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THE GIFT: A CLIENT'S PERSPECTIVE OCTOBER 2009 NEWSLETTER

A warm "hello" to all faithful, occasional, and new readers of the Solomon Massage monthly newsletter. I have been a massage therapy client of Lee-Ann's for two years. At my last appointment I volunteered to write something from my own experience, and Lee-Ann agreed. So here it is.

One year ago Lee-Ann's October newsletter was titled "Giving Thanks". I found it quite inspiring. Lee-Ann identified many positive aspects of her personal and working lives. She wrote about how her experiences with clients have deepened her knowledge and appreciation of the workings of the body, and she expressed gratitude for her clients' sharing their lives with her. As Lee-Ann is a smart individual and a creative and dedicated therapist, I was not surprised at her ability to weave so much into this expression of thanks.

I could write a long and convincing testimonial about Lee-Ann's work, but I promised not to. I am going to write about how massage helps me.

Like Lee-Ann, I have a lot to be thankful for. Near the top of the list for me is massage therapy. Though I pay the going rate for my sessions, each time I go, I feel as if I have received a gift. They don't sell wrapping paper big enough for this kind of gift! My regular massage sessions not only 'get the knots out', they help me appreciate and enjoy many other good things in my life, and to deal with the more difficult aspects of living.

I was diagnosed with Parkinson's in my late 30s and I am now in my mid-40s. People with Parkinson's have lost most of the dopamine-producing neurons in the substantia nigra, a part of the basal ganglia in the centre of the brain responsible for movement. My main physical symptoms are muscle stiffness and rigidity, and I am starting to have more difficulty with slowness and initiation of movement (bradykinesia). On my right side, the muscles are always in tension, and this can make the muscles feel exhausted. Massage brings blood to these muscles and stretches them out in a way that only massage can. This softening reduces the need for the other side of my body to compensate with movements and positions that can be a strain and cause longer-term problems. Massage gets neurotransmitter chemicals moving. I believe that both gentle pressure and vigorous digging (including use of elbows and scraping tools) stimulate the chemical communication pathways between the brain and the muscles. I also experience well-known common benefits including improved posture and reduced chances of injury. I am also sure that massage can help with circulation, digestion and quality of sleep, reduce mental and physical stress and anxiety, and improve energy and concentration.

While I am generally in quite good health, there are times when my body just doesn't feel good. The stiffness and rigidity can be uncomfortable. So the "good feeling" I have from the massage (to some degree during, but especially after) is a wonderful gift. Imagine someone gives you an exotic young flowering tree. It looks beautiful standing



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there in its pot, but the beauty will not last without some investment from you. You have to plant it in the right place and nurture it appropriately. If you continue to care for it the tree will become stronger, and produce more foliage and blooms. It can bring pleasure to you and others. The opportunity to go for massages on a regular basis is like getting this gift of the young tree. I try to care for it by complementing the "bodywork" with taking care of myself. I try to eat well, watch my posture, avoid repetitive strain and other injuries, and I have recently increased my frequency of exercise at the gym and attending a variety of yoga classes. The right kinds of strength and flexibility exercises are proving to be invaluable. (I could write much more about the benefits of yoga). My body feels generally better, and massages are more effective as less time is spent on painful trouble spots and more on reducing general muscle tension. I still spend too much time being busy and too little time relaxing and sleeping, and I need to work on my breathing ... but massage, exercise and good lifestyle choices can weave together to create a sense that experiences of good times and good health are in my future.

One of my favorite times is my walk home following a massage. I try to explain the feeling to Lee-Ann: "straighter", "stronger", but that's not all of it. The effects of the massage *resonate* ... I feel all sorts of connections: tingling, skin sliding over muscle, my feet tell me more about the texture of the ground, street sounds are more intriguing than annoying, I catch myself smiling at strangers, I appreciate how I feel at that moment and feel that I will be able to handle problems when they arise. I feel stable and balanced. I feel that I understand a little better what is going on around me. And to prolong this glorious feeling, sometimes I take a long route home.

Solomon Massage has gone electronic with merchant services! For your convenience, we've added the debit feature to the current payment options of cash, cheque, Visa and Mastercard. You will notice there is an option on this new feature to add in a "tip" – please disregard this. Clients often ask me about tipping etiquette & massage because they're just not sure! This is my position on tipping practices and massage: my preference is to **not** accept tips because massage therapy is a regulated health care profession (I **do** make exceptions *sometimes* -- house calls for example). Would you tip your dentist, oral hygienist, chiropractor, x-ray technician, optometrist or midwife after receiving their services? We are all part of the Regulated Health Professions Act, but the unique position that massage therapy holds is that spas are a place of employment for many therapists -- and this is a service industry where tipping is *literally expected*. My view of working in a spa is rather cynical due to experience – they don't pay or treat therapists well to begin with, so the tips were well appreciated. However, tipping is NOT an established tradition in this profession and appears to have increased through the employment of R.M.T.'s in spas.