

## Tribute to Craig

By Susanne M. Alexander

When the sun of someone's life sets in this world and rises in the next one, we realize that each of us knew the person in different ways. For me, Craig has the soul of a jazz man. He often heard melody when others heard noise. He would take the contradiction of notes or disunity between people and blend them together for harmony. When improvising, Craig's music was "free form." Sometimes he would sing according to the notes in the songbook; other times he would follow his own tune. Or, as his friend and fellow singer Nik Tressler would say, Craig would sometimes simply stop singing and nap!

Craig's poetry was beautiful and heartfelt, often vulnerable and amazingly honest. But, it rarely rhymed. His artwork had moments of realism, but was usually abstract and full of movement. When doing dishes, he would often create new and interesting places to put things away. Sometimes he would slow down and listen intently. Other times, he absolutely couldn't sit still or walk slowly. He was always a mix of notes and melodies.

People looked at Craig and saw a calm, peaceful gentle-man. But underneath, he yearned for adventure. His spiritual heroes were Mulla Husayn and Quddus, steadfast early Bahá'ís who wielded swords in battle and didn't back down from difficulty or danger. He wanted to float above the earth in a hot air balloon seeing new vistas. He wanted to scuba dive beneath the sea. He talked often of wishing he lived in the time of the explorers and could sail around the world. He once lauded the captains of these ships by saying, "It took courage to sail the open seas, running down the swells with the wind at your back." The posters I found that reminded me of Craig's adventuring spirit have been on the walls of his bedroom the last few months and are here on display for you all to see. During the last months when we reviewed Craig's lifetime personal transformation journey, I became clear that over time he learned to courageously captain his own ship and rely on God to guide the way. His life became a symphony of spiritual triumph.

As with music, Craig and I often had separate lines of melody. But, put together we created a wonderful harmony in our marriage. Craig and I have been clear throughout our marriage that one of our strengths was starting out as friends, and having our friendship helped to sustain us through good times and difficult ones. We learned how to communicate and consult effectively about choices, projects, books, finances, and problems. We focused on building family relationships. We balanced and enhanced each other's contributions to others. Our marriage partnership included creating the Marriage Transformation Project together, something that is benefiting thousands of relationships around the planet. A profound, life-changing experience for us was being able to go on pilgrimage together to the Bahá'í holy places in Israel in 2006. We laid our foreheads together on the thresholds of all three Shrines. The spiritual reverberations from that time have significantly influenced and sustained us during Craig's illness.

In the months prior to Craig's passing, we had the experience of being partners in planning this honoring service. Extraordinary and creative projects emerged out of our open discussions about his soul's journey, about what would honor his contributions to the world, and about what legacy to leave for his family, friends, and others. With the help of many people, we were able to collect Craig's recorded voice raised in song and create a CD. We compiled Craig's poetry, artwork, and written words for both display and a book about his lifetime journey of personal transformation. Finally, we created a book entitled "Empowered Healing: Creating Quality of Life While Journeying with Cancer". It has been a profoundly moving and amazing experience for me accompanying Craig on this last stage of his journey on earth.

Craig was honored, but also somewhat embarrassed, as I began collecting and listing his lifetime of service accomplishments...and I probably missed a few that only you know about. Craig followed Bahá'u'lláh's guidance to "be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in" (*Gleanings*, p. 213). When I asked him what types of service to others he really wanted to do, he always said he preferred to build things or dig ditches. Friends often remember him for his willingness to lend a hand, a vehicle, or a place to sleep for the night, week, or month. But, his list of service accomplishments more often shows him sitting in meetings and building relationships. He passionately wanted to make a difference with achieving what Bahá'u'lláh refers to as having the "entire human race as one soul and one body." (*Gleanings*, p. 214) Building community, fostering positive interracial friendships, serving on executive boards...Craig adjusted his melody to steadfastly create unity. He felt that he lived to serve others.

Craig often helped me by modeling this quotation from the Bahá'í Writings: "Beware lest ye harm any soul, or make any heart to sorrow; lest ye wound any man with your words, be he known to you or a stranger, be he friend or foe." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 73) He often influenced me to take a kinder, gentler approach to other people. Craig was committed to knowing our neighbors and being on peaceful and friendly terms with them. His philosophy was "Can't we all just get along?" He did his best to create good wherever he went and help others whenever he could. Our neighbor Frank, who became a good friend, said truthfully about him, "Craig doesn't have a bad bone in his body."

Marriages built on unity and love last for all eternity, and I'm confident Craig's soul and mine are linked forever. It will be a unique and interesting experience in the time to come to learn what it's like to be married to someone who is spiritually with me but not physically present. I know that he will continue to be my guardian and champion wherever he is, and that he will watch over and continue to influence all the members of our blended family. I pray that God will bless his soul in the next world with abiding happiness. Farewell, sweetheart!