RSI is supposed to be a ‘mechanical problem’ of overuse. But Kathryn Fletcher’s own healing crisis suggests there’s more to it than just that.

Repetitive strain injury (RSI) is thought to be a mechanical problem brought on by repeated overuse or doing the same tasks over and over again. Tennis elbow and writer’s cramp are two well-known manifestations.

The muscles, tendons and nerves and other soft tissues can all become inflamed, and almost any delicate movement becomes impossible. Symptoms can ease over time, but medicine’s standard response is an NSAID (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug) to reduce swelling.

Pretty much the same thing happened to Kathryn Fletcher when she suddenly developed RSI so badly that she was forced to give up her work as a chiropodist working for the National Health Service (NHS). Although she refused to take any drugs for the pain, it did eventually subside into a constant dull ache that she had grown to live with for 20 years.

Then, almost overnight, she was struck down with an illness that left her virtually debilitated and unable to even get out of bed. However, this new crisis was the beginning of the end of her RSI, and she believes her story throws a new light on the disease and offers a different healing therapy for fellow sufferers.

Kathryn is now 61 and her health crisis happened just over two years ago. Today her RSI is a dim memory, and she has finally been able to begin painting and redecorating her home in Bolton, Lancs. She was toying with the idea of buying her first PC, but a bad case of technophobia rather than any RSI made her change her mind. Kathryn’s story begins in the late 1980s when she suddenly developed RSI while working as a full-time chiropodist for the NHS. She had noticed aches and twinges for nearly five years before the full-blown RSI happened, but it was something she ignored as she was always able to carry on with her work.

Then, over a few weeks, her right hand became so bad that she was unable to do anything with it. Soon after, her left hand started to react in the same way. “I just couldn’t use them, which meant I had to give up my work,” she said.

Everything suddenly became an uphill battle. Not only was she without money,
but she couldn’t cook properly or carry out basic household chores. Even reading a book became difficult. “I used to have a little negotiation with myself: I could either lift the book or turn the page, but I couldn’t do both.”

Nobody was very sympathetic. At the time RSI—or tenosynovitis and epicondylitis in Kathryn’s case—was not recognized. She recalls that in the middle of a court case a High Court judge had pronounced that RSI doesn’t exist, which was probably music to the ears of major employers who feared a raft of damages suits from incapacitated employees.

Kathryn assumed that her RSI was the result of the repetitive work she did as a chiropodist and thought nothing more about it.

Her doctor was unable to throw any light on her problem other than to prescribe painkillers. “I didn’t want to start taking drugs and, by then, the RSI had settled down to a nagging discomfort,” she recalls.

And so she lived with the discomfort for 20 years until 2010, when she suddenly became very ill around the Christmas period. Her energy levels were so low that she was almost unable to move. “I have a pet pony, but I was so bad that I couldn’t get out to feed it,” she recalled. She also suffered from severe stomach cramps and began to suspect that she had Candida, the digestive problem caused by fungal overgrowth.

She decided to see a naturopath as she’d read several books about that form of alternative medicine. “I didn’t know who to try and so I phoned Directory Enquiries and asked for a naturopath living near my home,” she said.

The closest one to her Bolton home was Janet Wrathall, whose Millennium Medicine Naturopathic Clinic was a 45-minute drive away in Garstang (read Janet’s own healing story, page 71). “I remember she had a late cancellation and could see me almost straightaway, so I decided to go even though I felt dreadful.”

The two women got on instantly, mainly because they shared a love of animals. Kathryn completed a full questionnaire, then Janet carried out a battery of tests, which covered her lifestyle and medical and emotional history, including an iridology examination of the eyes, and tongue, nail and skin tests. “I was pretty sure at this point that Kathryn’s health crisis was caused by metal toxicity,” Janet said, taking up the story.

Her suspicions were confirmed when she carried out a full body scan using a Nutri-Energetics Systems (NES) device that, according to its inventors, harnesses energy medicine with alternative healing modalities like homeopathy and acupuncture.

The scan revealed metal deposits in Kathryn’s vital organs, but how did they get there? After a series of further questions, Kathryn remembered that just a few weeks before, she had had three of her amalgam fillings removed. She still had a mouth full of amalgam fillings when she first met Janet.

Despite their anodyme name, the fillings are made up of mercury, one of the most toxic metals known to man. In the wrong hands, amalgam removal can release large amounts of mercury into the system, which is what happened to Kathryn, and it was this that sparked her complete immune system meltdown. The Candida was just one symptom of a compromised immune system.

Janet prescribed herbal preparations to help cleanse Kathryn’s bowels, kidneys, liver and lymphatic system, and she also took plant-based antifungal agents for the Candida and herbal tinctures to fight parasites that might be related to the infection. One of the supplements was Zeolite, a popular cleanser of toxins (available online at a number of sites and also under other names like Zeotrex and ZeoForce).

“Janet advised me on nutrition and lifestyle, and made sure that I understood how these things would help me. I’m a vegan, so Janet found me lots of really interesting recipes to incorporate all the things I needed to eat and to replace those that I should avoid,” she said. All wheat, dairy and sugar became dietary no-nos.

Within the first week of being on the regime, Kathryn started to feel better “and by four weeks, I felt a whole lot better,” she said. Janet also recommended a different dentist, one who was experienced in dental amalgam removal, and she was able to have all her remaining fillings removed safely.

Healing the mind too

But the whole experience with Janet opened up other healing possibilities too. Kathryn started reading the works of Louise Hay and others who overcame their own trauma through forgiveness.

Although Kathryn is reticent to talk about early traumas in her life, she started her own programme of forgiveness, which she carried out while taking Janet’s herbs and cleaning up her life.

Whether it was the forgiveness or the herbal cleanse Kathryn can’t be sure, but one thing happened that she never expected—her RSI started to go away. “I had suppressed a lot of things in my life and pushed them down into my body. Looking back on it now, I also really didn’t enjoy being a chiropodist at the NHS. It had started to be all about numbers and targets, and I didn’t want to be there.” The RSI certainly made sure of that.

Today she still suffers the odd bit of pain in her right hand, but she can do all the things that once she couldn’t, such as picking up things and carrying out delicate work with her fingers.

She’s still taking the herbs and every three months or so she can be found at Janet’s clinic for her regular check-up. Kathryn has an NES scan each time and it never fails to impress her. “It really seems like it’s reading out my life to me,” she said.

Bryan Hubbard
Triumph after trauma

Trauma seemed to be the common thread that drew Kathryn and Janet Wrathall together. Trauma brought Kathryn to Janet’s clinic, and trauma started Janet’s career as a healer.

Janet had been working as a secondary school teacher when, at the age of 33, she developed chronic fatigue, or ME (myalgic encephalopathy). Just a year into her marriage, she also learned she had fertility problems and, two years after that, breast cancer.

If that wasn’t enough to deal with, her father suffered a stroke and died shortly thereafter, and the week after the funeral her husband left her. Eventually they divorced, but Janet had no money or resources to fall back on.

Looking back she says: “I learnt a very important life lesson: the people who bring you the most heartache are also there to teach you the most profound lessons. I had a decision to make, and that changed my life completely; it was as if I had to start my life again. “I was grieving for my father, I was grieving for the loss of my husband, I was grieving for the children I couldn’t have, and I was grieving for the health that was slipping away from me.”

She started to get back on her feet financially by teaching students at home and this was supplemented by promoting health products.

Dealing with her breast cancer, she underwent surgery, but refused both hormonal treatment and chemotherapy. She wanted to understand how she had developed the cancer and to explore better ways to first stabilize and then eventually overcome the disease.

The best way, she thought, was to become a qualified natural health practitioner, and this ambition took her to the College of Naturopathic Medicine, where she studied naturopathy. She also discovered from her studies that she was suffering from hypothyroidism, which explained the melancholy and depression she had experienced since she was small.

Having set up a very successful naturopathic practice—the Millennium Medicine Naturopathic Health Consultancy—Janet is hoping that her dream of setting up a naturopathic cottage hospital will one day come true.

All she needs, she says, is a kind soul who will donate a stately home they no longer want. Compared with all that she has so far overcome and achieved, that one sounds like a doddle.