

Holistic healing or new age hoodoo?

Few answers are blowing in the Gentle Wind

BY HENRY GARFIELD

ELLSWORTH — "My knees still hurt," my friend said, after holding the multi-colored Trauma Card between her palms for the prescribed twelve minutes.

"Well, it's supposed to take up to thirty days," I told her.

"But the card says 'If necessary, repeat in 24 hours.' How can you tell if it's necessary if it takes thirty days to work?"

"That's a good question," I said.

"What's in this thing, anyway?" She held the laminated card up to the light. It looked like nothing but two flat pieces of paper, and a slightly thicker square where you were supposed to hold the card between your thumb and forefinger for three minutes before placing it between your palms.

"Some herbs, I think. They were pretty vague about it."

"I think I'll just take a Vicodin," she said.

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The Gentle Wind Project



Gentle Wind Project representatives Mary Miller and Mary Ann Hale (holding Trauma Card) maintain that the project's spiritual healing devices can help individuals attain a state of inner peace.

HENRY GARFIELD PHOTO

blew through Ellsworth last Saturday, leaving balloons with messages of holiday good will up and down Main Street but attracting few people to an "open house" in the Hancock Room of the Holiday Inn. Three



curious souls—two of them from this newspaper—showed up during the first two hours of the four-hour event.

Missing from the open house were the group's vaunted

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"hockey pucks"—plastic, hand-held discs filled with mysterious ingredients that, according to some, relieve physical pain and promote psychic healing. Also absent were any requests for money, though the Gentle Wind Project is being investigated here in Maine and in California for allegedly bilking followers out of thousands of dollars.

Two former followers—husband and wife Jim Bergin and Judy Garvey of Blue Hill, are being sued by the Gentle Wind Project for purportedly spreading false information about the organization in print and on the World Wide Web.

"We have seven thousand volunteers around the world," said Mary Miller, spokesperson for the organization, at the Holiday Inn. "We feel like we're onto something that can make a difference in people's lives."

Miller, who holds a master's degree in social work, has written about the Gentle Wind's

were followed by requests for money to help publicize the Gentle Wind Project and support its alleged research.

"They get people like me, who are do-gooders to begin with, and are also looking for spiritual answers," Garvey said. "And you start to feel gratitude for gifts."

That gratitude became financial support. "We gave them a lot of money," said Garvey, who declined to specify the amount. "As you get more committed to something, it becomes easier to be an advocate. It's embarrassing, but we've already been embarrassed to the nth degree."

Garvey and Bergin are not alone. The Maine Attorney General's Office is investigating the Gentle Wind Project, and has received numerous complaints, according to Charles Dow, director of communications and legislative affairs. "Some people feel that the services and products they offer are not legitimate," he said. "We've heard from people who have lost money in the project. We've also heard from people who are pleased with the project."

Members of the Gentle Wind Project were in San Diego last year, offering the group's "healing technology" to victims of the wildfires that devastated the area. Three weeks ago, Miller was back in San Diego for a seminar. A private investigation firm called Special Investigations Agency is investigating the group.

"We believe that they're scamming people," said Kevin LaChapelle, director of SIA. "We're looking into the financial aspects of this. We believe they're methodically doing it."

LaChapelle said scientists contacted by SIA have analyzed the Gentle Wind's products. "It's a joke; they don't do anything," LaChapelle said.

Last Saturday's event seemed more about public relations than raising money. Miller asserted that the Gentle Wind's healing technology is always free to anyone who wants to use it. However, the Gentle Wind's website offers products to potential "instrument keepers" for a "suggested donation." The amount varies from \$250 for a laminated card to upwards of

\$7,000 for a healing puck. Some of the pucks have turned up on e-Bay.

Mary Ann Hale of Bass Harbor has been involved with the Gentle Wind Project for 20 years, and says the group's products changed her life. "Everything has an energetic vibration," she said. "All I know is that it works."

It gets weirder. The Gentle Wind Project is allegedly headed by a man named John Miller, who does not make public appearances. The group's public representatives, all women, take "Miller" as their last name. The headquarters of the group are in Kittery, but a core group of Millers lives in Durham, New Hampshire. Instrument keepers are continually encouraged to purchase new and more expensive instruments, and to spread the Gentle Wind message through seminars, conferences, and group therapy sessions, according to various on-line sources. Subtle mind-control tactics are also allegedly used. Members are gradually encouraged to give up careers, relationships and family ties, according to Garvey and others.

A San Diego television station reported that Gentle Wind's tax statement in 2001 revealed the organization took in \$1.2 million in contributions, of which \$860,000 was spent developing "healing instruments."

"They live a pretty good life," LaChapelle said. "They own things people couldn't normally afford: boats, plasma screen TVs, things like that."

At the seminar in San Diego, LaChapelle said, Gentle Wind representatives spent a lot of time attempting to dispel claims made against them on various web sites. The same was true in Ellsworth. Miller said one of the Gentle Wind's detractors has published claims that the Holocaust never happened; another has provided information on how to make bombs. She mentioned the lawsuit against Garvey and Bergin without being asked

about it.

"In 1999, Judy Garvey was asked to leave a volunteer position," Miller said. "I can't get specific because of the litigation, but let's just say it wasn't working out."

She accused Garvey and Bergin of publishing reports that "have been very hurtful to our project."

She acknowledged purchasing high-ticket items, saying that some Gentle Wind participants became interested in building or restoring sailboats, and in electronics. "We're trying to help people develop their skills," she said.

The Gentle Wind took out a full-page ad in Blue Hill's *Weekly Packet* for three weeks preceding the event, and employees at North Light Books in Blue Hill confirmed that several vehicles bearing Gentle Wind placards were conspicuously parked on Main Street Thursday and Friday.

Miller said the cards are given away to veterans and members of the military. To receive a card, a person is required to fill out a form with name, address and phone

number, each card has a serial number, and the Gentle Wind Project keeps track of who has them. In addition to the card, an instrument keeper receives a "certificate of authenticity."

The *Ellsworth Weekly* was able to obtain a card, serial number 02131P, when we revealed that we were doing a story. Though it has been held by various members of the staff, the stress of meeting press deadline has not been noticeably alleviated.

The Maine Attorney General's office is actively seeking information about the Gentle Wind Project. The phone number is 626-8800; the fax number is 287-3145. ■

so-called "healing technology" in a number of new-age publications. In a February 2004 article for *Innerchange* magazine, she wrote:

"Imagine the human consciousness as a vast, energetic electrical system. In this electrical system, there are red cables that are connected to other red cables, blue to blue, and green to green, etc. When a person has surgery, for example, these energetic cables are severed. Some reconnect properly, but often the red is connected to blue or green to yellow, causing severe imbalances that may be the underlying causes of future emotional and physical difficulties... The Gentle Wind Healing Instruments work on the non-physical level to restore this energetic circuitry and bring a person's system back into balance."

Miller became involved with Bergin and Garvey when the Blue Hill couple lived in Massachusetts and ran a publishing company. Miller, known then as Claudia Panuthos, authored a book entitled *Ended Beginnings: Healing Childbearing Losses*, which Bergin and Garvey's company, Greenwood Publishing Group, published in 1983.

Garvey said she and her husband became gradually involved with Miller/Panuthos and the Gentle Wind Project over the next few years. "We didn't have big issues going on," Garvey said. "We were looking for family counseling, that type of thing." She said Miller gave them healing instruments, which

