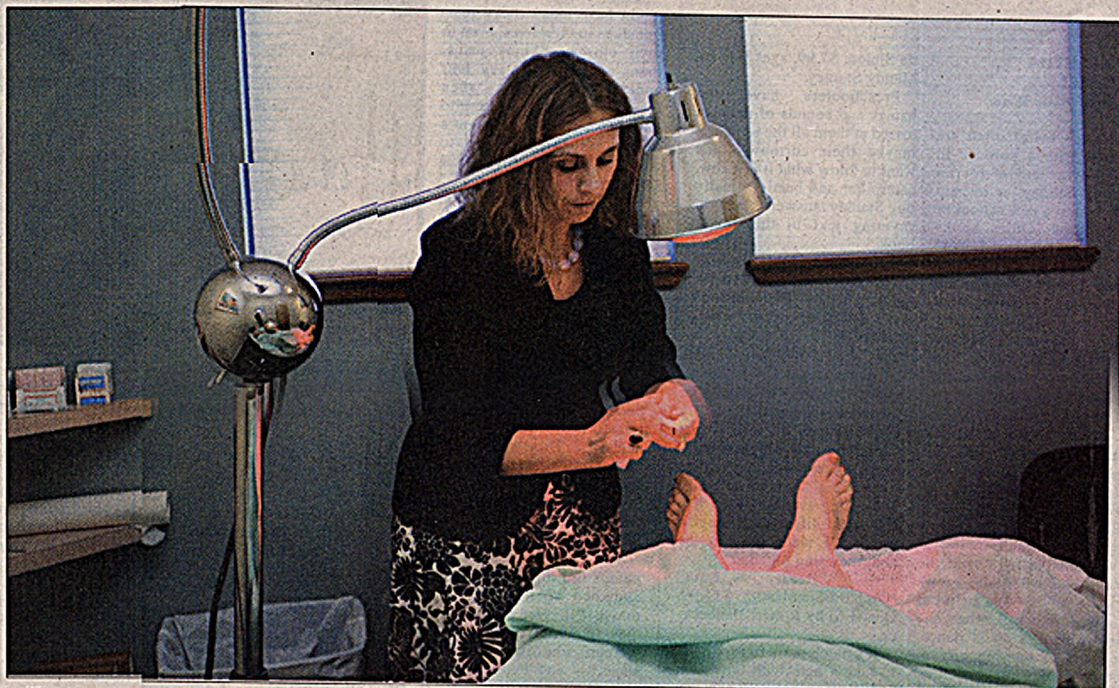


Peace and Acupuncture



Irit Weir uses acupuncture and other Chinese medicine practices to treat her patients. There are about 400 points on the body, which, when stimulated, can alleviate pain throughout other parts of the body. *Brett Ascarelli photos*

Irit Weir turned the pain of living in a war-torn country into a power for healing

By **BRETT ASCARELLI**
Register Correspondent

Irit Weir's parents met for the first time in a tent village. Her father's quest for milk or oil brought him to the neighboring tent — her mother's. The year was 1948, and they had each moved from Iran to settle in the new state of Israel.

Today Weir is heavily involved in peace efforts to reconcile Israelis with Palestinians, many of whom were displaced with the advent of the state her parents helped build.

Besides her peace work, Weir also runs the Acupuncture Clinic of Napa, which she founded in 1987. Acupuncture is a 2,500-year-old branch of Chinese medicine that maps roughly 400 different points on the body and suppresses pain by stimulating these points. Weir's clinic also offers other therapies that go hand-in-hand with acupuncture: cupping, moxibustion, herbalism and massage.



Weir, who runs the Napa Acupuncture Clinic, treats Naomi Harstein for lower back pain. Weir uses disposable, threadlike needles that are virtually painless.

From Tel Aviv to Napa

Weir was born and raised in Tel Aviv, where she studied art and philosophy and aspired to be a businesswoman. Because military service is compulsory for Israeli citizens, she joined the army at 17 for two years, working in the intelligence unit.

"I was stressed all the time, working night shifts," Weir said. "We got coupons for cigarettes and chocolate, but otherwise our parents had to take care of us. All I ate was chocolate and bread."

"To be in the world" she opened a clothing store with her boyfriend, but in the summer of 1980, her cousin was killed in the Yom Kippur War, and Weir's father decided to move the family.

"He didn't want my brother to join the army. My parents gave me the choice to move or stay," Weir said.

She decided to move with her family to Los Angeles, but that city did not appeal to her. "I went from one reality to

another; it was just too much," Weir said.

During a four-month trip to Peru and Ecuador, she considered settling in Peru, where the government was giving away jungle land on the condition that one remained for 20 years to cultivate it. At the recommendation of a friend, she decided to visit Berkeley, where she finally felt comfortable enough to stay.

It was there that she met her husband Ernie Weir, who owns Hagafen winery on Silverado Trail.

"I went home (to L.A.) for Passover and had the food my mother had given me to take back with me. I was standing in line with an Israeli guy whom my father had asked to take me to the airport. My father thought it was time for me to get married. Ernie saw that I was obviously not interested in this guy and approached me. We ended up sitting next to each other on the airplane and sharing our holiday leftovers," Weir said.

Prime Meridians

In Berkeley, Weir had no green card, but she wanted to stay. She did odd jobs, teaching Hebrew and modeling for art schools. She also cleaned an acupuncturist's office, and a week after she started there, the secretary left. Weir got the job and fell in love with the practice, which was helping her deal with the pain of war.

"I was cynical about everything when I left Israel. There were things I hadn't dealt with ... sort of ip boxes. It was time to do something," Weir said. She decided to try acupuncture, because it has no side effects.

After studying massage at an acupressure institute, Weir enrolled in the American College of Traditional Chinese Medicine in San Francisco. At the time, there were only 20 students and the classes were held out of an apartment. She learned Chinese in order to decipher the textbooks, which had not yet been translated.

Weir did her internship at the Guangzhou (Canton) Hospital in China, where both Eastern and Western medicine is practiced in the same facility, something that is unheard of in the United States. After the four-month internship leading to a master's degree in Chinese medicine, Weir returned to Napa and saw her first patient as a fully trained practitioner.

"I got a phone call for an 'emergency' acupuncture. I pulled the needles out of my suitcase and tried my best. I didn't see the lady for a week. Then I bumped into her in the supermarket, and she thanked me for saving her life, pre-surgery," Weir said. Her next patients, a couple who was infertile for five years, conceived after a week of treatment.

From the calm, airiness of Weir's

Peace

From Page C1

current facility, outfitted with four treatment rooms, she attributes these early successes out of her home to "beginner's luck and a great medicine."

Her thriving clinic is equipped with disposable, threadlike needles that are inserted virtually painlessly along meridian lines of the body to prevent disease, control pain and strengthen the body. The needles generally do not cause bleeding. Weir's team treats adults, babies and children, and also uses several non-needle methods.

A pamphlet at the clinic translates how Chinese medicine works into Western medical terminology: "The western explanation (of acupuncture) is that the release of endorphins suppresses pain and creates a great feeling of relaxation after treatment."

Acupuncture is a holistic treatment that aims to treat the cause of discomfort, rather than the symptom. Because acupuncture is a treatment tailored to an individual's specific constitution, a patient's first visit to the clinic entails a thorough consultation, where the acupuncturist asks questions and examines the tongue and the pulse of the patient. Afterwards, treatment can come in different forms. Moxibustion, for example, is an herbal mixture that, once lit like a cigar, generates a therapeutic effect when applied to an acupuncture point.

Pressure points for peace

"I would not be doing this work now if I did not carry my own personal narrative of pain growing up in a country with war. For me, there is a relationship between this work and being an Israeli," Weir said.

In 2001, Weir spent a year in Israel with her husband and children organizing peace dia-



Besides practicing acupuncture, Irit Weir, who is originally from Tel Aviv, also organizes peace dialogues in all over the world in an effort to reconcile Israelis and Palestinians. *Brett Ascarelli photo*

logues. "I wanted to be involved, not just a bystander," Weir said. She held round table discussions and met with non-governmental organizations advocating peace.

"We started a news forum to share stories on a humanistic level in Israel to balance the bloodshed. It was a forum for families with food, dance and stories. But we always came close to the place and then we stopped seeing each other," Weir said, referring to the 1948 *nakba*, which Arabic for "catastrophe" and the term many Palestinians use to describe their displacement to make room for

Israel. Weir was instrumental in organizing a formal dialogue with Palestinian and Jewish facilitators where both Israeli and Arab participants could address these contentious points.

When the Weirs returned to Napa, they started a sort of "living room" dialogue to continue working for peace. The group has drawn peace-minded dignitaries, such as Yossi Beilin, current leader of the Yahad party in Israel.

Although Weir says it was painful to leave Israel the second time, she said "We're so lucky to be here."