby buildings. Sometimes laundry was hung out to dry on ropes from one window to another. The Lower East Side was the cherished destination of many European Jews who immigrated to America from 1870 to 1920.

From women friends I learned of the best hospital for delivery in New York. I met some other supportive people and worked as a nanny. I even met Dorothy Day, the leader of the Catholic Worker movement. I was impressed by her personal welcoming. I sensed that coming to live with that community might be a possibility. Later I learned that she had had two children without the support of a marriage. I wonder what my life might have been like if I had followed her leading.

Instead, I embraced a young Irish American man, and we were together for the next 6 years. We started our life together in rural New Jersey and experienced the birth of my second daughter, Dorothy, in April 1968. It was a tumultuous year which

included the death of Martin Luther King Jr. and Bobby Kennedy. We decided we needed a community. We moved to Urbana-Champaign where we both planned to finish college.

Now I found the welcoming experience of the Urbana-Champaign Meeting of Friends. Several older women were elders who nurtured me and my two young daughters. I began to attend Illinois Yearly Meeting Annual Sessions. In the summer of 1969 I met more nurturing elders, Phyllis Berentsen, Royal Buscombe, Nancy Breitspecker. I immediately felt grounded in the landscape of McNabb with its deep Quaker roots.

The year 1969 was marked by the death of my mother, Grace Melinda Smith Mack, after a long struggle with emphysema. She was only 61 years old; her mother, Ella Phyllis Dinsdale Smith, died at the same age. Coincidence between generations is a common experience in families, as I learned many years later in workshops on family systems therapy. An inheritance from my mother enabled me to purchase a home in Urbana. I planted my second white pine tree there. The first I had planted at my Springfield home on Cherry Road. Planting a white pine tree became my practice at each home I lived in. Perhaps this practice was the expression of my intuitive connection to Indigenous people.

Fast forward twenty years, to 1985. I was living in Evanston, Illinois where I moved after I married Wilfred Reynolds in 1974. I had completed my nursing training at Ravenswood Hospital School of Nursing. I was working as a Visiting Nurse through various neighborhoods in Chicago. My two daughters were progressing through schools, into high school and college.

By this time in America, adoption was no longer wrapped in the shame and secrecy that had cloaked it for many years. I found a group “Truth Seekers in Adoption” that met in Chicago monthly. The leader was Barbara Gonyo, a birth mother. Each month we gathered and listened to many reunion stories, from adoptive parents, birth mothers, and adoptees.

One of the group’s leaders was an adoptive mother. “Contact the adoption agency but do not tell them you are searching. Send them your updated family medical information—your mother’s death of emphysema, your father’s prostate cancer, and anything else, and ask about the life of the adopted twins.” I had already found the updated birth records with their current names, Tami and Tom. From the agency I received a message: “Thank you for

your family medical information. The daughter is interested in Theatre or the Law. The son is quite an athlete.”

After some reflection, I thought my daughter, Tami, growing up in the Midwest with an interest in theatre, might be a student at Northwestern University which has a robust theatre department. I called the student directory telephone line and asked for her telephone number, using her name. I was told she lived on Foster Avenue, just two blocks from my home on Orrington Avenue in Evanston. Barbara helped me by making the first phone contact to explore whether Tami was interested in meeting me and then we arranged a date in Tami’s apartment. I also informed the birth father that I had found the twins. Thus began the relationships which continue today.

My nursing career began with a job as a nursing assistant in a nursing home in Urbana-Champaign. I realized I needed to create a job that had meaning for me. A quotation from Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, the physician who brought the hospice movement to the United States, caught my interest. From a book she wrote I found her quote: “Those who spend time with people who are sick and dying can learn a lot about themselves.” I knew I needed that experience and knowledge. In 1974, I began nursing school at Ravenswood Hospital School of Nursing. Much nursing training was then still connected to hospitals. When I graduated and became an R.N., I began work on a surgical floor at Evanston Hospital for nine months.

Then I accepted a job as a visiting nurse with the Chicago Visiting Nurse Association. This organization was founded by Mrs. Armour, Mrs. Field, and Mrs. Swift in the late 1880’s to serve the health needs of new immigrants.

We made many visits to Chicago Housing Authority public housing high rises including Ida B. Wells, Stateway Gardens, and Robert Taylor Homes, often to see newborn babies and young mothers and sometimes adults with chronic problems like diabetes, hypertension, and long term wounds. I usually went early in the morning on my own, although an escort service was available. Going on my own seemed simpler. My visiting nurse career continued north to Evanston and then further north to Highland Park.

Here is a poem I wrote about my experience as a visiting nurse:

I have been in many different places:
In CHA housing, the high rises, now demolished,
In the homes of wealthy families on the lakefront,
In the small apartment of a previously homeless woman.
I have met and touched,
bandaged and nurtured
many different bodies,
male and female, young and old,
some beginning life, some moving into death.
People I did not know before
Some I would never see again.

Except for a few.

Mary was my most memorable “patient.”
She had a small Japanese home, on a few acres.
A tiny stream flowed through the land to a pond.
I visited her for several years,
As she went through times in and then out of the hospital.
Then we all realized “recovery” was not the next step on her path..

“I have 2,000 daffodils on that hill.
It is not fair that I have to leave them.”
Her anger was clear and out spoken.
For several years I had seen those spring blossoms
And gone to her December birthday celebration.

The next step was apparent:
“When the leaves fall, Mary is out of here.”
“Oak leaves or maple leaves, Mary?”
We both knew that some oak leaves do not fall until spring.
“Maple leaves.”
She died November 14.

A memorial is held at her home in December.
A friend and I look out the window.
A coyote is running along the stream.
He pauses looking up towards us.
“That’s her,..... that’s really her.”
“Yes, yes, you’re right. I know it is her.”
The coyote runs on over the daffodil hill.

The North Country

In 1970, Wilfred Reynolds, his son Hugh and nephew, Hadley Reynolds purchased forty acres of forest from two farmers, Orville and Yvette Martin, who owned land on the

Garden Peninsula, in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Wilfred, Hugh, and Hadley had been camping there for several summers and decided they wanted to build their own cabin. They met the Martins at a farm stand where Yvette was selling vegetables. They began the conversation about a land purchase and Yvette was very pleased to let them know about the 40 acres across the road. “We need to pay for our daughter’s wedding.” On that side of the road there was no housing along the unsurfaced road, which continued several miles west to South River Bay, on the edge of Lake Michigan. Now many years later nearly five hundred acres have been sold or donated to the Nature Conservancy. This land is now known as the Haunted Forest.

The location for the cabin was chosen in an open meadow area of the woods. A large white river birch tree was the anchor for the cabin. Now that tree is gone, her large white body is lying on the ground to the east of the porch. Only the white birch bark remains. All the inner flesh of the tree has melted into the earth beneath. Piles of rock and branches lie in this area. Tiny new conifers are growing as well as some large ones. In the interest of tidiness, on several recent visits I gathered dead branches into piles in the open area, hoping we can have a controlled burning of the dead wood. I would not feel comfortable doing this alone. Now as I sit on the porch during my solo retreat (in August 2019), I realize that new life is finding its way into this land: some tiny ferns, new spruce trees, light green moss, and grass. Now I name the area “The Botanical Graveyard.” I no longer feel the need to clean it up. Mother Nature is taking care of this task. Here is a poem I wrote during my retreat.

One Animal Among Others

On my solo retreat
In the North woods,
I am the only human I meet.
A hummingbird, a raven, a crow,
A tiny frog in the patch of green moss,
A deer in the shadowy woods,
A buck with antlers, a soft gait,
Fluffy blond hair,
Blowing in the wind.

Because I sit quietly, they accept me.
I do not seek another human companion.
Because I am alone

I am not distracted or disturbed.
I feel no puzzlement or panic.
I observe the world I am part of.
I make my food, wash my dishes,
I sleep on my mattress on the floor.

When rain comes
I observe the change in the light,
The clouds, the leaves,
The wind and the sounds.

My daughters and I and Wilfred visited the cabin every year. We continued a close relationship with the Martins as their children grew up. Some moved away but one, Mark, stayed and became our go-to person for carpentry problems with the cabin. In time all three of the Martins in Garden had passed away.

My spiritual journey was mainly focused in Evanston Friends Meeting but several other threads entered my experience. In the late 1980s I worked as a Parish Nurse at St. Paul's Lutheran Church and St. Mary's Catholic Church in Evanston. The pastor and the priest saw my work as an ecumenical opportunity to foster interaction between the two churches which are within several blocks of each other. I appreciated the opportunity to engage with both communities. Their common liturgical tradition, including Old and New Testament scripture, prayers and communion, led me to attend St. Luke's Episcopal Church which also has a similar liturgy

Another persistent practice of mine has been Zen Buddhist meditation. I went to the San Francisco Zen Center when I visited my son Tom in California. Then I found Lakeside Buddha Sangha, in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh. Lakeside met Sunday evening in Evanston at the Congregational Church. We still gather, by zoom, during the pandemic.

Judaism has spoken to me for many years. I took an "Introduction to Judaism" in several Reformed Synagogues in the area. I did not convert to Judaism. I do not have the Jewish tribal identity which is inherited through ancestors and family. By Zoom I have been able to attend Torah study with the Jewish congregation, Tzedek Chicago, whose Rabbi Brant Rosen is a former Director of the Midwest office of the American Friends Service Committee. In the past, in my Jungian studies, I found a comment by James Hillman, a Jungian analyst, comparing the

traditions of Christianity and Judaism: “ The Christian scripture focuses upward, on Spirit, vision, and healing. The Hebrew scripture focuses downward, to Soul, to depth, and to dreams.” This comparison between the two traditions has been an important and memorable concept for me.

Illness and Meaning, North Park University

Education has been always appealing to me. For several years in the 1980s I took classes at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago. Performance art was held in an open space that I knew immediately was special the first time I entered. When it was my turn to perform I felt a strong sense of the Spirit entering my body. This experience was similar but more intense and embodied than my experience of receiving the Spirit during a Quaker Meeting for Worship which has been described as experiencing the sense of “Quaking”.

Next I took a bachelor’s degree in nursing from North Park University. The next excursion was in 2002. I applied for a Masters in Nursing program at North Park. I was forced to get a computer as education was changing. Research and writing required this new practice. Classes were held in the evenings and weekends with many nursing students, not only women, and from different countries and backgrounds. My clinical experiences were scheduled in different Northside locations.

“Illness and Meaning” was the title of my thesis when I graduated in 2004. Meaning begins to be important in the presence of death and the possibility of loss. Meaning resides in a deeper, more fundamental level that includes ambiguity, the presence of contradictory opposites, life and death. Much of our lives are lived on a more superficial level where our goals, desires, and attachments are the primary concern. When these are jeopardized and relativized by more powerful experiences, such as life threatening illness or overwhelming political realities, we are challenged to dig deeper in order to make sense of what has happened and to achieve what equanimity is possible. Other responses are common—denial, anger, projection, to name a few.

We are seeking to understand not only why this happened to us but what it will mean in our lives. Ultimately, we will try to discover if a redemptive purpose or meaning in our suffering can be created. Meaning is constructed, discovered, and shared in the

narratives that we create to tell the stories of our lives. Stories have plot, drama, character, action, suspense, performances, silences and subplots, and ultimately meaning is revealed. In the past three to four decades the field of narrative medicine has emerged to explore the meaning of the patient's experiences and how the medical practitioner might most ethically and meaningfully intervene and enact his or her role in the patient's narrative.

One of the authors who have created important perspectives on narrative medicine is Rita Charon; she trained physicians and surgeons in Narrative Medicine at Columbia University. This training seeks to enable practitioners to develop "narrative competence" in order to understand and interpret the text and metaphors of the stories, as well as to be moved by the events and people, to be curious about how the story unfolds and tolerant of the ambiguity and uncertainty of the experience. The practitioner who encounters a patient with narrative competence, values the story the patient tells and goes beyond the case study/differential diagnosis perspective to make room for the patient to establish genuine contact.

Arthur Kleinman, a psychiatrist and medical anthropologist explores the difference between the patient's experience of *illness* and the physician's biomedical concept of *disease* in his classic study, *The Illness Narratives*.

Illness narratives share the personal experiences of those who have encountered illness and how this has affected them and their lives. One of my favorites is *Intoxicated by My Illness* by Anatole Broyard. He was born in New Orleans in 1920. He had many black ancestors but he chose to pass as white and went to Greenwich Village in New York, in 1946, after his service in the military in World War II. This was a time of great creative energy in Greenwich Village. For many years he reviewed books daily for the New York Times

I found the story of *Broyard's life in Life Stories: Profiles from the New Yorker*. Henry Louis Gates wrote "White Like Me," a profile of Broyard. In 1989, Broyard was diagnosed with prostate cancer and was soon a terminally ill cancer patient. Broyard writes of his desire to be seen by his physician, to be enjoyed by him "I want to be a good story to him, to give him some of my art in exchange for his...just as he orders blood tests and scans of my body. I'd like my doctor to scan me, to grope for my spirit as well as my prostate." Broyard is aware of the power

inequity between the doctor and the patient but says “I’d like him to know that I feel superior to him too, that he is my patient also and I have a diagnosis for him. There should be a place where our respective superiority could meet and frolic together” (From *Intoxicated by My Illness*).

In an epilogue written after Broyard’s death, his widow Alexandra writes of a time he was addressing medical students at the University of Chicago when he was asked if he found the doctor he was looking for. With typical style and humor he replied, “My urologist is a very handsome man. He’s slender and a fabled tennis player. He wears very expensive loafers and has a sixty-dollar haircut. He comes into the room like a matador. He has style. He has magic and is extremely competent. He doesn’t talk, He’s too much of a star but he has an oncologist who talks for him.”

Another writer I have found to be especially meaningful is Arthur W. Frank, a medical sociologist at the University of Calgary in Alberta, Canada. He shares and writes from the academic perspective of medical sociology and also shares his own experience of undergoing a virally induced heart attack at the age of 39 and then several years later receiving the diagnosis of testicular cancer. His personal story is *At The Will of The Body*.

My Own Illness Narrative 2012

My own illness narrative began in July 2012 when I received an email from my cardiologist. He would not renew my cholesterol medication unless I came in to see him in his office.

“How is everything going?”

“Oh, I’m okay. Maybe I am a little more short of breath.....But isn’t anyone climbing up two flights of stairs to the El, Huh?”

“Let’s do a stress test.”

That same day I do a stress test and flunk it. “Keep going, keep going,” the technician urges me to push on further.

“That’s it, I can’t go any further.” I am completely exhausted and short of breath. I am glad the test is over.

“You need an angiogram. You might need some stents if we find some blockages in your arteries. The stents could be placed and you could go home the next day.” That doesn’t sound like a big deal. I would miss a day of work. The angiogram is not difficult. I am an alert, observant participant, without much memorable discomfort.

“Stents won’t work. Your particular blockages can only be repaired by cardiac surgery.” I am stunned. A cardiac surgeon is upstairs and comes down to talk to me.

“I could do the surgery on Thursday.” He is a tall young man in a handsome suit. He gives me his card. I sign up immediately and obediently. Two of my daughters are physicians. Tara and Tami. They are both able to come on short notice and are there when I go into the operating room. After the surgery the next step is a rehabilitation facility; I chose one in Skokie. As my recovery progresses I notice I am having more trouble with my breathing. I go to speak to the young nurse practitioner who manages the floor. She tells me she is busy with other patients and will see me later. In several hours I return and am told she has gone home for the day. My breathing is getting more difficult. I talk to Tara on the phone.

“Have them call an ambulance. Be sure they take you to Evanston Hospital, not ‘Death Valley Hospital!’” Tara had grown up in Evanston and that was the nickname of the hospital in Skokie, the closest one to the rehabilitation facility. That step was accomplished. I have few memories of that experience. I was on life support for 3 weeks in the intensive care unit. My medical diagnosis was ARDS, Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome.

My next step was rehab at the Presbyterian Home. After leaving that facility in November of 2012 I went home. I was grateful to be in my own home again with my kitties, Maki and Sushi. Elizabeth Mertic had cared for both of them while I was sick.

The next step was cardiac rehab, three times a week for an hour and a half for a month at the hospital. After that, I moved on to pulmonary rehab, same place, same staff, same schedule but at a different time of day. The staff was warm and friendly but there was little interaction with other attendees. Later I returned and asked the staff, “What about more psychosocial interaction... like ‘What brought you here? What happened? How do you feel about this experience, now?’”

“Oh, people don’t want to talk about that. They want to protect their privacy.”

“When they graduate (their last session before discharge) they can share their feelings.” another staff member suggested.

Sometimes I feel odd in the eyes of friends who are health care providers when I tell them I was in ICU. Later I shared this with

Virginia, “Oh that’s *deformation professionelle!*” which is a French phrase meaning a tendency to look at things from the point of view of one’s own profession rather than from a broader perspective.

How do people who have worked closely in intensive hospital situations view the patients who survive that experience? How do they imagine them to be, now? How do I step outside of the identity I imagine other authoritative, confident medical people have of me?

I have several memories of encounters with health care professionals after my illness. When I was about to be discharged after my ICU experience I met with the cardiac surgeon in his small office. He seemed awkward and uncomfortable with me. What if he had been able to say to me “I am really sorry that you had these complications after your heart surgery.” Would he feel that it might put him in a position of liability to be sued for a medical mistake? Once, after my discharge, I went to the ICU unit. One of the nursing students I had been with at North Park in the Master’s program worked in that unit and came to the entry area. He looked stunned, puzzled, uncomfortable to see me. What were his impressions and questions? Do medical professionals draw a line which they are not able or willing to cross with their patients?

Two years after my illness I felt I had “recovered.” I decided I wanted to travel and chose to go to Ireland to a program organized by “Jung on the Hudson.” After many years of contact with Carl Jung’s thoughts, through Memories, Dreams and Reflections, Jungian workshops in Evanston as well as the experience of Jungian analysis, I was drawn to this organization. They sponsored workshops in Ireland every spring.

A women’s retreat in 2014 County Donegal, near Northern Ireland, was my first experience. During breaks I walked along the ocean and was often joined by Irish race horses, trained and practiced running in the shallow water at the edge. Here is a poem I wrote about that experience. This is in the tradition of Amairgen from *Anam Cara, a Book of Celtic Wisdom* by Father John O’Donohue, an Irish Priest and writer.

When Spring Comes to Ireland, County Donegal

I am the raucous rooks circling their tall colonial nests.

I am Eros residing at the hospital, awaiting a call to healing;

Thanatos is not the only god who lives here.

I am the ancient tree on the road, older than any human person
who passes.

My roots are deep.
My branches are tall.
My leaves are emerging again.
I am one of twenty-eight women together by the ocean.
Suzy, Suzanne, Susanna, Susy, Sue, Sally and twenty-two others.
Some of us are teachers, some students;
Some are therapists, some receive therapy;
Some are writers, some artists.
All seek the path we need and long for,
We are all daughters, some are grandmothers.
Many are mothers of children, grown, growing, some lost.

I am dew on the grass, graced by a rainbow.
I am new buds emerging.
I am sun, wind, and clouds.
Rain and ocean,
Green grass at my feet.
I am in my place in the wild world.

When I reflect on what drew me to Ireland I think of several things. A family history story was about an ancestor from the 18th century, John Mack. He was part of the MacGregor clan in Scotland, at a time of serious conflict among different clans. Since keeping his name “MacGregor” was considered risking a death sentence, he changed his name to Mack and went to Londonderry in Northern Ireland. He eloped with the Earl of Londonderry’s daughter and they went to America and founded Derry, New Hampshire, with many other Scottish-Irish immigrants.

I attended two more Jungian workshops in Ireland the next two springs. These were with the Benedictine monks of Glenstal Abbey, in County Limerick. We stayed in a hotel in Adare and were bused to the monastery residing in a Revivalist castle built in 1840. The monks also managed a boarding school and we occasionally ate lunch with the restless teenage boys. “Forgiveness” was the theme of one retreat I attended. After workshops with different Jungian analysts, and field trips to ancient Irish sites, we met on Friday for an evaluation and response with all the presenters.

One attender, a woman said, “This was an interesting presentation on Forgiveness, but what about self- forgiveness?” There was a gap of long silence, even a gasp of startled breath following the question.

“That’s a good question.” Clearly, this was not a perspective the presenters had considered. I don’t recall what was said but some response was delivered.

Another workshop I attended was led by Ariyeh Maidenbaum, the co- director of Jung on the Hudson. The workshop topic was “The Archetype of Resilience, the Jewish Experience.”

My Life in Art

Visual art has been an important influence in my life for many years. My first experience was in grade school. Miss Roper was our art teacher. Fran, a good friend of mine had wonderful drawing skills that I could never match. My next experience was many years later, after I became a nurse and began working in Chicago.

I have taken classes at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, drawing and painting at the Evanston Art Center, and botanic illustration at the Chicago Botanic Garden. I remember a class in Evanston with Frank Piatek, who graduated and taught at SAIC. Wikipedia describes Frank Piatek as “an American artist known for abstract illusionistic paintings of tubular forms and three dimensional works exploring spirituality, cultural memory, and the creative process.” One day in winter there was a severe blizzard. I was the only one, beside Frank , who made the trip in the dangerous weather. Frank said, “In making art, following your personal leading is the most important practice you can create.” This statement deeply resonated with my Quaker experience.

On my way north to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan I usually stopped in Sheboygan, Wisconsin and visited the James Michael Kohler Museum. There I became engaged with Outsider Art. These are often self- taught artists and their creations were more compelling to me than the work of classical European artists.

The primary change in my perspective since my illness in 2012 has been my leading to describe and express my experiences in poetry. Perhaps there was something about my illness experience that freed my right brain. As I near the end of this Plummer lecture I want to conclude by sharing another poem from this year of the pandemic.

A Woman in the World March 12, 2021

The first deep snow fall
Of this winter season
Calls me out as evening comes.

The snow is still, clear and softly curved
Across the lawns and bushes,
Like soft white pillows.
A tall tree beside the sidewalk
Is like a woman with her roots
Reaching deeply into the earth,
Beneath the snow.
She raises her arms in praise.

Snow gently fills the nooks and crannies of her body,
With delicate softness and detail,
In her throat, her shoulders, her wrists, her hips and legs.
I want to touch the carefully landed snow flakes.
She reaches into the sky
To embrace the spirits that nourish her.

Many days later, more snow has fallen.
As time passes the temperature is warming.
Beside each trunk, a circle of open space
Emerges as the snow melts.
Her body releases her warmth into the world around her.
When all the snow has sunk into the earth
Her roots are revealed.
Some twist and turn,
Some lift the sidewalk at its edge,
Not nearly as assertive as
The Live Oaks of New Orleans.
Each one has a trunk
Whose skin is different
In texture, color and structure.
Some are related to others.
Some are unique.
Each has her own tribal identity.

After St. Patrick's Day
A celebration of the Emerald Isle,
Tiny small grass lifts from the ground.
Green begins to enter the landscape.
Soon all their leaves will flutter
In the wind, in rain,
In sun, and in shade.
Our world will soon become full of chlorophyll,
The roots of my name, Phyllis,
Lover of plants.

THE JONATHAN W. PLUMMER LECTURE

Beginning with the 1961 sessions, Illinois Yearly Meeting of Friends proposed to annually honor its first clerk by designating the principal or keynote address, the Jonathan W. Plummer Lecture.

Jonathan Wright Plummer, acknowledged by Quaker Torch Bearers, as the father of Friends General Conference, was born in 1835 at Richmond, Indiana. He died in 1918 at 83 years of age and lies interred at Graceland Cemetery in Chicago.

When he was 39, he moved to Chicago, where he was first with E. R. Burnham & Son, wholesale druggists. Later, this was the Morrison-Plummer Company, wholesale druggists, and is now known as McKesson & Robbins.

He introduced profit-sharing in his business and he practiced tithing, giving one-tenth of his private income and one-tenth of the income from his drug business. He also loaned money freely to people in need. He advocated prison reform.

“He did go to Meeting, headed committees of action, and notably in 1878 wrote letters which were albatrosses about the neck of pious epistolary correspondence. Illinois Yearly Meeting, which he helped to create in 1875, was housed in the country near McNabb, Illinois. Here he came once a year by train to meet with Friends from 10 neighborhoods of Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois, and Indiana, as well as with spiritual leaders from other Yearly Meetings.

“In 1878 he came with a project as clear as a blueprint. Its framework was a conference and its aim to co-ordinate widely scattered activities.... Jonathan Plummer desired a conference that would consider all the social testimonies of Friends. As a result, minute 52 of Illinois Yearly Meeting’s proceedings in 1878 set him at liberty to prepare an address of invitation to the several Yearly Meetings for holding a general conference once in five years or oftener.”

He gave the opening address at the World’s Parliament of Religions (held during the ‘93 Fair), expressing hope for greater helpfulness and for co-operation among all faiths.

“He was not a pronounced religious mystic, as were many earlier Quakers. He listened to the ‘still, small voice,’ and this prompted both charity and vocal ministry.

“He measured up to the test of greatness set by Goethe in that he expressed clearly what others felt but were unable to express. He lived in the midst of what shall not pass away. Whoever is the messenger of its truth brings surprises to mankind. Such was Jonathan W. Plummer.”