

Reiki Thrives in Ann Arbor

by Matthew Muth

Photography by Linda Lawson

(Editor's Note: We asked Matt Muth, a Crazy Wisdom Tea Room staff person, to profile some of the Reiki practitioners in town. What follows is his youthful and enthusiastic account of his introduction to energy healing.)

Today, feel no anger

have no worries

show gratitude

be diligent in all undertakings

treat others with kindness

Morning and evening press your palms together

Take these words to your heart

Recite them with your mouth

- Mikao Usui

These are the reiki precepts, a few simple words embodying the essence of this particular method of energy healing. Of course, dear readers, you probably already knew that reiki was a form of healing involving direct transmission of cosmic energies to an afflicted area of the body through an intermediary, known as the practitioner. Well, I did not at the beginning of this small holistic odyssey; in fact, reiki could have been a Ninja Turtle if I had not previously committed them all to memory. Know-



Chiropractor Kathleen Dvorak incorporates Reiki, as well as craniosacral work, into her practice.

ing what it was not, I endeavored to find out what, exactly, reiki consisted of.

What I did learn about reiki was that, both as a theory and a science, reiki is astoundingly simple and devilishly complex, with significant applications in the fields of traditional and emerging medicine. Reiki was invented and pioneered by a Japanese monk named Mikao Usui, who developed the initial techniques that were subsequently passed down from generation to generation of healers in a very personal and intensely secretive fashion, until it eventually landed stateside in Hawaii and spread to the mainland.

Reiki today refers to many different variations of the original method, and can also be used as a blanket term to categorize methods of healing that are not, technically,

reiki. As one of my interviewees asserted, "You can't stand on a street corner and swing a dead cat in this town without hitting a reiki practitioner," but even if this statement is proven true (experiments are still inconclusive), after inviting some of these mystical universal forces into my own body, I can safely say this a good thing.

For the few skeptics still reading this article, perhaps the most persuasive evidence I can offer of the validity and reality of reiki is my own personal experiences under the spell of this ancient art. At great personal risk I placed myself in the able hands of several practitioners, whose effects on me ranged from decisive filming of peripheral vision and jelly-like substance replacing cartilage in the knees (which made for an interesting drive home), and, most startlingly, waving of the arms, seemingly under their own power, in the creation of arcane symbols in the air. This frightened me, as I am not prone to spontaneous outbursts of channeling, but did drive home the point that there were larger forces at work.

But perhaps the most astounding aspect of reiki is its versatility; in this vein, I have attempted to cobble together seemingly mutually exclusive applications and professions that all incorporate reiki to some degree. There is seemingly no limit to the fields that reiki can influence positively, and as such I present two individuals who have incorporated reiki into their areas of expertise, and two individuals who have earned the lofty title of reiki master. And as different as they may seem, all of these incredible people share an unequivocal commitment to helping those who are in pain.

Kathleen Dvorak

Kathleen is a chiropractor by training, a classical music and arts enthusiast by birth, and a sunny woman by disposition. But while simply learning the nuances of vertebrae and spinal fluids might satisfy the curiosity of any other chiropractor, Kathleen has taken a strong interest in using reiki in her practice. It should also be noted that Kathleen strongly believes in the connection between psychological distress and the physical manifestations of troubled minds. A Freudian chiropractor may seem unusual, but these elements can be readily combined with the help of a certain method of energy healing which, for the purpose of secrecy, shall remain nameless. OK, OK, it's reiki.

Kathleen was brought up with a strong Catholic background, and was instilled with a strong drive to help people in pain whenever possible. After taking a position in campus ministry, she concluded that many of the physical ailments students were exhibiting were the results of psychological trauma and high levels of stress. This evidence suggesting that mental turbulence and tangible illnesses were linked led her to attend the Cleveland Chiropractic College, where she earned her degree in 1989.

She had now been given the tools to treat physical problems, but was still searching for the bridge that would allow her to work with both the mental and physical roots of suffering. Kathleen became involved with the Lighthouse Center, where she was exposed to reiki, and decided to further explore its healing potential. This proved to be the link between physical and psychological ailments that she had been looking for, and allowed her to heal both the body and the mind simultaneously.

In addition to chiropractic work, Kathleen also does craniosacral work and trauma healing, both of which are designed to help the body release pent up energy blockages and tension. To get at these blockages, Kathleen uses reiki to shake them up, which is (loosely) comparable to bombarding a kidney stone with sound waves. While describing her "eclectic" healing techniques, Kathleen notes that most people do not "listen to their bodies;" for example, if your body twinges in pain while you, say, arm wrestle an East German shot putter, "you shouldn't do it."



Massage Therapist Robin Ashlock brings Reiki to her animal healing work.

While most of her clients are simply seeking a spinal adjustment, Kathleen still has the opportunity to use reiki in the most straightforward of her sessions. Usually employed to ground patients before therapy begins, Kathleen notes that reiki definitely helps "bring the self back to the body," and also facilitates the patient being more in touch with his/her body. Reiki is also useful in helping to regulate the exchange and interplay of energy between organs of the body, and releasing "what is stored as negative energy." So whether your spine is misaligned, your organ energy is unyielding, or your thoughts are trapped in trauma, Kathleen Dvorak has the tools to heal you.

Robin Ashlock

Robin Ashlock has been a massage therapist since 1998. Reiki entered her life through an unusual avenue: her specialty, and passion, is animal healing.

Robin had multiple dogs and cats growing up on her stepfather's farm. She was also surrounded by cows,

I spoke with Dr. Elena Gillespie, one of the authors and co-investigators of a study on reiki begun in 1998 and conducted at the University of Michigan, about the mechanisms and results of her work with co-author Martin Stevens. Although she was reluctant to give the Crazy Wisdom Community Journal the scoop over slightly more prestigious medical journals, she could tell me that 202 total patients participated in the study, which focused on diabetic neuropathy, and that a "statistically significant" number improved during the course of the treatments. In some measurements there was a 95% probability that improvement was due to the introduction of reiki. The complete study should be published some time in the next seven months.

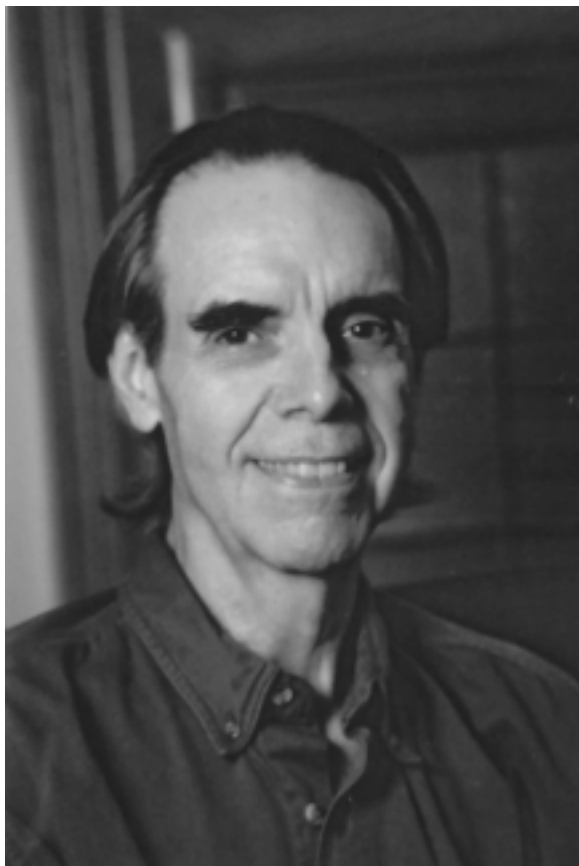
- M.M.

pigs, a goat, a pony, and over 40 horses her stepfather boarded, which effectively illuminates why she has been infused with such a love of all creatures great and small. She tells me that animals "have been among, and continue to be, the best teachers of my life," and that she would have gone to veterinary school, but flunked physics twice. We commiserate over this shared shortcoming, then move on.

Her teacher at massage therapy school was none other than Suzy Wienckowski, and Suzy's emphasis on reiki as an element of massage piqued Robin's curiosity about its potential applications in other fields. But perhaps the true epiphany occurred when Robin's first dog began having severe attacks of epilepsy; drugs and medication were ineffective, so Robin used reiki to ease the canine's passing.

Although it was not an overnight change, Robin began to focus more and more on ways to help animals using her considerable skills. She teaches dog training classes at Country Kennel in Saline, and uses not only reiki, but also animal massage (which is different than just petting), flower essence healing, and aromatherapy to help relax and train animals. She noted that reiki toned down the "fight/flight response" in her patients, and says that animals will clearly indicate whether or not they want reiki, and how much. Be warned, house pets: Robin can, and will, "turn it up to 11."

She relates to me a story about finding a baby sparrow in a bucket of bleach water as a clear indicator that animals do appreciate, and enjoy, reiki; after scrubbing the chick with soap, she performed reiki on it for fifteen minutes to calm its rapidly beating heart. She opened her hands to release it, but the bird was not going anywhere, and only after another fifteen (free of charge, we can only assume) minutes would it fly away and rejoin its mother, who was observing this strange ritual from a safe distance. Her ultimate goal is to phase out people massage entirely and open an animal clinic specializing in holistic healing and communication between man and beast. Animal lovers, rest assured that your four legged family member is in excellent hands, with Robin.



An engineer by background, Reiki Master Ray Golden leads Reiki workshops, as well as teaches classes in developing intuition, and in animal healing.

Ray Golden

Ray Golden is not your typical reiki master; for starters, he is the only 3rd degree certified (master level) Reiki practitioner I know of with a masters degree in engineering from the University of Michigan. He put this degree to good use designing industrial computers for the Big Three automakers, until Ford decided to employ his small company permanently, at which point Ray became expendable. He began having unexplainable "experiences," which eventually led him to study reiki under the noted holistic physician Gabriel Cousins, who also holds the curious honor of being the only reiki master to be inducted into the National Football Hall of Fame. But becoming a

reiki master is not as easy as running a ten yard buttonhook on two deep zone coverage, and Ray studied diligently for five years before he was awarded the title of "master."

Ray walks with a nasty limp, the result of a broken neck in a diving accident when he was nineteen years old. Despite temporary paralysis and the lingering effects of such a debilitating injury, Ray shrugs it off as "something I'm supposed to go through." Ray is a strong advocate of people "going through things," which, when explored in greater depth, is actually a paraphrase of Ray's belief that people's lives consist of karmic cycles they are supposed to experience, with sickness being no exception.

This becomes problematic only when people are not ready to be cured; for some people, their "illness or problem is part of their identity," and thus they are not prepared to lose the malady and become both a different person and healthy. Metaphysically, "the energy coming through is based on what a person needs," but it also "honors a person's boundaries," so people unready or unwilling to feel good again will probably not experience any tangible benefits of Ray's ministrations, and need not apply.

For those ready to make the leap to great health, Ray has finagled miracles involving people sicker than yourself. He was performing work on a man waiting on the liver transplant list when a massive energy, like "being in the middle of a hurricane," hit Ray, and through Ray, the patient on the table. The man returned for another session a week later, then disappeared, but months later he called Ray to inform him that not only was he off the liver transplant list, he wanted to take classes on reiki.

If that wasn't enough, Ray actually detoxified himself when his appendix exploded. He was "in agony," with a 103 degree fever, when a "lightning bolt" of energy smashed into his abdomen, perplexing the doctors who later diagnosed that his appendix had ruptured days earlier, but that surgery was totally unnecessary. Ray grins and notes that incident won him quite a bit of fame around the hospital.

Ray's talents lie not only in waxing philosophical and turning water into wine, but also in the classroom, where he has been teaching all degrees of reiki for thirteen years. Like every good dojo, Ray has a secret technique he uses in his training of would be reiki practitioners, which I will reveal to you here as it was revealed to me, risking the wrath of a man who could conceivably save my life someday. The secret, he tells me, is in the initiations.

While other masters and schools have, over the years, begun initiating apprentices en masse, Ray still prefers the good old fashioned method of one on one initiations. He likens it to "turning a radio dial" to get the right frequency, and it also leaves the practitioners "aligned for life," without the need for further adjustments in energy balance. When group initiations are performed, it is difficult for individuals to be correctly attuned to the mob frequency, sometimes resulting in misdirected energy coming through the apprentice, and into the patient.

Reiki has played a critical role in Ray's life, and he has endeavored to make it a part of other people's lives as well. He has studied with six other 3rd degree masters besides his mentor Gabriel, has taught psychotherapists in his classes so they could better help their clients, and has participated in a cutting edge University of Michigan study on the healing effects of energy work in medicine, with results unpublished as of yet (see sidebar). But what ultimately brings Ray back to reiki again and again is that he considers helping people "rewarding," and that "giving people what they want," is its own benefit, and he asks no more than that.

Suzy Wienckowski

Suzy remembers that early on in life, she was always rubbing people. Since both parties seemed to enjoy the arrangement, Suzy began pursuing a career in massage therapy, but soon encountered the problem of persistent arm pains from such intensive hands on work. Looking for a gentler way of working with people, Suzy found reiki, and has since become a 3rd degree master, applying reiki in her personal practice and her classroom at the Ann Arbor Institute of Massage Therapy.



Suzy Wienckowski is a Reiki Master and Reiki teacher, as well as a teacher of massage therapy.

Suzy believes she has been unconsciously performing reiki all her life, but teaching it requires a little more exertion, as does learning it. She emphasized to me that she is not an easy teacher to have, and that a serious commitment of time and effort is necessary, especially if one wishes to progress toward the higher ranks, but the work itself is "personally invaluable."

Classes begin with learning the history and story behind reiki, and prominently sitting across from me, benevolently facing the massage table, are photos of Usui, the founder of reiki, Hayashi, the man who trained the next generation of masters after Usui's death, and Takata, the woman who brought reiki to the West; I refer to them as the "Reiki Triumvirate."

By tracing her lineage of teachers directly back to Takata, 7 generations removed, Suzy is eligible to become a member of the Reiki Alliance, and, in fact, is one. The Reiki Alliance is not, among other things, the arch enemy of the Justice League, but an organization devoted to promoting a specific interpretation of reiki, one that members believe conforms closest to Usui's original methods.

To become a member of the Alliance, one must link their lineage directly to the teachings of Usui by retracing the teachers of their teachers until they reach someone personally taught by the monk, very much like an inverse family tree. Suzy believes strongly in honoring time, which led her to the Alliance, and is unashamed to call herself a "traditionalist." Her gratitude for the triumvirate's work is because their teachings "opened me up to my spiritual nature."

Aside from her devotion to Usui's theorized original method, Suzy is pretty flexible when it comes to actually performing her craft. She applies "everything [she] can to resonate with the cosmic life force," and uses her daily self reiki session to keep in close contact with that force. She likens it to meditation, noticing a "profound difference" before and after.

Once she's tuned in, Suzy has to clear her body of any impediments that may block the flow of cosmic energy, such as energetic knots, stuck emotions, and unhealed injuries. These things are like boots, car batteries, and livestock droppings in a river; you wouldn't drink out of a river like that would you? And in the same way, Suzy feels she owes it to her patients to give them the cleanest, non-flourinated energy possible. We think Usui would be proud.

###