

I. Getting in better shape by getting a better shape: Kinesis Myofascial Integration is a deep tissue therapy that promises change

Vancouver Sun Monday, June 28, 2004
Page: C1 / FRONT Section: Arts & Life
Byline: Kirk Lapointe Source: *Vancouver Sun*

I decided one day that my body felt like a car whose tires had run up repeatedly against the curb. Nothing terribly wrong, nothing ready to break down, just nothing exactly right any more.

Maybe it was the middle-age encroachment, but I acutely recognized life's cumulative adaptations: Daily reshaping by hours over the workstation, near-daily stresses and strains through road and trail running, nightly twists and turns of sleeping. My body felt as if it were in constrictive armour, ill-prepared to take me further without a serious step back to take a couple of steps ahead.

Getting in better shape wasn't the immediate answer. Getting a better shape was.

I found what I consider the answer -- I guess I'll see over the next few weeks -- in a deep-tissue therapy known as Kinesis Myofascial Integration, or KMI, a descendant of the structural integration work best known as rolfing.

The process is, literally, a reworking of the body, head to toe, that aims to instill better alignment, a better relationship within the body of its connective elements, and a finer sense of inquiry to direct my resting, breathing and activity.

Literally, too, it's an arduous odyssey: Twelve 90-minute sessions over a period of months under the tree-trunk hands of Mark Finch, a Vancouver body worker (<http://www.thepathyoga.com/markfinch>) who has studied the techniques under North America's best. Four sessions to knead the various parts, four to really open me up, four to put them back together. Over the next number of weeks, I'll keep track of my sessions and report here on the process of change.

Some friends think I have taken leave of my faculties. One called me a flake. Another suggested I was foolish to defy the properties of middle age. Others wondered why I would pay to have this inflicted on me. Mainly, though, they wanted to know more. They, too, have their aches and pains and trouble zones, and they want to know if this will help.

I know others who have gone through this process. Some gained height, or shoe sizes, and almost all experienced immeasurably improved flexibility and better balance. But many also spoke of an emotionally deeper experience, because the deep tissue therapy on the body can produce different neurological connections -- a rewiring in the reworking -- that taps into something beyond the flesh. The spirit.

This is not for the pain-shy. A life's worth of adjustment isn't easily undone, and some won't finish the course of treatments. But I'm told, and I'm certainly expecting, the dominant feature isn't about reaching my physical pain threshold. There is bliss in each session, too, and not the kind of feeling good that comes when you stop hitting your thumb with a hammer, but actual elation in the body work that reboots your operating system.

Mark is an affable mid-30s New Zealander with a fragrant, welcoming office adjoining a Montessori school. The sessions on his table and bench have a

soundtrack of hushed classical music CDs and the hardy chirp of children outdoors.

His Popeye-like forearms and calloused fingers -- and on occasion his utterly unforgiving elbows -- probe and manoeuvre well into the tissue, and you have to learn how to deal with what he endearingly calls "sensation." It's necessary to learn how to "move toward" that sensation to embrace and cap it; resisting it only makes you break into a fight-or-flight sweat and deepens the stress.

Our first session worked the front of my legs, my ribs and chest, and the effect was instant: I felt a larger range of breathing, my legs felt looser for walking and running, and I could stand more easily over my pelvis.

But the real impact came the next day in a more limber stride when I walked and ran. My breathing was relaxed because I had a little more space around my ribs. And my shoulders and neck weren't as tense when I sat down to the keyboard.

No real emotional -- or spiritual -- result yet, but it's early days on the journey.

Next week my feet are the focus, and given my daily abuse of them through nearly a quarter-century of running, I am apprehensive.

Illustration: Color Photo: Ward Perrin, *Vancouver Sun*. Mark Finch does extensive bodywork on *Vancouver Sun* managing editor Kirk LaPointe. Photo: Ward Perrin, *Vancouver Sun*. Mark Finch works hard on the legs, chest and feet of *Vancouver Sun* editor Kirk LaPointe.

II. Learning how to put his best foot forward: Just a few seconds of arduous strain on the system brings about tremendous rewards

Vancouver Sun Monday, July 5, 2004

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Byline: Kirk Lapointe Column: Kirk Lapointe Source: *Vancouver Sun*

Kirk LaPointe is getting a full-body restructuring through a 12-session deep-tissue process known as Kinesis Myofascial Integration (KMI). This is the second in a series about the sessions.

I won't kid you, the first of my sessions under the needlenose-plier hands of Mark Finch was intense. Which is not to say all pain and no pleasure. Mark smartly moves during the course of about an hour from that fight-or-flight grief to blissful pressure. You're left with the full-body equivalent of a runner's endorphin high.

But the slow, strong application of fingers deep into my muscle tissue brought on profound sensation and an almost arresting level of pain bound to come from an overwound, understretched, middle-aged body. You learn how little you do for yourself when someone has to do something like this for you.

Still, those few seconds at a time of real arduous strain on the system brought about tremendous rewards: Slightly more space for fluidity of movement, wonderfully relaxed muscles that were clearly on the road to more efficiency, and the first baby steps toward greater physical potential.

A little surprisingly, the next day I wasn't sore. I kept looking for some strain, but all I found was a more limber gait and a bit more breathing room. I

ran like a gazelle -- OK, like a gazelle freshly off rehab, but a breezy speed for me.

I wanted to go back and do more.

There were reasons to approach my second session the next week as a race driver would a yellow flag. When Mark assessed me before our 12-session process, he identified my feet as the body part most out of whack. Today we were going there.

I know my feet are a real mess. Running will do that to you. Putting three or so times your body weight's worth of pressure on them for six to 10 kilometres, five or six times a week, for nearly a quarter-century, isn't exactly a recipe for nirvana. I can't recall any specific problems, but I don't get any calls to be a foot model in sandal advertisements, and my children have more than once told me not to move my feet when we're watching TV because the clicking subsumes the onscreen dialogue.

Some may disagree, but I think we mostly like our feet rubbed. There are so many body functions tied up in the reflexes of the foot, and it's hard to beat the relief that comes with de-stressing the constant pounding.

But what Mark was proposing was much more radical and visceral. He'd found that my running gait had essentially reshaped my feet over the course of years. I tended to strike my mid-foot, not my heel, when I landed, and it meant I had slightly less space between the back of my ankle and my heel. It affected the way I stood, walked and ran.

Basically, Mark set off to rearrange my wonky dogs. It was my first experience with the real structural promise of Kinesis Myofascial Integration (KMI), in how deep pressure could realign. It got nasty at times. I felt alternately as if I'd just experienced second-degree burns and stumbled into a beaver trap. I think I ran out of sweat.

But if I can bring you past my pain for a moment -- I feel like I'm whining -- here's what also happened. When the pressure stopped, a second or two later I would have a gigantic electric-like reflex, as if my muscles were adjusting to a new connection. And when I stood, I felt like I had two giant new buckets for heels. I could lean back on them more, I could stand more appropriately over my pelvic bones. I felt an astonishing balance.

Even though it's preliminary, it worked. I could feel a change for the better.

On my next run, I spent a few minutes trying to strike my heel first. I can't accomplish the change overnight, but I'll see where it goes. I'm standing on a golf ball a couple of times a day -- usually with a drink in hand, I might add -- and it's opening my foot a bit more.

With a few more sessions, I think my good feet will start coming back.

Next up in the sessions is the back of the body, and interestingly, no direct work on the back itself.

III. Pain for gain: Work on feet helps balance: KMI's third session works at lengthening space between ankle and heel

Vancouver Sun Monday, July 12, 2004

Page: C1 / FRONT Section: Arts & Life

Byline: Kirk Lapointe Column: Kirk Lapointe Source: *Vancouver Sun*

Kirk LaPointe is undergoing a 12-session reworking of his body in a process called Kinesis Myofascial Integration (KMI) by Vancouver body worker Mark Finch (<http://www.thepathyoga.com/markfinch>). This is the third in the weekly series.

My second session of Mark Finch's deep-tissue body work focused on my feet, and his mighty effort to lengthen the space between my ankle and heel tested my capacity to withstand what he calls the "intense sensation" -- occasionally I still call it "pain," but I'm trying to acquire the lingo.

It will sound like one of those old jokes about pain to say the "intense sensation" felt especially great when it stopped, but it did, and in a truly good way. I felt I could move back on my heels. I was much better balanced and aligned, which is one of the purposes of the weekly sessions.

And, if I can venture into a bit of a new-age zone for a second, I felt a powerful new sense of inquiry emerging about my body -- how I could stand, walk, breathe, recline and run with greater efficiency, particularly in the days after the sessions. This is one of the strongest purposes of the body work.

Back to the old-age zone again: My feet may be what Mark detected as my biggest problem, but I've always felt my back was the weakest link in the chain. My posture has been ruined by too many hours over the typewriter and computer terminal, and my back seems to droop instead of drape.

I'm accustomed to mid-back stress and the unsightly stand-up slouch it produces. I've come to the conclusion I'm too far along in years to do much about it structurally, so I've just tried to get the occasional bout of relaxation, typically by having someone directly massage it.

Mark believes he can help me deal with this in a more significant way. Interestingly, his hands don't touch my back at all in our session. Instead, they work on everything around it: the ribcage, the breastbone, the shoulders, the armpits and the sacrum, among them. If he can reinvigorate the frame and get my head aligned with my ribs and my pelvis, my back should begin to naturally fall into place.

So he works on my sides, delving under my breastbone. Out of it I feel a slight opening of my ribs and chest, as if I were being granted more breathing space.

Then he goes into my armpits, which is not a sensation for the squeamish. With a force that I think could crush a car, he wheedles his way into my right armpit as I lie on my back and follow his instructions, attempting to move my arm toward the wall.

Sounds a little strange, but when I stand up, I notice my right shoulder blade is about an inch lower than my left one; it has been released into a less-stressed position. When he works on my left side, the two shoulders balance and I feel like I've had air taken out of overcompressed tires.

Learning to breathe properly amid the deep-tissue work remains my largest challenge, and I'd recommend to anyone thinking about going through the sessions of Kinesis Myofascial Integration (KMI) to know how to breathe fully. I tend to wince, withhold breath and work against the sensation instead of breathing deeply toward the locale of the body work. I have that fight-or-flight response, which only makes me sweat, clench my jaw and feel greater pain. The better I get at breathing, the more I can withstand and the more progress I make.

Lest anyone think these sessions are all about reaching a new plateau for this sensation, there is also a para-sympathetic phase to lengthen the spine and some dandy neck work to bring on the bliss.

You leave these sessions feeling like the contours of your container are different.

The next session, my fourth, is the last of the first phase of KMI, and it will deal with a lot of the large-sized connective tissue criss-crossing the body.

I'm hoping to get some clues about the next four sessions after that, which are supposedly the most intense of the dozen.

IV. Deep tissue work bruises, but relieves years of physical strain: Moving toward the pain is the only way to cope as the work becomes more intense

Vancouver Sun Monday, July 19, 2004

Page: C1 / FRONT Section: Arts & Life Byline: Kirk Lapointe Column: Kirk Lapointe Source: *Vancouver Sun*

Kirk LaPointe is undergoing a deep-tissue process called Kinesis Myofascial Integration (KMI) by Vancouver body worker Mark Finch (<http://www.thepathyoga.com/markfinch>). This is the fourth of the 12 sessions.

Session 3 of my 12-step Kinesis Myofascial Integration (KMI) makeover with body worker Mark Finch provided real insight into the delicate balance between physique and psyche. He worked on my back without actually working on my back, mainly by addressing the incongruence in my shoulders, ribs and chest. It's an interesting approach: Get the frame right, the picture gets clearer.

And as I stood and walked, I felt less stress and strain in my neck, which (don't laugh, even though you are entitled) made me think more clearly. By the end of the session, and for days after, I felt more upright and limber. My improved balance came with much less effort -- it wasn't hard work at all to stay in that better position -- which suggested a preliminary realignment was taking effect in some of my larger muscle groups.

How long it will last, I don't know. But I think it's the start of a process that leads me in the right direction. I don't view these 12 events as the be-all-and-end-all -- no one should view any program or process as anything like that -- but the start of a more conscious inquiry about how my body works.

A big part of the process involves expanding what Mark calls the "container" of pain and pleasure. This has meant bearing up as his jaws-of-life fingers dig deep enough into my tissue to make me wonder if he's extracting a kidney. I foggily recall he commented once about the size of my liver. The deep-tissue probing and prodding can reopen memories of injury and incapacity, so there is an enormous emotional quotient on the table as you're on the table.

I was expecting to be sore the next morning, but the aches haven't materialized. I've slept well, run well and experienced very little post-session discomfort. The recounting of it hurts more. As for the improved pleasure, well, let's just say it's a work in progress.

For the fourth session, Mark brought his fingers and elbows to bear on the large muscle groups that wrap the body across the abdomen and down the legs. Once again, I was driven to near-panic with the intensity, particularly in the hips,

around the ribs and into my armpits. Once again, I learned to move toward the pain, breathe deeply into it, and cultivate more tolerance. I didn't cry, but don't think I didn't think about it. I welcomed the end-of-session work on the neck to elongate the spine.

The fourth session is the end of the first of three major phases of the KMI process. Essentially it's a bit of a clean-up of some particular issues before the most substantial of the work takes place in sessions five through eight. The last four sessions put you back together.

I wanted Mark to deal with some physical effects from three decades of working over a keyboard. As much as I love the technological advancement of the mouse -- I just used it to go back four paragraphs to tinker with a phrase -- it's not an ally of an aligned body.

Mark relieved a lot of stress along my arm by working under my arm. Digging into the armpit may sound brutal, but it undid some of the tension that influenced my shoulder, arm and wrist. He instructed me to raise my ribcage, instead of pulling my shoulders back, to mitigate the end-of-day strain from writing and editing. Pulling the shoulders back aggravates the very tendons that you want to ease.

It's part of the puzzle that keeps me from aligning my head, ribs and pelvis, that keeps me from being balanced over the pelvis and from my feet. I'm finding more and more that the series of small adjustments over the years has left me in need of a series of large adjustments over the weeks with Mark. If I can get past the bruising, the bliss is worth it.

The next four sessions will be the most arduous ones: Work on the insides of the legs, the stomach, and the neck, among other things. With that should come some real emotion, too.

V. As intense sessions start, body opens up: Still standing -- and standing straighter -- after the first of the truly tough sessions

Vancouver Sun Monday, July 26, 2004

Page: C1 / FRONT Section: Arts & Life Byline: Kirk Lapointe Column: Kirk Lapointe Source: *Vancouver Sun*

Kirk LaPointe is undergoing a 12-session deep-tissue process known as Kinesis Myofascial Integration (KMI) by Vancouver body worker Mark Finch

(<http://www.thepathyoga.com/markfinch>). This is the fifth in his series of weekly reports.

Now, I am told, the truly tough stuff happens. Or, as body worker Mark Finch puts it, the "quality" of the sensation now becomes most intense.

Forget the fact I translate "quality" and "sensation" into "quantity" and "pain."

Now, I am told, the real impact of Kinesis Myofascial Integration (KMI) takes hold. Out of it should come a greater tolerance for pain and a greater capacity for pleasure. Out of it should come a readier balance, an easier posture, and a stronger sense of inquiry about my body's alignment. Out of it may even come a purging of emotions trapped by old ailments and incapacities.

The first four sessions essentially were there to knead the dough, the second four are here to open me up, the last four will reassemble me.

Trouble is, I found the first four arduous enough. Can it possibly get any more challenging physically?

Yes, it can, and yes, it does.

The focus of the fifth session starts on the insides of the legs. In the past, Mark has run his elbow down the outside of my legs on the iliotibial bands. That was a jaw-clencher.

But it doesn't compare to the probing into my calves and inner thighs; the result is an excruciating new experience. No matter how much muscle there seems to be, he digs well into it. No matter how little muscle there seems to be, he digs well beyond it.

Any second now, I think he'll extract bone marrow.

OK, you wonder, as I have wondered: When is this going to go from great aching to great feeling? The answer is the same I've given before: When it stops.

Once he's worked on one leg, Mark asks me to stand. The first news is that I can. The best news is that, only seconds after I've almost pleaded with him to stop, dear God, stop, I can feel a new series of electrical connections in the leg, a pathway that hadn't been there.

He works deep into the hips, then into the pelvis. Each time, a new appearance of connection, a newly established corridor.

He finds the link between my leg and the pelvis just below my buttock and, no fooling, it feels like he actually lengthens my leg when he digs in and pries.

Fact is, he's opening up all sorts of new spaces for my pelvis, hips and legs to align. It may only amount to a few millimetres, but it feels massive, as if the cap came off a shaken bottle of soda.

You store a lot of stress in a lot of places, some of it the result of earlier pain or injury or even an associated memory of sadness, and I'm finding that the intense experience of KMI helps purge it. Although it hasn't hit me yet, others attest to an emotional ingredient of the sessions that can be transcendent.

Again and again, he manipulates, and brings about a new space.

By the end of the session, I have enough natural analgesics coursing through my system that I won't need a workout for a couple of days -- not that I'd dare, anyway, what with the searing of the skin and the certainty of imminent swelling.

To end each session to date, Mark has worked on spinal alignment and lengthening, first with some slow work along the spine, then with some even slower work along the neck.

Technically it's helpful in the long-term to the eventual aim of KMI, but personally it's helpful in the short-term. It's as if I've been out on a long run. The sensation and exhaustion is all over, but I can't recall feeling this good.

Round one of the four most significant rounds of KMI are done, and I am still standing -- and standing better.

VI. Stomach work pushes pain tolerance to the limit: Session takes the body's physical -- and emotional -- centre

Vancouver Sun Monday, August 9, 2004

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Kirk LaPointe is undergoing a 12-session deep-tissue process called Kinesis Myofascial Integration (KMI) by Vancouver body worker Mark Finch (<http://www.thepathyoga.com/markfinch>). This is the sixth in his weekly series.

I have complained week after week of the sheer sensation of Mark Finch's ballpeen-hammer fingers in my weak, puffy, aging flesh.

But, truth be told, I had been getting a grip on the pain by breathing much more deeply, using my mind to move toward the intense locale, and effectively capping the stress and strain before it sprawled out of control. I found that the more you ran from the sharp sensation, the greater it chased you, and I wanted to get out of the woods alive.

While I don't want to focus unduly on the pain, accommodating it is an important part of the Kinesis Myofascial Integration (KMI) process. If you can't deal with it, it deals with you. And if it occupies too much of your focus, you can't focus on the more significant changes KMI provides.

So I thought I was out the other end of my struggle.

The after-effect of my sessions was terrific. I have run more fluidly (if, sadly, not more quickly), walked more easily and stood more sturdily. My posture isn't ideal, but I'm heading in the right direction.

It bears repeating, but the principal benefit of KMI is how it opens a new line of inquiry about your body. If you spend a little more time thinking about better alignment, and a little more time finding that better place, you'll be surprised how you start to get there.

But session six caught me by surprise. Literally, it went to my core -- my midsection -- and the severity of the sensation eclipsed anything I'd experienced under Mark.

There are good reasons for this. The midsection guides so much of the body's physical conduct and houses so much of its emotional state. When it's worked over, it's a real challenge to the status quo.

At first, all seemed bearable. Mark's fingers and elbows moved into the muscles of my pelvis and hips, and while it was no picnic, I was feeling that the worst was pretty well over. It felt like more space was there.

But then he moved to the stomach. Now, I don't know about you, but aside from an enjoyable love-pat on the tummy, this is a part of the body largely left alone.

I recall as a boy trying a pro-wrestling submission move that involved clutching as hard and deep as possible the skin of someone's belly.

It looked paralyzing on television when some masked villain unfurled it, but my friends and I merely found it hurt like hell. And it left a fair-sized mark and a large-sized resentment.

So, here I am a few decades later, and Mark is essentially doing the same thing to me, only this time with two fearsome hands and in three fearsome different places: low (but thankfully not that low), middle and high.

He started by pressing fingers just inside the ribcage and driving them toward the centre of my stomach in an attempt to separate the muscle tissue (and whatever covers it) atop my belly.

Each time he did this -- and he did it well, and he did it quickly -- it was all I could do to hold it together. Hyperventilating, not breathing. Losing all train of thought, not focusing any of the mind. Hanging in, not hanging out. Gasping.

For the first time, I had to ask him to stop so I could regroup. For the first time, I experienced that emotional element of KMI others have told me about. It came a bit in the form of resentment for Mark's invasive work, but it mainly came in the form of memories of other stomach ailments and injuries over the years.

Resentment is common in KMI, Mark says, because the deep-tissue work reopens a lot of stored memory. But it also is a form of a purge. Others attest to the way it permits you to move on from those memories.

I was back on speaking terms with Mark in a few seconds, and he brought me back into a much more peaceful state with the soothing work on my neck to elongate the spine. But I assumed again that the worst was over.

The next session is to be a bit of a breather, I am assured. Which doesn't mean the one after that will be easy.

VII. Reliving trauma in the seventh session

Vancouver Sun Monday, August 16, 2004

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Kirk LaPointe is undergoing a 12-session deep-tissue process called Kinesis Myofascial Integration (KMI) by Vancouver body worker Mark Finch (<http://www.thepathyoga.com/markfinch>).

This is the seventh in his weekly series.

I am halfway into the 12-session deep-tissue process known as Kinesis Myofascial Integration (KMI), and there are a few things to commemorate.

1. I am still coming back for more.
2. I am still on speaking terms with Mark Finch, the body worker who is working over my body one vulnerable piece at a time.
3. I am still not crying.
4. I am still finding subtle differences in the way I'm standing, walking and running.
5. I am still finding it hard to withstand the more sensational sensation, commonly known as pain, but I am learning to breathe into it and cap the onslaught.

Mark promised the seventh session would be a breather, but it wasn't a true break. Instead, I experienced the first real reliving of trauma.

KMI is complex to explain -- it's certainly not just a deep-body rubdown -- but one of its principles is that the body stores memory in its tissues. Thus, if you reach deep into the tissue and reprise the sensation of injury or incapacity, you also tap into an emotional vein that reawakens the earlier incident.

For me, the revival came in the strangest of places: my calf muscles.

I had a serious tear a half-dozen years ago playing tennis -- on a simple approach to a volley, I dropped to the court like I'd been shot, and my playing-partner son must have surmised I'd had the big one. It put me on crutches for the first time in my life.

I'd also been a bit of a guy as a runner, meaning I hardly ever stretched before or after I hit the road and I ran too many extra days in worn-down shoes, so I was routinely sidelined or hobbled by strained and slightly torn calves.

Micro-tears have left scar tissue galore.

So, when Mark's lobster-pincer fingers dug in, the memories of my athletic injuries came pouring back. I remembered the tennis court moment and I was reminded of some of the times I limped through my running routine, partly because I hadn't experienced that pain since then.

Others who have undergone KMI speak of this phenomenon as a routine part of the process. They speak of how KMI purges this emotion and helps them find a new way to accommodate it. My own injuries were minor by comparison, so the emotional release was minor -- it just felt eerily in the room with me for those moments, then went on its way. But now I can understand the deeper connection to more substantial pain.

Mark builds each session as one would an ideal workout: he builds a gradual intensification to the peak of exertion, then he introduces a smart cool-down to leave you relaxed. It's not that you forget the most intense elements -- you bear the bruises for some days to come, in fact -- but the mixture of sensation draws on the brain differently.

Most sessions this bringing-back-to-earth phase has involved soothing, spine-elongating work on the neck, where there are so many receptors. This time around, his neck work was more strenuous, even a little bruising, but it brought about an enormous serenity and de-stressing. If you could bottle that feeling, you'd be giving Bill Gates a run for his title.

My next session promises to be the most unorthodox. Mark has been working up the body. Next time he'll don some rubber gloves and get inside my mouth to work on my jaw, which houses substantial stress and adapts over time in ways that he will try to undo.

VII. Mouth alignment a bizarre sensation: Jaw work -- the final punctuation in a process of moving up the body

Vancouver Sun Monday, August 23, 2004

Page: C1 / FRONT Section: Arts & Life Byline: Kirk Lapointe Column: Kirk Lapointe Source: *Vancouver Sun*

Kirk LaPointe is undergoing a 12-session deep-tissue process known as Kinesis Myofascial Integration (KMI) by Vancouver body worker Mark Finch (<http://www.thepathyoga.com/markfinch>). This is the eighth in a series of reports.

Think about this: When was the last time someone stuck his fingers into your mouth and rearranged your jawline? Probably not in the last little while, right? It's not like a weekend ritual, or something you do when you balance your chequebook, or even every time you bring the car in for an oil change.

No, that finger-into-the-mouth stuff is just a little unusual. And when I started the process of deep-tissue work under Mark Finch a couple of months ago, I knew that this was going to be the most memorable of all the sessions.

It was also some sort of final punctuation to a process that had largely worked its way up the body. Others I know who have undergone Kinesis Myofascial Integration (KMI) speak of a pressure building on their jaws and necks as the procedure progresses, partly in comparison to the relaxation and new openness of the rest of the body.

What I didn't bank on was how significant the inside-the-mouth work would be. I thought it would be weird and novel, but not particularly transformational.

In previous sessions, Mark dug his fingers, strafed his forearms or leaned his elbows into nearly every external pressure point. The effect over-all has been great. I'm acquiring a better sense of my body's position and alignment, and it's making me inquire more about what's a better way to sit, stand, walk and run.

But no matter how intense I found the penetration, no matter how searing was the sensation, no matter that I hadn't felt that kind of force in that place before, there was a certain familiarity about the contact. We've been touched, brushed, bumped, bruised and even hit almost everywhere.

Getting inside the mouth is a different thing. Brushing and flossing are in our control and we won't hurt ourselves. Apart from a dentist's drilling or a hygienist's scrubbing, there isn't much invasive activity. So when Mark donned the latex glove and reached in to probe, it was an entirely new experience.

The fascinating thing about it is that the pain isn't all that severe and that even a short session of pressure can work wonders.

For more years than I can recall, I've had a common, minor click on the right side of my jaw when I chew -- nothing audible, but it's there. Mark made it disappear.

It's probably an adjustment of a millimetre, if that. But it felt like an enormous change. Which is part of the point of KMI: Just a little extra space, just a little readjustment of your tendencies, can make a massive difference.

Now, I don't want to avoid a little whining here: The pressure itself inside the mouth is sharp. The gums aren't built for someone to lean into them terribly long. But Mark's process is to build a conversation over the course of the sessions, to develop some instincts about what's enough and what's too much for you to handle.

Of course, when his fingers are in your mouth, there is no conversation. You have to use other body language to communicate. But my apprehension was unfounded. I didn't bleed or develop a headache or hurt. I just felt something slide back into place.

The click hasn't come back, although Mark says it likely will eventually. Next time, I won't hesitate. Which is another effect of KMI: Your body learns to relax, accommodate sensation, and use it to your advantage.

Now comes the phase of building me back. In the final four sessions, Mark will tweak what he's wreaked, fortify some of the weaker areas, and most substantively give me some ideas about how to use my new information to develop a better sense of self.

IX. Some stand-up routines can do with a massage: Body realignment gets a fine-tuning

Vancouver Sun Monday, August 30, 2004

Page: C1 / FRONT Section: Arts & Life Byline: Kirk Lapointe Column: Kirk Lapointe Source: *Vancouver Sun*

Kirk LaPointe is undergoing a 12-session deep-tissue process called Kinesis Myofascial Integration (KMI) by Vancouver body worker Mark Finch (<http://www.thepathyoga.com/markfinch>). This is the ninth in a series.

The most gruelling of the sessions to realign my body have come and gone. The last four appointments with Mark Finch aim to fine-tune the deep-probing work of his hands, forearms and elbows into my tissue.

But this won't be easy street. During the first eight encounters Mark found deep-seated issues, so he'll use the final third of the process to return to the biggest problem zones.

Step one has to do with my gait. Like a lot of people, I wear out one heel on my shoe faster than the other. When I run, I often feel one leg is longer than the other one. Of course, it's a perception more than a truth -- one leg isn't longer than the other by more than a couple of millimetres -- but the tendency to lean to one side when standing has created a significant imbalance. The more I lean, the more my legs and hips adjust, the more strain ensues, the more I need realignment.

To deal with this, Mark heads to the hip, where he applies his elbow to the soft tissue near the socket and opens up some space on my right side.

It's not a pleasant moment. I've learned to expect and indulge unpleasant moments at these sessions. I had a conventional massage recently and didn't enjoy it as much because it was so -- how do I put this? -- serene. Felt the way a BC Lion might feel playing flag football.

After years of imbalance, I've asked for everything Mark can throw at me. He calls the sessions I'm undergoing "aggressive," which allows me to capture the most knowledge and impact.

I expected big things from Kinesis Myofascial Integration (KMI). After all, our culture suggests there's a panacea for every problem. Truth be told, there's no liposuction equivalent in the field of structural integration. KMI, like its relatives in the family of deep-tissue techniques, can bring about extraordinary change in the body. But its lasting impact is greater self-awareness and self-inquiry.

When Mark is done reworking the tissue, he starts instructing me on finding the opportunity in the new space he's opened. His expectations aren't big. He knows that years of unconscious adaptation leaves a lot of maladjustment -- as he puts it, "practice makes permanent."

What he counsels is not a strenuous attempt to sit up, stand taller, walk straighter or breathe deeper. It's gentle guidance to take a few seconds from time to time to think about your sitting position, your posture, your gait or your breathing. In that way, you're able to recognize what's off base but not feel you've got to correct it on the spot.

After this session on the hips, I noticed a new balance in the way I stood. I adopted a slight difference in my stride. And, perhaps, my next pair of shoes will wear down equally.

X. Reworking of body tissue, muscles creates self-awareness: KMI shows how breathing can be used to deal with physical stress

Kirk LaPointe is undergoing a 12-session deep-tissue therapy known as Kinesis Myofascial Integration (KMI) under Vancouver body worker Mark Finch (<http://www.thepathyoga.com/markfinch>). This is the tenth part in a series.

It has a jokey, self-evident, duh-no-kidding quality to it, but the saying is true: Everything begins and ends with breathing.

As Mark Finch has been refurbishing my various body parts with his crush-a-Volkswagen hands these last few weeks, I'm finding the biggest breakthrough of his Kinesis Myofascial Integration (KMI) sessions to date has been what he has taught me about myself. I'm standing a bit better, sitting a lot better, running and walking a lot easier. But the most significant change has to do with the air I'm taking in and letting out.

No joking, you can be taught more about how to breathe. And to stay serious for a moment: There is no agreed-upon way to breathe -- full, slow, with a stronger inhale, or a stronger exhale, through the nose, with the mouth, or whatever. It's an individual trait, everyone does it differently, and there is no one right way. But there are less ideal ways, and I would imagine I'm part of a large cohort with a lot to learn.

My tenth session with Mark, the affable and calming New Zealander, continued to delve and probe and revamp. But the effort took place more specifically on and around the ribs to open some space and offer a new opportunity to fill the lungs differently.

Throughout these sessions, particularly when the intensity of his fingers or forearms or elbows moves up the register into red-line territory, Mark will tell me to breathe into the area he's reworking, even if he's digging into my shoulders or pelvis. As far away from the lungs as that may seem, the exercise coaxes a new thinking about the range of breathing you can experience.

The other major benefit is to help cap the pain when the deep-tissue work is particularly stark. It's undoubtedly a physical result, but it's also a psychological technique: The more you focus on breathing (and not holding your breath when the stress of pain hits you), the less you seem to focus on the sensation itself.

A number of people have e-mailed and called to ask if the KMI sessions are simply about enduring pain and building a better tolerance for it. While there's no question they were a shock to the system at first, as they progress there's hardly ever anything approaching the initial level of hardship.

Much of that has to do with breathing and the way it can be used to deal with physical stress.

I'm finding that, as I learn to breathe better -- in my case, a little more broadly into the chest and a little more consciously -- I'm opening a new container to deal with the pain and also one to accept the pleasure of reworked muscles, tendons, ligaments and tissue.

I'm far from a finished product. I still tense up with some of the deeper sensation and don't readily exhale.

The depth of my breathing tends to stop at my belly. But I'm learning to think about breathing from the inside -- how the lungs push out all of the ribs

and broaden the abdomen -- and ultimately that is where the magic of these sessions can emerge.

XI. Masseur's healing hands can help a modern man avoid the mouse trap

Vancouver Sun Monday, September 13, 2004

Page: C5 Section: Arts & Life Byline: Kirk Lapointe Column: Kirk Lapointe Source: *Vancouver Sun*

Kirk LaPointe is undergoing a 12-session deep-tissue process known as Kinesis Myofascial Integration (KMI) by Vancouver body worker Mark Finch (<http://www.thepathyoga.com/markfinch>). This is the eleventh in his series.

The white-collar boom of the last generation, and the arrival of the seemingly friendly keyboard and mouse, have ruined many necks, shoulders, arms and wrists.

While Mark Finch has opened all kinds of space all over my body these last few weeks, the most nagging area remains my arms -- in particular, my right arm, the one that uses the mouse a few hundred times a day.

One of the great aspects of Kinesis Myofascial Integration (KMI) is learning more about the connectivity of the body's parts, rather like the old song about the ankle bone being connected to the leg bone, and so on. Mark's approach is that, without our arms, we are essentially like fish. The arms gather our information and take in our stresses, and while they can become muscular and toned, they also need great relief because they are connected to our many parts of the body.

The computer has brought about entirely new stresses on the arms that we're only now understanding. Our tendency to reach for the mouse puts enormous stress on the right side (or left, depending on which hand you use). To get at this, Mark worked first on my ribs, then shoulders, then under the arms, along them, and down the forearms to the wrists and hands.

Where a lot of conventional massage aims to relax the areas and provides a few minutes of soothing comfort, Mark's work probes much more deeply and tries to reopen the cramped space and repetitively strained system.

Like a lot of KMI, it brings about a lot of new sensation. You don't realize how sensitive the arms are until their muscles have been challenged by someone's fingers. But the overall effect is superb. It was as if a logjam were broken around my wrist and up the arm.

Mark accompanies his treatment with several suggestions to reduce the strain of keyboard work. The simplest one is to take a break regularly. The next simplest is to pull your hand away from the mouse when you don't need it there. The next is to let the arm earn the support of the rib cage when you're using the mouse -- we tend to reach too much and that creates problems.

Instead of pulling your shoulders back to combat stress -- which will only further strain the inflamed tendons -- he advises lifting the ribs to support the shoulders better. And, of course, flex and hold your wrist back and forward to break the rigid form that the keyboard and mouse command.

Since that session, I'm more aware of my sitting position and writing posture. I've learned a lot more about the physical way I write and use the computer. And I've learned when enough is enough, as it is right now.

XII. Gain comes after the pain: Therapy reverses years of neglect and creates better posture

Vancouver Sun Monday, September 20, 2004

Page: C2 Section: Arts & Life Byline: Kirk Lapointe Column: Kirk Lapointe Source: *Vancouver Sun*

Kirk LaPointe is undergoing a 12-session deep-tissue process known as Kinesis Myofascial Integration (KMI) by Vancouver body worker Mark Finch (<http://www.thepathyoga.com/markfinch>). This is the 12th in his series.

In 11 sessions to date, Mark Finch has probed and reworked my muscle and fibre. He's created and instilled a new awareness of the alignment of my head, ribs and pelvis. He's taken me into spasms of pain and blissful pleasure.

But my back is still a mess. I've got chronic mid-back tension from working over a keyboard for nearly three decades. It's not pain so much as it is stress.

In our last session of Kinesis Myofascial Integration (KMI), his job is to break some of this down, generate more space for me to breathe and stand, and bring about the first step of some recovery.

I've written repeatedly about Mark's vise-like grip and intense fingers, hands, forearms and elbows. By now, he's feeling cast as some sort of torture-for-a-fee practitioner, because almost everyone's first question to me concerns the pain of the sessions.

Sometimes, though, the pain has to be there. The deep-seated, tightly-wound tissue has to be untied and rerouted. As is the case with my mid-back.

The application of his hands practically knocks my breath out. But it's like an asthmatic might feel with a blast from the inhaler: for all the shock to the system, it opens up a huge new pathway.

Inch by inch, he pushes into the tissue and finds a crevice here and there that can be widened. The straitjacket feels escapable. And I can actually sense neuro-connections being revived, as if new electrical wiring had been activated.

The years of reinforcing my physical tendencies have wrought an overwrought back, and Mark's effort is helping me take one step away from the seemingly permanent state to create a new opportunity.

In the end, that's what KMI is all about. Yes, it's every bit as arduous as a hard run uphill. And certainly, it's not for everyone; if your pain threshold is slight, you're not going to suddenly buck up and bear it.

But its bounty is a new familiarity with the body's capabilities and a great insight into how it can function more efficiently. By the time Mark had worked over my mid-back, I felt a different balance in my standing and sitting position.

My posture isn't necessarily ready for the catwalk. Nor am I a threat for gold in the 2010 Games.

But I think I can work with fewer physical stresses, rest and walk and run with greater alignment, and get a lot more out of the body without wearing and tearing it. In short, I feel integrated.

Next week, I'll look back and review the overall process.

XIII. Overcome the pain, and there's much to be gained

Vancouver Sun Monday, October 11, 2004 Page: C5 Section: Arts & Life Byline: Kirk Lapointe
Column: Kirk Lapointe Source: *Vancouver Sun*

Managing Editor Kirk LaPointe participated in a 12-session deep-tissue process known as Kinesis Myofascial Integration (KMI), designed to rework the body's major muscle groups and help realign it to work most efficiently. Vancouver body worker Mark Finch (www.thepathyoga.com/markfinch) conducted the weekly sessions. In this final instalment, both men share their perspectives.

My running had gone stale. My posture was a mid-life mess. My back felt like it was smuggling cargo somewhere.

I am aware that much of this can be ascribed to age. But even so, I needed a serious tune-up.

In my two decades of running a few times a week, I'd read many times about the benefits of deep-tissue work on the system, pioneered by Ida Rolf. (Thus the early technique was known as rolfing.) Committed and recreational athletes alike had testified to profound and subtle changes for the good.

I also knew there was a physical price to pay for those years of gradual slippage, in that the realignment was going to involve pain. I felt old enough to need it, young enough to bear it.

Mark Finch conducts hour-long sessions in Kinesis Myofascial Integration (KMI), one of a few such deep-tissue techniques, in his Vancouver clinic for \$120 an hour. He had spent years watching athletes deal with particular symptoms and giving his clients temporary relief. But he wanted to more effectively treat the body overall and provide longer-lasting effects, so he was drawn to learn KMI under some of the world's leading practitioners.

While the sessions I had aren't for everyone, Mark and his fellow KMI workers customize their approach to the individual. He refers to the process as a conversation. The more trust we built, the more he could push me. The more I was pushed, the more I could withstand.

Most remarkable was the way the sessions ended each week. My body's natural painkillers, the endorphins, would be coursing through the system (as they do about four or five kilometres into a run). Mark would capitalize on them by working the neck or the back to absorb and apply them. So, even though you can bear great pain in the session, you tend to leave in a state of bliss.

My advice is this:

1. You've got to realize you're not there for a massage; you're there for body work.
2. You've got to be well-rested for KMI. It's no different than working out.
3. You've got to be ready to learn. KMI involves a lot of teaching, and if you're attentive, you can equip yourself to be healthier for life.
4. You've got to be accepting of pain. All those years of misuse have shifted and adapted the body, and even slight readjustment is going to be stressful.

5. You've got to understand how to breathe to cap the pain. Your first response to stress is the fight-or-flight reflex, and that will only make things worse.

6. You've got to be prepared for the consequences of how body stores memory. Be ready to relive injury, incidents and stressful events of yesteryear when the fingers, forearms or elbows connect with the vital tissue.

7. You've got to be ready to feel new connections in the body. All that deep-tissue work will literally switch on new electricity in the system.

8. You've got to practice between sessions what you've learned about the body's alignment -- how to stand or walk or sit or breathe better -- in order to make the most serious progress by the end of the process.

9. You've got to accept surprises along the way, particularly the emotions that such physical work can elicit.

10. You've got to recognize your results will be substantial, but they won't be any kind of reversal. KMI is not a cure-all, but its wondrous effect is how it sets you up to take the right path. I would do it again.

Illustration Type: Colour Photo Illustration: Color Photo: Ward Perrin, *Vancouver Sun* / Vancouver body worker Mark Finch unwinds 'strain patterns' in The *Vancouver Sun's* Kirk LaPointe.