

MOVING STORY the healer

A LOVE OF THE SEA LED OSTEOPATH CAROLYN MCGREGOR TO LIVE AND WORK IN NEWLYN

Words by **Liz Norbury**, photographs by **Charles Francis**

Late one summer's day five years ago, Carolyn McGregor was sitting on a Cornish headland just as the sun was setting. "The sea and sky were full of fiery orange, gold, turquoise and lilac," she recalls. "Then out of all these colours, came two sea kayaks – and my heart just exploded into a thousand bits. I promised myself that the next time I came to Cornwall, I would learn sea kayaking."

Carolyn grew up in Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire – "about as far from the sea as you can possibly get," she says with a smile – and at the time of her visit to Cornwall, she had been running a successful and busy osteopathic practice for more than 15 years in East Sussex.

Holidays were spent winter climbing in Scotland, fell walking in Cumbria and walking around the Cornish coast. "I wanted a lifestyle which would allow me to balance work with my love of wild places," she explains. "I was searching for a home that would give me those opportunities."

The search led her to sell her practice and take a sabbatical. She spent six months wild camping and sea kayaking up through the Hebrides, the Shetlands and the Orkneys, and then solo paddling along Norway's coastline.

"I would often arrive in a community from the sea, which gives a unique perspective," she says. "I loved these fishing communities, often in wild, beautiful landscapes. It's the kind of place I was searching for when I decided to live in Cornwall." She found it in Newlyn, Cornwall's largest fishing community, and says Carolyn, "a proper working village".

"I buy my food locally from Newlyn's fishmonger, butcher, cheese shop, baker and fabulous greengrocer who specialises in local sourcing. I can even bank locally. I am trying to be more aware ecologically of my own footprint: if I do shop in a supermarket, I paddle my sea kayak there."

The former fisherman's cottage where Carolyn now lives and works is close to the harbour, so she can launch her kayak from the beach. Between April and October, she also swims in the sea daily before work. One morning last year, she was accompanied on her swim by two curious and playful seals, as the sun rose from behind St Michael's Mount.

"My health and my life have to be shipshape for what I do," she says. "Osteopathy encourages people to take

responsibility for their health, and I try to live with integrity and by the principles I practice."

Carolyn knew from an early age that she wanted to work with her hands. "I remember playing in the garden on a beautiful spring morning. I sat on the grass and closed my eyes. Shafts of sunlight were beaming down around me, and I felt a wave of warmth between my hands. With it, came the impression that I must do something with this gift."

In her teens she developed a love of pottery and later Carolyn went to art school. However, a road accident when she was 16 was a turning point. "During my recovery, I consulted an osteopath – and I can only describe the experience as transformative," she says. "I was impressed by his care and attention. He spent over an hour with me, providing gentle osteopathic manipulation of my spine and shoulder girdle. He then explained that he had been learning some new techniques, called cranial osteopathy, that might be helpful. With my head quietly resting in his hands, I felt serene, and then a feeling of warmth quietly spread through my body. The aching in my neck ceased.

"I got off the couch thinking: 'I don't quite know what you did, but I want to learn this, too.' That autumn, I started my training at the British School of Osteopathy in London. It was a five-year, full-time course. Going from art to a science-based curriculum was tough, but I loved my training. I knew when I graduated that I had the clinical knowledge and technical skills to enable me to diagnose accurately and treat effectively."

Osteopathy was founded in 1874 by Andrew Taylor Still, a frontier physician in the midwest of America, who had been both a battlefield surgeon and a doctor in rural practice.

Carolyn explains: "One of the founding principles of osteopathy is that the body is a self-corrective mechanism, always striving to express health, and when given the right stimulus, can restore itself. The osteopath's task is to remove impediment or obstruction to enable health to manifest. Osteopathy is so much more than treating back injuries and managing arthritis."

In 2002, she began her homoeopathic training, to support in healing what she perceived through her hands. "As an



experienced osteopath, I knew that health is complex, with subtle layers of experience, trauma and memory woven into our bodies," she says.

She emphasises that her practice in Newlyn is about treating a broad spectrum of the community. "A lot of my work is with the fishing and family families. I see mums and dads, kids and grandparents. Osteopathic care in pregnancy, labour and post-partum is a big part of my work; also the newborn child's sleep difficulties or digestive problems, and in older children, developmental delay and learning difficulties."

For patients with mobility needs, Carolyn consults at the nearby Newlyn Centre with its purpose-built disabled access and facilities. "Living in Newlyn means I am able to give more to my patients and it enriches my life," she says.

"I try and get out and kayak for a few hours most weeks. My paddling time becomes part of a reflective, learning and sensory process, humbly becoming one with the environment around me, treading lightly in our wild places. I leave the sea with an impression that somehow I've been given more than I can describe. I am lightened, joyful and humble.

"One day I was at Sennen Beach. It was early in the morning, and there was a very low tide. I came across the flipper and shell prints of a green turtle. It was a privilege to have this interaction with such a rare wild visitor, and I was filled with awe.

"I also row for Mounts Bay Pilot Gig Club. We were out in the bay on a beautiful winter's morning, and the sun was really warm. Just when I was thinking: 'Life in Cornwall doesn't get much better than this,' out of the water leapt a pod of bottlenose dolphins. They stayed with us for 20 minutes. It was sheer delight." 🐬

Carolyn McGregor is based at 18 Florence Place, Newlyn, Penzance, TR18 5PT.

www.osteopathcornwall.co.uk. Carolyn is registered with the General Osteopathic Council and Society of Homoeopaths. As well as obstetric and paediatric osteopathy, she specialises in cranial osteopathy and osteopathic treatment of sports injuries and post-trauma states.