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PHOTOS BY GENIA WICKWIRE

Mother Earths in-store cafe.

by Zac Shaw

WE'RE HAVING A national conversation about food quality right now, as the recent confirmation hearings of health advocate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. highlight just how poisonous the average American's diet has become. It's not only the amount of food being consumed that's killing us. It's what's in our food – carcinogenic dyes, industrial byproducts, preservatives, and cheaper, less healthy alternatives to natural ingredients.

The local conversation around food quality here in the Hudson Valley is a much different story. We have a long history of agriculture and progressive food values that have led to the flourishing of healthy food sources. Yes, food insecurity persists among the poor – the elephant in the room is that healthy food is generally (but not always) more expensive than unhealthy food. But if you have the means, the Hudson Valley's healthy food bounty is waiting for you on shelves well within your reach.

In fact, there's so much healthy food stocked in our area's stores, it can be hard

to clearly define what a health food store is. Decades ago, you couldn't go into just any supermarket chain and grab nut milk or fill up your reusable container with organic granola, but today that's commonplace. In the past, you often weren't sure exactly where many local restaurants sourced their food, but today it's common to assume a high-end establishment will automatically be farm-to-table.

What delineates a "health food store" in the modern retail landscape? The common thread tying yesterday's hippie-fueled healthy food movement to today's USDA Organic-branded corporate



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Part of the High Falls Food Coop's fresh produce selection.

ominipresence has always been a focus on wellness. What exactly constitutes "health food" is a moving target – science advances, cultivation and manufacturing methods change – our understanding of the long-term effects of any given diet necessarily take time to develop.

That said, the human biology has remained functionally the same for quite some time. Yes, food allergies have risen dramatically as other incremental genetic and epigenetic shifts have occurred, but what constitutes healthy food has remained consistent. Nutrient-dense items such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats have always supported overall well-being. Healthy food is often characterized by minimal processing, lower amounts of added sugars and unhealthy fats, and a focus on supplying essential vitamins, minerals, and other beneficial compounds. Ethical sourcing – preferably from local suppliers with the freshest foods – is vital as well.

Perhaps the biggest shift in nutrition over the last few decades has been the



Mother Earth has an abundance of fresh organic produce.

focus on customizing one's diet to one's particular needs. One food pyramid cannot rule us all. Personalized dietary approaches are a must, especially for those with particular preferences or conditions. This is where local health food stores shine, offering a kaleidoscopic variety of healthy ways to custom-tailor your diet to your needs.

There are many places to get healthy food in Ulster County. Below are the largest and most established.

Health & Nutrition Center

15 New Paltz Plaza, New Paltz

Who needs health food more than college kids? But seriously – New Paltz has long been a healthy town, from its svelte climbers and mountain bikers to its eco-conscious forest hippies. Being surrounded by vast tracts of farmland didn't hurt, either.

The Health & Nutrition Center in New Paltz embraces all things wellness, It caters to those whose diets deviate from the status quo. You'll find fresh, locally-sourced produce, holistic wellness products and natural, organic, ethically-sourced groceries. Gluten-free? Vegan? Allergies? You've come to the right place.

High Falls Food Co-op

1398 Route 213, High Falls

Locals who have watched High Falls Food Co-op "grow up" over the years could not be prouder of what it's become. Dating back to the Seventies, its roots run deep into the foundation of our com-

munity, providing season after season of fresh produce and grocery products to a dedicated local following.

From humble beginnings as a small cooperative of farm-fresh food fans, High Falls Food Co-op has blossomed into a full-fledged food distribution network, grocery store and deli.

The co-op's members own the operation, and unlike its more profit-driven counterparts, fair pricing is always a goal. Folks, it doesn't get any more community-oriented than this.

Mother Earth's Storehouse

300 Kings Mall Court, Town of Ulster
Mother Earth's Storehouse has been

a cornerstone of Hudson Valley's food community since its founding in 1978. It's more than a health and wellness supermarket – it's a lifestyle.

While its Saugerties and Poughkeepsie locations closed following an expansion and sale, Mother Earth's original location is still going strong, with a steady stream of foot traffic throughout the day. The store offers an extensive array of organic groceries, a robust selection of dietary and wellness supplements, freshly prepared hot meals, and baked goods. Vegans and vegetarians in particular find it to be a Disneyland of options tailored to their dietary needs.



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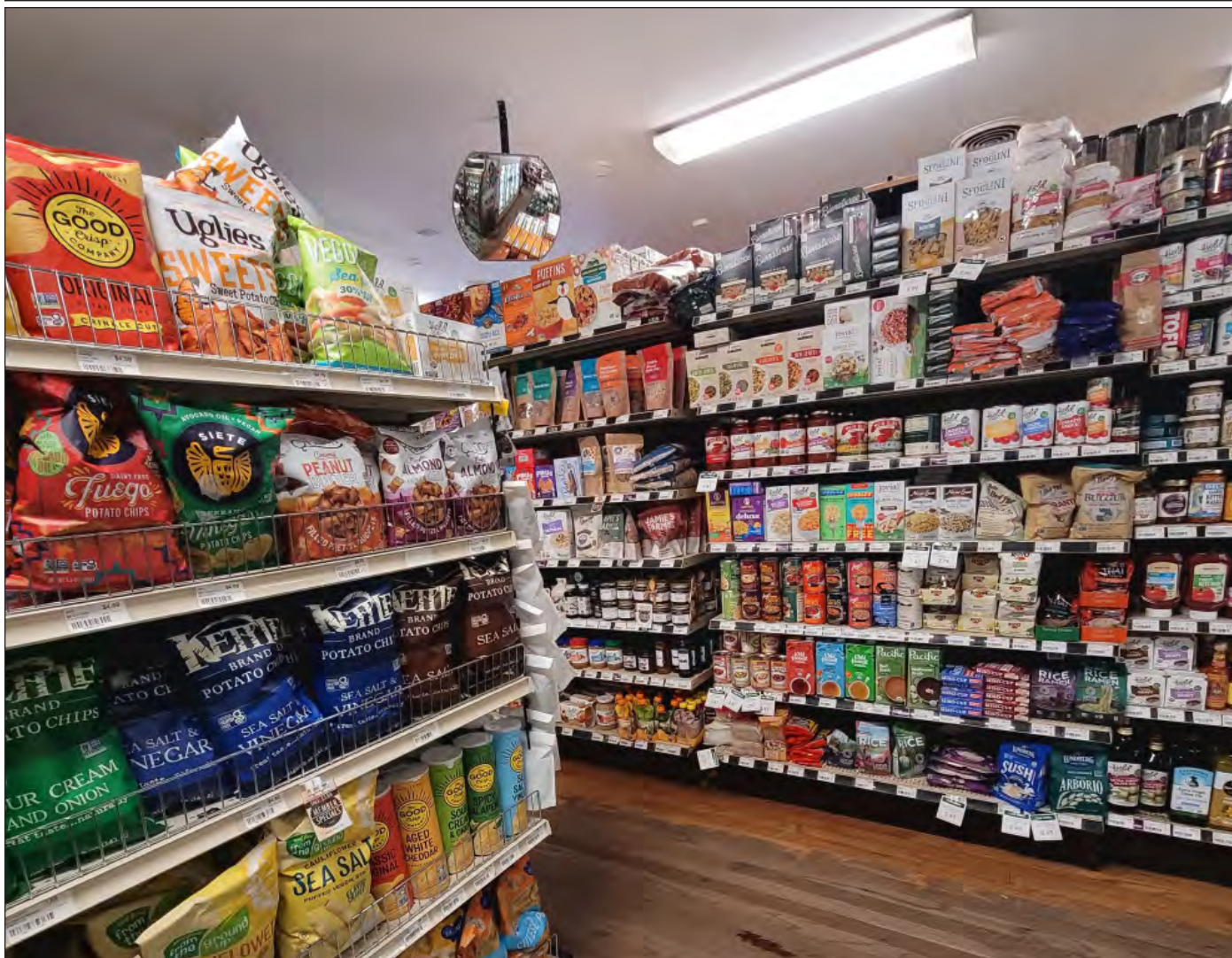


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Sunflower Natural Foods Market

75 Mill Hill Road, Woodstock
24 Garden Street, Rhinebeck

Sunflower Natural Foods Market has been serving health-conscious locals

since its birth in Woodstock circa 1978. It was ahead of the curve then, and it continues to push the envelope of what a local health and wellness store can be. Sunflower embraces every healthy

buzzword in the dictionary: Non-GMO, small batch, ethically sourced, humanely raised, sustainable, organic, local and antibiotic-free.

Locals appreciate Sunflower for its welcoming atmosphere and knowledgeable staff, many of whom have been part of the community for years. Today, the store's offerings range from natural skincare and herbal supplements to artisanal cheeses and fresh produce — all carefully chosen to support the region's thriving network of farmers and small-scale producers.

In 2024, Sunflower raised \$20,000 for local organizations that support the community, demonstrating its continued commitment to keeping Woodstock healthy and well.

Sunfrost Farms

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is Woodstock's year-round farmers' market.

In operation since the 1980s, Sunfrost embraces local agriculture with strong connections to local farms and producers. If it's in season, it's in here. If it's dairy, it's from an animal that was not far from you. Alongside the choice fresh goods, you'll find specially curated grocery items, baked goods, juices and plants. It's also a popular locals' breakfast and lunch spot, with an adjoining cafe making sandwiches and other goodies. I probably shouldn't even be telling you about it.

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Limb-loss fellowship

Group meets monthly in Kingston

by Violet Snow

GATHERED FOR THEIR January meeting at the Resource Center for Accessible Living (RCAL) in Kingston, attendees of the Mid-Hudson Limb Loss Group introduced themselves to two visitors with a capsule description of what they're dealing with.

"Left above-knee amputation, 2022, due to sepsis," said Nancy Hulahan, a former occupational therapist who had known exactly how to furnish her home with grab bars and other equipment so as to assure her independence.

"Right below-knee, from a car accident in 2013," said Dan Breslin, joining the meeting by Zoom from Athens, New York. "I worked on saving it until 2018. It was a choice." "Above-knee, right side, Lost my leg on my motorcycle, trying to keep up with a guy," said Barbara Montheith, also on Zoom, from her home in Lake George, where she lives alone and cares for her horse, rabbits and cats.



Gina Kothe's service dog, Opal, resting by her side.



PHOTOS BY PHYLLIS McCABE

Left to right, Samantha Lucas, Gina Kothe with Opal, Linda Neu, Nancy Hulahan and Dan Breslin and Barbara Montheith on the screen.

The Amputee Coalition, a national organization, estimates that 2.3 million people in the U.S. are living with limb

loss. Another 3.4 million have a limb difference, which is when an arm or leg is not shaped in the usual way, more often

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Gina Kothe and her service dog Opal.

by a congenital issue but sometimes due to injury or disease.

“Tonight’s topic is self-care,” began co-facilitator Linda Neu. “Every day is a challenge. I practice self-care by making myself presentable, going for walks near the reservoir, four-wheeling on the mountain, and getting involved with new hobbies.”

When Neu, a Hurley resident, lost a leg above the knee in a motorcycle accident, she was determined to ride her beloved horse Shyla again. She succeeded due to her own grit and the help of family, friends, companion animals, and advanced medical technology.

“I can’t is not in my vocabulary,” she stated. “Sometimes you just have to find another way.”

She wants to raise awareness in the Hudson Valley about the group, which can help

amputees and their families and friends supporting them. “There’s a lot going on here,” she said. “We’re here to support each other and make new friendships. It’s a place to come and feel comfortable, tell your story, bring happy and not-so-happy moments. People can also talk to us about how to help the person who

has an amputation to go on and have a successful life.”

Samantha Lucas was a yoga professional until Covid shut her studio down. Her below-knee, right-side amputation was the result of a motorcycle accident in 2015.

“Before I lost my leg, I was practicing and teaching — as well as after,” she said.

“Self-care is having exercise to do every day. Yoga helps with emotional stability. When I was in the throes of depression, yoga really helped me.”

Lucas said that amputees might need assistance to figure out how to practice yoga.

For Gina Kothe, who lost a leg below the knee to a crush injury as a Kingston



Samantha Lucas with Gina Kothe.

firefighter, finding self-care means expressing her emotions.

“If I have a crisis, sometimes my husband will say, can it wait till I get home? But if I wait I miss my opportunity. I’m an impatient person.”

One of Kothe’s outlets is collecting prostheses that are no longer being used and sending them to South Africa, where supportive devices are hard to come by. “They come from deceased people, or they’re ones that that didn’t work out,” she explained. Here, you can’t recycle them. A prosthetist won’t fit you with a used one.”

About half of amputees do not use a prosthesis, but the six group members present have them.

“I got a new leg today,” said Kothe. “It has a cow print. I gained 30 pounds, so I needed a new socket. For a new foot, socket, visit, bits and pieces: \$26,000.”

Due to changes in insurance regulations, she has to pay 20 percent of that amount. Other people have insurance that covers all their costs, but some find it a stretch to deal with the expense of prosthetic devices.

When Neu was injured, the Amputee Coalition connected her with a peer advisor who helped orient her toward available services and offered emotional support. Now she is training to be a peer advisor to others. “When I see an amputee in a parking lot, I go over and introduce myself.”

Peer advisors are helpful because, as Lucas points out, “You don’t know what you don’t know. Everyone’s journey is different, but the resources are not. Hearing a lot of solutions makes a difference.”

One resource that’s hard to come by is a mobility dog, specially trained to prevent falls and help people move around when their balance is impaired. The large-breed type of dog required does not have a long enough lifespan to make training financially worthwhile for most service organizations.

“When I see an amputee in a parking lot, I go over and introduce myself.”



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After extensive research and long waitlists that didn't pan out, Kothe is training Opal, a four-month-old Great

Dane, with the help of Operation At Ease, a Schenectady-based organization that supports veterans and first responders.

"I am working on bracing and balance," said Kothe. "Many times you have to go up stairs, and there's no railing. No one wants to see me on my hands and knees, and I don't use a cane. I don't usually need it, and then when I need one I don't have it." A mobility dog could help her navigate such situations.

When Breslin asked his prosthetist about balance, he was told to "try to get outside your

comfort zone once in a while." Among Breslin's projects was renovating his kitchen. "It's not easy trying to get underneath the sink with my leg on, getting up and down to get tools," he said. "I keep working on things around the house, continually pushing myself to do more."

Neu agreed with that approach.

When you step outside your comfort zone and achieve a goal, it's an incredible feeling."

Group outings take place about once a month. Expeditions planned for this year include snow tubing, archery, kayaking, bowling, climbing, and biking.

Members recently took a trip to Montana's shoe store in Saugerties. "I asked one of owners if he could talk to us about customizing shoes," said Neu, "like putting in snaps or zippers. We keep trying to find new products that make our lives a little easier."

A buddy system will be kicking off at the February meeting. Each month, every member will be assigned a buddy to check in with. Buddies will change each month.

Neu told a story describing a social role people in the group sometimes fill. Last summer, she was making purchases in a convenience store and asked a man who

"I can't" is not in my vocabulary.'

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Meeting participants Samanth Lucas, Gina Kothe, facilitator Linda Neu, Nancy Hulahan, and screen participants Dan and Barbara.

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was walking in if he would help carry the items to her truck. Outside, he noticed her prosthesis and wondered, “How do you do it?” He revealed that he was a recovering alcoholic who had hit bottom

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after a decade of sobriety and had been on his way to buy a six-pack of beer.

Neu immediately connected him with a friend who's a prison chaplain. The man is still sober, has made changes in

his life, and now talks with Neu regularly on the phone.

The Mid-Hudson Limb Loss Group meets at 6 p.m. on the second Thursday of each month at the RCAL, 727 Ulster

Avenue, Kingston. For information, see the Mid-Hudson Limb Loss Group's Facebook page, email midhudsonlimbloss@gmail.com, or call Linda Neu at 845-750-0467.

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PHOTOS PROVIDED

Eric Glass toasting to good health.

Cancer schmanzer

Longtime Woodstock resident survives Orlando ordeal

by Eric Glass

VISITING MY PRIMARY-CARE physician in Florida a few times and two other specialists in 2017, I was assured I was fine. My incredibly attractive Vietnamese doctor charmingly told me to “stop kvetching,” suggesting I not obsess about the persistent sore throat that I’d been complaining about for months. She offered me a referral to a mental-health specialist in the area, implying, I believe, that my concern was bordering on the neurotic. I asked her if she would refer me to the best E.N.T. doctor in central Florida. She reluctantly did. He was two hours away. I made an appointment for the following week. Ushered into his office, I was asked why I was there. I told

him about the inability of the specialists I had seen over the last year to find anything wrong with me even though I was something was. He shoved a scope down my throat and said

.....
When the tests came back, I drove the two hours to his office. His first words were “Sit down.”

something that was not comforting to me: “Jesus Christ, how did they miss this?” Fairly certain I was not going to like his answer I asked what they had missed. “There’s a large growth on

your larynx,” he answered, “and I don’t like the looks of it. I’m sending you for more tests and a biopsy.”

If he didn’t like the looks of it, I was pretty positive I wasn’t going to like it, either. Biopsy was not a word that inspired confidence.

When the tests came back, I drove the two hours to his office. His first words were “Sit down.” The underlying message in this inconsequential phrase translated into, “I have some very bad news for you.”

He said I had Stage 4 cancer, which because it had gone undiagnosed for at least a year had spread from my larynx to my pharynx, my thyroid, all my lymph nodes, and part of my tongue.

He referred me to the Orlando Cancer Center, “the best around.”

Those were the last words I remember hearing. My ears got really hot and stopped functioning. Though I could see his lips moving, I couldn’t hear a single word. It was like what happens when you lose the sound on your television.

He must have understood, He eventually signaled with his hands that it was time for me to leave his office.

I drove home in a state close to catatonic. I have no memory of the drive. That week, I had a series of tests and was admitted to Orlando Cancer Center, where I underwent a six-and-a-half-hour operation. A huge skin graft from my thigh was used to reconstruct a new throat for me.

My recuperation


Six weeks of radiation, five days a week, followed. A puncture procedure in my stomach accommodated a potential voice prosthetic, I spent four months on a feeding tube, eating nothing but three cans of Jevity per day. A wound machine on my thigh covered the area where the skin had been removed to construct my new throat.

I couldn’t shower for six weeks. My lymphedema was so pronounced that my face looked like an overstuffed pillow ravaged by angry wolves.

Thus began my recuperation. The only good news was that I lost 42 pounds in four months while on the feeding tube.

With the exception of my horribly swollen face and the gigantic, bloody crater of the wound on my thigh, I looked fabulous, I hadn’t looked this good since sophomore year in high school when I

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played on three varsity teams.

I couldn't speak until the voice prosthetic, a device called a Trans-esophageal Voice Prosthetic (a T.E.P for short), was installed. My voice sounded

remarkably like Louis Armsrong with a severe cold.

In spite of all this, the ordeal never seemed terrible or that I was suffering with something horrible, much to ev-

eryone's surprise.

I found out three years later, over some beers with two good friends, that everyone thought I was going to die, a thought that occurred to me, not even once. I just plodded on, did what I had to, and survived the very real pain enjoying the wonderful painkillers that were liberally prescribed.

Surprisingly, I never even felt sorry for myself or thought that an injustice had

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been dropped on me, or that I had been wrongfully singled out to undergo this experience. I don't even think I was angry at anyone, with the possible exception of myself for smoking for 47 years, not to mention the other toxic substances I had put into my body.

Yes, I was a little sad that I lived alone, but my daughter, sister, and three of my closest friends flew down to Florida in shifts to take care of me for months, never leaving me alone for more than a day or two. I felt blessed, that these people in my life cared enough about me to put their lives on hold to do this for me. I knew not everyone else in the world could say that.

Dolphin therapy

One afternoon, sitting on my screened porch overlooking the Intracoastal Waterway, watching dolphins and manatees play near my pontoon boat, I thought again about the whole experience.

It hadn't been half as bad as it probably should have been. How come I didn't suffer, feel despondent, sad, morose, angry, or have the negative experiences other cancer patients and survivors have experienced? Why hadn't I felt horribly depressed and in need of therapy or antidepressants like so many others in my situation? Why wasn't I overcome with debilitating sadness?

Two dolphins breached at the same



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The author, immediately after receiving his laryngectomy, right before his face swelled to the size of a pumpkin.

time. They looked like a momma or daddy dolphin and their infant, leaping a good six feet out of the water like synchronized swimmers. I remembered playing my autoharp and singing for my daughter when she was a very young baby. She would try to sing along, look at me and smile. It would make me so happy, all was right in this world.

I hadn't sung to her for almost 30 years. That was the moment that I realized I would never sing to my daughter again, never see her smile when I played and sang a song she especially liked.

That's when I cried, for the first time in over a year, maybe longer. I cried uncontrollably for what seemed like forever.

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Healing hands



PHOTOS BY DION OGUST

Anna Ginta Zvilus administering a Reiki treatment.

Reiki treatment bridges the physical and the spiritual

by Violet Snow

OF THE MANY types of bodywork available in the modern world, Reiki is perhaps the least dependent on physical manipulation and the most related to the spiritual. It usually involves the practitioner placing hands on or above the client's body while

connecting mentally to a form of energy—or is it a form of consciousness?

In her book *Empowerment Through Reiki* (Lotus Light Publications, 1997), Paula Horan explains that Reiki sees all physical issues as having mental causes, specifically a misalignment between mind and spirit. Purely physical treatment does not address the true cause and therefore does not bring about complete

healing. Reiki brings spiritual energy to bear on the problem and helps to resolve the mental cause.

Different practitioners define the energy in different ways. Anna Ginta Zvilus, who lives in Phoenicia, calls it “the love of God, a universal healing energy. The word ‘Reiki’ means life force.”

Liam Watt, another Phoenician, explains, “The practitioner’s energy is



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Reiki healer Anna Ginta Zvilius.

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aligned with a higher level of consciousness, and there is a sympathetic response in the client, so that their energy level aligns with that balance.”

Cindy Brody of Woodstock says, “I call it a love energy, the power of prayer. It’s a positive and intelligent energy.”

However the process is defined, the goal of a Reiki treatment is deep relaxation and healing. Zvilius finds people often come to her when they have given up on medical treatment, which has its limits in dealing with pain. “Someone has an ache or pain that’s chronic, and they’re open to the idea of energy work. The term encompasses a lot, but basically it’s looking beyond the physical.”

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She emphasizes that Reiki is not a religion. "Some people are hesitant to try it because they think it's a cult. It just touches on the spiritual aspect of our nature. We are spiritual beings. You become aware of that."

Brody had never heard of Reiki when she discovered healing in her hands as a child. At the age of eight, she was sent to her grandparents' farm in Nebraska. One day she was sitting in the dirt of the barnyard, watching the animals. Next to her was the barn dog. "A voice in my head said, 'Beam your hands

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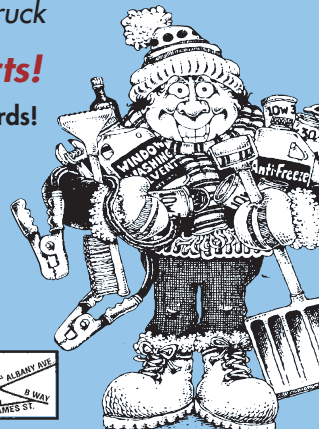
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at the dog.' When I did, the dog jumped in the air, then put its mouth gently on my hands and asked me to do it again." In Nebraska, gems and crystals pop up out of the ground, and Brody theorizes that crystals in the soil conveyed an energy attunement while she was sitting in the dirt. "After that, I held feral kittens at the farm. My hands would get hot, and the kittens would calm down and purr. I was drawn to animals and loved putting my hands on them." Later she worked with people as well.

Brody was in her 30s when she walked through a New Age fair in New York

City and saw a man putting his hands on someone, doing exactly what she

.....

Reiki sees all physical issues as having mental causes, specifically a misalignment between mind and spirit.

.....

had been doing. But when she learned that the price of a Reiki attunement, a

transmission of energy from a teacher, was \$10,000, "I whimpered and walked away. But when anyone says you can't do this... if you say no, I say go. I put together a small practice during the AIDS epidemic in the early '80s, putting my hands on artists, dancers, people with AIDS. You can do energy work without an attunement.

We all have the ability to help using energy."

Some years later, when the price came down, she took Reiki training and found that attunement made the energy in her hands “hotter and more focused.” By then she had moved to Woodstock, where she was taking riding lessons. At the barn, she saw horses that were sore or hurt. “After my lesson, I’d sneak into the barn and put my hands on the horses. Next day, people would say their horse looked better, wasn’t limping as much, or had stopped coughing.”

Brody soon had a thriving practice treating horses. Their owners, seeing the results, asked her to work on them as well. In the late ‘90s, she treated many women with breast cancer. Reiki treatment reduced pain after any type of surgery and speeded the healing process.

Twenty years ago, Brody treated Petal, a pit bull diagnosed with leukemia and given 30 to 90 days to live. Petal recovered and survived another five years with weekly Reiki treatments. Brody, who also practices animal communication, heard a message from Petal: “If

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you take care of the dogs, the dogs will take care of you.” She set up a room in her office for treating dogs. She has given Reiki to cats, snakes, cows, turtles, plants, and a hog.

Brody is now teaching Reiki and believes anyone can learn to heal with their hands. “The energy is a part of the healing of our planet. It’s been utilized back to the Egyptians. We’ve walked away from our intuition and our own natural gifts. Now it’s so needed. When doing energy work, it sharpens your intuition. When we listen, we can change our world and the people around us.”

Watt agrees that the healing power is available to everyone, and he also discovered his abilities early in life. “In my teens, I found I could lay my hands on people and they would feel better from whatever was going on.” Wanting the support of a formal system, he studied Reiki. In the training, “I felt they were talking about

History of Reiki

ALTHOUGH REIKI WAS DEVELOPED IN JAPAN, IT HAS HISTORICAL CONNECTIONS with the U.S. The dominant system of Reiki came from Mikao Usui, a civil servant and a student of spirituality, who received healing power through a mystical experience on a mountain.

Hawayo Takata, a Hawaiian woman of Japanese descent, traveled to the Tokyo clinic of Usui’s student Chujiro Hayashi. She was suffering from a tumor, gallstones, appendicitis, and asthma, which were healed during her four-month stay at the clinic. Upon her recovery, she convinced Dr. Hayashi to teach her Reiki, although it was traditional to teach only men. In 1937, he went to visit her in Hawaii to help establish Reiki there and initiate her as a Reiki Master.

When the Japanese government was planning to attack the U.S., Hayashi was asked to identify locations of warehouses and military targets in Hawaii, and he refused. He was labeled a traitor, causing disgrace for his family, and he committed ritual suicide.

The practice of Reiki in Japan was suppressed during World War II, and the method might have died out if Takata had not kept it alive by teaching Reiki in the U.S.

When learning Reiki, the student receives an attunement from the teacher, strengthening the student’s healing power. Mrs. Takata required teachers to charge \$10,000 for an attunement at the Master level, to ensure that students respected the teachings. Later teachers lowered the price, encouraging the spread of the practice.

what I know I have. Everybody has it. They just have to open to a certain level of sensitivity within themselves.”

Zvilius and Brody both place their hands on people who are lying clothed on a massage table. Watt sits his clients (also clothed) in a chair. Along with applying gentle touches, he reports the intuitions that come to him as he works. Like some practitioners, Brody at first held her hands above the client’s body, but she eventually realized that people crave touch.

“I’ve been told by teachers that the energy has a mind of its own,” said Zvilius. “I’m just a faucet. The energy comes through my crown, down my arms, into your body, and the energy knows what you need. It has its own intelligence.”

So is Reiki energy physical or spiritual? Zvilius: “Is electricity physical? It’s the same kind of thing. But the source in non-physical, I believe.”

Watt: “When I walk past a TV, it crackles, so that’s physical.” But he also does distance healing, where the client is not physically present.

Brody: “I think it’s a spiritual energy. It’s a spiritual practice.”

.....
To contact Anna Ginta Zvilius, email her at ginta65@aol.com. Liam Watt can be reached at iamliamwatt@gmail.com or 845-688-3344. Contact Cindy Brody at cindy@cindybrody.com.

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