

# Herbal First Aide

## Cuts, Lacerations, Bruises, Burns, Boils, Broken Bones, Bites

**Matthew Wood** MSc (Herbal Medicine)

Registered Herbalist (AHG)

The modern idea of wound healing extends little beyond the admonition to keep the wound clean and 'let nature do its work.' Antibiotic creams are given to protect against infection or fight established infection, but this is secondary to the wound itself. Stitches are used to bind the lips of the wound together. So far, so good, so much more can be done.

Herbs have affinities to certain phases of wound healing and different types of wounds. Therefore, they can accelerate the process of healing beyond what people would imagine. There are herbs to draw out dirt and pus from wounds, close the lips of clean wounds, prevent the development of excessive scar tissue, remove it after it has developed, reduce proud flesh, reduce nerve damage, regenerate lost tissue, make threatened amputation unnecessary, and so forth. Herbs possess intelligence. When we see them rapidly change a dangerous situation for the better we know that they are following a plan, as it were, which is written in their genes and a reflection of their essential nature. They are not just a bunch of 'active ingredients.'

If I could only have one herb in my practice it would be yarrow – and many herbalists would agree. It acts deeply on the blood, circulation, fever, and diverse tissue conditions. It is probably the single most important wound-healing plant. Everyone should know about it because it can literally save life and limb.

Here's an example of how yarrow cured a terrible injury quickly and almost miraculously. One of my students was cutting firewood in the woods with a chain saw. He slipped and cut himself across the shin, to the bone, three inches long, the width of a chain

saw blade. He was too freaked out to look at it and kept working for the next ten minutes. Finally he went over to the little road in the woods, found some yarrow, chewed it up and put the wad on the wound. The pain and bleeding stopped immediately. After about ten minutes he took it off and put on another wad. The blood had been pooling under the skin to create a blue-red bruise around the wound but this was now gone. It looked as if the lips of the wound were drawing together. Twenty-four hours later, when he showed it to our class, all that remained was a brown line across the skin. As we will see from some of the stories below, yarrow has healed other dramatic and terrible injuries quickly and efficiently.

### **Basic Stages of Wound Healing**

Medicine has long recognized three stages to the healing process. Each one is important for a wound to heal completely in a healthy manner.

**Inflammation.** The first stage of healing consists of inflammation, the purpose of which is to send blood to the area to feed and strengthen wounded or stressed tissues and provide white cells to the area to fight bacteria and consume waste products of tissue breakdown. Since the time of ancient Greek medicine four characteristics of inflammation have been known: *calor* (heat), *robur* (redness), *tumor* (swelling), and *dolor* (pain). Even today, this is what the doctor or the house wife sees on looking at a wound. Each of these characteristics is important.

**Granulation.** Regrowth of the flesh itself fills the wound. 'Feed a wound' with good food and usually there will be no problem. The main problem is excessive granulation, or granuloma, commonly known as 'proud flesh.' The flesh overgrows the wound. Poultice with raw potato. Or, take elecampane internally and externally. An old name for

elecampane is 'scabwort.' I thought that meant it was for scabby skin but it is the opposite. Jennifer Tucker, an herbalist in State College, Pennsylvania, said her mentor, an older practitioner named Evelyn Snook, used 'scabwort' on proud flesh 'to form the scab.' Another remedy may be rattlesnake master (*Eryngium yuccafolium*). This problem is more common in animals than humans; I have seen it numerous times from badly done biopsies of the breast.

**Scar Formation.** Finally the scar forms. Yarrow will keep scar tissue in a bad laceration to a minimum. *Monarda fistulosa* will reduce scar tissue from a burn, or lessen the formation in the first place. This is an old Indian remedy. I was also taught the Indian philosophy to healing burns: always draw out the fire with hot dressings and herbs; don't put on cold, which drives the fire deeper and prevents healing. Scar tissue from acne: wild lettuce. Excessive scar tissue or overgrowth is called a keloid; prevent or lessen with homeopathic silica, *Silicea 6x*, three doses a day for five days, or with herbal horsetail.

### **Cuts, Lacerations**

In order to cure wounds quickly and effectively we need to understand them. The main organ we are dealing with here is the skin. It protects the body from the entry of impurities. Numerous minute capillaries carry blood to the sub dermic layer – the third layer down from the surface. Here the plasma seeps out of the vessels, full of food and oxygen, which permeate into the second and first layers of the skin. Waste products are carried away by the veins and lymphatic vessels in the third layer. In the second layer we find the connective tissue that provides a supportive platform for the surface skin. Here the immune cells and particles congregate, providing an immune barrier. If the surface layer of the skin is broken an immune response will get to work on the impurities that enter. Finally, we reach the first or surface layer of the skin, the lower

part of which is alive, generating new skin cells, the upper part of which consists of old, dead skin cells providing a protective barrier to the body. Nerve cells penetrate into the first layer, to provide the ability to sense by touch. Secretions of watery sweat and oily sebum lubricate, moisten, nourish, and keep the surface healthy.

A break in the skin can be a clean, knifelike cut, a mangled, jagged laceration, or a superficial abrasion (scrape). Blood and lymph are released from cut vessels. Nerves will be damaged, resulting in pain. The major needs of the moment are to stop the bleeding, reduce shock, and keep the wound clean. The blood contains coagulation factors that help form a scab. The lips of the wound probably release compounds that help the lips seek each other out and close the more quickly, in the same way broken bones release factors that search for the other broken bone and bring them together. Thus, there are herbs that 'bring the lips of the wound together' quickly. To remove unclean substances and bacteria, the process of inflammation (heat, redness, swelling, and pain) will set in. If the bacteria grow and proliferate this process will be unnecessarily extended and there will be a generation of pus from dead bacteria and immune cells. This may exit externally through the wound or internally through the lymph and veins draining the wound. As inflammation subsides the skin will concentrate on regrowing healthy tissue (granulation), forming minimum scar tissue, and minimizing damage to nerves.

Complications include *excessive bleeding, dirt in the wound, prolonged inflammation, bacterial infection, pus production, 'dirty blood' or impurities that cause extended inflammation, poor granulation, excessive granulation (proud-flesh), poor formation of scar tissue, excessive scar tissue (keloids), poor lymphatic drainage, and chronic nerve injury and pain.*

Although doctors generally only consider the activity of the coagulants in the blood when there is a need to stop bleeding the body actually has developed other functions that assist stopping or staunching blood flow. One of the most important of these is an increase in the blood flow to the capillaries in the rest of the body to

keep excessive blood from flooding the area of the wound. The capillaries of the skin have the ability to take up to twenty times more blood than the skin needs in order to warm the surface to release heat from inflammation or to take blood away from a wound. This is why the old doctors gave 'stimulants' to stop bleeding. The Civil War doctors used whiskey as a stimulant.

Here is an example of incorrect and correct wound treatment that demonstrates how important it is to understand how healing works, rather than to simply throw herbs at a problem blindly. This is a medicine story told by herbalist 7Song. A man came to see him who had a deep cut on his finger that had been stitched up by a doctor. Someone told him to put comfrey on the wound. After a few days the wound got putrid, starting discharging pus and the finger turned blackish. 7 Song removed the comfrey, put on yarrow and the next day the end of finger had "pinked up." What happened here was that comfrey, which is well known for encouraging cellular proliferation or growth, caused the cells in the end of the finger to grow more quickly. Yet, they had no blood supply so they started to die off, shown by the blackish color. The yarrow, on the other hand, stimulated blood flow into the finger to nourish the tissues and out to remove waste products. It is an excellent wound healer, so it started the job of recovery correctly.

**Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*).** This is my favorite wound-remedy and is well known to many herbalists, though it is not advertised by the big companies and therefore is not as well known as it should be.

The Latin name *Achillea* comes from Achilles, the famous warrior. Homer gives an example of yarrow being used to treat an arrow wound. It was carried into battle by warriors for generations and is also known as "carpenter's weed."

Yarrow is specific for deep wounds that hemorrhage freely. It is less effective for a puncture wound or when the bleeding is not profuse. It almost seems like the more the

blood, the more it sprays, the more it bleeds, the better yarrow works. It stops the bleeding quickly, brings the lips of the wound together, prevents infection and excessive inflammation and promotes healing with the minimum scar tissue. It doesn't stop acute bleeding just by promoting coagulation and astringing the wound (laying down proteins that pucker the tissue) but also by stimulating peripheral circulation so that the blood is dispersed throughout the body and less of it is available to surge out of the wound.

Those who have used yarrow can attest that it helps the veins soak up blood with renewed vigor. It is not unusual to see a fresh bruise removed in a short time because the veins pull in the pooled blood. There are coagulating factors that help close the wound, yet the blood that needs to be removed from the wound is kept moving. Yarrow is a stimulant and like all stimulants, it increases circulation to the capillaries in general. This takes the burden off a local area of congestion and hemorrhage, decreasing bleeding. By decongesting the capillaries yarrow is also cooling and sedating.

Yarrow works on internal hemorrhages as well as external. My friend Margi Flint, a community herbalist in Marblehead, MA, was called by a patient in tears. Her teenage son fell off his skateboard onto the board. He seemed to be o.k. at first, but his kidney had been injured and the hospital could not stop the bleeding. Could anything be done? "Of course," replied Margi. She administered yarrow and the bleeding was stopped in short order. The doctors were amazed.

The mother of one of my students was asked to help by her neighbors, who didn't have health insurance. The husband had gouged out a chunk of flesh on the front side of the ankle on a barb wire fence. The tendons were freely visible in the wound. The couple went to the emergency room but when they heard they were going to have to have a skin graft from the other leg they asked their neighbor, who was a nurse, if she

would help. She agreed to change the bandages everyday and called her daughter to find out what herbal medicine could be given. She was advised to put on yarrow poultices. Feeling very much as if she was committing a crime, and knowing that her license might even be endangered, she helped change the bandages and poultice the wound every day. In addition the man took yarrow and comfrey tea. Several weeks later the wound was completely healed with a barely visible scar. "I kept expecting the wound to get infected, but it never did," the nurse commented to me. "That was almost more unbelievable than the fact that the flesh filled in with barely a scar."

It was fortunate that the man did not put the comfrey on the wound externally since, as we have noted, this herb tends to cause a wound to grow back on the outside, rather than from the inside out. This would have caused the wound to heal on the outside but become rotten on the inside. However, comfrey is very good for regenerating tissue and is especially beneficial to the tendons, so the internal use was likely to be very helpful.

Several years ago another herbalist told me about a young girl in his neighborhood whose arm was badly mangled in an accident with a lawnmower. The parents were advised to have the arm amputated as the wound was so dirty and mangled. The father talked to the herbalist, who advised poultices of yarrow. The wound healed without serious infection.

**Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*).** This is an old central European folk remedy which was adopted by Samuel Hahnemann and introduced into the homeopathic pharmacopoeia. After having more or less died out as a folk remedy it was reintroduced into herbalism from homeopathy.

Calendula is suited to the treatment of cuts after the bleeding has stopped. It keeps the inflammatory stage, which follows the hemorrhagic stage, in check. It will keep a fresh cut clean or cleanse out an old, infected or purulent (pus-

producing) wound. I always think of the archetypal calendula wound as resembling an infected cat scratch: red, swollen, tender, warm and possibly full of pus. Calendula does not generally open up a vent for pus so much as cleanse it out through the lymphatic ducts. In fact, this points to organ affinity: calendula is a great lymphatic cleanser. If there is need to open a vent for pus there is hardly a better remedy than the following.

**Plantain (*Plantago majus*, *P. lanceolata*).** This remedy is what we call a “drawing agent” in herbal medicine: it pulls material out of the body. Therefore it is particularly suited to cases where there is dirt, infection or poison in the cut.

One of my friends described a case she sat in on as an apprentice many years ago. A man fell off a motorcycle and skidded across the pavement. His ankle was cut up, full of dirt and infected. The doctors didn’t know how to clean out the wound but my friend’s teacher juiced plantain and poulticed the wound in the chopped leaves and juice. Shortly it looked clean and healed without trouble.

An Indian woman from Cass Lake described how her husband had a festering ulcer on his leg from an old wound that required him to go to the hospital in Minneapolis – six hours away – one a month and have a painful cleaning and bandaging done. Her mother-in-law suggested that she take a plantain leaf, bash it up slightly between two rocks and put it over the wound. The ulcer healed up completely. The doctor scolded the man and his wife for using a folk remedy!

A woman on one of my herb walks had a bad scrape on the knee that had gotten inflamed, red, swollen, and tender. “Just a second,” I said. I slightly chewed a plantain leaf and she placed it under the bandage. “It’ll look clean by tonight,” I promised. Sure enough, it was. She changed the bandage and

put on some elecampane leaf I had given her. It healed without complication.

**Elecampane (*Inula helenium*).** A common name for this plant is 'scabwort.' I used to think this meant it was for mangy diseases with scabby skin. Perhaps it is, but I was corrected by my friend Jennifer Tucker, of State College, Pennsylvania. Her teacher, Evelyn Snook used it as a remedy for 'proud flesh.' That is a condition that occurs when there is excessive granulation (flesh proliferation) and the next stage of wound healing (scab or scar formation) is retarded. So elecampne, according to Mrs. Snook, forms a good scab. Since that time I have seen this indication verified several times.

Elecampane has natural antibiotic and antiseptic properties so pronounced that it has actually been used as a surgical wound dressing to prevent infection after a wound (Maude Grieve). We will visit this plant again when we come to the respiratory tract; it is most famous in conditions with yellow-green mucus, indicating bacterial infection.

One of my students had a friend who got her bellybutton pierced. The cut got infected and continued to suppurate pus for weeks. She put elecampane on the wound and it quickly healed up. Later she sought out my friend for advice about a more serious problem. This is often how things work with herbalism: we establish trust with a little problem and are entrusted with more later on.

**St. John's Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*).** Long before the recent ruckus about St. John's Wort as a treatment for minor anxiety and depression, it was used as an important medicine for wounds, especially those involving nerves. It is an old central European folk remedy, beloved in Russian herbalism, picked up by Samuel Hahnemann, the founder of homeopathy. The latter was able to determine specific indications calling for

the use of *Hypericum* in wounds. It is for “injuries to areas rich in nerves.” This includes the spine, eyes, ears, genitals, and fingers. The area becomes hot, swollen, red and very painful. *Hypericum* keeps the nerves from being damaged and is the remedy for choice when a part has been lost and is sewed back on surgically or simply when it has been lost.

**White Pine (*Pinus strobus*, *Pinus spp.*)** The two main herbal drawing agents that I am familiar with are plantain and pine. A careful observation of the natural history of each plant revealed why they are useful in this fashion. Plantain grows on ground that is hard-packed or compressed from the passage of foot traffic or wheels. It has extra power to draw nutrients and water out of the earth and what it can do for itself it can do for us. Pine shows us the same property in a different way. White pine is often the tallest tree in the forest, towering above all the rest. In order to feed the high limbs, where the needles grow, it has to have extra pulling power to pull nutrients all the way up the trunk from the ground. It does this despite the fact that it is full of sticky sap. The tree repairs its wounds with this sap, which led to its use to patch up wounds. It is also used to patch up birch bark canoes.

One herb student was visiting a class with her husband, who was a Navajo. We were discussing wound-remedies and he gifted us with a story that illustrated the use of this old Indian wound healer. Somebody shot his horse, but the wound wasn't fatal. He stuck pine sap on the wound, it kept it from getting infected, pulled the bullet out, and healed it up. This would not have been the white pine, but most pines will work the same way.

**Comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*).** I'm going to continue to tell bad stories about comfrey so that readers really

understand how inappropriate it is to use an herb unless it is well indicated and specific.

One of my students in Pennsylvania reported that after birth she used comfrey on a vaginal tear. The remedy, rather than bringing the lips of the wound together, caused healing all over the surface of the tear, leaving the gaping wound intact but covered up by a membrane. In the end the doctors had to sew up the tear surgically. Another student in New York recounted how an acquaintance of hers used comfrey for diaper rash on her baby, only to have it cause the lips of the vagina to grow together. They had to be surgically separated. Another student in the glass realized that exactly the same thing had happened when she used comfrey for diaper rash on her girl baby.

**Goldenseal (*Hydrastis canadensis*).** I am including a discussion of this remedy, not because it belongs among the top half dozen wound-medicines, but because it has been used more often than it should be.

A common idea nowadays is to give goldenseal for cuts because it is a “natural antibiotic” and will kill the germs settling into the wound. Goldenseal was a fad herb for cuts when I was a young herbalist. That was before the days when people who read studies but had no direct experience butted in and interjected all sorts of nonsense. Goldenseal was recommended in those days because it has a powerful ability to “seal” external cuts.

Goldenseal might well be effective in a case where there is a clean hemorrhage that needs to be sealed up and where we want to prevent bacteria from entering the wound – the powder is sprinkled into the wound – but it is completely incorrect to give when there is a dirty, infected cut. We do not want to close this up. I have seen it seal up inflammation, pus, and dirt, resulting in systemic infection rather than cure. Therefore it is

the wrong remedy to give unless we have a fresh, clean cut that we want to close up and keep from getting infected. Once inflammation has set in, with heat, swelling, redness, and pain, it is counterproductive. If there is pus in the wound, despite the fact that goldenseal is a natural antibiotic, it will make the situation worse by closing it up prematurely.

One time I was called to attend a mother of five out in the country west of me who was having trouble with a burn on her hand. It was small but had opened up – a third degree burn. She kept putting goldenseal on it and every few days it would close up. Then she would get a fever with exhaustion until the wound opened up again. She was closing up a vent that the body wanted to use and poisoning herself with the pus that was flowing into the bloodstream. I stopped her and used something else – can't remember what now. The burn quickly healed. I was rewarded with a few weeks supply of well appreciated goats milk for my efforts.

Here's a case where goldenseal was appropriate. Years ago a friend of mine cut himself on the bottom of his foot while wadding in a city lake. He got the wound stitched up and used antibiotics but the wound would not close up since he still limped around on the foot. It was not infected but it would not close up. He put goldenseal on it and it closed up quickly.

### **Bruises, Strains, Sprains**

Bruises occur when large numbers of capillaries under the surface of the skin are broken but the skin is not, so that the blood pools under the skin. What we see is a contusion or 'black and blue' mark. Actually, we should be very careful in our use of terms here. Only some bruises turn 'black and blue.' Most are red and blue, showing that there is inflammation and spillage of blood. Black and blue only occurs when there is a de-oxygenated tendency in the blood – found most often in older people and severe bruising.

When a larger arteriole is broken we usually get a large pooling of blood under the skin so that a blood blister is formed.

Minor bruises usually heal quickly in the young and middle aged, but can remain long in the elderly. If the bruise is deeper we may not see the injury but there will be stiffness and pain in the muscles and sometimes sharp pain from pressure on nerves. Coagulated blood in the internal spaces does not show up on x-ray or other medical imaging. We often have to guess that it is there from the pain, the complexion (blue in the tongue, in areas where veins come to the surface), and past history.

Strains and sprains are related to bruises because the stretching of muscles causes breakage of capillaries and leakage of blood into the adjoining tissues. Treatment is the same except that we may also have to attend to damaged muscles, tendons and connective tissue.

There is an old, widespread American Indian maxim to the effect that one should always treat a bruise because a bruise will change to bad blood, and bad blood can change into cancer. I was once teaching a class of about twenty, one of whom was a Native American raised in a traditional household. She exclaimed, "oh yes, we were always taught that, but isn't everybody?" The rest of the class looked at her blankly.

The same doctrine is found in Chinese herbalism and even in homeopathy. In Chinese medicine a bruise or tendency to bruising is called 'stagnant blood' or 'congealed blood,' and it is always considered wise to treat bruises because 'stagnant blood' can turn to cancer. The same doctrine is found in homeopathy. It was introduced by Dr. James Compton Burnett, who noticed that bruises were sometimes followed by cancer. He recommended *Bellis perennis* (daisy) as a treatment to prevent bruises turning to cancer. Other important bruise remedies used in homeopathy for cancer are *Ruta* and *Conium*. These folk-medical theories are in accordance with modern knowledge, for it is indeed found that cancerous tumors thrive best where there is limited oxygen in the bloodstream.

**Arnica (*Arnica montana*).** This is one of the few alpine plants used in Western herbal medicine. Shepherds pasturing their sheep in the mountains in the summer noticed that when their animals fell and bruised themselves, or strained a muscle jumping from stone to stone, they nibbled on the fresh leaves or flowers of the arnica plant. They collected these plants for extra income and eventually arnica became a famous remedy for bruises of every kind. The old time doctors classified it as a counterirritant, i.e., it caused heat in the tissues to keep the blood from congealing and the joint from stiffening up. Indeed, it is at its best immediately after an injury and the longer one waits to give arnica, the less dramatically will it work.

At a later date arnica was incorporated into the homeopathic materia medica. Samuel Hahnemann, the founder of homeopathy, gave it a “proving” and it became famous in both homeopathy and herbal medicine. Arnica is somewhat toxic and should not be taken internally. It is best given externally, but some people are even sensitive to this method of treatment and it can cause a skin rash. It should not be used longer than two weeks.

Arnica is indicated as a specific in recent bruises, strains and sprains, where the color of the contusion is red and blue (indicating recent injury with inflammation and internal bleeding), and where there is no broken skin. Placed on a laceration it can cause irritation, excessive bleeding and excessive bruising around the lips of the cut. Here one should use its cousin yarrow instead, since this plant is suited to open wounds as well as cuts.

**Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*).** Yarrow is specifically indicated in bruises where the tissues are red and blue, showing that there is active inflammation with congealed blood and the bruise is recent. By stimulating the venous side of the circulation it pulls in the spilled blood and reduces heat and

congestion in the capillaries. It is for this reason that *Achillea* has a paradoxical action. It is a stimulant increasing blood flow to the part but is used where there are the classic symptoms of heat and irritation: red, swollen, hot, congested tissues, an elongated, red tongue and a rapid pulse. Sometimes there is a blue undertone to the tongue, indicating stagnant venous circulation.

Yarrow is similar to its cousin *Arnica*, but had different indications. It is indicated in more violent bruises, from sharper instruments, with cuts and lacerations accompanying the injury, while *arnica* is indicated where the instrument was more blunt and the bleeding is confined to the capillaries and internal spaces. Yarrow is therefore indicated when there is a blood blister because it has a greater affinity to blood spillage, even inside the body.

One time I slammed the door on my pointer finger and got an inch long blood blister along the side. I put yarrow on it and it went away in twenty four hours. The next year I slammed the same finger in the same door. I thought to myself, "Who cares. That'll go away in a day." This time it stayed for two weeks and turned into a boil. The bad blood deteriorated instead of being flushed out of the area, as the yarrow treatment had done a year earlier. I treated the boil with homeopathic *Hepar sulphuris 30x* and it went away, but I learned a lesson.

**Safflower (*Carthamus tinctoria*).** This is the third in a row of remedies that are closely related by indications and effect, as well as botany. Safflower is indicated by the red and blue coloration of the skin around the bruise but there is more of a septic, deteriorating quality to the injury than in the former two cases and there a darker hue. It is indicated in bruises when there is poor peripheral circulation and recuperative capacity. In fact, it is indicated in a disease of diminished peripheral circulation – Raynaud's syndrome. This is where

there is numbness and whiteness of the fingers in cold weather. I learned the use of safflower in this complaint by building on my knowledge of its use in bruises.

I was visited at my old farm on Sunnyfield road one day by a woman whose hand was injured in an industrial accident. She almost lost it and there was nerve damage and some lack of movement. She had Raynaud's much worse in that hand, which also had a red and blue hue indicating that there was still some stagnant blood there years after the accident. I figured there was old stagnant blood in the hand keeping it from full health and operation but I didn't expect it to cure the Raynaud's. I had her spread safflower oil over the hand and the improvement was prompt and amazing. She called my later to apologize for her critical demeanor. Her partner brought her in against her will; now she was impressed and happy about the results. The mobility of the hand, its warmth and sensation and the Raynaud's were all dramatically improved.

**True Solomon's Seal (*Polygonatum spp.*)** This is a beautiful plant and a great healer. It more especially belongs under the muscular and skeletal system, where it will be more fully described, because it is a great remedy for stretched, weak or tight tendons. However, it is also a remedy for black-and-blue marks, especially when these occur in combination with tendinal injuries.

Solomon's seal was not used in Western herbalism because the Greeks thought it was poisonous (only the seeds are toxic). In 1597 Gerard reports that the "vulgar people in Hampshire" used it for their cows and themselves, for broken bones, stretched tendons, and contusions. Subsequently it was in English herbalism to some extent. The American Indians used it, though it did not become an important remedy, and

finally, today it has re-entered into herbal usage, largely on my recommendations.

There are many, many stories I could tell about Solomon's seal. One student had torn her achilles tendon walking on a sloped parking lot. In addition, a blood vessel ruptured to cause a huge blue/black bruise at the bottom of the gastrocnemius muscle. The color looked like Solomon's seal berry. She used this plant, the bruise went away quickly and the injury healed without complication and permanently. Another student tore her achilles tendon walking in her yard, which was also sloped. True Solomon's seal cured quickly and effectively. These students pointed out that Solomon's seal likes to grow on slopes. I had not noticed that before. How true!

This remedy will be discussed more fully under the section on the muscular and skeletal system.

**Elder** (*Sambucus canadensis*, *S. nigra*). Elder flower or berry is indicated in bruises where there is swelling and edema from water as well as a blue color. This particularly happens around the wrists and ankles, so elder is especially effective in the strains and sprains of these parts.

**Angelica** (*Angelica archangelica*, *A. atropurpurea*). European and Chinese angelica are both used for removing stagnant blood or bruises. The specific color to look for is a yellow/green/blue and sometimes gray. If we see this around the wrists it is a constitutional indication. It is indicated in thin, undernourished or thick, stout persons with this color. Also in local bruises of that coloration.

Sometimes an old bruise will turn from red/blue to yellow/green/blue. This indicates a considerable amount of stagnation tending towards danger – i.e., the development of cancer. Angelica is used in Chinese herbalism for bruises and

cancer prevention and treatment, especially in the sexual areas. Angelica is a cousin of poison hemlock (see below), which has similar affinities.

**Sassafras (*Sassafras officinalis*).** As the blood gets more stagnant and sluggish, usually in association with aging or bad circulation, the bruises get darker. Sassafras is an old American Indian bruise remedy. It is specific for bruises where the color is blue/black. There may also be a sooty look around the eyes.

**Poison Hemlock (*Conium maculatum*).** This remedy can kill a person 'graveyard dead,' so we don't use it in herbalism. In the old days it was used externally, as a poultice, but it is better to avoid it all together and use the diluted, safe homeopathic preparation. Conium is indicated in old people, who get pure black bruises because their blood is moving so slowly. It is also indicated in bruises to the soft tissues, especially the sexual glands – breasts and testicles – to prevent (and even to cure) cancer.

### **Burns, Sunburn**

When intense heat is applied to the skin the living cells are destroyed. If only the outer layer of the skin is involved there will just be red, rough, painful tissue. This is called a first degree burn. If the damage extends deeper a blister raises up as the body floods in water, between the dead and living layers of skin tissue, to lubricate and protect what remains. This is considered a second degree burn. If the burn kills tissue all the way through the skin an open sore or wound, surrounded by red, rough, painful skin remnants will appear. This is a third degree burn. Because it is open it is more dangerous because it can get infected. If it is large and extensive so much dead tissue breaks down in the blood and liver that the kidneys are shut down by the excessive protein waste going through the urinary channels. This is what used to cause death from burns in

the old days, before kidney dialysis was available. Another problem with the third degree burn is that the matrix for making new skin has been destroyed and only scar tissue can form – according to science. However, in traditional American Indian medicine we are firmly taught that there are remedies which can literally resurrect the ability of the cells to make damaged tissue. This I have seen with my own eyes.

**Agrimony, Cinquefoil (*Agrimonia spp.*, *Potentilla spp.*)**

Sometimes we have to be very careful with regard to the exact species in our selection of a healing plant, while other times we can use any member of a genus or even a closely related genus. Such is the case here. Both agrimony and cinquefoil, and probably also their cousin avens, are beneficial for injuries where one holds the breath to stop the pain. That action releases endorphins – the body’s natural opiates – triggering a palliative effect. It is not curative – one needs to “breath through the pain.” That is what agrimony and cinquefoil help us do. That makes them especially beneficial for burns, because this is an injury where one commonly holds the breath. Or rather, agrimony and cinquefoil are specific for burns which cause one to restrict the breath. .

These are my favorite burn-remedies, partly because I discovered it (if I can steal the credit from divine providence) and partly because it works especially well on my own burns, which tend to fit the pattern here. One day I was mowing in my field with my big brush mower when, through some combination of inattentiveness and stupidity I put the palm of my hand on the manifold of the engine. I heard a sizzle, smelled burned flesh and felt tremendous pain intantaneously. Looking at the palm a second later it was one huge raised blister. I staggered over to a patch of sweet leaf, which I knew to be a good burn medicine, chewed up a bunch of the flowers and put the poultice on my hand but to no immediate effect.

The pain felt just as bad and the wound looked just as serious. I staggered up to the house and asked my friend Lise Wolff, who was then an apprentice but is now a fine herbalist in her own right, if she would stay with me for the next couple hours as I was afraid I might pass out. I tried St. John's wort, nettles and other things, but nothing worked. After about an hour, in a great paroxysm of pain I let my breath out like steam from a kettle, wincing with the pain, but saw a picture in my mind's eye of a tiny cinquefoil leaf.

Just the day before I had been out in Montrose seeing a case and noticed the tiny leaf in the lawn. I wondered what it would cure. "That wasn't a coincidence," I said after it popped into my mind. I had some cinquefoil (*Potentilla recta*) tincture I had made a few years before but never used. I put some on the wound and the effect was immediate and exquisite. I sank back in relief. The pain went down and I never felt it so bad again. It took a week for the burn to heal but that was to be expected.

One thing I noticed about the relief when I put the cinquefoil on was that it felt exactly like there was a nerve in the palm my hand which split into five parts that went to every finger – like a cinquefoil leaf. As far as I can ascertain, there is no such nerve, but it felt like there was. Cinquefoil gets its name (cinque for five and foil for leaf) from the hand-shaped leaf – it looks like marijuana.

Now I knew cinquefoil was good for burns but I wasn't sure if agrimony would be too. Next time I burned myself I tried the cinquefoil, just to be sure, then planned on taking the agrimony. However, the little burn went away and I didn't need another dose. Finally I got a chance to test the agrimony. I was visiting my friend Susan in the city. She had some spaghetti noodles in a pot on the stove. She lifted off the pot, it caught on the burner, and the boiling water spilled on her arm. It was terrifically painful but Susan is tougher than just about anybody I know, so she still managed to get the pot to the sink.

(I remember what one of the landlords said when she threatened some gangbangers when she was a housing code inspector (they were trying to open a gas pipe and blow up an apartment building), “ma’am, parden the expression, but you’ve got more balls than I do!”) At any rate, Susan was holding her breath from the pain. “Oh boy,” I thought. “I don’t have any cinquefoil but I have agrimony so I’ll have to use that and we’ll see if it works.” I ran out to the car, grabbed a bottle and put some on a tissue, which we draped over the burn (first degree). Relief was immediate and we had a nice dinner. Susan put it on once more for pain in the evening and was fine.

These are superlative burn remedies, but they only work when a person has to hold their breath from the pain. Maybe there are some exceptions, but I leave that for others to explore.

**Sweet Leaf (*Monarda fistulosa*).** According to the American Indian view, burns should not be treated with cold but with heat. This was related to me by one of my teachers, Tis Mal Crow. It is also mentioned by an old Native gentleman who explained Indian healing to Elizabeth Janos (see her book, *Country Folk Medicine*, 1997). Cold only drives the heat further in, but heat allows the burn or fire to flow out in its similar so to speak, into the hot medicine.

Tis Mal taught that sweet leaf is a fiery hot remedy that will draw the heat back to the plant and out of the body. The flower tops need to be exposed to saliva to unlock the burn medicine in the plant so they are chewed and placed on the wound. He said, “the little old lady who taught me this said, ‘the same thing that turns the cracker sweet in your mouth turns sweet leaf into a burn medicine.’”

Sweet leaf is especially effective for burns where there is a cold sweat. This often accompanies a burn where there is shock.

**Lavender** (*Lavandula officinalis*). This is an old European burn medicine, still often used and often found effective. Sweet leaf and lavender make a good combination as a burn cream because they both have beautiful smelling essential oils.

**Nettle** (*Urtica dioeca*). This remedy enters into use through homeopathy. It is a “like treats like” remedy since nettles causes burning. Dr. Margaret Tyler make it popular in homeopathy. See her *Homoeopathic Drug Pictures* and Dr. Dorothy Shepherd’s *A Physician’s Posy* for case histories. Nettles is probably most beneficial for getting the damaged protein in the bloodstream through the kidneys after a burn.

### **Poisonous Bites**

There are various kinds of bites and quite a few remedies. If one lives in an area where there are a lot of poisonous bugs, spiders or snakes one should study this topic carefully and know the local venomous creatures and antidotal flora. I myself live in the north, where we have no poisonous snakes and few poisonous spiders, so I am not as experienced with this problem. Yet, I have had to invent remedies to save people for pain and suffering and perhaps even the loss of limb.

**Plantain, Snakeweed** (*Plantago spp.*) Immediately after receiving a bite a person should chew or chop up some plantain and put it on the bit. The sooner the better. Bee stings and mosquito bites will respond promptly and there is a history of its use in snake bites as well. Dr. Shook, who lectured on herbs more than fifty years ago, told a story about a woman who can to see him in hysterics. She had been bitten by a bee on one arm, had an allergic reaction, and had to have it cut off to save her life. Now she had been bitten on the other arm and was again threatened with amputation. Dr. Shook went out in the

back yard, chopped up some plantain, put it on her arm, and saved it.

Keewaydinoquay, the old Anishinabe healer on Beaver Island in Lake Michigan said, “every herb has thirty or forty uses, and four or five that it is especially good with, but there is one thing it excels at and plantain is the remedy to pull out venom.

**Rattlesnake Master (*Eryngium yuccafolium*).** This is the specific for *hard edema* from venomous bites – or from any cause. Hard edema occurs when there are not only fluids in the swelling but proteins.

**White Snake Root (*Eupatorium rugosum*), Boneset (*E. perfoliatum*), Grave Root (*E. purpureum*, *E. maculatum*).** I was teaching at my friend Ellie Levenson’s in New Jersey. A woman was virtually pleading with me for help with spider bites that were driving her crazy. One was on the cheek of the face, the other on the cheek down below. They were hard, a little red and excruciatingly painful. Plantain failed to help. Rattlesnake master, my remedy-of-choice in hard swellings and a good spider bite remedy from past experience did nothing. I was sitting there feeling like a chump, starrng out the window into the yard when I saw a stalk of white snake root “twitch” back and forth. There was not an iota of wind. “Ellie, why don’t you go out and pick some of that white snake root there,” I said as if it was merely the next thing on my list of spider bite remedies. It was only after a rough poultice of chopped leaves provided instant pain relief and reduced the swelling that I told the two of them how the leaf had waved at me.

I have also used boneset and gravel root, cousins of white snake root, when nothing else was available. Late one Sunday night I was called by a friend from White Earth Reservation in northern Minnesota. Her brother-in-law was bitten by a

poisonous spider. There was a big, open wound with purple flesh around it, redness and a red streak going up the arm – all developed within twelve hours. The doctors had him on drip antibiotics. Of course, this does nothing for poison; it only stops a bacterial infection. The poor man was shaking with fever and chills from the severe, deep poisoning of his system. My friends only had a few good Indian medicines on hand so we did what we could. It was just before winter and we could only get a few things fresh. She took plantain and St. John's wort leaves (picked fresh but long after the flowers were gone), poulticed the wound all night, and had him take hourly doses of boneset, gravel root and sweet leaf tincture (about 15 drops per dose). In the morning the red streak was gone, the chills had subsided and the pain was down but the putrefaction needed more time to clear up – which it did. He might have lost his hand.

What was the logic behind this treatment? We gave boneset and gravel root because of the chills, for which the former is a specific, and the sepsis, for which the latter is known. They are both cousins of white snake root.

**Virginia Snake Root (*Aristolochia serpentaria*).** This is now considered a powerfully toxic remedy and indeed, I would only recommend it's use as a homeopathic remedy, as in the following case. However, at one time it was a prized snakebite remedy, as the name testifies. It was particularly used in the worst cases, where the patient had fallen into a "low" state, with near-unconsciousness, great exhaustion and lack of circulation, the limbs turning blue. In such a state this poison was itself most curative. It was a stimulant that would get the blood moving and increase consciousness and protect the poor victim. Such is the testimony we have from an old nineteenth century doctor, William Cook (1869). He recommended it in puerperal or childbed fever, when the woman was not able to

completely expel the afterbirth and some of it broke down in the uterus, resulting in putrid decomposition, pus in the blood, and low grade fever.

When the herbalist/nutritionist John Heinerman was in the United Kingdom he ran into a medical doctor who had been treating some of the early cases of 'flesh eating strep,' when the subject captivated the newspapers. Heinerman asked how they treated that. Oh, explained the gent, the patient asked her village herbalist what to do and the latter gave her homeopathic *Aristolochia serpentaria* 12x. The situation cleared up nicely. (The remedy didn't make it into the newspapers of course).

*Aristolochia* is suited to such cases of low resistance, where the disease gains a momentum because the body is too weak to fight it. I have only used it once. A woman had a break out of herpes lesions. I took her pulse and was surprised to find it low and discouraged. Clearly, there was some kind of exhaustive process going on, which allowed the herpes to attack her system. I gave her *Aristolochia serpentaria* 12x and the symptoms were better immediately.

***Apis mellifica* (Homeopathic Honey Bee).** This homeopathic remedy was adopted from American Indian sources. In the 1840s a homeopathic doctor was called in to treat a young boy who was suffering, all summer long, from a hot, burning fever that was finally starting to look like it would terminate in death. He had been called in after all the allopaths in town had failed and he too failed. About this time a Narragansett Indian woman happened to be strolling by the house and she heard of the little patient and asked if she could be of service. She looked him over and requested that several honey bees be captured in a pan, roasted over a fire, and made into a tea. This was given to the boy, who quickly gained

strength and turned a corner on the fever, eventually recovering completely.

The homeopathic doctor did not cure the case but he did not lose the opportunity to learn. He observed that the boy was red and swollen, like a bee's sting, and concluded that the treatment was homeopathic – i.e., the symptoms caused by the sting of a honey bee were those it would treat. This led to the introduction of one of the most important remedies in the homeopathic materia medica: *Apis mellifica* (roasted honey bee).

The indications for *Apis* are those of a beesting: tissues swollen, red, hot, painful, stinging. The mind is usually either agitated like a bee hive or semi-comatose, like a child bitten by a bee, with swelling on the brain.

**Gentian (*Gentiana spp.*)** Many years ago one of my students told me a story after this plant which has since helped me in a number of situations. Her ten year old daughter was bitten by a bee and went into anaphylactic shock (pale, cold, difficulty breathing and staying conscious). She ran inside, called 911, ran to the shelf of herb books, grabbed Michael Tierra's *Way of Herbs*, looked under insect bites, found gentian, ran to her Bach flower kit, got gentian, ran back to her daughter and gave her drops of the flower essence. She quickly returned to normal. When the ambulance arrived five minutes later she was fine.

Since that time I have found that gentian is specific for anaphylactic shock. We usually come across this in association with bee stings, but even foods can set off a reaction. I remember one time when I had to use it because one of my students had a bad reaction to tasting corn silk during class. I was glad I knew about it then.

Gentian is a wonderful remedy for panic and that's what we get during anaphylaxis. We often learn from the acute use more about the chronic use. This is a remedy which helps

people with weak instincts. It strengthens the solar plexus, the nerve center where we feel instincts which is right next to the stomach. Gentian people doubt their own instincts and those of others. They have weak digestion and are prone to weakness or inflammation in the gall bladder.

### **Boils, Abscesses**

Boils can develop from another of different situations. A poorly treated wound could turn into a boil or one may form from the inside, to allow pus to come to the surface. In the latter case we know that there are unclean processes in the body generating bacterial infection, tissue breakdown, and pus-formation. If the pus were to circulate through the bloodstream it would cause generalized infection, exhaustion and even death. Instead the body tries to open up a vent to discharge the pus.

In the old days internal abscesses would form in the lungs, on the liver or the intestines – appendicitis was considered to be an ‘abscess.’ Many times these were fatal. Modern antibiotics routinely heads off internal infections before they get this bad, but there was a time when traditional doctors had to rely on more primitive means. During one of my classes I noticed a student so tired that walking thirty feet, from the picnic table to the garden, was a great effort. I asked what was going on and she said she had a boil on her ankle. It had been bothering her off and on for more than two years, ever since she had a broken ankle. At the time of the break the doctors put a few pins in. One of them worked out and where it came out a boil formed that wouldn’t go away. The doctors said there was no connection with the broken bone or the pin (are these people for real?) and gave her antibiotics. These proved to be useless and now she just had to accept the debility.

This was an excellent educational opportunity and the direction of the class immediately shifted. We started to collect the ingredients for a healing poultice. Pliny, the ancient Roman authority on agriculture and natural history, recommended burdock leaf,

cinquefoil leaf, and plantain leaf as a salve for boils. These plants are pretty easy to find in most places between Rome and Minnetrista. I had often used plantain for boils, infected wounds and abscesses. Clearly, this was a case where infected material had to be pulled out of a wound where it was deeply entrenched. Plantain is a drawing agent, so this seemed like a sure place to begin a formula. I knew the reputation of burdock in treating boils, so this seemed agreeable. It is something of an antiseptic for putridity and this wound clearly was long-infected with putrid material. I hadn't heard of cinquefoil being used in modern times as a boil remedy, so I rounded out the formula with elder leaf, which is used for boils. Three leaves seemed like a good balance. We chopped them up, attached some with a cloth bandage over the boil and went back to study. I sent our friend home with some more of the herbs to store in the refrigerator, chop and apply daily. In two weeks she was permanently healed. She was much more energetic, both on and off her feet.

We should always be prepared to work out a remedy for injuries and acute problems as they arise. It is a great blessing to know how to stop bleeding or treat a bad burn when one is out in the country by oneself. In order to be effective, we cannot just apply remedies to names, but must understand the process going on in the injury and which remedy acts on that kind of process. For instance, plantain is best known as a drawing agent which will pull pus and infection outwards from boils while calendula will help drain them away internally. Do we want the pus to come out or cleanse through the interior? In this case, it seemed appropriate to draw out, open up, and cleanse, while also adding remedies that were antiseptic (burdock) and improved blood circulation (elder). Many other variables could enter the picture. For instance, in this case I also considered goldenrod, which is good for old, pus-producing (purulent) wounds and tired feet. It is a cousin of burdock so it seemed redundant to add with that medicine. Plantain by itself did not seem appropriate because it is not stimulating and an old wound need stimulation to bring in blood. For that, elder would be

appropriate. All these factors sifted through my mind quickly. It would be difficult to say whether that was a bit of divine guidance or just a picture forming in my brain due to rational thoughts about what was needed for this particular injury. That is often how herbalism works.

**Plantain (*Plantago spp.*)** One area where we commonly see abscesses and which can be treated with far greater success holistically than surgically, is another the roots of teeth. Abscessed teeth are very common and cause a great deal of suffering and expense, yet they can easily be prevented or cured with plantain.

**Peach (*Prunus persica*).** This is one of my favorite remedies, although I have not used it on boils and abscesses. However, it comes highly recommended in the folk medical tradition, with several good case histories, so I have included it. Hopefully it will be justified more fully in the future. It would be indicated for a hot boil, especially if the skin or tongue is dry, showing a lack of fluids.

**Elder (*Sambucus canadensis, S. nigra*).** The leaves are an old specific for external use on boils and burns. Elder, like sweet leaf, draws heat out of an area.

**Echinacea (*Echinacea spp.*)** Not only is echinacea a specific for application on a boil, but it is also useful as a remedy for chronic constitutional production of boils.

**Burdock (*Arctium lappa*).** This is another old stock item for the treatment of boils. The ancient Roman author Pliny mentions the use of plantain, burdock, and elder leaves as a specific topical agent for boils. This is a formula I have seen work in my own practice.

Other plants which can substitute for burdock or echinacea because of an antiseptic property, but which are not ordinarily used in boils, abscesses or infected wounds include their two relatives, boneset and gravel root. A case history is given under poisonous bites, in which I had to recommend boneset and gravel root for a terribly infected spider bite when nothing else was available.

An Amish farmer told me about how one of his young sons got his legs caught in the reins and dragged across the field by a frightened runaway horse. There were deep cuts and in some places the flesh was missing. The wounds were full of dirt and manure. They were afraid they were going to have to take him to the hospital but decided to try herbs. They had no health insurance and over ten children, but I'm sure they would have if they hadn't already been developing confidence with herbs. They put poultices of plantain leaf and burdock leaf on the wounds, which cleaned out, remained uninfected, filled in missing tissue, and healed beautifully.

I had not heard of the use of burdock leaf in this way, but I shared what my late friend William LeSassier said. One takes the material right at the top of the root and bottom of the stalk and packs it into a wound with missing flesh. The tissue will regenerate. It is hard to tell which is more regenerative, plantain, burdock, yarrow, or comfrey – though the latter is problematical.

**Gravel Root (*Eupatorium purpureum*, *E. maculatum*).**

This is the great remedy when there is pus in the bloodstream.

Mary Beith, in her book about Highland Scots folk remedies, tells the story of an old traditional doctor in the eighteenth century who was called in when the patient had been given up on by the university physicians. The old practitioner examined the man and determined that there was an abscess on the lungs. It needed to be

broken, but how could he accomplish the deed? The old country doctor emptied the chamber pot, dried the contents over the fire until they were loose granules and wrapped them up neat in an envelop. He told the patient not to take the medicine but not to tell the city doctors what was in the package. When he was finished the two highly educated physicians rushed into the room and wanted to find out what the old doctor was trying to give so they opened up the envelop and tasted the granules. The patient laughed so hard the abscess burst and from that time on he started to get better.

### **Teeth and Gums**

White oak bark is a specific for improving dental health; plantain for pulling abscessed material out from the roots of teeth and preventing the need for root canal surgery. Dandelion is the remedy for recalcifying bone that has been infected, and for stopping infection in the bone. Self heal is indicated in weak kidneys and tooth decay.

### **Broken Bones**

A bone can be crushed, fractured, broken clean through or shattered. The first step in healing a broken bone is putting it back in place. People go to doctors to have this done, but even here the right herb can assist the job.

In order to be reset appropriately the muscles surrounding it need to be relaxed so that the bone will slide back into place easily. Not only tension in the muscles but a lack of lubrication (explained in the chapter on the muscular and skeletal system) will prevent the muscles and bones from sliding back into place.

**Boneset (*Eupatorium perfoliatum*).** Some know-it-all in the nineteenth century stated as a fact that boneset was never used for setting bones despite the name. Rather, the name came from its use in fevers that caused deep aching in the bones like they were broken or crushed. Indeed, it does work for just

these kinds of fevers, but it is also a superlative remedy for setting broken bones. Indeed, the name for the plant in Anishinabe-Ojibwe (and probably other northern dialects of Algonquin) means “to repair bone.”

**Comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*).** This herb is famous for setting bones and is sometimes called “knitbone.” However, even here it can be problematical. One of my students broke a carpal in his wrist. “Oh, no,” I’m going to have to go to the doctor he thought. Then he thought again. “Wait a second, I’m a chiropractor, I can figure this out on my own. He went to the office of a peer and got an x-ray to confirm the break, then he make a simple temporary cast. He put comfrey on the back of the hand every morning and night. After a week the bone was healing but there was a big boney callous on the hand so he had to stop using it. Another friend showed me exactly the same kind of calloused broken bone on his hand.

**True Solomon’s Seal (*Polygonatum spp.*)** Recommended by Gerard to prevent or remove swellings on the bone after breaks. Solomon’s seal rhizome looks like the periosteum on a bone and probably has an affinity for this part of the bone. In addition, it acts on the cartilage and collagen, so it is likely that it helps restore bones that have lost their collagen fibers. These are what keep the bone flexible.

**Mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*).** Mullein is another remedy, like boneset, that helps lubricate the bones and get them back into the right place, so that they can heal. It can also be said to “bring the bones together,” as the following story shows.

A friend of mine who requested anonymity was working in a hospital where she attended a patient who was stuck in non-recovery after an operation on the heart. As is customary

in open heart surgery the surgeons sawed the xiphoid bone over the heart in order to winch aside the rib cage to gain access to the inner sanctum of the chest. After the operation, which was a success as far as the surgery went, the chest was closed up and the bones were drawn back together with the expectation that they would heal together. Unfortunately, some kind of bacteria got into the wound, the area became infected and the patient lay in this terrible condition in the hospital bed for three months. One antibiotic after another was tried. Finally my friend got tired of the situation and simply put some mullein on the chest around the wound. The infection subsided, healing set in quickly and the doctors were soon patting themselves on the shoulders about how this or that antibiotic must have been the one that turned the case. My friend couldn't reveal the real healer for fear of losing her job, but I can tell the story from a safe distance.

### **Nerve Injuries**

When the nerves are injured we feel intense pain or numbness because they have been so damaged that they can no longer function. It should always be remembered that when there is numbness it does not mean the nerves are dead. Rather, when nerves are damaged they may stop working but sometimes they will still keep themselves alive, even if they are no longer functioning. That is why there are strange and unpredictable recoveries to spinal and head injuries.

**Chamomile** (*Chamomilla matricaria*). This is the remedy for injuries to tissues that are very sensitive or to people who are sensitive or have a low pain threshold so that they 'cannot bear the pain.' They whine and complain. Have sympathy but give them chamomile, either the homeopathic *Chamomilla 6x* or an herbal preparation made from the *fresh* herb, like tincture or salve/rub.

**Wood Betony (*Betonica officinalis*).** This European herb, easy to grow in the American garden, is more of a 'brain tonic' than a wound remedy, but it can be useful in some conditions. It is definitely *the* remedy for an acute head injury.

**St. John's Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*).** This well-known herb has a deserved reputation for treating mild depression; it has, however, long been used as a wound remedy for severe nerve injury. It is specific for injuries to areas rich in nerves – eyes, ears, nose, tongue, lips, spine, genitals, fingers, and toes. It is also a specific for sharp, shooting, needle-like pains. There is a 'signature' here for this use: the leaves contain like punctures (or windows actually) through which light shines. It is like a needle prick and the remedy is for needle-like shooting pains and puncture wounds.

One of my students helped a friend who was cut by a table saw between two fingers down through the wrist joint! Horrible! His wife called my student from the hospital. He was repaired and wrapped up by the doctors but still in horrific pain. Taking the St. John's wort he was soon laughing with his wife and friends! My student, Carol Maki, said, "Matthew, you know how you always claim that boneset helps the broken bone pieces find each other?" It stimulates the hormones released by broken bones, which seek the other part broken off. "Well I think St. John's wort helps the cut nerve ends find each other."

My cousin Winnie cut off two of his fingers with a table saw making himself a homeopathic home remedy kit. They were hanging by the skin. He was an experienced industrial designer so this can happen to anyone! He went to the hospital, they reattached the fingers, sat him down and told him, in two days you'll know if your fingers will take or not. He was in his fifties and they told him older people don't heal as well. He

recovered completely and could play the mandolin as well as before!

By comparison, a nurse told me the following case. A man in his late thirties came into the ER with two fingers cut off. They were sewed back on. He went outside to smoke a cigarette. In three hours his fingers turned gray and died.

**Prickly Ash (*Xanthoxylum americanum*).** This is a superb remedy for very severe, torturous pain. The pain is even worse than in the St. John's wort case. The people literally writhe in agony. If you haven't seen a person writhe, that means they can't stop moving in their chair or around the room. The pain is terrible.

Years ago I helped one woman who had severe menstrual pain. "It feels like my ovaries are being ripped out by wires." She had these pains since age 13 and had been on social security her whole adult life. She was now 39. She writhed in agony for four days a month. I gave her prickly ash. Six months later she came back with an empty prickly ash bottle and big smile. No pain at all. "You gave me my life back," she said. Then she took a box out of a bag. It was one of the all time best presents I ever had! An old homeopathic remedy box from a pharmacy in Minneapolis!

Some people I have known want to say on the dole and don't want to work but this woman was chomping at the bit: she moved to Hollywood, became a make-up artist, and had a boyfriend within the next six months.

Prickly ash is also for numbness and tingling for nerve injury. One of my friends gave it to a woman who had a numb spot on her face after a car accident thirty years previous. In a few days the sensation came back.

This herb teaches us something very important: a nerve may be numb but it may still be alive. The last thing a nerve

does is keep itself alive, even if it is no longer doing its chores. These nerves can be brought back on line.

**Calamus Root (*Acorus calamus*).** The FDA disapproves of the internal use of this rhizome (not root) in herbal medicine because some of the Asian varieties contain a carcinogen; the wild American one does not but it is no longer possible to tell visually if one has picked the wild one or an introduced species.

No mind, we are using this plant externally. The Vedic doctors of India make an oil for use in the nose from calamus, called *nasi*. This can be used externally as well.

Calamus root or rhizome is for numbness, tingling, and pain in the nerves. I don't know the specific indications so I use it after St. John's wort and prickly ash have failed.

### **Head and Spinal Injuries**

I have seen such improvement from head injuries, in terms of improved comprehension and reduction in pain, that I would not feel comfortable leaving this topic undiscussed.

**Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*).** Always give some to a person who has just had a head or spinal injury or surgery in order to cut down the pooling of blood that swells and kills the nerves. I have seen unbelievable recoveries. I wish surgeons would trust just this one herb.

**Wood Betony (*Betonica officinalis*).** This is for head injury, concussion, and surgery; not for the spine, to my knowledge. It makes a person 'come back into' their brain if they are spaced out or have trouble being grounded. It is also excellent for old people who are spaced out due to senility and lack of circulation to the brain. This herb probably works on nerve force and circulation of the brain.

**Calamus Root (*Acorus calamus*).** See above under nerve injuries; this herb is beneficial for helping thinking processes come back on line either a short or long time after a head injury.

**Peony Root (*Paeonia officinalis*).** This is an old remedy for head injuries based on the doctrine of signatures: the bud looks like a cranium with suture marks and everything. It is excellent, like calamus, for restoring and rewiring thinking processes after injury.

**Black Cohosh (*Cimicifuga racemosa*).** This is better for neck and spinal injury; also for brooding and darkness of the mind after a neck injury.

**Goldenseal (*Hydrastis canadensis*).** We once had to use this for leakage of a shunt in the brain that was threatening to kill a man. Goldenseal *SEALS*, and it will seal internally tears and wounds even better than external ones. This is the great remedy for torn disks in the spine.