

Pathfinder

By Catherine McGarry Miller

*“My purpose in my work is not only to help people to back out of pain and suffering but to put a spotlight on their greatness so these symptoms don’t **become** an illness or sore knee.”*

— Gary Chulkins, Licensed Massage Therapist and Acupuncturist with a Master’s Degree in Oriental Medicine.

Gary Chulkins has followed many paths to find his niche. He’s been a karate instructor, a business owner, a car and ad salesman and a factory worker along the way to becoming a licensed acupuncturist and massage therapist. His way was not always clear, but he’s clearly now in a business that employs all the accumulated skills of his lifetime.

The 55-year-old Milwaukeean grew up on the Northwest side. His father Al, an AO Smith factory worker, was in the hospital from complications of diabetes by the time Chulkins was five and dead two years later. He’d been a great outdoorsman, hunting and fishing and raising hunting dogs. His mother, Florence, now 84, worked numerous jobs to support Chulkins and his older brother John as a widow. The family supplemented their income selling produce from their huge garden packed into a half acre of land.

Though he hardly knew him, Chulkins inherited his father’s love of the outdoors, spending his childhood out with the dogs, roaming the Menomonee River Parkway winter and summer. “We built shelters and hunted rabbits, whatever...like Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer.” He also liked sports, playing sand lot football and baseball. “This was my first experience with healing—getting all banged up and being very perceptive of the healing process,” he said. “As kids, we heal very quickly— if kids would only realize that this is a kind of an illusion that won’t be there later on. As we age, we become less resilient and less flexible.”

Chulkins found school boring—it made him feel caged, so he didn’t consider college upon graduation from James Madison High in 1973. “I didn’t know what my purpose was at that age and I was not called to factory work either.” The Kunfu Fu television series pointed him in the direction of martial arts because it emphasized the importance of inner strength. He studied the Kempo style of Karate, attained his black belt and began teaching. “Back then if you were certified by your instructor,



you had the confidence to open your own school.” And he did just that, establishing Midwest Karate on Teutonia and Silver Spring, a location chosen because there were no other Karate schools in the area. It was a neighborhood that brought him a diverse spectrum of students.

“A lot of teachers will hide secrets because don’t want students to go out and set up their own businesses, but I trained students to be as good or better than me—why not?” Chulkins avers sincerely. His approach was based on intelligence and building confidence more than on brawn.

A decade into his business, with the economy quaking, he began looking for another income source that would dovetail with his existing career. He knew police officers who worked third shift and operated businesses during the day, so he invested five years in Police Science at the Milwaukee Area Technical College successfully completing his degree and all written and physical exams. He hit a roadblock during his interview. “They were grilling me with questions and I started to cry. “Mr. Chulkins,” the interviewer said, “I think we have enough.” The Police Department didn’t appreciate Chulkins’ empathic nature, so integral to the work he does now. Thus his potential law enforcement path came to a dead end.

Chulkins’ business eventually failed due to economics and crime in the neighborhood. For the next few years he worked through a variety of jobs. Then, in the early 1990s, he saw an ad in the Outpost Newsletter for the Blue Sky Massage School and enrolled for a year long program. He was already familiar with bodywork from Karate and years of yoga practice. And he certainly knew about pain having broken his back and bashed his hip in car and motorcycle accidents at the age of 18. As a licensed massage therapist, he worked out of his home and in health clubs for the next decade.

“I don’t focus on retirement,” says Chulkins, “but as I got older I thought massage might get harder to do and it’s always good to have new tools in your box, so I took the masters program at the Midwest College of Oriental Medicine which includes herbal study. Going three days a week and some weekends, depending on the program and clinical hours in addition, I burned up a lot of miles on my car going to Racine.”

Upon graduation in 2004, he launched Acupuncture and Massage, an enterprise that embodies all the knowledge and experience he gathered from his many paths of employment. There, he enjoys the camaraderie of several colleagues including massage therapists, Barbara Garrison and Susan Struve, his significant other. The



creating healthy communities

practice offers natural health care and pain relief services including nutritional counseling.

Chulkins teaches yoga classes for “people who don’t think they can do yoga - people with challenges, who haven’t learned the basics.” The practice also offers seminar special guests including Dr. Gregory Antyuhin, a friend and colleague of Chulkins’ for 17 years, who helped Chulkins open up his spiritual energy, which improved his work. A native of Russia, now living in Florida, Dr. Gregory comes to Acupuncture and Massage every three months to conduct workshops on energy medicine and meditation and to do medical intuitive readings. He will return in January 2012. “I send people to him for a second opinion or a first opinion. He helps people be more balanced, effective and have more a harmonious journey toward transformation,” said Chulkins.

The Treatment

Traffic zips by noisily outside Chulkins’ office which faces onto I43, but inside there’s an immediate transition to tranquility. There’s the calming sound of water bubbling up from a large fish tank housing colorful goldfish. There’s the welcoming table with an urn of hot water for tea and a pitcher of filtered water. And there’s the beauty of original artwork throughout the office including the works of his daughter, a painter, commercial artist and graduate of MIAD.

When I arrive, his large wooden desk is clear, decorated only with trays of health bars and his computer. Only later does he admit he’s as paper challenged as I am, having swept a large pile of folders into a Trader Joe’s bag stashed quietly beneath his desk.

I am a good foil for a man of his skills, having chronic back, neck, hand and arm pain and a persistent, annoying burping disorder. I’ve tried just about everything the East and West have to offer except acupuncture.

For an initial treatment, he uses both massage and acupuncture, which seems to me a perfect blend of practices. First he reads a detailed medical history intake form and listens to my concerns. Then he feels my pulse, which is “slippery,” coming in and out which suggests a dampness in my system. He also examines my tongue which is a bit swollen and shows little teeth marks around the edges which leads him to suspect a chi deficiency. “Your spleen and stomach energy are compromised and may not be enough to grasp the digestion process and keep it closed,” he tells

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me, “but can it get stronger—all breath work is about getting that connection.”

The lights are low in the treatment room and he plays an ethereal type of music in the background. He starts the process by massaging acupressure points all over my body and head. “I checked back and spine muscles which can tell me a lot, he explains. “Counter flow chi could have something to do with belching.”

I am relaxed and breathing comfortably when he begins placing the acupuncture needles. Due to my level of relaxation, he is able to insert 15 needles at critical points. He discovers a very nasty cut and bruise on my leg from a recent accident and surrounds the injury with needles. Placing a cozy warming lamp on my feet, he leaves me for fifteen minutes as the needles do their work.

“The acupuncture I did was to tonify your spleen and stomach energy plus lungs and kidneys. Next time, I’ll involve the liver more which is about blood storage, movement and energy.”

I leave feeling reenergized, resilient, and refreshed. The cut and bruise are starting to heal, but I’m still burping. “This may be chi and blood stagnation, one treatment isn’t enough to have it tone up,” Chulkins suggests. I take his suggestion and schedule 5 more appointments. I’ll keep my kind readers posted on my progress in future columns.

