

Light Lady

Need your aura strengthened? Your chakras balanced?

Migraines or midlife crisis cured? Meet Elsie Kerns

By Robyn Post

South Jersey Magazine, Vol 4, Issue 11

They say Elsie Kerns can heal you without even touching you. She could do it, they say, even if she were in China and you were in Cherry Hill— even if you didn't believe she could. The irony is that if she were in China, or Japan or India, no one would think twice about this claim; but we're in South Jersey, and most of the population probably finds it very strange.

Toni O'Donnell certainly found it strange. One day back in 1995, Elsie told the then-45-year-old social security worker to lie down for half an hour in her South Philly apartment while Elsie, at home in Marlton, did a healing treatment on her. Elsie explained that she would envision O'Donnell on the massage table and would manipulate her energy field as if she were there in person.

What? She thought. Come on. This is really out there. But O'Donnell figured "what the hell." She was so sick from Hodgkin's Disease— tests showed 40 percent of her lungs had been burned by the chemo— that just walking in her apartment fatigued her. She had called Elsie out of desperation after seeing her lecture at a bookstore. During the treatment, O'Donnell says, a profound peace like she'd never felt in her life enveloped her, and from that moment forward she started to heal. O'Donnell began seeing Elsie in person on a weekly basis. "The six people I met in the hospital during treatments were my age, and within four years, I was the only one left alive," says O'Donnell. "Now I'm healthy, cancer-free, my lungs healed with only two percent residual damage, and my oxygen intake is better than average for my age. The doctors said it was just luck of the draw, but I know it was Elsie's treatments."

O'Donnell says Elsie gave her a powerful gift. "She taught me that the healing ability is within all of us— the Chinese call it chi, the Indians call it prana. Call it whatever you want to call it, but we get separated from it by our own neurotic processing. People think I'm crazy or a Pollyanna or a throwback from Woodstock if I talk about it, but I call Elsie my Light Lady," she says.

Elsie, a short, pretty woman of 64, looks like a "light lady," with a sweep of chin-length, blond feathered hair, and blue eyes. She often wears a heavy cardigan with splashes of Southwestern reds, sky blues, and burnt siennas, and a pair of beaded moccasins. "There's no boundary to energy," she says. "I've worked with people from Europe to Iceland to California. I'd rather do a treatment in person, though, because it's much stronger."

When people ask the light lady what exactly she does, an easy explanation eludes her. "People have traditional jobs. I'm not selling insurance or air filters or printer cartridges," she says. "And I don't use the term healer because that's reserved for the medical community. So I say I'm a wellness educator; I provide stress reduction and give people a way to heal and empower themselves."

Elsie also calls herself "energy intuitive," meaning she can feel, see, or sense another person's energy field. Through extra sensory perception—Everyone has it. You just have to hone it—she says she can detect disruptions in the body's energy flow that can cause pain, fatigue, anxiety, disease, or general unwellness. She helps people reclaim their body's natural state of health using a variety of energy-manipulation disciplines, including Reiki (pronounced ray-kee), in which she transmits qi, or life force energy by placing her hands on or near you; emotional freedom technique (EFT), created by a Stanford-trained engineer, in which you say personally-chosen affirmations while tapping acupuncture points; and energy medicine exercises, in which you manipulate your own energy field in order to strengthen and balance it, and release stress. People go to Elsie to fix everything from depression to midlife crises to cancer, or to simply keep their stressful lives in balance.

In her home, pictures of cherubs hang on the wall, and the aroma of lavender hangs in the air. The house is a peaceful sanctuary, removed from the world of cell phones, faxes, and urgency. When Elsie starts speaking in that calming voice of hers, you're ready to unpack your bags and move in.

Elsie and her healing powers draw Mariko Tokito every six weeks like clockwork. A research scientist at the University of Pennsylvania, Tokito suffers from debilitating pain in her muscles and joints. "A couple years ago, I got such excruciating pain in my elbows that I was only comfortable if they were bent. I had to keep my arms folded across my chest. Very painful. So I went to Elsie in that condition, and after the treatment, I stood up and let my hands fall to the side and the pain never came back. Now I go to Elsie whether I need to or not, just to stay healthy. I haven't had a cold in years."

Tokito says that being Japanese, the concept of energy is a given. It doesn't contradict her training in proofs and logic, she says, because as a cell biologist, she knows firsthand the self-imposed limits of her field. "They couldn't track bacteria until technology caught up," she says. "Science makes sense in its own context, but doesn't make sense for anything that doesn't fit. As soon as mainstream medicine accepts that, the better off we'll be. For me, these treatments take the place of drugs."

"Elsie has a powerful gift," adds Tokito.

"I do have a gift," Elsie says, balancing on a blue exercise ball in her Haddonfield treatment room. "But I don't heal people, they heal themselves. I just facilitate."

Such hocus-pocus would never have been accepted in the Philadelphia home where Elsie grew up. "In our Irish Catholic culture, if you had a problem," she says, laughing, "they told you to go have a drink." But a young Elsie was enraptured by a family friend, a Southern woman named Augusta, who was into herbal and natural remedies and was full of healing wisdom. Decades later, at age 42, Elsie was a housewife with two teenage boys and some minor health problems when she remembered Augusta's philosophy. She turned to herbs, yoga, meditation, and books on Native American spirituality, which led her to Eastern philosophy and other types of healing.

“The theme of energy, or life force, seemed to be universal,” she says. The Chinese, Japanese, and Southeast Asian cultures have held for thousands of years that people are made of subtle fields of energy in constant interaction with their environment that can feed, deplete, or damage the energy makeup—that is, the aura (the outer energy field), the chakras (seven spinning spheres that contain your encoded emotional patterns) and meridians (12 energy pathways manipulated during acupuncture, which correspond with the body’s organs). “The cultures teach that your body is its own natural healer,” Elsie says. “Not that you don’t need traditional medicine or vitamins or herbs also, but if your body’s energy gets blocked or damaged by stress or emotional patterns, you lose some of your innate healing power.” The better Elsie began to feel, the more fascinated with energy she became.

In 1988, she went to a holistic healing expo in New York City that would change her life. A woman named Barbara Brennan, a former NASA scientist and astrophysicist who turned her research to the human energy field, gave a lecture and demonstration there. “We were doing a quiet meditation when she came down the aisles waiving a giant eagle feather through the crowd,” Elsie recalls. “Even with my eyes closed, I could feel this woman’s tremendous energy moving toward me.” Elsie bought Brennan’s book, *Hands of Light*, and the following fall, enrolled in her school—which, at that time, consisted of 120 students in a Radisson hotel on Long Island. There she learned to read, understand, and manipulate the human energy field, and hone her intuition.

Elsie quickly learned how to “open up” her intuitive gift. “Everyone has intuition, or high sensory perception,” she says. “But we’re not encouraged to develop it. Like an athlete who has talent, you have to hone it.” She began to see and feel people’s energy fields, and they appeared to her in various colors—blues, reds, yellows, and oranges. She began to sense the chakras as a kind of vortex, also with colors, and was able to sense people’s life issues, and detect blocks to healing. “When it first happened, I thought it was fabulous, but I didn’t know how to use it. It didn’t have any boundaries,” she says. “I was clairvoyant, and seeing too much information. I had to be taught how to reign it in, and focus it.” Elsie began practicing her gift with family and friends, when one of her teachers encouraged her to go teach. “I said, ‘But I have no credentials,’” she recalls. “She said, ‘Teaching comes from your heart.’ So I taught an adult education class on intuitive awareness at Lenape High School. After that, they were open enough to let me teach a class on angels. Twenty-five women signed up for a night on angels!”

Elsie continued to study in order to teach, and became a Reiki master in 1992. “At that time it didn’t have nearly the acceptance it does now,” she says. “The East Coast is still a little conservative, but now acupuncture, healing touch, and Reiki are all done in the country’s top hospitals.” She trained in several other disciplines, including energy medicine, mindfulness meditation, psychotherapy, and kabbalistic healing, and all show up in some form in her practice.

In 1995, she co-founded Wellness Workers Holistic Health, which combines her private practice with teaching stress reduction in the health, education and business sectors. What she likes most is teaching others to heal themselves and hone their intuitive gifts through her classes at Drexel University, Camden County College, and other venues. Sometimes people get unexpected intuitive gifts. “They’ll come to me, and they’re scared, and they say ‘Elsie, I don’t know what to do with this.’ Sometimes they even start seeing people who’ve crossed over. So I try to point them in the right direction.”

A woman named *Jill is sitting in a chair in Elsie’s treatment room. The treatment room has peach walls, a geometric mobile made of copper, a framed painting of a cherub, a massage table, and a wreath. Elsie flips on a tape recorder, then settles onto the blue exercise ball. Jill has been feeling depleted lately, she tells Elsie. Elsie asks Jill about her work and then her relationships and closes her eyes. She’s looking at Jill’s energy, looking back and forth in time to understand Jill’s life dynamics, mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. I get images. Or I hear a word, or I can sense a sequence. Then I can put together the puzzle.

Elsie relays what she senses: a childhood dynamic with Jill's mother that caused fear, now encoded in Jill's physiological make-up. It drives her to great heights in her career, but it has also made her ignore her health. In tears, Jill listens, confirming Elsie's insight. "It's your gift and your curse," Elsie says quietly. "You want to keep that drive that makes you excel, but do it with the proper balance."

"The issue is in your third chakra," Elsie continues, pointing to the area above her navel. "It corresponds to the solar plexus area. That chakra is about finding your identity within the family during adolescence. A depletion there means you're struggling with issues of inadequacy, failure, rejection, issues of your own power." Jill mentions that come to think of it, she's had stomach issues lately. Elsie shows her some energy-medicine exercises for clearing the blocked areas herself. Then she directs Jill to the treatment table, covers her with a warm throw, and tells her to take a nap. With a feather and long, broad strokes, Elsie sweeps her aura from head to toe, smoothing it out. Laying her hands on her and above her, she summons the same energy that moves the planets and grows the trees, channeling it all into Jill's body. Heat radiates off Elsie's hands like they are electric mitts. Then Elsie fluffs the air above Jill's solar plexus, plucking and weaving it higher and higher until her arms are halfway to the ceiling. Thirty minutes later, she holds Jill's calves down with her forearms, going under her energy field to strengthen her foundation before she walks away to let Jill bask in the feeling. Once at home, Jill is assigned to do her energy exercises daily to keep the energies humming. Sometimes one treatment does the trick. Sometimes it takes a few or several. Treatments range from \$60 for half-hour long distance healing to \$125 for a 75-minute consultation and energy treatment in person.

"It's not black magic," says Elsie, filling a spray bottle with 25 percent lavender oil and 75 percent alcohol. "Everyone is aware of energy, they just don't know it. Like when people say, 'That place or that person gives me a bad vibe.' Or, 'That person is toxic, they suck the life out of me,' or, 'That person is invigorating to be around.' That's energy. You go to a gym to keep your muscles in shape and stay healthy. Well, you also have to keep your energy in shape to stay healthy. Your body's natural healing ability depends on it."

"I think it's time for miracles," Elsie says, eyeing a shelf with framed photos of Mother Theresa and the Dalai Lama. "The world's in a very difficult place with the war, all the hatred and prejudice, these chronic debilitating illnesses, and we're all living longer. People can come together to create miracles. Compassion creates miracles. I think we're ready for that."

*Name changed

The Practicality of Light and Energy

Eastern philosophy has long held that energy is the core of life, and the concept isn't completely foreign in the west. Albert Einstein said all matter—animate and inanimate—is made of energy. Conventional medicine

measures heart rhythm with an electrocardiogram and brain waves with an electroencephalogram; sound waves are used to break up kidney stones. Energy healing, which falls under the umbrella of complementary and alternative medicine, has not yet been scientifically measured or proven. But overwhelming anecdotal evidence has made it one of the fastest-growing forms of alternative medicine in America, according to the National Institutes of Health. Part of the appeal is that it's noninvasive and risk-free. The NIH's National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, which dedicates part of its Web site to energy healing, put more than \$1.2 million into research for 2007 alone, funding grants at over 15 of the country's academic medical centers. More than 100 U.S. hospitals—including Our Lady of Lourdes, Cooper, Jefferson, and CHOP—use some form of energy healing, such as Reiki or healing touch, and more than 86,000 nurses and health professionals nationally use it in their practices. It's been integrated into cardiovascular care, orthopedics, cancer care to reduce side effects of chemo, and post-surgery care to reduce side effects and hasten recovery.