

'My career is in MY HANDS'

KIRI LOWE (39) OF AUCKLAND KNOWS HOW TO RUB CELEBRITIES UP THE RIGHT WAY!



Serious sports injuries had a big influence on my early sporting life. While I was very active in my youth, I was forced from any potential sporting career because of my injuries. However, it did lead me to my current profession as a soft tissue therapist, in which I have been lucky enough to have my hands on a number of well-known New Zealand athletes and celebrities.

As a kid, I was heavily involved in basketball and netball. But it was a time before we knew about the importance of core strength and stability. I have hypermobile joints and I ruptured ligaments in both my ankles. I also suffered from shin splints and the start of a dowager's hump, due to poor head posture. I used to wake up and not be able to move my neck properly.

I would frequently visit the physiotherapist for my injuries, and it was from there my interest in massage and natural health developed. I trained in 1997 at the New Zealand College of Massage in Auckland and started working full-time two years later, taking some time off to work part-time in between having my daughter (7) and four-year-old son.

Soft tissue therapy involves many different techniques; postural assessment, stretching and strengthening and can include what people might know as Swedish massage, flowing strokes with oil. I also do a myofascial release. This involves working with the connective tissue or fascia (the tissue your tendons and ligaments are made of), for a deeper release and increased mobility.

PHOTOS: ROB TRATHERN • HAIR AND MAKE-UP: KATE SMITH

Over the years, I've treated some of our top athletes. I worked with the New Zealand Sports Academy (now High Performance Sport New Zealand) for 10 years. While I can't disclose specific details, I can say I worked with the All Blacks for the first time in 2004 and during the Rugby World Cup in 2011. My role is to assist the medical team with sports massage when they are in Auckland.

I've also worked with the Sydney Roosters, the Auckland Blues and Olympians, such as triathlete Debbie Tanner. I've also been the therapist for a number of world-class performers, including the core cast of the TV show *Spartacus*.

When Cirque du Soleil was here last year for their *Totem* show, I treated the acrobats and dancers, which was a highlight. It was amazing to go behind the scenes of what they do and how they can push their bodies to the limit – they are so strong!

How does it feel to have my hands on celebrity skin? Well, it's always fun to do something a bit different – that's what helps make my job interesting.

I believe the secret of being a good massage therapist is only going as deep as someone is comfortable with. You know the difference between a 'good sore' that's working out the tension and using too much pressure.

There are so many benefits to massage, from decreased anxiety and depression, to enhanced sleep and increased circulation.

Clients visit me for all sorts of reasons, including Occupational

Overuse Syndrome (OOS) and postural issues. Many back, neck and shoulder issues are due to computers and the sedentary lifestyle a lot of us lead.

What I love most about this role is educating people and helping to relieve their pain. It's all about making people feel better and aiding them to help themselves through improved posture and better ergonomics.

As for me, I still lead an active lifestyle and try to get walking every day with the kids on the way to school.

I also need a massage every three to four weeks – I can't do without it!" ■

As told to Laura Weaser

Quick fire:

Three tips for better posture? *Good core strength, correct head positioning and an ergonomic set-up in your workplace.*

If I wasn't a massage therapist, I would be a... *Travelling chef.*

My fave Kiwi holiday destination is... *Wanaka.*

One piece of advice I'd like to pass on to my children is... *Don't be too keen to grow up too fast – enjoy being a kid!*

The massage therapist's clients have ranged from circus acrobats to All Blacks.

