

An Interview with Pietro Abela

Review by Kristen McHenry

Pietro Abela is the founder of The ARC Institute, dedicated to high-quality education in health-care so that reputable holistic care is made available for personal needs and for the needs of the community. For the past eight years, Pietro has traveled internationally, practicing and co-teaching ARC with his wife Melanie. He recently spoke with Kristen Farrow about his personal journey into healership and the development of ARC.

How did your early life influence your development as a healer?

I grew up in Wallsend, a working-class town in Northeast England, that was once known for coal mining and shipbuilding. There was much emotional repression, so violence spilled out into families and onto the streets. As a young child, I learned very quickly to placate and serve people's needs to ensure that I would not invoke anger. Being intelligent and small in stature, I was ostracized for both. It was difficult. By the time I was ten, I entered into rebellion and acted out in rage at every authority figure around me. Though self-protective at the time, that learned ability to serve and understand others' needs became the foundation for my current work.

How were you able to cope?

There was always an acknowledgment in the family of what we called "The Abela Knowing." My great uncle was a medium, and psychic ability ran on my father's side of the family. Throughout my childhood, I experienced powerful moments of pulling back, inside myself, and viewing what was going on around me from some deeper place within. I knew that I was something more, and that all these angry people around me were as well. That there was within all of us a beingness.

At some point you made the decision to immigrate Canada. What was the impetus for this?

Ostensibly, to become a rock star. This was a shock to my family, because I was an up-and-coming jazz musician, and recognition was on the horizon for me. But I was determined, and in my 20-year-old mind, I somehow saw Canada as a steppingstone to fame and glory. At the deepest core of it, though, was my need to escape from the turmoil of my parent's separation. I couldn't acknowledge it at the time, but moving to Canada was my way of running away from pain.

What was it like to immigrate at such a young age?

Scary and lonely. Emigrating is a big step for anyone to take, leaving your family and friends. Once in Canada I spent much time exploring various spiritual communities. I was searching for that beingness that I had experienced. But I was looking outside for it.

Many spiritual teachers talk about what St. John of the Cross called “the dark night of the soul,” which takes one to the shadow places within. Did this occur for you?

Yes. My dark night began when my first marriage ended. I was a rage-aholic. My anger from childhood erupted constantly. When my divorce happened, I recognized that what was going on within me wasn't the fault of the world. I was responsible for my feelings and actions. There was no one to blame. And this recognition propelled me into a crisis; total confusion. My whole life was called into question. I didn't know who I was anymore. It didn't occur to me to seek counseling and support, but I knew something had to be done. I had meditated, and I had read about the benefits of fasting. So I jumped straight into a regime of continuous meditation and fasting. I did this as much as I could for three years. I would escape to a retreat setting of my own making, or I would spend time in monasteries, which I loved to do at the time. I grappled with my demons, my shadows.

Did all of this internal focus have a tangible outcome?

I had an intense energy shift. The top of my head began to burn. It started as a pinprick, then gradually spread down my head, arms and body until all I was energetically on fire. I'd wake up at night red-hot from the openings in my chakras. I was getting information from somewhere about my past, and what it was really about. It was frightening, but it wasn't painful. I felt charged all of the time with this vibrant bubble of energy. When I stopped resisting and just surrendered to it, it was pleasant, though intense

What happened with the “energy bubble”?

It took weeks to complete its movement throughout my whole body. After it settled, I became compelled to put my hands on people who presented me with physical problems, and found I was able to intuit information about them. At first it was just something I experimented with. Then I decided to hit the workshop trail. I studied with some excellent teachers: Rosalyn Bruyere, the techniques of Barbara Brennan, Daskalos in Cyprus. My studies took me throughout North America and part way around the world. But I discovered that I needed to improvise my own expression of healership, not be a clone of someone else.

Were you on a quest?

Yes, and what I found was not what I set out looking for. The trip was a transformative experience, because I had to face my fear of death. Among other things, I was in a shipwreck and almost drowned. I ended up hospitalized with amebic dysentery, losing a lot of blood every day. But facing my own death rid me of a lot of fear. It was an awakening.

Did this awakening lead you to the creation of ARC?

Not immediately. After I had been practicing nutrition and energy work for a time, clients began asking me if they could apprentice under me. At first I said no; I had quit school teaching to develop my practice, and thought that I would never teach again. Then I took a trip to England, and while I was on the plane, I started to write--and I couldn't stop. I was obsessed. At the risk of sounding cliché, it was as though there were a spiritual source speaking through me. I received visions of the work. It eventually emerged as a two-part course called "Energy Dynamics," which has evolved to become ARC.

You designed ARC's therapeutic dialogue specifically for a hands-on approach. Why do you choose not to use traditional counseling methods?

In bodywork, you don't want clients intellectualizing about things. ARC works with the assumption that the emotional has manifested physically in the body. The dialogue is designed to confuse the mind, which allows the body to speak. When you bypass the intellect and go right to the feelings in the body, the therapeutic process is often very quick.

A central focus in ARC is the restructuring of internal "defenses" as a way of ensuring that positive change stays in place. Can you elaborate on that?

Growing up, being good at music always won me approval. If I wanted to be liked or appreciated, I played music. I was good at it; it worked. When I "gave up" my music in favor of my present profession, I discovered I couldn't play an instrument without imagining there was an audience present. Without the audience I was unmotivated. So playing music was a defense. Once I became conscious of this, I found that I was undeveloped in the area of expressing emotion, and had to learn how to do that. We emotionally organize ourselves in our early years to ensure survival in our immediate environment. So we possess parts of ourselves as adults that are programmed to exist in other times and environments. And since these parts are not equipped to operate in present time, they hold us back. Until those defensive parts are addressed, it's impossible for change to stay in place. Once our defenses are integrated into a more helpful role, then the expression of who we truly are, the Self, is supported by the emotional system. That way, change stays in place, releasing the need to rely on the practitioner to maintain those changes.

ARC heals through the reorganization of defenses?

ARC uses healership as a vehicle, but it is not about healing as an end in itself. When people drop outmoded defenses and live more in Self, they have more energy, and there is an inherent desire to focus that energy in specific directions. This is being drawn to be of service: coming to realize the task we have in the world, and having the energy and stimulation in place to manifest it. It is the discovery of your heartfelt task, whatever that may be. It is coming into the realization of your full potential. And it takes courage to walk that path in integrity.

What is it like to co-teach with your wife Melanie?

Melanie is the feminine expression of this work. We complement each other; I portray the bigger picture and she fills in the details. She understands the bridge between learning the work and applying it for self growth; bringing that into one's workplace or community. It's a wonderful privilege for me to work with her.

ARC stands for "A Return To Consciousness." How is A Return To Consciousness relevant to the work?

It is a growth process. In ARC we call it the Cycle of Integration. It begins with crossing from denial into self-responsibility, then working through our defenses, which leads to the full expression of Self. As you come into Self, you come into your own strength. Physically, there is greater tolerance and therefore greater ability to protect yourself from stress and disease. And as your inner reality changes, your outer reality changes. You have a healthier lifestyle, fulfilling relationships, career changes that reflect who you are and what your heartfelt tasks are in life. This unfolds naturally as a reflection of Self, because you've changed internally. It's something that you can see in yourself as it occurs, and something that people can see about you. The greater the presence of Self, the more conscious we are of our present needs. There is peacefulness in that knowing; an internal safety. It is a coming home.