SHAMAN

Don Cameron, a high-tech engineer, follows an ancient path of healing

BY BARBARA RAVAGE

It all started with a snowy owl.

Don Cameron had taken three of his grandchildren to see naturalist Marcia Wilson, who periodically comes to the Cape with her Eyes on Owls educational program. As part of her presentation, she brings out six live owls, one by one, carrying them on her wrist, so people can see these remarkable birds close up. That day, she showed a great-horned owl, a tiny saw-wet, and then walked through the audience with a majestic snowy owl, with a wingspan that can exceed five feet. As Don watched, it spread its wings and, he recalls, "It felt like somebody punched me in the gut."

The feeling was unmistakable – "It took my breath away," Don says. But he did not know what to make of it. When Wilson and her owls came back to the Cape three months later, he went again. And the same thing happened: The snowy owl spread its enormous wings and left Don breathless. Experiencing it for the second time, Don says it was almost as if the owl was saying "pay attention!" He didn't realize it then, but his encounter with the snowy owl was the first step in his journey to becoming a shaman.

Shamanism is an ancient animistic tradition in indigenous cultures the world over. Although the specific practices differ, the common thread is a connection between the natural and spirit realms, which is bridged by the shaman, who serves as an intermediary. Shamans are healers, of both body and spirit. Native-American "medicine men" are shamans. The tradition also exists among Asian, African, Eskimo and Inuit people, and Pacific islanders. One of the strongest shamanic traditions can be found in the high Andes of Peru among the indigenous Q'ero people, who are descended from the Incas.

STEVE HEASLIP/CAPE COD TIMES

Naturalist Marcia Wilson (left) brought her Eyes on Owls educational program to Harwich recently and met up with Don Cameron (right). When Don first saw Marcia's show, the engineer's encounter with a demonstrative snowy owl, like this male, so moved him, he sought training to become a shaman. He has since finished his training and now practices his healing art.

It was to Peruvian shamanism as it has been interpreted by Alberto Villoldo, of The Four Winds Society, that Don was drawn. As Don explains it, "In the Peruvian tradition, the role of shaman is often transferred through a dramatic, initiating event or it comes through a messenger, which could be a powerful animal like a condor or a bull, which appears in waking life or in a dream.

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About the author

Barbara Ravage moved to Cape Cod from her native New York City in 2000, after the youngest of her children went off to college. She considers heavy doses of ocean air and Cape light the best cure for empty nest syndrome. A graduate of Barnard College, she is the author of nine books, including a biography of Rachel Carson for middle-school students and "Burn Unit: Saving Lives After the Flames," which explores the history and science of burn treatment. She balances her writing life with yoga, karate, and pottery. After years of making do with two summer weeks on the Cape, her favorite part about living here is that she's already home.

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In my case, it was a real encounter with a snowy owl."

Curiosity brought Don to an introductory weekend at Kripalu, in the Berkshires, run by The Four Winds Society, which was founded 27 years ago by Villodo, after he left a scientific career studying brain chemistry to explore this ancient path. As Don heard about the basic concepts and saw demonstrations of a few of the healing procedures, he found himself moved despite a lingering skepticism. He had had an MRI a few weeks earlier because of a shoulder problem. "I was really struck by the contrast between the clanking technology of the MRI and the simplicity and power of the shamanic healing," he recalls.

By the end of that weekend, Don had decided to go to Park City, Utah, The Four Winds home base, to begin training in energy healing. The program consists of seven one-week sessions over a period of 18 to 24 months, with an extensive mentored practicum in between. As he worked his way through the training, he repeatedly encountered, and then overcame, his own doubts.

Born in Scotland and educated at the University of Cambridge, Don has spent his entire professional life as a software engineer and management consultant – "about as far from shamanism as you could imagine," he says with a smile. He considered himself a man of science, with no religious leanings, though he says he had always been interested, in a theoretical way, in such New Age thinkers as Jean Huston, Michael Harner, and Mircea Eliade. "I was also drawn to helping people without knowing exactly how. My basic work as a computer guy didn't fulfill that yearning, and I knew I wasn't going to go back to medical school or become a therapist." Still, it was a challenge for him to embrace the idea that we have energy fields that become blocked, which may cause both physical and psychological symptoms, and that unblocking that energy can bring relief.

"All this stuff about energy fields? Come on! I'm an engineer. It just cannot work."

Still, somehow shamanic healing spoke to him. As he came to understand, shamanism is not a religion, and it is not about belief. It is not even necessary to understand how healing works. "I know what I do, what we're trained to do, but I don't know how it works," Don acknowledges. The shaman is a go-between. The healing takes place within the person who is seeking relief. All that is required is an openness to being healed.

Don received his certification from Four Winds in early 2009, and set up a practice in Brewster. His energy healing sessions are also available at the spa at the Chatham Bars Inn. The first, and most basic, procedure is called illumination. It involves work with chakras, which Don describes as "the little spirals that screw our energy field into our spine and physical body." They are positioned along a line that runs from the base of the spine, through the navel, solar plexus, heart, throat, third eye, and crown of the head.

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>
> DON CAMERON, SHAMAN

Unlike massage, there is virtually no touch involved in a healing session. And unlike psychotherapy, there is no discussion. "The shaman is not interested in the story," Don explains. "That doesn't mean he doesn't care about it, but it's not relevant to the healing." He asks his clients to ask themselves such questions as "What is not working in my life? What feels out of balance? What seems to be missing? What qualities have I lost that I long to reclaim? What do I yearn for? Are there unhealthy patterns in my life that keep repeating? Are there places in my body where I regularly

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Shaman

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feel pain?" Although some people choose to tell him what their issue is afterwards, Don does not ask and does not know what it is beforehand.

The session is conducted with clients lying on their back on a massage table, fully clothed, while Don determines which one of the chakras is affected, holding a pendulum or his hand over the body. "Think of chakras as getting blocked energetically the way an eddy in a river can carry little sticks and leaves where it whirls around." By unwinding the chakra, the blockage is cleared. At the end of the session, he rewinds the chakra and illuminates it, using rattles and other artifacts from his mesa, or power bundle.

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Don emphasizes that shamanic healing is neither an alternative nor antagonistic to mainstream medicine. "We do not recommend that somebody who comes to us should not see their own doctor." He draws a distinction between alternative medicine, which implies "instead of," and complementary healing, such as what he practices. "It is complementary in the sense it can amplify or simplify treatment, especially psychotherapy," he says.

Some of the most gratifying work he does is connected to Vicki Ward, a nurse-practitioner and counselor who treats patients with dual diagnoses (usually substance abuse and psychiatric illness) through Integrated Health Services of Cape Cod in Hyannis. She had come to Don for a healing session, and "she found it very powerful, so she asked me if I would take on a couple of her

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Quick**hits**

WebLinks
Don Cameron
508-221-5537
www.enhealing.com

The Four Winds Society
www.thefourwinds.com

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clients as an adjunct to her work." As Don explains it, "many of her clients are depressed, unmotivated, apathetic, and my kind of work can bring them up to a more normal level where they are more receptive to the talk therapy she does with them and to be more consistent about taking medication. For others who are anxious and can't focus, she finds that my kind of work helps them be more grounded, more centered, calmer, and again makes them more receptive to her work with them."

Now 67, Don has lived in Orleans since 2000, though he and his late wife, Carroll, had been visitors for more than 35 years. In 1995, they built a house on a piece of land on Barley Neck that her grandfather bought in 1892. He has three grown children and five grandchildren, ranging in age from 6 to 20. He met his fiancée, Mary Jane Curran, at a Nauset Newcomers singles dinner in 2006. As it happens, neither was a newcomer to the Cape, but it was Don's first time at such a gathering and Mary Jane was one of the official greeters.

As a modern-day shaman, Don seeks to demystify shamanism. "I want to help people understand how such an ancient tradition fits into and complements modern psychotherapy and even modern medicine." It is now well established that the mind-body connection is real, that physical symptoms are often amplified by emotional issues, and vice versa. "The more clients I see and the more I witness the experiences the clients have, the more powerful is my conviction that the healing works."

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