

# Daily Record

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## Therapist aims to heal trauma in combat veterans



Ask Beth Haessig of Mountain Lakes what her life is about and the tall, slender yogi, who has a doctorate in psychology, will not hesitate to answer: Peace and healing.

In August 2005, she and her three children joined peace activist Cindy Sheehan outside President Bush's Crawford, Texas, ranch. Every August she takes a PeaceWeavers retreat in Bath, N.Y.

"I've always been anti-war," said the 46-year-old Haessig, whose private practice is in downtown Denville.

War is one of the many things in life that cause trauma, and trauma, if untreated, can lead to a life of pain, dysfunctional relationships, loneliness and desperation. No healer likes to see that.

For years Haessig was a talk therapist, and she still is. She believes in talk.

But ever since curiosity drew her to have a session in Core Energetics -- a 30-year-old technique that purports to release trauma and its deleterious effects from the body -- she has been enamored of its ability to heal adults.

During that first session, the Core Energetics practitioner noticed that while Haessig spoke of her long-standing habit of stifling self-expression, she often motioned to her abdominal area.

The practitioner helped Haessig physically move the area, loosening the emotions. The movement helped release Haessig's feelings from her body, which in turn released a repressed memory, relaxed her shoulders and increased her lung capacity. The effect, she said, rippled throughout her being - and lasted. After years of Core Energetics therapy

sessions, she now enjoys a more spontaneous, energetic life.

"I feel more of a range of emotion," Haessig said. "I was amazed this practitioner could do so quickly what I couldn't do at all, though I had 10 years' more education."

The heady swirl of connections started firing inside Haessig. War, soldiers, personal pain, trauma, releasing

trauma, healing, personal peace. Recently, after four years of additional study, Haessig has become a certified Core Energetics practitioner and is doing what comes naturally: Offering her services to veterans, of all wars, for free.

"Twenty-five percent of the veterans coming back from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have mental illness," she said. "Their stories are so full of grief, and they come back and don't want to talk about it. I wonder what that's costing us."

The academic lineage of Core Energetics causes some people to look askance at it, Haessig said. According to the United States Association for Body Psychotherapy, the origins of the technique trace back to the German psychologist Wilhelm Reich, who developed the key notion that trauma itself does not cause life problems. The true cause is the "constant day-to-day repression of trauma" -- allowing the body to hold the unexpressed emotions.

Reich went on to advocate direct physical touching of the patient, which the mainstream psychological community has rejected. Today, Core Energetics practitioners do not necessarily touch their patients, but they do believe in the power of Reich's initial insight.

Generations that came after Reich went on to apply his key insight in different schools of psychological practice, including Bioenergetics, co-founded by John Pierrakos and Alexander Lowen. Later Pierrakos would add more spiritual dimension to the work, calling his system Core Energetics.

Haessig, who brings her doctoral expertise to the practice of Core Energetics, likes the

latter because it has worked for her and her patients. Most all combat veterans, she said, hold anger in tight-set military jaws and ramrod straight upper backs, shoulders and necks, a posture conducive to headaches.

"The posture literally holds them back from expressing themselves," she said.

Some veterans may be diagnosed with what the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders call Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or Adjustment Disorder, others with what the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research has called "battlemind," and still others with angst and despair that has no name. Haessig is interested in helping all of them.

"There is capital T and small t trauma," she said. "Whatever it is, the question is, how do they get help?"

With gently and expertly led movements, she said, she can help them release the trauma.

Dr. Karyne Wilner, who also has a doctorate in psychology and is assistant director of the Institute of Core Energetics, said that Haessig "brings a safety, patience and a caring quality to each client" and that, as a licensed psychologist, she can apply Core Energetics to psychological problems.

"A Core Energetics practitioner has many more tools to work with than the typical therapist," Wilner said. "People with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder often are able to function better after two or three sessions."

For Haessig, choosing to work pro bono with veterans has to do with more than being a psychologist. As a lifelong peace activist, her offer for free therapy also has to do with being an American.

"How do I express my patriotism in relation to peace?" she asked. "This is how I do it. By healing."

-By Lorraine Ash  
Daily Record

### To learn more

- Contact Beth Haessig at [www.bethhaessig.com](http://www.bethhaessig.com) or (973) 627-5810
- United States Association for Body Psychotherapy, [www.usabp.org](http://www.usabp.org)
- Core Energetics, [www.coreenergetics.org](http://www.coreenergetics.org)