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Open Heart:

Using Alexander Principles in Everyday Life

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Last month, I spent the longest day of my life in the Stanford Hospital ICU waiting room with my two brothers, my step-father and sister-in-law. My mother had Open-Heart Surgery (a quadruple bypass). Everything went extremely well and we are all incredibly grateful. It was the waiting that made this day long. There was nothing we could do but wait for word as each phase of her surgery was completed.

For us, it was emotionally impossible to do "our other work" (phone calls or computer work). I even found it difficult to focus enough to read. To deal with my anxiety, I walked. I walked the halls of the hospital and the grounds of Stanford University, all of which were incredibly beautiful. Extraordinary art work filled the walls of the hospital as muted sunlight poured in from the vast windows. Outside the architecture, the lawns, the sculpture garden and the meditation gardens provided distraction and sometimes respite from my unrelenting anxiety.

And when they were not enough, I found that I always came back to my Alexander directions: neck free, head forward & up, back lengthen & widen. They were my mantra. They grounded me and allowed me to open my heart to this experience, to my family, to the other families in the ICU, to life.

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