

Hudson Valley Health

Spring/Summer 2023

The Zion 100

*New Paltz woman runs
almost four marathons in 36 hours*



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A hundred-mile desert race

Could you run a little less than four marathons in 36 hours?

by Erin Quinn

ONE HUNDRED MILES is a daunting distance to walk. When you substitute the word “run” for “walk,” it starts to feel, well, just like a spin around Crazy Town. And that’s what a 100-mile run is — a very long, grueling, and unbearably beautiful fun-house ride on your own two legs.

At least, that’s what my race, the Zion 100, felt like to me — an all-night human-powered party in the Utah desert, complete with food, drink and a trailside vomit-fest.

When I first heard about ultrarunning (any race beyond the traditional 26.2-mile marathon distance), I was intrigued. A lifelong runner, I wanted to know how the race was physically feasible. And if it was physically possible, how does one train for it? Finally, how can the ambitious runner complete such an ordeal? As a journalist, I had been able to interview a few people who had ventured into Crazy-Town, and with their encouragement (some might call it a cult initiation) I decided to try my hand and legs at one.

I first dipped my toes in with a 50K in Moab, Utah in March 2022. I nearly died from heat stroke. Still, I finished, which gave me some confidence.

Then I continued to train for and complete the Dead Horse 50-Mile Ultra near Moab in November 2022. It felt exhilarating to be running in cooler temps. I was able to go further and run faster than I had in the 50K.

With two finish lines underneath my beltless shorts, I decided to sign up for the Zion 100 in March of this year. Why the hell not? What’s the worst that could happen?

I loved the training. I loved the



Erin with her support crew.

thought of being able to cover more than 100-miles of ground on my own legs. When I had the opportunity to pace a friend for the last 40-miles of her 100-mile race in February, I got to see first-hand just how formidable of a task it would be. That only got me more excited.

Getting ready

I had to put together this giant physical, mental and tactical jigsaw puzzle. There was not only the day or days of the race to deal with. I had to learn about carrying a hydration vest and eating gels and chews. I would carry miniature waffles in my pack. I learned the hard-way I had to fully coat myself in an anti-chaffing body glide. I had to get a headlamp, backup batteries, and a portable charger for my watch and phone. I had to study maps and elevation and do hill strides and

pickups and long runs and then back-to-back long runs.

Rest days were my favorite.

In most longer ultramarathons, the racers are allowed pacers and crew at a certain point. While I had assembled a world-class crew (my two childhood besties Amy and Kristen and my boyfriend Kip), none of them were runners. Though all three were adamant that they were not going to pace me for any length of the course, they did believe I needed a pacer for safety reasons in the night.

“We will clean the vomit from your hair and reapply the body glide underneath your armpits, but we’re not pacing,” said Kristen.

“We think you should have a pacer,” added Amy, who was busy listening up on the ultrarunning podcasts on how to be a good pacer and/or crew member,

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Erin amongst some of the beautiful scenery.

“but it’s not going to be us.”

What they didn’t realize was that knowing they were there when I was going to take on something this challenging was all that I needed from them. Yes, it was so helpful to have Kristen tracking me and telling me when I went off course (several times), and Amy mixing my electrolytes into my water bottles and refilling my pack. I wanted to hear all of them telling me how great I was doing and how good I looked.

Kip made sure that I had backup headlamps and batteries and knew how to hook everything up when I was too bleary-eyed to see straight. But it was way more than that. It was knowing that they were there with me on this wild journey.

A crew is a lot of things, and when it comes to ultrarunning they have a lot of specific duties. But the one that I can’t quantify is that these were my people,

part of my tribe. Even when I was lost out there (tacking on bonus miles) and hurting, or tired or nauseous (sometimes all at once), I knew that if I kept moving forward I would eventually get back to them near some aid-station tent in the middle of the desert. That would make everything okay.

I’m not going to say that running a hundred miles is not hard. It is hard. It’s very hard. But it’s not the hardest thing I’ve ever done.

There are those marathons that we run that we do not have the ability to train for — like illness and loss, heartbreak or hopelessness. Those are things that have no clear start point or end point. You don’t know whether there will be aid stations or if there are when you’ll reach one. Will you make it?

As I hit Mile 60 and 70 and 80 and ventured into the unknown, I kept thinking

that I had chosen this hard path. That was empowering. I had been able to go for a big adventure in the desert and bring some friends along with me. How cool is that?

The start

Once everyone had landed and we were in our Quality Sleep Inn hotel, we all went to the Zion Ultra Expo the day before the race to get a lay of the land and pick up my race packet. There were so many interesting tattoos covering calves and forearms of very fit-looking individuals milling about that I felt kind of naked without one. We discovered that the Zion Ultra was not actually in Zion National Park but would begin at the Apple Valley Ranch near Zion, within a Bureau of

Hudson Valley Health

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Land Management parcel. They had a 100-mile, 100K, 50K and half-marathon all slated to go off one after another over a two-day period, with the 100-miler starting first.

I set off at 5:30 a.m. Saturday morning. I had a 36-hour cutoff to make it back.

I waved goodbye to my crew and headed out into the cool morning desert air with a headlamp on. That first 20 miles went by in a blur. There was a beautiful dirt road that rolled through desert floor for a few miles. We then hit a trail that started to really climb. The sunrise took place on a section of trail that was on top of a gooseberry mesa with tons of slick rock, sand and tenacious little juniper trees. We saw sweeping vistas of desert below and the other mesas we would eventually climb.

As the sun mounted, the sky turned from a pale violet to a silky blue. The red-saturated canyons and the seagreen and blue of the grasses made me feel like I was snorkeling on land. I felt like I was diving in and out of dry water. My eyes were trying to adjust to the way the light seemed to bounce off the edge of the earth. The striations of the mesas each formed such a unique pattern that reminded me of fingerprints. The junipers and cottonwoods looked stoic and lonely.

Mile 25 was the first time I was able to see my crew. They were ready for me with a baseball hat and sunscreen -- both of which I had forgotten -- as the sun was starting to sink its teeth into my skin. My left foot kept going numb. I had to lean on a split-rail fence and swing my leg from side to side to try to relieve whatever nerve was being pinched.

It was exciting to see my crew. I felt the temptation to stay, but all the podcasts I'd listened to had warned of staying too long in an aid station. I needed to get in and get out. My people helped me refill bottles, covered me in sunscreen, and hugged me. Off I went, running across the desert floor in the heat of the day, feeling like the luckiest girl in the world.

After that 50-mile mark

Because I had done the 50-miler, I kept telling myself that this race really didn't start until mile 51. Well, at Mile 51 I got to the Flying Monkey. Kristen, who along with Amy had memorized the Runner, Pacer and Crew Manual, had watched videos of mountain bikers going down the Flying Monkey. They said that it



Support crew and Erin at the finish line.

looked absolutely terrifying. Some race reports alluded to this section as “down-right irresponsible.” I kept thinking that it couldn't be all that bad.

Wrong.

We dropped more than a thousand feet in less than a mile on a path that wasn't a path, but more a blurred line in the sand that someone had traced from the top to the bottom of the canyon. My heart rate was spiked so high trying to navigate my way down this precarious descent that at first I didn't hear the three mountain bikers with go-pros on letting me know that they were coming behind me.

Where did they want me to go? To the right was a deadly dropoff into the abyss. To the left was crumbling sandstone and loose rock. We had less than six inches to navigate our feet or wheels.

I pressed myself into the side of the canyon and just started praying as they passed me. When I turned back around, a rope appeared. I grabbed it and started rappelling down. Just as I got the hang of bouncing on and off the canyon wall, the rope ended. I was again left with nothing securing my body to the planet.

Finally, the pitch started to level out to a manageable degree. I could hear the cowbells and chatter from the upcoming

aid station.

Not only my friends but an entire group of strangers were cheering me on. One man said they'd heard so much about me. “Kristen's been making friends,” explained Amy as she guided me towards a bag chair they had set up.

“That should be illegal!” I replied, pointing in the direction of the Flying Monkey as my crew helped me get cleaned up, restocked and ready for the nighttime section. I wouldn't see them again for another 25 miles. “Someone's going to die going down that thing!”

I knew when I left that I wasn't sure what to expect next, but I was going to find out.

The night was both ethereal and stressful. The little pink course ribbon markers were so minimally placed that I kept thinking I would go off course and have to backtrack. I had just the cone-shaped light from my headlamp on the slick rock, the sight of my own sneakers, and the sound of my own breath to carry me forward. I was mostly alone in the night.

I would see an occasional runner and their pacer, but the greater the distance the more all 170 of us were spread out. Trails and roads wove through the desert night. I ran and shuffled, moving as



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quickly as I could, thanking the universe for carrying me this far.

I tried to follow the basic ultra-rule-of-thumb to keep eating 200 to 300 calories an hour and drinking several ounces of fluid. It had worked for my previous runs and training runs, but the longer you go the more your stomach starts to revolt. I was so nauseous on a seven-mile stretch that I had to force myself to take tiny sips of water.

I was powering up a steep hillside when everything I'd been taking in suddenly came up, and I stood bent-over on the side of the trail heaving until there was no vomit left. I was clammy, sweaty and teary.

Though I didn't feel great after that, at least I wasn't nauseous any more. I wiped my brow with my forearm and looked up at this veil of stars that swept over me like a cool compress.

I was going to be okay. I just had to keep going. I turned and ran down the hill towards the aid station — the oasis in the desert where my crew would be.

Mile 78 and the Mondo Z

After I took a few minutes to clean up, I hugged them and headed back out into the night. Mondo Z was waiting for me, as I knew it would be. I enjoyed my run/shuffle as long as I could until I hit the bottom of that climb, which appeared to be more an Alpine ski slope than a hill one could run up. All I could see was a long trail of headlights slowly bobbing up the mountain for what seemed like miles. "Don't look up," I cautioned myself. "Focus on each step. Left foot, right foot..."

I kept repeating that mantra. I would give myself five seconds to pause, put my head between my knees, and then keep pushing up. It wasn't a question if I would get up the hill, but how. Gravity was pulling me backwards. I had no poles.

There was nothing to hold on to. The rocks and sand would slip beneath

my feet as I tried to gain traction. I sidestepped for a while, and then tried to walk backwards. I tripped and fell. Then I scooted on my butt for a while then back up to the left-foot, right-foot routine. I asked God to help me find my way to the top of this hill. I said "thank you" every ten steps because that was ten steps more than I thought I could go.



More of that incredible Utah scenery.

Eventually I made it up. It had taken a long time. But here's what I learned: In an ultra; every step is closer to the finish. You try to persuade yourself it will get better. You're just not sure when, so you keep moving the best that you can.

There was an aid-station at the top. I loaded my water bottles with Coke. It was the middle of the night. I had 22 miles to go and I wanted to be firing on all cylinders. I hadn't pulled an all-nighter in quite a while, but having been a mom of three kids four years old and under, plus being a reporter constantly on deadline, I was no stranger to sleep deprivation. I felt some energy return as I made my way to Mile 80, where I could give my crew one last hug before the finish line.

Amy calmed me, telling me I was well ahead of my time goal and had seven hours ahead of the grim-reaper cutoff time. I headed out towards the Wire Mesa

the sun rose.

Smelling the barn

Time slowed here. The sunrise was so stunning that I was tempted to sit down and watch it, though I knew that I had to keep going. The wind was whipping on top of the mesa, and all I had was a thin shell that I could put on over my vest and hold it together with my hands. I hadn't eaten in at least three hours and knew that I needed to. I could not bear to look at, smell or ingest anything in my pack. I was even beyond my love of Coke, and what existed after Coke?

I didn't see a soul for at least eight miles on this mesa, and I started wondering whether I might not be going around in circles. I started to panic. I had no one to ask, so I just kept pressing forward. Okay, I told myself. You've already run an extra two miles from going off course, what's another eight miles?

I was trying to work my mind around tacking on another ten miles to a hundred-mile race. When I finally heard some aid-station banter, I was happy and so relieved. I accepted a shot of pickle juice they were peddling. Though it felt like battery acid going down, I soon perked up. I only had nine more miles to go.

Nine miles! That was less than ten! I could smell the metaphorical hay in the barn. I started to realize as I looped back that I was alone because I had passed a lot of people just heading towards Wire Mesa as I was heading towards the Grafton Mesa, the last loop of the course.

This was such a stunning trail that I tried to inhale every bit of it. I was running along the edge of the mesa rim looking down at the Colorado River's huge boulders worn down by water. They looked like free-standing sculptures.

My phone had hit service. I could feel it vibrating. I knew that my kids, friends and other loved ones were sending me messages of encouragement. I felt some life come back to my legs. At that point I knew that that barring some sort of catastrophic mishap or injury I was going to finish. I'm not going to say that the last few miles were easy on body or mind, but I knew this party was about to reach its crescendo.

As I got closer to the finish, I could feel all the miles in my legs start to throb and the blisters start to scream. None of it mattered. I knew I had been on this

~~~~~  
**I believe that we all have  
epic adventures inside us.**  
~~~~~

and just kept repeating to myself, "Run when you can and walk when you have to." At this point, I couldn't really run anything that even hinted at an uphill. I could run flats and gentle downhills, but there wasn't much that was gentle about Wire Mesa except the views of the snow-capped mountains in the distance and the silhouette of Zion canyons as

pilgrimage where all of life happened in one day, and that one day happened in all of life.

I was able to run in that last couple of hundred feet. I collapsed into my crew's

arms and started to cry. Yes, I was proud and relieved that I had crossed that finish line. I was also steeped in gratitude for the opportunity to go on this adventure and to have some of the people I loved

most be able to share it with me.

I believe that we all have epic adventures inside us. We just need to listen and find out what they could be.

Happy trails.

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will help you study for your classes! He is extremely affectionate and looking for someone to love. He does take medication to assist with chronic constipation, but this is easily managed and not life-threatening. If you're looking for a buddy to keep you company, Kevin is your boy!

Alex

ALEX IS A 12 YEAR OLD male domestic long haired brown and white tabby. This senior sweetie still feels young at heart! He is incredibly affectionate and loving. He would do great in just about



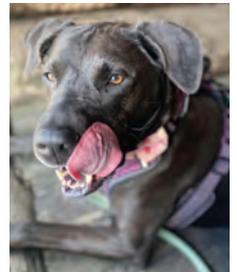
any home, with other cats, kids and cat-friendly dogs, or with someone who works from home or as a first time pet. Despite his kidney disease (common in older kitties) he will still play, zoom, and show his youthful and silly side.

Thor

THOR IS A 3 YEAR OLD MALE DOMESTIC short haired grey tabby. Thor is one of those super social cats who absolutely loves people and prefers to spend his time with his best human friend. He possesses a sweet, curious nature, and is currently our volunteer in-residence greeter in the Cat & Dog supervisor office at the shelter. He needs a calm, quiet home. While he does do well with other cats, is comfortable with cat-friendly dogs, and likes children, it would be better for him to be in a home with adult people only. Don't let this discourage you, though - Thor is one of the sweetest cats, and is very much looking forward to finding his fur-ever home!

Aspen

ASPEN IS A 6 YEAR old female Labrador Retriever. There are a bunch of reasons why you should adopt Aspen! She does cute stuff, like when she is in the car with her handler, she will sit politely and lay her head on the handler's shoulder. She is smart and knows the following commands- sit, paw, and wait. She wants to do whatever you are doing. She is cool with snuggling and watching a movie or going on an adventure, like a hike. Aspen prefers to be your only pet in the home and would do okay around children who can respect her belongings.



Remy

REMY IS A 9 YEAR OLD female American Pit Bull Terrier. Remy is what you would call a "couch potato". She is getting up there in



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age, and although she is still strong and healthy, her age is certainly catching up to her. She is a little shy with new people, so it is a must to take it slow with her in the beginning. Remy is a very mature gal, so she does not have the patience for small children or other animals anymore. An ideal home for Remy needs to be an adult-only home where her boundaries can be properly respected. Although it may sound like Remy plays hard-to-get, her love, cuddles, and affection make the chase even more rewarding to introduce this sweet girl into your home!

Shanaya

SHANAYA IS A 4 YEAR old female Am-erican Pit Bull Terrier. Shanaya absolutely loves to play! She is considered a high energy dog and can get over-stimulated easily, but it is just because of



how much she loves humans, their attention and affection! She could fit in well with most households where everyone is over the age of 10. She also has the potential to live with cats. Shanaya is quite

picky on which dogs she wants to play with and can get along with. All she wants in this life is to get all the love, pets and playtime in the world. She promises to love you back even more!

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Peaceful warrior

*Daily classes have resumed
at Harvey Konigsberg's Woodstock Aikido*

by Frances Marion Platt

“FOR THOSE WHO don't know this, it's like magic.” So says Harvey Konigsberg, chief instructor for decades now at Woodstock Aikido. And indeed, to an outsider watching one of Konigsberg Sensei's classes at his dojo in a barn on the Byrdcliffe grounds, his consistent ability to deflect a student attacking him (the *uke*, in martial arts parlance) seems almost supernaturally effortless. Like *Star Trek's* Spock disabling an adversary using the Vulcan nerve pinch at the back of the neck, all it takes is a finger or two applied in the perfect spot to make the *uke* collapse and roll. It's pretty impressive technique – especially from a guy who's now 82 years old and has had knee replacement surgery and shoulder injuries.

One of the most respected and experienced American aikido masters -- his rank is Seventh Dan, Shihan -- Konigsberg has been practicing for 58 years now, since almost the dawn of aikido in this country. He has taught on five



Inside the Woodstock Aikido studio.

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continents and is still regularly invited to give classes at dojos and conferences around the globe, including a weekly session at the New York Aikikai, run by Konigsberg's mentor, Yoshimitsu Yamada.

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Yamada is one of the last living senseis to have trained at length in person with the founder of aikido: Morihei Ueshiba, also known as Osensei or Great Teacher.

The son of a gentleman farmer in Tanabe in Wakayama prefecture, Ueshiba (1883-1969) studied Daito-ryu Aiki-jujutsu with its founder, Takeda Sokaku, before going on to develop his own form, informed by the spirituality that he embraced as a member of the Shinto sect known as Omoto-kyo. Aikido translates as “the way of unifying energy,” and what sets it apart from other East Asian martial arts is its decidedly unmartial approach: a commitment to defusing conflict without seriously hurting anyone.

“The Way of the Warrior has been misunderstood,” Ueshiba wrote following his experiences during World War II, which he had tried to forestall. “It is not a means to kill and destroy others. Those who seek to compete and better one another are making a terrible mistake. To smash, injure or destroy is the worst thing a human being can do. The real Way of a Warrior is to prevent such slaughter – it is the Art of Peace, the power of love.”

Aikido’s fluid, almost dancelike self-defense techniques are designed to channel the momentum of the attacker and ground it, while exerting little obvious effort on the defender’s part. This is often accomplished through a pivoting semicircular motion called *tenkan*, which keeps the attack on the periphery while the defender calmly commands the center. There are no striking counterattacks, as in karate, but rather a firm but gentle grappling that employs precise pressure on certain nerves, joints and soft tissue



A class at work at the Woodstock Aikido studio.

to “lead” the opponent to fall away from the initial point of contact.

“Osensei was highly religious, but never imposed his religion on anyone,” Konigsberg observes. “The only restriction in aikido was not to do harm. He taught that a human being can’t evolve at the expense of another human being. Thus, aikido training is joyful and vibrant.”

So noncompetitive is this approach, in fact, that practitioners (*aikidoka*) progress in rank through their demonstrated mastery of the techniques, without having to defeat other students in matches as in most other forms of martial arts. Improvisation is encouraged, especially once a student has practiced long enough that the forms have been internalized into muscle memory. Both student and instructor are expected to treat one another

with courtesy. There’s no drill-sergeant mentality here. “I’m known for being not strict,” notes Konigsberg. “Respect is one thing; severity is another.”

Aikido’s cooperative and non-dogmatic spirit was part of its initial appeal to Konigsberg, who had grown up in an Orthodox Jewish family and was fed up with rules. Born in Manhattan in 1940, he moved with his family to Florida. “At 16 or 17, I was going to be a boxer. I didn’t like school,” he says. But his teachers had noticed his artistic talent and encouraged him to pursue that as a career. He majored in art at the University of Miami and apprenticed himself to painter Eugene Massin. To keep body and soul together after school, he went to work in a warehouse, and continued to pursue boxing as a hobby.

He returned to New York City in his twenties as a working artist, in time racking up more than two dozen one-man shows. And he found himself needing something that would replace the thrill of movement that he had found in boxing without the punishment of being repeatedly hit in the face.

In 1965, he saw his first aikido demonstration at the first aikido school on the East Coast: New York Aikikai, headquarters of the US Aikido Federation. At the time, it was a martial-arts form that hardly any Americans had ever heard of, other than the few military personnel who had encountered aikido in Japan just after World War II. Most Americans had only seen approximations of East Asian martial arts in spy movies by that point.

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It was only one year before, in 1964, that judo had become an official Olympic sport and Bruce Lee had captured the spotlight at the first annual Long Beach International Karate Championships. It was not until 1966 that he would be cast as Kato in the TV series *The Green Hornet*. The kung fu mania of the 1970s had not yet taken hold.

At age 25, Harvey Konigsberg was living in a loft on West 24th Street, a short walk from the New York Aikikai, which he had heard about from Harry McCormick, an artist friend who was showing his work at the same Greenwich Village gallery.

Together with a fellow boxer named Clem Florio, Konigsberg stopped in to watch a class taught by two world-class senseis who had both studied with Morihei Ueshiba himself: Yoshimitsu Yamada and Koichi Tohei. "I was entranced," he recalls.

Konigsberg signed up for classes at once, and although he "had to unlearn things I did in boxing," he learned how to fall properly and was "teaching within a few months," he says. In 1967 his first wife Patti, a clothing designer, decided to open a boutique in Montreal, and they moved there for a couple of years.

By then, aikido had become a part of him, even invading his dreams. The snowy winters drove them back to Manhattan, and he resumed his training with Yamada Sensei – this time for good. As an early recruit to New York Aikikai, he's now one of the longest-practicing American-born aikidoka still active.

Fast-forward to the 1980s, when skyrocketing real-estate prices forced the Konigsbergs to give up their Chelsea loft. They had already found a summer retreat in Woodstock through their friendship with painter Mylo Quam, so they moved



Harvey Konigsberg, chief instructor for decades now at Woodstock Aikido.

there full-time. Harvey joined an aikido dojo in Saugerties founded by Lowell Miller, and became its director not long after the death of Lou Kleinsmith Sensei. He reorganized the group in its present location on Upper Byrdcliffe Road, as Woodstock Aikido, in 1986. Konigsberg Sensei also became a member of the technical committee of the US Aikido Federation, responsible for teaching guidelines as well as rank promotion across the US.

The historic barn formerly used for wood storage and now housing Woodstock Aikido, like most of the historic buildings on the site of the former Byrdcliffe colony, has been maintained and gradually improved over the years thanks mostly to volunteer labor and donated building materials. In a recent visit, a 40-year-old overhead propane heater

was about to be replaced after a successful crowdfunding campaign.

Following a long fallow period during the pandemic, when instruction was offered only over Zoom, Woodstock Aikido is back up to a full schedule of in-person classes, viewable at <https://woodstockaikido.com/schedule>. Participants range in age from preschoolers in the Saturday morning parent/child classes to seasoned veterans, including five senior instructors who have reached Sixth Dan level.

Konigsberg, who can no longer do exercises in a kneeling position due to his bionic knee, is especially sensitive to the need to tone down falling and rolling exercises for older students. Special low-impact evening classes are geared for seniors, people rehabilitating from injuries, and others who have "physical challenges," he says. "They're not brutal or damaging in any way."

While Konigsberg Sensei himself has had to adjust his teaching style in recent years, he's still personally conducting three classes per week, and says that after each one he "comes out feeling rejuvenated."

Currently he is traveling the world to offer seminars once again. And he's thinking it's about time for another art show. You can see some of his paintings at <https://harveykonigsbergart.com>. To schedule an introductory aikido class or inquire about signing up for an ongoing class, e-mail woodstockaikido@gmail.com or woodstockaikidokids@gmail.com.

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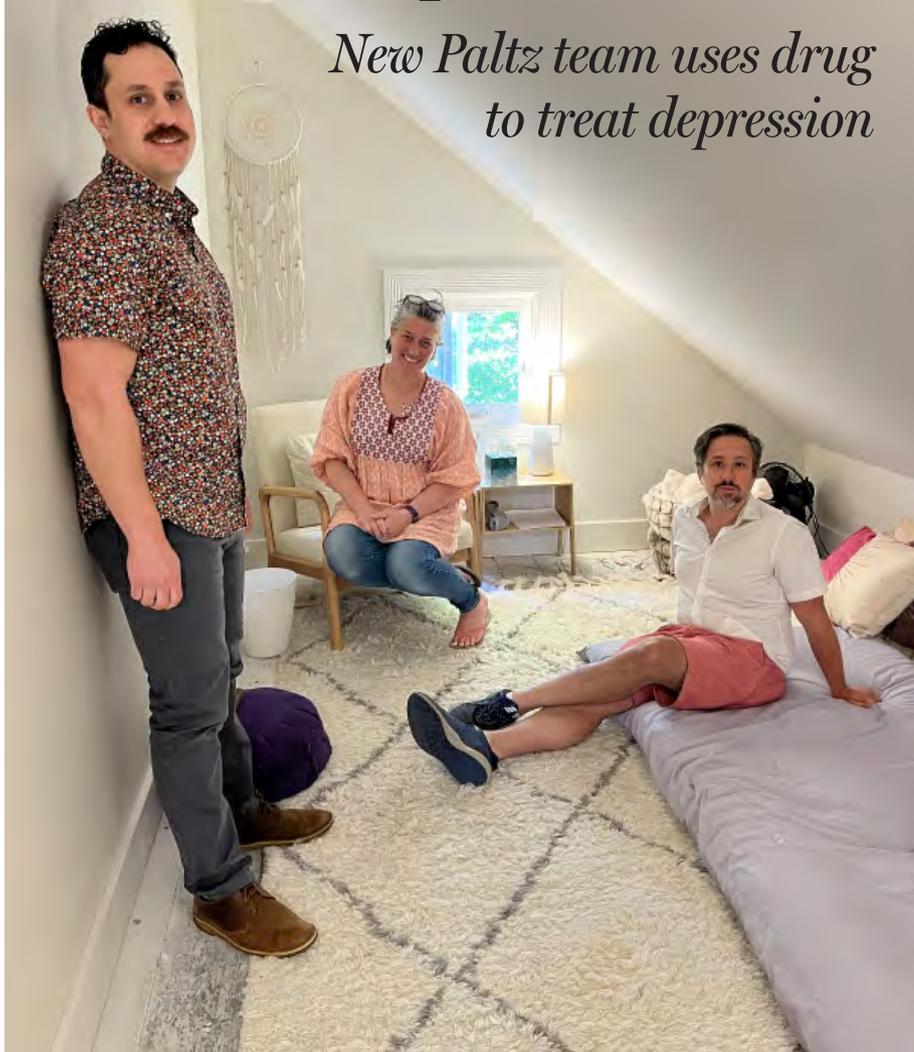


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Special K

New Paltz team uses drug to treat depression



David Schaffer, Doree Lipson and Simon Abramson.

by Erin Quinn

WELLNESS EMBODIED AT 257 Main Street in New Paltz has put together a team of psychotherapists and a medical doctor to offer Ketamine Assisted Therapy (KAP) to clients suffering from depres-

sion, trauma, or anxiety. It's more than talk therapy. While ketamine has been used as an emergency-room sedative or a psychedelic street drug for those looking to go on a hallucinatory journey, it has recently made some inroads into the therapeutic world, particularly for those with severe depression.

"I would say that over the past five

years it has become a more widely used and sought after form of treatment," said Simon Abramson, a psychotherapist and a member of the Wellness Embodied KAP team. "There were the Yale trials, and then a series of studies conducted that looked at the efficacy of its use in treating depression."

Used mainly on battlefields and in operating rooms or emergency rooms as an anesthetic, or even as a horse tranquilizer, ketamine is a legal drug when prescribed by a physician.

It is not clear exactly why ketamine has been effective in treating some patients for severe depression. According to Abramson, it likely has to do with "increasing the amount of a neurotransmitter called glutamate in the spaces between neurons," which has shown to be atrophied in people suffering from depression or PTSD.

Trials, tests and treatment

Dr. John Krystal, the head of psychiatry at the Yale School of Medicine, was instrumental in arguing the case that ketamine could have an efficacious result in depression-resistant therapy. The trials and studies he and his colleagues have conducted, showed ketamine produces antidepressant effects "by working on an entirely different brain system than current antidepressants do."

Traditional antidepressants target serotonin, norepinephrine and dopamine systems in the brain. Ketamine is believed to produce antidepressant effects by "triggering the release of glutamate, which then stimulates the growth of new synapses between brain cells," according to the *Yale Journal of Medicine*. "As a result, ketamine is effective in patients with major depressive disorder who are resistant to common antidepressants. It takes effect in a matter of hours rather than weeks."

Another article, published in the *Harvard Health Blog* by Dr. Robert Meisner, explained ketamine's chemical impact this way: "Glutamate then activates connections in another receptor, called the AMPA receptor. Together, the initial blockade of NMDA receptors and activation of AMPA receptors lead to the release of other molecules that help neurons communicate with each other along new pathways. Known as synaptogenesis, this process likely affects mood, thought patterns, and cognition,"



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“We use it as an accelerant”

Abramson emphasized ketamine was part of therapy. “It’s not separate,” he said. “We use it as an accelerant.” Ketamine, when effective, can help speed up the process of seeing relief from acute depression, anxiety and trauma.

Dorie Lipson, founder and director of Wellness Embodied works as a psychotherapist with KAP clients. She is quick to point out that an involved intake process and full medical examination take place before a client is accepted into the KAP program. “We need to know if there’s a history of psychosis or addiction,” said Lipson. “If there’s support for the individual in this process.”

If the initial session goes well, the client is referred to a medical-team doctor to ensure there are no medical complications.

Dosage and costs

The dosage is very low, lasting 45 minutes spent mostly in conversation with the therapist. The sessions are three hours long, with an hour of regular therapy, coupled with the ketamine ingestion

and then another hour to process what the individual experienced.

The doses, given in lozenges, stay in the client’s mouth so that they’re absorbed through the inner membranes of the cheeks it’s not the Kool-Aid Acid Test, but possibly like having two drinks, said Lipson.

Clients are just a bit more relaxed and able “to see your own thinking,” said Abramson.

“Ketamine is effective in patients with major depressive disorder who are resistant to common antidepressants. It takes effect in a matter of hours rather than weeks.”

The client can lie down on a futon a special ketamine room in the center, or sit up and talk. It’s designed to be a smaller, more contained and peaceful space. The client is given an eye mask so that they can have “an internal experience,” or decide to talk with their therapist about what they’re seeing and feeling. All three therapists said that their clients haven’t reported physical effects, save for an occasional report of some nausea.

“There are places where you can go

and get an infusion that is way stronger, and they leave you alone in a room,” said Lipson. “This is done with the supervision of a licensed therapist at a much lower dose.”

According to Abramson, the client is likely to have to repeat this treatment twice a week for two or three weeks, then once a week for a few weeks, and after that periodically, when and if needed.

“Ketamine is most effective those first three days after treatment,” explained Abramson. That’s why it is suggested that treatment is two times a week because it captures six days of direct chemical activity in the brain. The therapists are hoping six days of direct chemical activity in the brain will help break the chain of acute depression and traumatic thought patterns.

There’s no one-size-fits-all prescription. It all depends on the person being treated.

Wellness Embodied is one of the few KAP programs in New York State where the therapist is present throughout the entire treatment. Because it is still relatively new and placed under the umbrella of psychedelic therapeutic treatment, insurance does not cover it. The three-hour session costs \$400. In addition, there is a \$250 charge for the medical examination, \$75 for the ketamine lozenges, and then \$125 for the medical follow-up session.

“We’ll do our best to get someone in if there’s a cancellation or to refer them, and we always encourage people to call because we want to help,” Lipson said.

For information on the KAP program go to www.wellnessembodiedcenter.com or call 845-532-6064.

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