

Folk healers of Saskatchewan

□ Book chronicles people who practise folk medicine

By Darlene Polachic
for The Saskatoon Sun

Jacqueline Moore has long been fascinated by stories of folk medicine and folk healers, particularly healers in Saskatchewan. That fascination led to her spending a number of years seeking out and interviewing 13 such remarkable people and compiling their stories in a recently published book entitled *The Saskatchewan Secret: Folk Healers, Diviners, and Mystics of the Prairies*.

"I'd been hearing about these remarkable healers by word of mouth for a long time and wanted to know more about them," Moore says. "It had to be word of mouth because true folk healers don't advertise. A couple had become almost legendary in my mind because of the extraordinary healing feats they had accomplished."

Moore says the hardest part of her project was actually locating the individuals. She did so by inquiring at health food stores, putting ads in weekly newspapers, "and basically just asking around."

"I had established some criteria regarding what I wanted in suitable candidates. They would be people who didn't advertise, and people who had no professional training in healing. They would not charge for their services; in other words, they didn't do this as a business. My other requirement was that their name must come to me from someone else. I didn't want anyone answering my ad and saying, 'Hey, pick me . . . I'm a folk healer.'"

Moore says she quickly discovered the people she was looking for were humble, modest folk who were often reluctant healers. In each case, they believed the gift had chosen them, rather than them deciding to go out and become healers.

Moore came to the project as a seasoned journalist with many years of freelance writing experience. She was further encouraged when her application for a Saskatchewan Arts Board Grant was accepted in 2005.

The *Saskatchewan Secret: Folk Healers, Diviners, and Mystics of the Prairies* contains 13 profiles, all of Saskatchewan people, and represents a variety of cultures and specific healing skills. None have any professional medical training, but some were culturally trained in First Nations, Métis, Ukrainian and Hindu healing. They include a palm reader, a Ukrainian wax pourer, and a dowser, a mystic, a prayer healer, a psychic, a herbalist and more.

"Their great modesty sometimes made it difficult to interview them," Moore says. "In some cases, I spent quite a lot of time getting past their humility. It often took some work to convince them to speak about themselves or their successes in healing, mostly because all of them firmly believe the healing is done by something or someone bigger than themselves."

Moore taped the interviews, and then allowed each participant to read his or her story before the book went to print.

"I wanted them to see what I had written to make sure I had their full blessing," she says.

The book is written in the first person and articulates Moore's experiences, encounters and conversations with each of the healers, as well as her own personal responses to each one.

"It was necessary for me to be in those stories in order to fully understand and convey what the healers are doing," she says. "I had an excellent editor in J. Jill Robinson, who helped me pull myself into the stories."

Not only has the project brought attention to these unsung healers, Moore also found it to be life-transforming for her.

"I came away from all these people, who use their beliefs, their faith, their thoughts and their intentions to bring about healing, more aware of my own thinking and beliefs and more aware of how that affects my body health and what's going on around me."

She says her greatest joy was discovering that she had



—Photo by Darlene Polachic

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a profound reverence and respect for each one of the 13 healers.

"It was an honour to have them spend an hour of their time with me and share their insights, their wisdom, and their guidance."

Moore self-published *The Saskatchewan Secret* and launched it on Nov. 12 at McNally-Robinson Booksellers. The initial print run was 1,000 books; 900 have sold.

"I never dreamed it would be so well received," Moore says, "because it addresses some contentious issues about God, reality and the afterlife. But people seem to be open to hearing about those things. I'm getting wonderful

comments and many e-mails telling about how the stories resonate with people on many different levels."

Since the release of *The Saskatchewan Secret*, Moore has been kept busy speaking about her book before several bookclubs and creative writing classes. She can be contacted through her website: www.folkhealers.ca.

The Saskatchewan Secret: Folk Healers, Diviners, and Mystics of the Prairies is available at McNally-Robinson, the Mendel Art Gallery, the University of Saskatchewan Bookstore, several places on Broadway, and Moore's own website. Books purchased through the website are guaranteed to be signed copies.