

Anne Marie

My Story of Healing & Wholeness

By Anne Marie Gabrielle

And so it's very peculiar. I can't think of anyone who would want to have cancer, including myself, but the paradox is that so much love and caring has been directed towards me because of it. It's pretty awesome to have that goodness and love—that grace—directed towards me. Like the rock stars say these days, "Feel the love."

I feel it.

Sometimes there is doubt and fear but most of the time I feel love and grace. It's certainly a sign to me of God's healing at work, no matter the doctors' scary research reports and terms like OS and PFS—there's tremendous power in the grace.

I am so grateful to all who have been so kind, and these are the things I try to remember to think about when things get tough.

But it still sucks!

Anne Marie

Preface

Anne Marie's book contains two sets of stories.

Part 1 is the book Anne Marie wrote after she healed of serious multiple chemical sensitivities. This is the Anne Marie I met back when I owned a health food store in Bowie, Maryland. Anne Marie would shop in the store, always wearing a face mask to protect her from noxious fumes in the environment, always wearing a smile on her face, and always telling me something new she had learned along her journey. Anne Marie became one of the most committed organizers of the Bowie-Crofton Holistic Community when she cheerfully accepted responsibilities with coordinating our

weekly seminar series and training our speakers to share their stories of healing and what has worked for them.

Part 2 is the book Anne Marie started but wasn't able to finish. This part consists of the first chapter and unedited blogs she wrote over a 2-year span before she died of cancer in May 2012. Throughout Part 2, Anne Marie details the ups and downs of her journey with cancer. We have organized it by months, with monthly summaries that include the most salient quotes extracted from the blogs written during that month.

Throughout this book, you will find incredibly insightful and useful tidbits of theology & philosophy; and throughout this book, you will see how one mighty woman learned to dance between life's polarities. Sometimes with ease and sometimes with difficulty, as Anne Marie notes, "We are each being called into our destiny, into why we are here. Our task is to learn how to live, truly live."

Our editor, Clarence Johnson offers his comments about this book. Though he never met her, Clarence notes, "Anne Marie seems to be quite educated, street smart, eclectic, pithy, witty, spiritual, empathetic, loving, and tough--what a combination."

When you finish the book, I think you'll agree with me that Anne Marie did indeed accomplish her destiny – learning how to live, truly live—and to share her life's lessons with others. She is a way-shower, a healer and teacher to all of us.

Sandy Lundahl, Editor

Part One: There's No Place Like Home

My Journey through the New Age Back to Christianity

I was no longer sick—I was so much healthier and actually feeling quite well. So, now what? What was next in my life? I knew that part of the answer was to figure out how to live, truly live, now that I had possibilities for new life.

Personally, I'd been working on healing for years from an “incurable illness”—serious multiple chemical sensitivities, unable to be around “normal” people and their fabric softeners, hairsprays, perfumes, and extra smells. I now could live like normal people, having defeated that dreadful illness.

Professionally, as a healer and spiritual teacher, I also knew that my task was to figure out what had happened to me and to share what I learned with others. And at the same time I was to continue to do what was working and to be open to where this journey of healing would take me.

What was working was that I was praying every night with my prayer partner and friend, Tessa, and with a fundamentalist ministry twice a week. And it was the miracle of energy healing every morning that was working.

I hesitated to tell the ministry about the energy work. They'd want to know how I knew it was energy work and would tell me it was occult and shame me into not seeing Sue anymore. After all, they didn't believe I'd really felt Daddy or (God forbid) that Sue had seen him! They just saw a separate miracle that God gave me. The ministry was okay with my prayer partner since she was praying with them too. They took credit for my healing, and indeed their prayers were very powerful. When people asked about my healing, I said that prayer did it, but the answer was not very satisfactory to mainstream believers. It's not that they didn't believe that God could heal, but they knew me! I was Co-Chair of the Committee on Persons with Disabilities of the Baltimore-Washington Conference of the United Methodist Church. I suspect that it was a major hot potato. Why would God heal **me**? Others, deaf, blind, lame had prayed for healing. They had built a “safe” room for the chemically sensitive in their new conference center at my instigation (it wasn't that “safe” – but they'd made an attempt).

I'm sure some folks doubted not only my healing but that I'd been sick in the first place. I've heard the accusation many times that it was “psychological” or psychosomatic. No one said it to my face, but I heard from others that there were some questions about me now that I was healing. I probably was a little obnoxious in

those days. What I felt I could go public with was the prayer ministry, but their theology had some holes in it, and I – and the other members of the Committee were not willing to go so far as to assign sinful reasons to all sickness. What I felt I could do was speak of the mind-body connection and how looking within at how we are unfaithful to God might help alleviate symptoms. This was the best I could do, but it's the kind of thing that can be misinterpreted – and looking back, my presentation was probably not as diplomatic as it could be.

One of my lesbian friends really had a hard time with me too. I knew in my heart that she was as she was because that's how God had made her. That was a strong conviction of mine. But she began to worry that one day I might condemn her.

As I reflect, I think about what psychologists call projection, when someone subconsciously denies his or her own attributes, thoughts, and emotions...and then ascribes these attributes, thoughts, and emotions to other people. I think the fundamentalists were projecting the devil onto everyone else and the mainstream people were projecting negative intentions onto the fundamentalists. Whether or not projection was at work, it's clear to me that each side is operating in fear and I was caught in the middle trying to heal as well as make sense of it.

I learned to dance

I made partial sense by setting up a polarity and dancing between the two poles. On the one side was the fundamentalists, who definitely had something amazing going on—I could feel the power in their prayers and see some of the good results in other people. However, I was never sure I could see **their** results in **me**. I was never sure whether my results were a result only of prayer, energy work, or the way I danced between the two.

Walter Wink is a New Testament theologian who taught for many years at Auburn Theological Seminary. He'd written several books which I consulted multiple times during this period as I worked on learning the healing dance.

I also read the Bible each day and continued to pray. I had a solid background in theology, with a good grasp of Biblical nuances. What I'd learned from seminary was that there were different types of literature in the Bible—historical, interpretative, and mythological. Some of it was meant to be taken literally, some was mythological, and some of it resonated more deeply for me than others. But it was a totality—a story of a people's journey to God—and that it was bad interpretation to take sentences out of context and hold them up as the Whole Truth without checking in with what my professors used to call “the Biblical witness as a whole.”

The fundamentalists emphasized different parts of the Bible than I'd used before, held up certain concepts as The Whole Truth, and were pretty obsessed with Satan. They saw Satan everywhere—and not like Walter Wink as fallen powers which are operative

in the world in institutionalized racism, sexism, and all the negative “isms” which exploit people and create brokenness, poverty, and hatred. Their Satan was embodied—the guy hiding behind the Stop Sign (someone told me one day) just waiting to pounce out and make them sin. Indeed, there are Catholic prayers I remembered from the Bible—Satan was roaming through the whole world looking for people to recruit to his evil purposes. It was this Satan who created a “spirit of fear” which had “invaded” me and pulled me into my chemical sensitivities.

My job as a Christian was to resist this spirit of fear, to fill myself with the Bible every day, to cast out this spirit when I noticed it residing within me, to search my heart and being for experiences which had led to my spirit of fear and to cast them out of me by remembering and quoting fear-resistive Biblical verses. My favorite among many verses was: “When I am afraid, I trust in you.”

It was nearly a full time job following the fundamentalist ministries instructions, and many people who did so became perfectly healed. At least they no longer were chemically sensitive, even being able (as one person bragged) to sit in a room where they were spraying for pesticides and “not react”. As if pesticides were a benign product of human civilization, and reactions to them were the results of a spirit of fear.

But this was not for me. I had the additional job of processing and sorting through what it was I could buy into that the fundamentalists taught and what it was that I would have to dance around, using my safety nets of Sue and Walter Wink, to whom I owe a huge debt of gratitude. Walter Wink was an influential liberal theologian whose views on homosexuality, nonviolence and the nature of Jesus challenged orthodox interpretations. They definitely had something to contribute to the Christian conversation although they are often marginalized because many people can no longer relate to a literal translation of all passages in the Bible and a view of Satan as roaming throughout the world looking for people to entice into sexual and other personal sins. And yet, in their faithfulness to Jesus as they saw him, to God as they saw Him, they saw pieces of Christianity which the mainstream church did not see, even in some cases, afraid to even touch. For example, healing! If God heals **some** people and not others—all of whom pray, what does that make of God? And suffering in general, if suffering is a result of sin, then are the people who do not prosper more sinful than those who do?

Well of course, we know this is not true. Yet it is sometimes true, and our wanting to choose sides of the pole instead of dancing in the middle means the church divided itself into two—a split between those who take the Bible literally and those who don't.

I didn't learn in church very well how to be spiritual and how to take the Bible seriously and non-literally at the same time. I had to go to seminary to learn this. It was where I first danced, and it took a lot of time to do so. In order to prepare a sermon, you had to read the passage several times, look at the context it was written

in, ask what role the passage played in the life of the church at the time the passage was written, and analyze the key words of the text.

For example, mainstream scholars no longer believe that God dictated the Bible and then someone transcribed it exactly. Scholarship held that humans wrote the Bible—and depending on how cynical they were, they were pushing their individual point of view or simply recording what they saw. If God didn't dictate the Bible, then cultural context mattered. Biblical times and culture had a view of women that is repugnant to many women today—women were the enticers according to one first century document I read. Among their tools of enticement was luxuriously long locks of hair. Looking at the context, it seems reasonable that some of the passages in the Bible that assign particular roles to women might have been influenced by the culture in which the Bible was written. The same is true with slavery. Slavery was considered legal and okay in some parts of the Biblical world. Not only that, some felt that the end times were almost here. In that context, telling Philemon to keep his slaves might be different if the world were expected to last a long time. There were other parts of the Bible which might empower women and slaves by giving them a different view of God or their role—for example, that male **and** female both were created in the image of God. Or the fact that the pivotal event in Hebrew history was the Exodus, the story of God's helping them—a band of slaves--escape from slavery.

With a Master's Degree in Theology, I was a pretty advanced dancer. I knew that most people weren't and I'd noticed my friends who were clergy often having hard times bringing people along. Moreover, I personally could not stand Bible study at church unless I taught it myself. Most Protestants did not know how to make the leap between the science they took for granted in their daily lives and the Biblical text they intuitively knew to be more nuanced than what appeared before them. I'd found I could get over focused on the scholarship—and enjoy it tremendously—but leave without any feeling of spiritual positivity. At least with the fundamentalists, there was spiritual positivity. There had to be a way of bringing the two sides together, and I found that was the dance. To use Christian spirituality in such a way that it could empower me to become whole. Of course, that is the purpose of being a Christian—to become whole, but it's really easy to get lost.

There's so much evil in the world—Darfur, Iraq, nuclear weapons, climate change, and much more, including even the polarization we experience in so many realms of life. In my view these are today's manifestation of the crucifixion which has always been taking place. They are all the ways that human beings work to kill God, which we agree is—at least—Love, if not much, much more. I said human beings, for it is human beings who take action, although sometimes the actions are from institutional structures which human beings have created or situations in which human beings have created one problem unintentionally while solving another problem.

In my dance, the crucifixion and certain institutional structures, whether conscious or not, are the Dark Side of the Force (to borrow from my favorite movie series). I could see where fundamentalists might call this Satan. Walter Wink calls it “The Powers”. The Powers, to borrow Wink’s term, have a life of their own, almost pulling people in to their culture and reality. In my simplistic way of putting this into words, as I was struggling to understand what happened to heal me, I could see that the Powers, Dark Side, Satan—all had a role in my being sick, at least so far as there were situations which had created fear in me, which preoccupied me, and drew me away from Love. To the fundamentalists, this Light Side of the Force, was God. And of course, I knew that the Bible could be used in support of either side—to beat people over the head with it, to enslave people with it, to undertake Crusades, as well as to create some of the greatest beauty humankind has ever created—the Masses of Bach, the Cathedrals of Europe, and (depending on who you speak with) the vision of a country in which all people are created equal.

For example, the Bible played an ironic role in the abolition of slavery. Again, there were two poles. On the one pole was the reason to introduce slaves to Christianity in the first place. Christianity was meant to keep them in their place, teach the slaves about God and eternal life, make them **want** eternal life—and then show them, using the texts, that it would be theirs if they kept their place. Maybe they would be slaves for now, in this life, but later there would be “pie in the sky by and by.”ⁱ

But some slaves recognized and were empowered by the story of a God who **liberated from** slavery, and some white people recognized that too. In the 20th century, Martin Luther King used the Bible to empower the Civil Rights Movement and the ability to use non-violence to obtain justice. No thinking person today would justify slavery using Biblical texts. In this case, we’ve settled on a pole, but in order to get there, there was a dance between texts, a dance between what we used to think was true and how we changed it.

As I thought of my own use of the Bible, it began to play out in the dance between the crucifixion and the resurrection. Growing up Catholic, we focused more on the Crucifixion. The most prominent icon in many Catholic Churches was a huge cross with Christ hanging down overlooking us all, emphasizing the Crucifixion. In the Protestant Churches, the cross was empty, emphasizing the Resurrection. When I look around at the world today, the spiritual message often is either “God wants you to be prosperous, our God is a God of **abundance**, God will get you what you want if you just **believe!**” Or, God is a God of justice and wants you to do something about Darfur, climate change, sexism, abortion, racism, gay marriage—whatever the speaker’s major issue is. One side represents crucifixion and how we have to fix it; the other represents resurrection and ain’t it grand?

My tendency, having strong remnants of the justice God is to focus on all that needs to be done and changed. My left brain focuses on the details, noticing the wart on the

end of the chin rather than the whole of the face. I tend to focus on the details that need changing. Yet it is the right brain that allows us to focus on how wonderful it all is and how abundant and loving God is. Very true.

And what you focus on expands. So when I focus on the wart on someone's face, after a while, that's all I can see. I struggle against blurting out about their wart. When I focus on the positive, that feels a lot better and I enjoy it a lot more. The dilemma is that while right now we have many people for whom spirituality means prosperity and abundance and God bestowing good things on them, elsewhere the sky is falling. At least if you're in Darfur, are gay in the Catholic church, or live near the Arctic Circle where the ice is melting and you can no longer feed your family on the whales which are disappearing fast.

It felt to me that I needed a more whole-brained way to read the Bible and to think of my life—while I concentrated on getting well and continued to do my part to make the world the kind of place where my grandchildren could want to raise their children. The fundamentalists opened my mind to the idea of reading the Bible with a positive outlook, though from my study of religion, this worldview needed to be updated to make a place for post-enlightenment scholarship. Furthermore, I needed to see how I was focused almost exclusively on the crucifixion and not attending to the resurrection.

It happened one day during meditation when I received a healing myth. I didn't believe in the story literally, but on a mythological level it seemed to describe the way I approached Christianity. I could look around the world and really grasp the Crucifixion. I could look at scholarship and grasp the different voices that wanted to be heard in the Bible. But it became clear to me that I needed to develop a resurrection faith.

I learned the language of energy and I began to listen to my innate internal wisdom

While the power of prayer certainly helped heal me, prayer alone was not enough. It was the language of energy that I incorporated into my life that also made a difference. It was the language of energy that allowed me to experience the interrelatedness of body, mind, and spirit. It was the language of energy that helped make believable some of Jesus' actions that had previously seemed primitive or impossible or miracles, which I wasn't sure I could believe in. It was the language of energy that gave me a reason why my father could appear to me after he'd died. (He'd left this dimension. He'd left behind his physical body.) It was the idea of our subtle bodies, which I could look at mythologically, that helped me see that physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual planes all have a voice within me. Just as left brain looks at problems one way seeing the trees not so much as the entire forest, right brain sees the forest but not the trees.

I know now that the separation of body, mind, and spirit can lead to illness. Curiously, the classic Christian definition of “sin” is separation. Separation from God, from nature, and ourselves; it is this separation which leads to people committing the “acts” which used to be known as “sins”.

We need to connect to our innate internal wisdom and listen to the variety of voices with which this wisdom speaks.

Many of us act like we don't even know these varied voices are there! No wonder, the voices of authority outside of us seem louder. Television advertising. Employer demands. Scientific research. Old tapes from parents. These voices seem to work on the inside of us, so that we internalize **them** instead of our own still small quiet voices. Listening to others' voices and listening to reason and science primarily is the way of the *mind*. Yes, the mind is great, but an unfettered mind can be very mental, literal, authoritative, controlling, and always “right” (so it “thinks”).

Isn't it someone else's voice that tells us most of the time that the piece of cheesecake will make us happy?

When I pay attention to what is going on inside of me when I eat that piece of cheesecake or have that huge bowl of popcorn when I am not hungry I realize that it is a voice of a mental construct (my own or someone else's)—not truth. For example, milk. The United States Department of Agriculture says that milk is good for me since I am a middle-aged, small-framed woman of European descent, and it tastes good to me. But immediately, my body produces mucous, which leads to spasmodic coughing attacks; my mind tries to hold fast to the pleasure of that first taste by pointing out that I'm imagining the connection between my coughing and my milk drinking. If I'm smart, I listen to my body.

Energetically and practically speaking, the mind works best when it is not separated from body and spirit. Helping the mind so it doesn't operate alone can be a big challenge. It may not **think** it needs help and may dismiss the reactions from the body. So we have to learn to pay attention.

Communication from the body starts with sensations and symptoms. Wise people learn its language. They pay attention to gut feelings, they learn when they are experiencing certain emotions, and they form careful opinions based upon truth rather than wishful thinking. The more we pay attention to our bodily sensations, the more we find we may disagree with some other interpretations of the Bible our minds (or other authorities) had given us. This kind of communication can take time (and require courage) to develop, but it is accessible to everyone.

It also includes communication from our larger body, the body of the earth. The Biblical story of creation speaks about humankind being formed from the dust of the earth. That is true literally, for the food we eat, the clothing we wear—even when

synthetic—must come from the earth or be supported by energy sources connected to the earth. This is not necessarily “pagan”, Wiccan, or tree hugging (though I **am** a tree hugger), but was once considered a necessary part in a Christian education. St. Augustine, writing in the 4th century (?) said, “There are two books through which you can learn about God, the Book of the Bible and the Book of Nature.” You can access the “The Book of Nature” through observation and careful study. Even the well-known Islamic poet, Rumi, taught animal husbandry to his disciples because he knew this could help them connect with God.

Bringing a religious and spiritual perspective to the earth could change how we view the environment—not as some “other” to control or subdue but as a vital part of ourselves and of God’s creation. We might even have our eyes opened to Biblical passages we had never noticed before, as mine were. Several of these were in the Book of Psalms, where different parts of nature are personified to praise and worship God. I once thought this was symbolic language, however, Psalm 104 makes it clear that animals have God’s spirit within them (30), something my anthropocentric training would not have allowed me to think before—but any person with a pet might tell you the same thing.

Receiving communication from the invisible non-body, non-thought realms—what many people call *spiritual*-is accessible to everyone too. This is not the same as the Christian Holy Spirit, although I suspect that the Holy Spirit comes through this realm. Nor is it about channeling a spirit or going to a psychic. Wise people learn how to be their own psychics. What they do is learn the language of their bodies, but they also learn to pay attention to their intuitions, dreams, pictures in their mind’s eye, imagination, hunches, art, coincidences, and extra-ordinary senses (the ability to see, hear, smell, touch, or taste very subtle energies that so many people filter out). For example, the blind can have advanced skills in discerning small differences in texture and frequency of things they touch. Animals hear some frequencies that most humans cannot, though some humans are able to hear them too. Some people can see lights around others, as do, for example, artists that I know. Ever wonder why artists depict saints with halos around their heads? These experiences, extra-ordinary senses and hunches often come through our bodies, another reason to pay attention to body sensations.

Some people who have started to pay more attention to the non-mental dimensions have “imagined” they see angels or that trees are talking to them. This doesn’t make sense at all to the rational mind, but it wasn’t so strange in Jesus’ day. Jesus himself spoke to and commanded wind and water, as well as trees and invisible spirits. It is as if our mental selves are all Muggles, people from J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter book series who lack any sort of magical ability, but our bodies and spirits are not necessarily that way. Perhaps one day we will be able to see and do things that we thought only Harry Potter and his friends could do.

Becoming aware of and listening to each of these information sources—*body, mind, and spirit*—is important. It’s a holistic approach. Yet, in our culture, we often use the mind when we should be listening to something else. Someone who is taking the Bible very seriously from a strictly *mental* perspective may be ignoring vital information from the realms of the *body* or spirit. Body, mind, and spirit work together holistically when we read the Bible or do anything else in a comprehensive and thorough way.

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http://www.lulu.com/spotlight/sandy_lundahl

ⁱ “Pie in the sky” are words coined by Joe Hill in his song, *The Preacher and the Slave*, and sung to the tune of *In the Sweet By-and-By*.