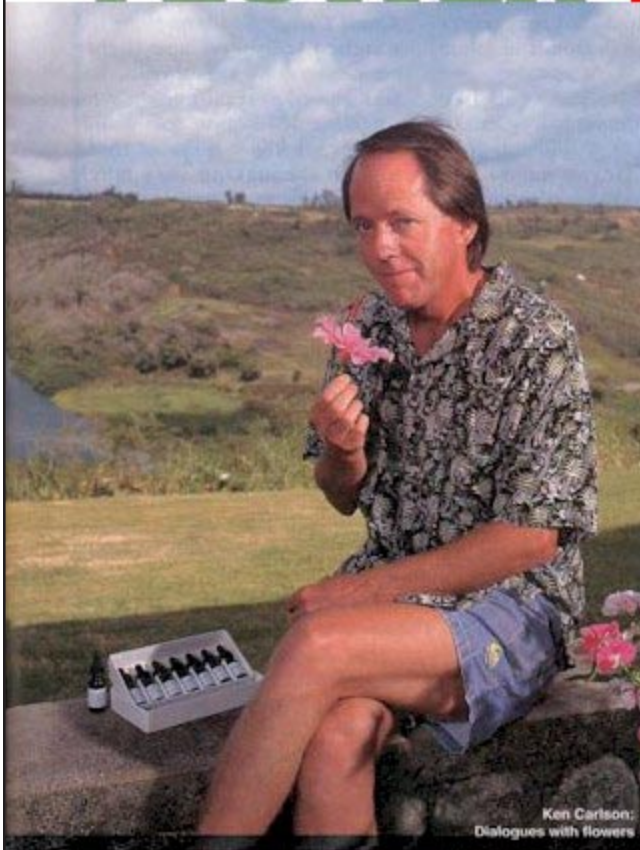


THE VIBRATIONAL FLOWER EXTRACT TEST



Ken Carlson:
Dialogues with flowers

It's still a cottage industry—literally—but as *Jeff Barrus* finds out, New Age businesses on Kauai are expanding and ascending.

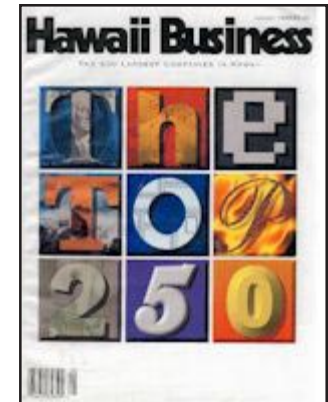
"I can talk to the nature spirits of flowers. I've had that ability for a number of years. I can carry on a dialogue with just about any flower."

These are words I will think long and hard about hours later, when the two-inch needles are sticking out of my feet and forehead and the time seems right for contemplation. Now, however, I sit in environmental attorney Ken Carlson's study above the cliffs at Kilauea and listen to his story: Last summer, using primarily the flowers of weeds and vines with distilled water and brandy (as a preservative), he began brewing "flower essences." Three

months ago, he and a partner started bottling and direct-mail marketing the extracts.

Flower essences are "vibrational medicine," designed under the thesis that the molecules composing a person are in a constant state of vibration. Carlson's "60-day program for conscious expansion and transformation" is meant to help people vibrate at a higher frequency, which makes them more self- and multi-dimensionally aware. His company, Starmen Unlimited, sells a \$72 set of 12 extracts that, because of their potency, can be used only once a year. He's predicting monthly sales of 200 units.

As he finishes telling me about an ancient continent called Lemuria—of which Kauai is a remaining part—and the flower-eating light beings who inhabited it, Carlson's friend and fellow Kilauea resident Katrina Wilson



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Ken Carlson's flower
essence venture is
featured in an article
on Kaua'i healing
arts entrepreneurs.

arrives. If Carlson represents a species of New Age small business that's proliferating like wildflowers, Wilson represents the collection and organization of such businesses. About a year and a half ago, Wilson's own vision inspired her to start *Kauai Speaks*, a quarterly magazine for the "conscious community." She tells me ad sales have risen consistently and circulation is now 16,000 with free distribution on Kauai and Maui. Tourists take more than 600 magazines every three days from the Lihue airport.

Wilson sticks nametags like "conscious community" on an industry layfolk would call New Age. By whatever name, she believes the industry is expanding in an unintended, big-bang way. "These vehicles are not businesses per se. They are something to trigger a process for enlightenment and for the ascension, which on one level is really not a big deal—it just *is* and it's what is happening on the planet. I feel like I'm connected to the global army of renegades going out to serve the planet."

I'm in Carlson's study talking about vibration and acting blasé about the ascension for a simple reason. I've heard about Kauai's significance in the New Age movement—about the island being a sort of global power spot—and about the number of New Age businesses that have come into being in recent years. I'm here to meet some of these entrepreneurs and take a stab at defining and quantifying their industry.

THE ROAD FROM WELLVILLE. My first sense is that to fit into Wilson's renegade army, you must talk the talk. And like all dialects, this one evolves constantly. If, for instance, I came on with some hokey about "healing my inner child," I'd be spotted as a charlatan in a minute. On the other hand, if I mentioned my attempts to "burn off past karma and actualize my vision," I would be talking sense.

In a phone conversation, Sue Kanoho, executive director of the Kauai Economic Development

Board, tells me a story that illustrates the language barrier between traditional business and the healing arts business. A woman came to Kanoho seeking KEDB support for a project to help New Age startups. The pitch was impassioned and eloquent—in New Agespeak. "I told her, 'Honey, get your feet on the ground and then we'll talk,'" Kanoho says.

Quantifying the industry is also difficult. As managing editor of the *Kauai Times*, Sue Dixon-Stong has watched legitimate and flighty businesses grow for six years. She was one of several people who encouraged Wilson to start *Kauai Speaks*. "I know none of these people are making very much money right now, because everybody's struggling," Dixon-Stong says. "It (the industry) is growing in terms of the number of businesses, but the dollar impact's not there yet." Dixon-Stong herself is a director of Honua Lani, a non-profit whose monthly meetings draw more than 100 people and whose stated mission is to bring about a "community of people co-creating Heaven on Earth."

Barbara Curl, another Honua Lani director, helps me understand part of the philosophy at work here. According to Curl, between 10 and 25 percent of Kauai's population shares her organization's vision of Kauai. Through New Age tourism and a preternatural selection process, that percentage is growing. "Iniki was a huge gift to Kauai," she says. "It made development stop, made people decide whether they wanted to live here or not—whether their business was right for Kauai or not. Iniki sorted out who was to be here for this new movement. New people who share the vision are being attracted, while people who don't belong here are leaving."

CHI WHIZ. After leaving Carlson's home, it's lunchtime on the road, which in this case means pizza with transformational psychotherapist Joan Levy. She leads Healing Arts Resources Kauai, a group that organizes healers and promotes Kauai as a wellness destination.

The organization claims 70 members, has a toll-free referral line, and is creating a 30-second ad to air on Kauai's visitor TV station. "I would say the majority of healing arts practitioners are not supporting themselves," Levy tells me, "but it's the association's purpose to change that." At last year's state conference on ecotourism, Levy lobbied tourism officials to support the growth of her industry. "People that are controlling the advertising and economic decisions about how to promote the island do not yet get the vast resource that the healing arts are for Kauai."

After lunch I follow Levy six miles out of town to Latifa Amdur's acupuncture clinic. It's here, lying on an examining table with the needles in, feeling remarkably good, that I get back to what Carlson told me this morning.

The "test" in all this, I decide, is to see the common philosophical thread running through seemingly dissimilar businesses. Since flower essences were invented in the last 60 years or so and Carlson has put his own metaphysical spin on his product, it seems permissible to refer to what he does as New Age. Amdur, on the other hand, has spent 22 years practicing in an experiential medical tradition more than 2,000 years old. "Healing arts" might suit her better. If I think of the healing arts as a sub-genre of the New Age movement, my head hurts less, so I adopt the practice. To the people involved, it's has-been terminology, but what other definition is nebulous enough to include *Kauai Speaks* advertisers selling rebirthing, crystal healing, soul essence jewelry, quantum shamanism, auric alignment and esoteric astrology?

Considering those possibilities, my greatest regret nonetheless is that I won't be experiencing Dr. Grady Deal's Hawaiian Metaphysical Vacation. Deal and his wife, Roberleigh, also offer a Hawaiian Wellness Holiday. The metaphysical vacation includes day trips to energy vortex centers, yoga classes and numerology and

astrology readings. At the wellness holiday, a promotional brochure claims, you can "bliss out while the G-5 vibrator massage speeds up detoxification" and "self-administered colonics may help you clean out and even improve your disposition." There's also hiking, aerobics, massage and Dr. Deal's Delicious Detox Diet. At the low end, one person can sign up for a three-day program with budget accommodations for \$795. At the high end, a two-week program for two with an ocean-view room at the Hyatt Regency Poipu costs \$6,660.

During the Deals' best year, circa 1989, they made \$50,000 from 40 to 50 tourists. These days, business isn't even half that, but Deal says it's starting to pick up.

Amdur takes out the needles and answers my last question: "I have no idea how much I earned last year," she says. "I don't work

"Self-administered colonics may help you clean out and even improve your disposition."

because of the money." She tells me how she uses a sliding scale based on ability to pay and how two days ago she traded treatment for someone who augered holes for her new fruit trees. She supports a family and just built a new home practicing acupuncture full time.

Back on the road, chi up, pedal down, there's time for further analysis of this cottage industry. Native Hawaiian groups tend to view it distrustfully, since it runs contrary to the Hawaiian ideal of free healing, and seems predominantly composed of *malibini* in the throes of midlife. Nevertheless as the community grows, it seems a certainty that Kauai's reputation among healers, New Agers and wellness-seeking tourists will also grow. Having figured that out, I feel pretty good about the day. That smell, I'm guessing, is the scent of burning karma. ☐