

## Two Sides Of A Coin

By Laurie Currie

Last summer, I attended a workshop in the Alexander Technique and movement improvisation entitled "Falling Up" taught by Joan Frost and Deborah Gladstein. I remember sometimes feeling as if I were a scientist, researching physical principles and mechanisms and putting provocative ideas to the test of experience. The other part of the time, I felt like an explorer who had just set foot in a strange, new, somewhat ominous but fascinating landscape -- an inner one, my own. Like the two sides of a single coin, these two aspects of the Alexander Technique are distinct but closely interrelated.

I find that the Alexander Technique is most useful when I think along the lines of, "Let's see what happens if...?" Nobody really knows what is going to happen when I think of freeing my neck. I like that, because it takes the pressure off of getting something wrong. At the same time, I know from experience that each time I employ the tools of awareness/ inhibition/ direction, something very similar happens.

Like a scientist, I test the hypothesis over and over, and the results accumulate into a body of information that, in this case, repeatedly confirms the original premise.

This workshop helped me to clarify the other side of the coin. It has to do with the creative relationship between our inner landscapes and our surrounding environments and to our choice-making process.

When I improvised movement without having any structure whatsoever, the freedom was at times exhilarating and at other times overwhelming. How can we even begin to make choices? There is so much to choose from. To make matters worse, what if one part of us wants one thing while another part of us is intent on something else? Or what if we are clear in our intention but lack (or think we lack) the courage to follow through? Or, we may find that our mind is cluttered, so that our movements become arbitrary, lacking any clear direction -- what then? Or any number of external forces can appear to distract us or interfere with our chosen path.

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## Applying The Technique to Weightlifting

By Kathryn Moeller Miranda

I have not pumped iron since the late 70s when Fitness Centers came into the mainstream of self-improvement strategies. I was a sedentary '9 to 5'er and started 'working out' with Nautilus and fixed weights. Moving with resistance helped me to clarify my murky, clothing-defined body image. Through the repetitive movement, I began to define bones, muscles and joints. This positive experience notwithstanding, I never quite understood the popular fascination with weightlifting.

Recently, I had the opportunity to learn more from Charles Stein, a colleague and weightlifter since he was 16 years old. Charles gave a class on weightlifting and the Alexander Technique for teachers in the Phys Ed department at a local college. I took notes and with Charles' permission, wrote this article to share his ideas with you.

Of course, Charles applies the primary control to every movement and that's something we all learn how to do. What I found unique was Charles' ability to communicate Alexander concepts with a weightlifter's language.

Weightlifter's tend to hunker down, to pull into their joints to prepare for the weight. When you look at a body builder, you don't see a lot of movement when they lift weights, especially not in the neck. Everything is pulled together and held. Afterwards, you see a lot of residual tension, almost an armoring, as if they are hiding behind their bulk. They tend to be very good at stabilizing by preventing movement from happening.

In any weight bearing activity, the dynamic of head leading spine increases with the movement. You might say the volume is increased. This dynamic opposition of head, neck and spine to legs and arms, stabilizes and strengthens the activity of weight bearing.

**Bench Presses** -- Its easier to think of the Head, Neck and Back (HNB) in standing than lying horizontal. On the bench, the tendency is to loose HNB direction and

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Published three times yearly by the American Center for the Alexander Technique, Inc ®  
129 West 67th Street, New York, New York 10023 212-799-0468

*The articles in this newsletter are the opinions and explorations of the authors and these views do not reflect a consensus of ACAT members nor do they represent the official policy of the Center.*

**Closing Dates:** April 1, August 1, December 1. **Editor:** Kathryn Moeller Miranda

## NOTES FROM THE TCP

By Kim Jessor

ACAT's school year ended on a warm June evening with a festive graduation ceremony and party. CONGRATULATIONS to our new graduates: Sandra Bernard, Elizabeth Buonomo, Laurie Currie, Cathy Hazeltine and Fern Kushner!

During Spring term, we had two extracurricular workshops. Rachel Zahn (ACAT, 1969) presented her work on "The Physical Intellect", and Diana Diamond gave an introduction to Cranial Sacral work.

In reflecting on this term, a thread that seems to run through it for me is communication. In several ways, we came together as a community to speak with each other about the nature of teaching and training. During our all school presentation time, Sandy Collozzi, an 8th

term, organized and moderated a panel discussion with the Friday senior and associate faculty. Myself, Joan Frost, Barbara Kent, Marta Friedland, Judith Lakin and Judy Stern responded to questions from Sandy and the audience. Because there often isn't time in class to do this, it was a special opportunity to delve more deeply into the larger questions about the nature of the teaching process. Questions ranged from the technical to the personal to the philosophical, and there was a sense of real sharing to this exchange. It was useful for the faculty to hear what kinds of questions are coming up for the students at their various levels, and for us to articulate our perspectives and experience. There was a general feeling that this would be stimulating to do on a more regular basis.

As a faculty, we also worked on communication amongst ourselves during our second annual retreat at the Phoenicia Pathwork Center. Here we had time to work intensively with each other on our hands-on skills. Each morning, we divided into small groups and Pearl

Ausubel, Debby Caplan, Barbara Kent and Sarnie Ogus took us through their approach to teaching two themes: initiation of movement, and how they work with putting their hands on student's hands in the training. It was wonderful to experience various approaches, as well as to play the role of trainee. I think many of us walked away with a renewed appreciation for what it means to both student and teacher in the training process.

At both the presentation and the retreat, I felt us coming together to communicate and exchange ideas, which continues to deepen and strengthen our program.

As I look towards the fall, which begins ACAT's 30th year of training teachers of the Technique, I feel a time to celebrate and to acknowledge what we have accomplished. It is also a time to rededicate ourselves to ongoing growth, communication, and exploration as we develop our work and our profession.

## NOTES FROM THE CHAIR

By Lori Schiff

As the thirtieth anniversary of ACAT approaches we are getting ready to celebrate. Plans are beginning for a 'Gala' event to take place in the spring, probably a Monday evening in April, and educational events are being organized to take place in the fall and winter.

Many thanks to all of you who have volunteered your time and services to work on these events. If we have not yet contacted you directly, we will before long!

We do need lots of help in planning and staging these activities. So, if you can give some time to ACAT to assist with mailings, or providing support work for the educational events or the thirtieth anniversary Gala, please contact me or Judy Stern.

JOHN NICHOLS  
IN NYC

John Nichols will be in New York City October 10th to the 15th. He is offering a workshop for trainees Oct 10th 2-4pm and for teachers Oct 13th from 7-9pm. He will also be giving private lessons and small group classes Oct 11th to 15th. Private lessons are \$50 for 40 minutes. Please contact Karla Booth 662- 4408.

The winter event will feature Michelle Arsenault in a presentation about teaching the Alexander Technique to children in the classroom setting. Michelle has developed approaches to teaching the Technique that she has implemented in public school classrooms in New York City. As part of this presentation we would like to provide a list of Alexander Teachers currently working with children

particularly in classes and also in private practice. If you or a colleague is working with children, please send us a note (to the ACAT office) about your activities and we will include you on this list. We hope that the audience for this presentation will include educators, and parents as well as Alexander Teachers.

Details about these events will be coming out through the year. Please watch for mailings and for further information in the newsletter.

Many thanks to fellow Board members, staff, faculty and volunteer faculty and to our trainees (all 33) for an excellent year in the training course and for your interest and energy in continuing to grow and build on the dreams of our founders.

Best wishes for a restful summer, LS, Chairwoman

*(Applying the AT to Weightlifting continued from page 1)*

shorten the torso by doing a contraction in preparation. The lifter then pulls into the joints to lift the weight. Also, many students are told to flatten the back to compensate for overarching. Charles suggests that the lifter keep the torso neutral (no preparatory contraction) and think of opening up across the chest (think of hugging a tree). A whole new dynamic occurs.

**Curls** -- Here the tendency to lift, literally lift, creates tension and holding and pulling up. After all the common definition of lift is to pull up and the tendency is to pull up with the whole body including legs and feet. To encourage an energetic balance, Charles suggests that the lifter allow the feet to go down as the weight goes up. Also, to let the hips help support the back, rather than use them as a stabilizer for the legs. "Sit on your legs."

**Squats** -- Almost everyone arches doing squats. When you're squatting with weights, you can send your hips farther back than without weights. If you send your hips back and your head forward, you engage the legs more and have much less pressure in the back. In the sequence of the movement, Charles suggests to leave the head behind and to think of the bottom dropping out from the head. Also, don't protect the knees. This really seemed to prevent pulling into the hip joint.

**Lat Pull Down** -- Here the general tendency is to recruit the torso to scrunch (an abbreviated term for shortening and narrowing) and to over-involve the shoulders. Stop before you scrunch and think of your elbows moving down and away from each other.

When less organized, weightlifters will recruit the shorter lumbar muscles and perhaps the neck muscles. When more organized, they will recruit the larger leg muscles and can lift more weight. Weightlifters can get caught up in the process of going for more and more reps and lose the quality of the movement. The Alexander Technique can help them get more out of each rep.

I remember my first experience of lifting weight without pulling into joints. Judy Leibowitz was teaching me how to lift a vase without gripping, it seemed like an impossible task. Every single other lifting experience I ever had involved some kind of squeezing. I didn't know any better and even more daunting I couldn't imagine any better. Somehow though after several false starts, Judy and I created this new experience. It felt wonderful. And maybe that's a bit what the dedication to weightlifting could be about, creating the sense of strength and wonder. Affirming our sense of totality as our whole being organizes itself to the activity of moving and supporting weight.

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I discovered that inhibition can be useful in such situations. It only takes a split-second of focused attention to pause and 'listen' internally. If I can do that, then I can become more aware of what expressive possibilities exist, and what needs to be expressed most. Obstacles or conflicts will start to become clear. Then I will be more able to carry out the movements that have the most significance for me.

Using inhibition in the Alexander sense is a very specific kind of pause. It involves paying attention both to the thoughts and feelings comprising my inner life and to the connection between those things and my physical self. It also allows me to consider whether something may be interfering with the efficient use of my self. If I incorporate into my pausing, the thought of allowing my primary control to work, and if I pay attention to the resulting chain of events stemming from that thought, then my "view" of my inner landscape comes more sharply into focus and registers for me in a strongly felt, physical way. The inner landscape is not a picture that I view with a detachment from my body. The two work together, reflecting each other. As a result, my chosen actions can be a more direct outcome of something honestly and deeply felt.

The process of pausing and of self-observation takes courage to quiet the noise that keeps us from knowing ourselves and experiencing the truth of who we are. And it takes courage to choose to express that truth in some form that others can experience. But in spite of the difficulties, I find I am rewarded with an experience of performing my actions with a greater sense of ease, resilience, understanding and clarity. Constructive change has taken place in my manner of doing things.

There was a span of time toward the end of the workshop where everybody in the group was exploring movement at the same time. There were no rules, and I suddenly realized that in front of me and to my right, most of the people in the group were making contact with each other. I was definitely on the periphery. An onslaught of questions raced through my mind -- Should I join them? How would I enter the group? How did I end up on the outside, anyway?

To my left, there was a large vertical window that went nearly from the floor to the ceiling. The bright sun coming through it cast a long, wide rectangle of light across the floor behind me. There was nobody anywhere near me there in that broad corner of space and light. I had to make a choice.

The next thing I knew I was in the patch of light. There was a potency there that I had been compelled to acknowledge and explore. This potency had less to do

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## Communications Skills for Alexander Teachers

By Joan Arnold

When we complete the ACAT training, we've acquired a unique, subtle skill that can release people from chronic pain and raise their baseline of health. But, sitting in the sun on 67th Street during break, I've watched many soon-to-be graduates roll their eyes at the unlikely prospect of making a living as teachers of the Alexander Technique. I've heard of talented, bright new teachers who have few or no students. Why?

People come to the ACAT training from a range of backgrounds -- some with years of experience as freelancers, performing or teaching -- privately or in groups. Others don't. And in order to go out into the world and build a practice, we need to know more than how to put hands on and structure a private session. We have to describe the Technique well enough to interest someone in a private session. We have to be able to write a press release, an article or a brochure. We have to learn to inspire a group to want to learn more. We have to know how to communicate.

This, obviously, is an ongoing process, and one with which we all could use some help, regardless of what our prior skills may be. Whether or not we feel comfortable with words, someone else's description -- spoken or written -- can provoke us to improve our own. You may have taught dozens of groups, but a new trick for getting across the idea of inhibition or direction to a bunch of newcomers could be, like an exchange of private work, refreshing and inspiring. The class I'll be leading this fall -- Communication Skills for Alexander Teachers -- will aim to give 9th term trainees and teachers a chance to develop, in a supportive atmosphere, the crucial skills of writing, speaking and teaching groups.

The spark for the 8-week course actually came from 8th and 9th term trainees, who requested last winter that I lead a class in how to teach group workshops. In the process of structuring my ideas for the class, I found out what they were: A group has a life of its own; it's not a private session with more people in it. Vary the dynamics, activities and groupings. Establish a clear structure with room to explore. Ask provocative questions that get your students to think. Draw themes and suggestions from the class. Watch your students' eyes to see if the dynamics are working. The organism that you're addressing is not a single body but the group; as the head, you lead the whole, making it work as an integrated unit.

The workshop was a discovery process for us all, and we did a total of four classes, beginning with fundamental principles and working toward leading group activities. Students came up with terrific activities and inventive ways to explore the Technique. It gave them a

jump start, and gave me a place where I could add to the vocabulary I've developed on my own.

Then, on a dreamy train ride to Westchester, the idea walked into my head for a more inclusive workshop. What if I combined creative movement techniques with those from writing classes? We could develop group activities that I couldn't imagine when planning on my own. We could read and hear each other's attempts to explain the technique. I could offer editorial feedback and lessons learned from my writing career.

I cohered these musings into what I hope will be an exciting class beginning in mid-October. For those who are interested, I look forward to having you join me in this group experiment -- to help us all better learn how to give the Alexander Technique the much wider exposure that it deserves, to a public that desperately needs it.

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## A Tribute to My Mother

By Fern Kushner

My mother died some twelve years ago, so she's not around to hear about my Alexander Technique learnings -- yet I feel that her esthetic taste shaped me decisively in a direction that made me appreciate the Alexander Technique when I met it.

My mother thought highly of Japanese brush-stroke painting and of watercolors. (Some of my most treasured possessions are the watercolor still lifes she painted herself.) I also remember her telling me that a circus clown has to have great control over his movement to create the appearance of buffoonery.

What do circus clowning and creating images with water-based pigments have in common? The appearance of ease and "tossing it off," the apparent naturalness, that one sees in a skilled practitioner of these arts, can come only through long practice. The casually deft gesture of a master brush-stroke painter leaves a mark on the paper that stands on its own. There's no chance to go back and patch it up or tinker with it.

My mother contributed strongly to slanting my taste in this direction, toward the appreciation of understated skill that looks simple until you try it yourself!

She also very much liked things that were what they appeared to be: driftwood, rocks, leaves. I remember that we had a box of polished stones that might some day be made into jewelry -- but for the moment they were just there to be touched and enjoyed, for themselves.

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## Freeing Your Natural Voice

By Jean McClelland

(This is an excerpt from an article Jean wrote for an Australian Magazine, Nature and Health. To receive a copy of the whole article, please contact Jean at (201) 854-7483, or 101 74th St. #4, North Bergen, NJ 07047.)

We can reclaim our real voice! To do so is a highly creative process which constructively blends spontaneous impulses with conscious control. Not surprisingly, this is also a path back to our real self and true emotional maturity. Many people are amazed when I tell them freeing their voices is as creative a process as painting, writing or improvisation. In connecting with our real voice, we experience enormous concentration and a quality of being 'in the moment' where we feel unselfconscious and free.

The great singer Luciano Pavarotti once told an interviewer he never tries to 'sing'; sound just flows

out of him. Similarly, Mozart wrote he really had no idea how he composed music, it just seemed to 'flow'. Painters talk about losing all sense of time when working and my students tell me when they first experience their real voice they feel 'out of control' -- as if somebody else's voice is coming out of them. All these examples have one thing in common: the creative process.

The search for one's natural voice is a deeply intuitive process of rediscovery. It can be difficult to let go of preconceptions about how our true voice should sound and just allow it to emerge. To free our voice from restraints may be frightening too, though at the same time it can be liberating. We must approach our work with a sense of discovery and Zen-like patience. Then this wonderful freeing process will cease to be a mystery and never be lost.

## The Alexander Technique: Natural Poise for Health

Richard Brennan (Element Inc., Rockport MA, 1991 -- 114 pp.; \$8.95)

Reviewed by Fern Kushner

Richard Brennan's book on the Alexander Technique is one volume in the Health Essentials series. Each book in this series is intended to present basic information on some alternative method of promoting health -- to give advice on using a particular approach to help oneself, and to provide information on where to go to learn more.

Brennan himself is an Alexander teacher from England. In addition to giving guidelines for working on one's own with the principles of the Alexander Technique, he sensibly recommends that readers take a few Alexander lessons if at all possible -- especially if they are in pain: "The main trouble with 'doing it yourself' is that many of us do not have a clue where to start." A reading list and suggestions for finding a teacher are provided for readers who would like some guidance.

The author seems to be at his best when presenting the practical material, both general and specific that he has garnered from his experience as a teacher of the Technique. His description of a self-lesson seems clear and helpful; it includes specific suggestions along with a general note to be patient and not to expect instant changes. He stresses that open-mindedness and a willingness to learn about oneself are the most important qualities to have in approaching the Alexander Technique.

The line drawings accompanying the text, especially those depicting the distortions of common sitting and standing patterns, make their point eloquently. Brennan's descriptions of inhibition, primary control, and direction are also quite clear. (Cat lovers will enjoy the references to cats: Brennan points out that even though they always pause for a moment before jumping, cats are still among the fastest creatures on earth.)

One problematic aspect of this book is that the author fails to make clear when he is presenting his own views as opposed to explaining principles of the Technique. For example, he recommends forward-tilting chairs, which may be helpful but certainly are not basic to the Technique. Elsewhere, in a discussion of end-gaining, he asserts that the destruction of the ozone layer caused the greenhouse effect (which is a factual error) and criticizes today's money-oriented mentality. A reader unfamiliar with the Technique could end up assuming that these ideas are somehow central precepts of the Alexander Technique.

Readers of this review will most likely have seen many versions of F. M.'s story. Brennan's retelling includes many details that may be of interest even to those who have already read several books on the Alexander Technique.

## NEWS FROM THE CENTER

ROBERT COHEN (ACAT, 1991) presented a 6-hour introduction to the Technique at the Third Midlantic Conference of the American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA) in White Plains this August. He is also providing input for Madeline Bruser's projected book on a body-oriented method of teaching piano.

How do we know what we know and how do we know how we know it? CONNIE SERCHUK (ACAT, 1989) offers this quote:

*God guard me from the thoughts men think  
in the mind alone  
He that sings a lasting song  
thinks in a marrow bone.*

William Butler Yeats

ANNE WAXMAN (ACAT, 1984) has been travelling and teaching small and large groups in Columbus, Ohio, Portland, Maine, Vitoria, Spain and Sweet Briar College, Virginia. She has future plans for Nevada and again for Ohio and Spain.

INEZ ZELLER (ACAT, 1969) gave a 1 day workshop to the staff of Paul Newman's Hole in the Wall Gang Camp in Ashford, CT. Jane Kosminsky (ACAT, 1985) and Judith Lakin (ACAT, 1984) assisted her. They had a great day.

The audio tape of Dr. John Austin's lecture is available on standard cassette for \$10. The fee covers the cost of the tape and postage and handling. Proceeds from the sale of the tape will be contributed to the JL Fund.

Congratulations to Annette and David Cantor who are the happy new parents of Leah Celestine! And congratulations to Debby Jay and Richard Levine who have happily celebrated the birth of their second son Harry.

LIBRARY -- Kim Jessor has generously donated a copy of Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen's new book, SENSING, FEELING, AND ACTION - The Experiential Anatomy of Body-Mind Centering.

UPPER WEST SIDE SPACE available for teaching. Its located on West 75th St. Call Anne Waxman at 212-928-1733.

ALEXANDER TEACHER visiting from London is looking for a place to stay from October 28 until early December, in New York City. Reasonable apartment or share, \$600 - \$800 max. She would be happy to exchange work also. Please phone, reverse charges or leave message, for Dinah Goodes, 011 44 71 723-6969.

BODYWORK TABLES > Discounts on Living Earth Crafts tables if you order with us! Made-to-order, environmentally sound, special Alexander padding. Contact Urs Sauer or Elizabeth Buonomo (201) 816-0556.

NEEDED at the Office: Used office equipment at low or no cost, such as a Fax Machine, a Metal storage closet, a transcribing machine. Also we need someone willing to recover the chair seats that have rips and tears in them, approximately six to ten chairs.

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with reflex mechanisms than with other kinds of meanings stemming from the particular situation: feelings, emotional and poetic associations, the geometry of the space, the quality of the light, the solitary nature of it, the interrelatedness of all of those internal and external elements. The choice I made had a strong feeling of 'rightness' for me.

In either choice, I would have still been using the Alexander Technique. The Technique does not imply or impose a set of values onto the range of expressive possibilities. I am still free to do my own valuing.

If we can learn to, and remember to, give a thought to our primary control, we will give ourselves the best chance possible of being physically integrated as we discover and outwardly express our inner selves in whatever manner we so choose. Two sides, one coin.

(A Tribute to My Mother continued from page 4)

So I too like things that do not pretend to be other than what they are. And I see in the simplicity and skill of the very best Alexander teachers exactly those qualities that my mother, through word, gesture, and thought, nurtured in me.

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