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The Energy Within: Healing in the era of COVID-19

By Carl Wilson LMT and Jane Paul LMT

These are trying times. Regardless where you are on the income spectrum, not being able to practice the work you love and give aid to those that love your work is emotional and challenging on many levels. Massage Therapists in most places are now into their fourth month of shutdown.

As I read the blogs, Facebook posts, and other media it's clear that this rapid economic decline due to a pandemic has everyone off balance, unsure, scared, and not feeling entirely hopeful about their practice options in light of what the medical and science professionals are continuing to learn and informing us about this novel Coronavirus.

The objective of this story is to offer up a point of view for your consideration. I provide it with the intent that it gives hope, awakens a memory, or situation from your own life experience that you may use as a foil to help map a path forward, or provide you space to evolve your own work if you feel you want to. This story is in two parts. Part one is my point of view. The second part is by Jane Paul LMT whom I will introduce as part of my story. This is a story about energy, life, intention, compassion, humanity, selflessness, and God in whatever form you may identify with.

Part one: Carl's story

My first exposure to energy work was in Massage school in 1990. It was a one-day class to experiment with what I recall was polarity therapy. We were in groups. We had an odd number of people, so I was paired with two others. One person was on the table as the "patient" and the other two were the "practitioners". The class instructor was guiding us through the work with a verbal meditation instructing us on how to focus our energy intention. I will be honest that I was not believing any of it and being the renegade and without warning I would "intend" my energy to go another way from the guided instructions of the teacher. After the session we debriefed. The first thing both the "patient" and the other "practitioner" stated was "everything was going along harmoniously and then wham out of nowhere I was all messed up". I fessed up, apologized to them both, and decided there was something here to consider as a bodywork modality. Was it therapeutic or even curative? I wasn't quite ready to take that on. Seven years later I had to address that question.

On October 10, 1997 my parents, Don and Irma, then both 64 years old were in Nashville, Tennessee on vacation. They were walking around downtown and came upon a construction site. Part of the construction was the installation of an electrical transformer in an underground sidewalk vault. It so happened that the electrical utility was powering up the transformer at the exact moment my parents were walking past the vault. It exploded and they were both consumed in flaming oil that came up out of the sidewalk. They were both critically burned. Mom was 90% 3rd degree burned, and Dad was 3rd degree burned over 60% of his body. Ask

any doctor, the survival rate for those statistics and they will tell you it's 0% chance of survival. My parents are alive and will both turn 87 this year.

While they were in the SICU at Vanderbilt University Hospital, Don, one of the burn center nurses, who also taught A&P at a local massage school, wanted to introduce me to Jane Paul, a colleague who taught at the school and was a massage therapist. He expressed that she did energy work and asked if I would be open to her meeting my Dad, who at that time had come out of sedation. Dad was in a great deal of pain and discomfort from wound care and skin graft surgeries. He was considered in critical but stable condition and not resting well at all.

On the day we scheduled for Jane and my Dad to meet I was purposeful in not telling my Dad that she was a massage therapist or that she did energy work. She was Jane, Don's colleague who wanted to meet him. She sat at his bedside, entered into a very normal conversation, took his hand and arm and just held it while they continued their conversation. As an observer, it was one caring person having a calm, nurturing conversation with another person in discomfort. After about 30 minutes she said that it was time for her to go, said her goodbyes, and left.

Early the next morning when I arrived to see my Dad, his first question to me was, "Who was that lady?" I said that was Jane, Don's colleague from the school he teaches at. He said, I know that, but who is she? I asked him, why? He said, "She did something to me, I slept like a baby last night". This is where my personal journey about the therapeutic benefits of energy work began, **in that very moment**. A man with 60% of his body covered in skin grafts, and the balance of his body covered in scabs from the harvesting of skin for the grafts ***slept through the night***. I told him she was a massage therapist and she practiced energy work. He didn't stop there. Without prompting he said, "I want her to work on your Mother".

Mom was in bad shape. She was in a medically induced coma. For weeks we were told daily that she would likely not survive. The intravenous fluids they had to give her to help keep her exposed dermis and hypodermis tissue alive swelled her small stature to the point that the pressure was shutting down her internal organs. To give her any chance of survival they had to open her abdomen from her sternum to her pelvis and let her organs expand outside of her body. This was all done within hours of the burns and hospitalization in the ER. She also had to have multiple skin grafts with the harvested tissue coming from what areas of her body were not burned. We could not go into her room unless we were in complete PPE: plastic protective gowns, masks, and gloves. I could only lay my hands on her scalp, and one foot. She was intubated, multiple IV's, everything else was bandaged and covered. Daily, her vital signs were all over the map. She had to endure constant dressing changes. I have no doubt that her subconscious mind was in absolute hell.

The day Jane first visited my Mother I made a note of the vital signs before and after the session. I wish at this writing I could say I still have those notes amongst my diaries from that time, however I have not been able to locate them. Regardless, we timed Janes' visits to

happen shortly after one of the two daily wound care sessions if at all possible. We did this so any restful therapeutic effect could last as long as possible. Consistently, her vital signs stabilized after the energy work and would remain so until the next wound care session. Consistently, there was improved blood oxygen level, usually going from the mid 80% to 90% or higher. Her blood pressure eased, and heart rate eased. It was as if Mom found a way to rest in this critical state. She was in the SICU for 70 days, listed in critical condition all of that time, never stable.

Jane was not always able to make it into the hospital as frequently as she would like and asked if she could do distance healing with her. Again, my personal beliefs were challenged, and I sure was not going to object! Jane gave me a small container that had a few items that were spiritually meaningful to her. She asked that I place them in Mom's room near her bed so she could focus on them during the distance work. When Mom was having a medically bad day it was not at all uncommon for Jane to call me and ask, "What's going on with your Mom, our remote session today was not peaceful". Jane always knew, ALWAYS. She knew ahead of the blood work when Mom was septic - ALWAYS. This accuracy led me to begin informing Mom's primary care physician to be mindful of the week's blood work. Her physician came to respect the work, the information, and Jane.

Jane still had not met Mom in a conscious state until she was finally discharged from Vanderbilt to Stallworth Rehabilitation Center shortly before Christmas. When Jane was able to visit Mom in rehab, she did it at a time when our family was not in the room. When Jane entered the room, Mom looked at her and said, "You're one of the people that took care of me while I was asleep". Mom knew Jane, she just didn't know exactly how she knew Jane. You can't measure the bond between Jane and my Mom.

Once released from rehabilitation Mom returned to Nashville several times for reconstructive surgeries and hospitalizations that lasted months or weeks over several years. Jane worked with Mom throughout those times as well.

Massage therapists are at a time where it's hard for us to predict what the future holds for us in how we provide care as healthcare providers. We have seen the incredible care and sacrifice our front-line healthcare providers are giving our friends and family who become sick with this virus. Our families and friends can't even visit their loved ones in the hospital. If we are unable to call or use video media our familial care is being transferred through our healthcare workers.

We are at a crossroads with our work. We don't know for how long, whether it will be temporary, or be intermittent. We do have, however, a choice what roads we can take. We have a choice on how we think about and apply our therapeutic intention. My offer and challenge to you for your consideration is to explore the means and methods and the application of your intention, compassion, empathy, and genuine love of your client's wellbeing in new and profound ways that you may or may not have considered before.

Part Two – Jane’s Story

One of my earliest happy childhood memories is playing “Florence Nightingale” and singing to my dolls to comfort them and magically mend their broken arm. I always loved singing music, so at the age of 8, I learned to play piano and violin and was told I was a natural. I could feel the music and my touch and timing reflected it.

My dream job was to be a nurse, so I started a two-year RN Nurses Training program immediately after high school. I loved Anatomy and Physiology but wanted more hands-on patient care than it looked like I was going to be able to do in Nursing, and being young and crazy I switched to Business Ed. At least I could learn how to take care of my finances regardless of what I did.

I was always spiritually curious. Going to a Baptist Church with one friend at 8, a Methodist Church at 12 where I asked for more books to read besides the Bible. Jesus was 12 like me when he left home, and I wanted to know where he went. Still reading and learning and following my spiritual path, I attended The Church of Christ in High School, later I was married to my first husband in the Catholic Church. All Churches provided wonderful insight into interpreting the Bible and establishing my faith.

My [in]formal study of Energy Work began in 1978 in Cape Coral Florida when I co-developed the [Cotyledon Bio-entrainment module](#) which is a music, sound, and conscious-awareness training device system with Michael Bradford. The work was spiritual, “Sound Therapy” when it wasn’t cool yet. I then received my Reiki 2 certification and that enabled me to work on people in the Cotyledon while their bodies were vibrated to sound. What I learned was that everything is vibration. So, when you can help people relax, it modifies their bodies, and sound can have therapeutic effects.

In 1984, I got my massage therapy training, and as a wonderful musician friend of mine said, “then I started tuning and playing bodies”. I had always been very sensitive to people’s feelings, knowing when someone was upset or sad and that helped me attain a successful massage practice.

I was approached in 1994 by the owner of a massage school to teach and rewrite his massage curriculum to help his students pass the incoming National Certification Test that would become the standard to license Florida massage therapists. You never know what you know, until you are asked to teach it. Such a humbling experience, I learned more than I taught.

In 1996, I was offered a position in Tennessee helping to redesign another massage curriculum. It was while teaching in this School that I met Don who was teaching the A & P class. I heard about the Wilsons on the news and I was moved to tell Don, who was the burn unit Nurse at the hospital where they were, that I would gladly volunteer my services to help in any way I could. He spoke to Carl and got permission for me to work on his Dad.

I had never done energy work in a Hospital before, and I was not prepared for the onslaught of disturbing thoughts and feelings you have to wade through just to walk in the door. After getting acclimated to the hospital “vibes” I settled down and focused on Don Wilson, [I know, two Dons can get confusing]. Once I got over all the bandages and his discomfort, working on him was easy, he was conscious and very easy to talk to.

It was a different story working on Irma. Just walking down the hall to her room felt like wading through sand up to your knees. Then finding a Life Force inside all that plastic and electricity was like feeling your way into a dark room looking for a small light. When I felt Irma's light it was faint, but I could tell she was a "Spitfire". YEAH!!!! I would love to help you!!! Reminded me of myself and the emotional pain and aloneness I felt as a child; but, Now the BIG Question, HOW?????

As Carl has explained, this was SICU, Surgical Intensive Care. I did have a Prescription from the Wilsons' physicians to work on her, which is impossible to get, but only having one foot and the top of her head that I could touch was a challenge. This is where my Spiritual Energy work was vital. In Reiki, I had worked with people with PTSD who re-lived their trauma, but now Irma is living TSD in the moment. The machines, the pain, the electricity, plastic, all foreign materials that are not in a normal massage setting were very distracting at first. Prayer was my first recourse, trusting my faith, love and compassion to know she would guide me where to focus my thought and energy to help her. Second, while she was so critical, I wanted to work on her two to three times a week and being 20 to 50 min away [Nashville traffic] I decided to do absentee/distance work also. That is when I gathered a box of spiritually significant items and asked Carl to place it in Irma's room in an area that would not be disturbed by her normal daily care. When doing the absentee sessions, I would go to a place where I wouldn't be disturbed, focus on the items until I felt a connection, and then meditate and Pray for her until I felt a peaceful feeling. These sessions took anywhere from 10 min to 45 min depending on her physical condition. If, after 45 min, I didn't get the peaceful feeling, I contacted Carl immediately. My only explanation was that something was off balance or compromised and needed attention. In on-site sessions, I monitored her breathing and vitals and could tell when she had a long exhalation that she was more relaxed, and our session was complete.

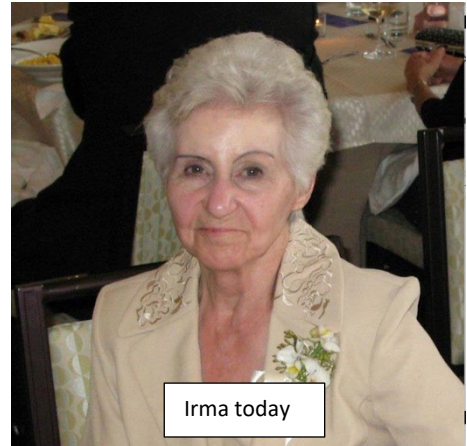
When discussing my experience with the Wilsons, I will always remember the best Christmas present I ever received. I had driven to Florida with my girls for a one-week Christmas break and arrived back in Nashville on Christmas Eve. I thought I would swing by and see Irma on my way home. I didn't realize what kind of facility she was in, so driving there I didn't have any clue as to her present condition. When I walked into her room, she was sitting up in her bed and told me, "Hi, I'm Irma, I know you are one of the people who took care of me when I was asleep". I backed against the wall and cried for Joy. So glad no one told me what fantastic progress she had made in such a short time. I introduced myself and then started our NEW Therapy sessions. I worked on her for 9 months, at whatever abode she was in, until she left for home. It was a life changing experience.

I always provided feedback to Carl, her son, and Don, her nurse, after each session, and I wrote some notes for myself, which are unfortunately MIA. Readjustment time was a new experience too. Recalling my Native American studies on how all of Nature is connected and we are a part of that Nature, I found my solace sitting at the base of a large Oak tree. No matter how disoriented I was after the sessions, within 10-15 minutes of breathing and prayer, I was back to "normal" and ready to resume my very active life of Mom, Teacher, and Therapist.



Jane working with Irma in rehab

In the coming days of post COVID re-opening, I would like to challenge each of you reading this article to rethink the definition of draping for energy work if you have concerns with working directly skin on skin. If your focus is subdermal what is the difference between a sheet and cotton sweats. As long as it's a natural fiber, both provide modesty and do not restrict energy work. In our present environment you might find the average person even more relaxed with their clothes on. When the session deems necessary you can touch, massage, or use cranial, acupuncture, or myofascial techniques as easily through clothes as you do through a sheet. This gives you more time before and after the session, and a lot less laundry. Think about it and BE BLESSED.



Carl Wilson LMT is licensed in the State of Washington. Licensed since 1991 and for nearly 15 years he practiced at Seattle Athletic Club and now practices part-time on a referral basis only. He has served as Chapter President for the American Massage Therapy Association Washington Chapter (AMTA-WA) and also served on several AMTA National committees. In 2015 along with other like-minded souls founded the Washington State Massage Therapy Association where he serves on their Board of Directors. You can reach Carl through WSMTA.

Jane Paul currently resides in Groveland Florida with her family and is semi-retired but will work until her hands don't function. She worked with Michael Bradford for 4 years and helped develop the Cotyledon. The first one was built in her garage in 1980. Jane received her Massage License in 1985 and wrote a massage curriculum for a school in Ft Myers in 1992 and taught there till 1996. Jane moved to Nashville with her two daughters where she wrote the curriculum and taught 5 classes for a school there. Jane is constantly learning and understanding the energy of the universe and how it applies to massage. You can reach Jane through WSMTA.