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Tapping into latest method of healing



HEALING HAND: Ilona Forsyth says the EFT technique used by Alan Morison has helped her get past the trauma of the attack at the polling station. Picture: DAN PHILLIPS

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"I've really now blotted the incident out of my mind, and it doesn't bother me at all Ilona Forsyth"

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By [SANDRA DICK](#)

THE golf club smashed down on to the ballot box just inches from Ilona Forsyth's arm, shattering it and scattering voting papers everywhere. Screams echoed around Carrick Knowe Parish Church Hall as the wild-eyed attacker continued to wield the metal club at shocked voting clerks and voters, sending them running for safety.

It was the evening of May 3, when Scotland had gone to the polls to choose a new Parliament and city council, and the routine of the Saughton Road North polling station had been disrupted in the most bizarre of ways.

While ultimately no-one was hurt, those involved at the time had no idea where the incident might lead.

"We didn't know what on earth was happening," says Ilona, recalling the attack. "He could have had a gun, we didn't know. It was absolutely terrifying."

It took a day for the shock of the incident to fully hit Ilona, who lives in Barnton. And when it did, it left her shaking uncontrollably, scared and sobbing.

But instead of turning to friends or a conventional therapist for support, Ilona decided to enlist the help of family friend, Alan Morison, a practitioner in Emotional Freedom Therapy (EFT).

When she arrived at Alan's house seeking comfort she was, remembers Ilona, "in a hell of a state".

Within minutes, however, Alan had performed a curious sequence of gentle taps across Ilona's face and shoulders. It may have seemed an extremely odd thing to do, but today Ilona believes if Alan hadn't "tapped" her, then she would still be traumatised by events of that night.

Dismissed by some as New Age mumbo jumbo, and despite having no scientific proof of its effectiveness, EFT is rapidly becoming one of the latest 'cure-all' therapies, claiming to help solve everything from anxiety to anger management, addictions to asthma and even help weight loss and post traumatic stress.

And practitioner and former teacher Alan - a sceptic himself until he used the therapy to cure bouts of neuralgia - believes it could even be the solution to the nation's growing problem of troublesome teenagers, helping control angry outbursts and improve classroom concentration.

The therapy, he explains, is based around the ancient belief that there are 14 major pathways of energy flowing through the body - known as the meridian system or the pathways of chi - which are adopted in various alternative therapies including reiki and acupuncture.

EFT therapists believe negative experiences and emotions can disrupt that energy system, and that by stimulating the meridian system using a sequence of carefully placed taps, while thinking about the negative event is the key to balancing the body's systems and achieving harmony.

However, while many people claim to have been helped by the therapy, so far, controlled scientific studies have failed to prove its effectiveness.

Not that Ilona was concerned about that when she arrived at Alan's home the night after the polling station attack.

"I thought I was fine about it, but it was at bedtime the next night that it hit me. The shock of what had happened set in and my mind was working overtime. Soon I was a gibbering wreck."

Alan used a carefully mapped out sequence of gentle taps across her face and collar area and encouraged her to talk through the evening's events, instantly switching her from gibbering wreck to calm, controlled and even able to crack jokes.

"I've really now blotted the incident out of my mind, and it doesn't bother me at all," says Ilona, 65.

It sounds unbelievable, indeed, there are many sceptics who firmly believe the technique is little more than a distraction technique. However, Alan, who claims to have helped more than 400 local people through various problems - from addictions to irrational fears, childhood abuse to simply calming them down before important events - believes "tapping" can have a dramatic impact.

And while the notion that deep-rooted fears, addictions and even medical conditions like asthma can be helped simply by tapping areas of the body may be dismissed as New Age smoke and mirrors, there are those who swear by its "magic" cure.

They include Falklands veteran Paul Wardell, 45, who found the therapy helped him come to terms with having witnessed the horrors of war, and has now trained as an EFT therapist himself.

"I was interested in EFT firstly because I wanted to improve my sports technique - I did a lot of swimming, running and I was finding I would get so far in my training then start to struggle.

"I didn't think at the time that the Falklands was a major issue in my life, except that it wasn't something I'd talk about. Then I realised through the therapy that I hadn't really dealt with it."

Paul, a firefighter from Dunfermline, now uses EFT to help him deal with the stresses of his job, improve his sports performance as well as offering therapy for other people.

Another person to benefit from the technique is brain trauma victim Brian Ross, who suffered irrational angry outbursts as a result of injuries he suffered after being beaten up 11 years ago.

Brian, 35, of Easter Road, shows how he taps points on his hand to help him handle a stressful situation. He says: "The therapy has been an incredible help. This is helping to change my life - whenever I feel the anger rising in me, I can stop it."

The same techniques could, believes Alan, of Barntongate Drive, be the answer to the growing problem of disruptive and unsociable behaviour among teenagers.

"I am convinced that 'tapping' troublesome teenagers could help not only improve their behaviour but also have a positive impact on their classwork," says Alan, who 'tapped' his own 14-year-old daughter in a bid to improve her focus on her English Higher with dramatic results - transforming her from an unwilling pupil to exam success.

The 57-year-old shrugs off suggestions that the therapy is merely a distraction technique, insisting he has seen dramatic results among many of his clients.

"One client had been involved in a very serious motorway accident - so bad that she couldn't bear to travel in a car and would become very upset. Within a few minutes of being 'tapped' she felt able to get back in a car without any fears," he explains.

"Another had a fear of water - soon after being tapped she was planning to go swimming. I've had the same results with people who are scared of flying, with weight problems or have been abused as children.

"And I believe that if the technique could be adapted in schools, there would be a massive improvement in concentration levels and behaviour."

For Ilona, the tapping has been a complete success - the trauma of the polling day is now forgotten.

"It's incredible," she laughs. "But what was terrifying at the time, within minutes of being 'tapped' I had virtually forgotten all about it.

"I'm even planning to apply to be a polling station clerk again at the next election."

• For details of Alan Morison's Emotional Freedom Technique, go to www.eftuk.org or call 0131-339 6979. One session costs £40. Paul Wardell, Dunfermline-based EFT practitioner: 01383-852 928

MIRACLE CURE OR MUMBO JUMBO?

FOR some, Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) is cure-all for addictions and anxieties in a single session.

But others argue EFT is simply a pseudoscience distraction technique.

Certainly, "tapping" doesn't work for everyone.

Louise Reilly, 35, of Shandon, developed a fear of flying shortly after the birth of her son. She opted to try NLP - Neuro-Linguistic Programming - a technique which works on the theory that the brain can learn healthy patterns and behaviours to bring about positive physical and emotional effects.

The therapy was also combined with a form of EFT-style 'tapping'.

So did it work?

"No," says Louise, "it didn't. I paid around £300 but I'm still scared of flying. What it has done though, has given me something to do when I'm on a plane - the tapping is a kind of comforting distraction."

A Canadian university study into EFT failed to support the therapy's claims. Four groups were given various treatments - including one with EFT. While the EFT group showed a decrease in fear and anxieties, so did two other groups, leading the study to conclude that the purported benefits of EFT are not dependent on the "tapping of the meridians".

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