

## Continuing To Learn ACAT Initiates Post-graduate Courses

by Lisa Trank

Training as a teacher in the Alexander Technique does not stop with graduation. As a teacher told me on my last day of school, 'Now you are ready to begin.' There has been an increasing concern within the Alexander community about maintaining post graduate teaching standards. And much of that maintenance depends on utilizing the teachers within the Alexander Technique community. New York and its surrounding vicinities has a vast concentration of qualified and experienced teachers as a resource. With this in mind, ACAT has developed a way to take advantage of the richness of experience of its alumni teachers by holding its first two series of post-graduate training workshops this past fall and winter. Both series of workshops were taught by ACAT graduates and attended by both member and non-member teachers in the tri-state area.

The first series of workshops was titled 'Working with Groups' and was taught by June Ekman, Barbara Kent and Jessica Wolf. June Ekman (ACAT 1980) brought her years of experience as a modern dancer as well as a teacher of the Alexander Technique to

*(continued on page 4)*

## How to Learn the Alexander Technique: A Manual for Students, by Barbara and William Conable, Second Edition, Andover Road Press, Columbus, Ohio.

reviewed by Robert Cohen

*Reviewer's Note: Most of the book, except for one chapter, is written in the first person voice of Barbara Conable. In this review, she is referred to as the singular author of the book.*

### Inside:

Continuing to Learn 1

Book Review 1

Notes from the TCP 2

Notes from the Chair 3

"On the Use of the  
Hands" 3

News from  
the Center 6

Every Alexander teacher since F.M. himself has known the difficulty of trying to communicate the Technique to people who can't get lessons. Until recently, there was only one book (Deborah Caplan's *Back Trouble*) that I felt able to recommend in good conscience as any sort of "manual" for laypersons.

Now I am happy to recommend a second: *How to Learn the Alexander Technique: A Manual for Students*, by Barbara and William Conable. Not only does it offer meaty, practical information for students; it also provides valuable insights for teachers concerning many teaching challenges.

The opening chapters give the best explanation of primary control and downward pull that I've yet seen. Included is a passage of dialogue from an actual lesson, which treats "feeling" and debauched kinesthesia in a refreshing, non-mystifying way. There is also

*(continued on page 5)*

## Notes From the TCP

by Joan Frost

**"This Fall  
we initiated  
creating  
course  
outlines for  
each class"**

We began our Fall Term with a faculty retreat at Judy Stern's beautiful home in Rye, where we welcomed back Anne Waxman after a year's leave. We had an hour of hands-on work together, then much of the meeting was devoted to business and long-range planning.

Speaking of such, ACAT is in the process of receiving state licensure. This is now a requirement for accreditation by ACCET and allows us to participate in the US government student loan program. Also, due to lower enrollment over the past several terms, we are looking at restructuring ACAT's administration.

In the spirit of enriching our own teaching and sense of community, the faculty at ACAT has decided to sit in on at least one other faculty member's class at some point during this school year. As this is Director review year, I will be visiting all classes between now and June and will spend time with each teacher discussing the class I observed.

This Fall we initiated creating course outlines for each class, which include objectives for the class, material to be covered, and expectations for each level. Each senior teacher passes these out to the candidates on the first day of the term and gives a copy to me, which I keep in a file in the office, available for any faculty member to read. The candidates have been very positive about this new policy, and have felt the classes were particularly clear - well-organized and well-presented - this past Fall. It is giving the faculty a body of material to refer to on each of the 5 day themes: chairwork, tablework, activities, voice, and procedures.

To further our in-depth and collaborative understanding of each of these themes, we have decided to discuss and demonstrate for an hour on one theme during a faculty meeting (once per term). We discussed "procedures" at our October 30th meeting. All agreed it was worthwhile. I took notes, typed them up and distributed them to the faculty as a record and some-

thing to refer to when teaching that theme. Our next theme will be "chairwork".

Once a term we have an all-school assembly. This Fall we had a video show: the old FM movie reformatted to video with introduction and narration by Walter Carrington (available in the ACAT library), and a film of Marjorie Barlow demonstrating tablework at the First International Alexander Technique Congress in Stony Brook, NY, August 1986, loaned for the occasion by Barbara Kent. Both films gave us a feel for masters at work.

We'd like to congratulate Urs Sauer, Shelley Senter, Sally Sullivan, and Kaori Yoshino who graduated from ACAT on Saturday, December 17th. The ceremony was held at the Sky Lounge in the elegant Colonnades building on West 57th Street.

The setting was intimate and relaxed. Graduation talks were given by Kim Jessor, Director, and myself, Acting Director, and a song was specially created for the occasion by Dan, Valerie Hooven's husband, who played the piano while Val (ACAT 1994) sang. After eating delicious food, many gathered around the piano for the singing of Christmas carols. It was an evening filled with warmth and good cheer, and a fitting sendoff to a fine group of new teachers.

Lastly, this Winter Term, we are delighted to have Bill Connington, co-author with Judy Leibowitz of *The Alexander Technique* back with us after his having taken a number of years' leave. §

Best wishes to you all in this New Year!  
Joan Frost

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## Notes From the Chair

by Lori Schiff

As we begin 1995, ACAT is poised for change. The Teacher Certification Course has been facing the pressures of increasing costs to support the ACCET accreditation, increasing "living" expenses, and decreasing enrollment.

The Board has been studying various ways to manage the situation we now face. We have already reduced administrative costs and we are considering other options for reducing our expenses. We are also researching opportunities for advertising the Teacher Certification Program in the U.S. and abroad.

In addition to managing the Teacher Certification Program, we are gradually expanding membership services and programs. The post-graduate seminars sponsored by ACAT have been very successful so far. (See article by L. Trank). We are planning to continue sponsoring classes and lectures to fill the need for the on-going education for Alexander Teachers in our area.

The ACAT AGM in March will be an important one as we will be illustrating the reasons for implementing changes in the administration and possibly in the structure of the Board of Directors. At this meeting we also hope that you will bring suggestions for the future of ACAT as a professional organization. How can we continue to support ACAT graduates and members? What do you want from your organization and what contributions can you make to it?

A special word of thanks to Lisa Trank who has been serving on the Board to complete the term of Rebecca Flannery. Lisa has contributed time, energy and some excellent ideas to ACAT. She will be missed when she leaves us for points west.

I look forward to seeing you in March and/or hearing from you regarding ACAT at any time!§

All best wishes for the New Year.  
Lauren Schiff, Chair

**"How can we continue to support ACAT graduates and members?"**

## Excerpts from "On The Use of the Hands"

transcribed from classes with Judith Leibowitz

"I talk about the uncommitted hand. This is a hand that goes on a person without having an idea of what's going on in the individual. You have to feel it. If your hand has any sense of a preconceived idea, it is going to sense with a preconceived idea rather than what's going on in the student. It is a thinking hand. This is something that I just came up with at the end of last year, and I think it's a marvelous idea. That hand has to pick up the student, it also has to tell something to the student, and what it is telling the student is what is supposed to take place. It has to be a hand, then, that comes on without the student's feeling tension. If it has tension, it feels it's own, and not the student's tensions. It has to be a hand that doesn't know to begin with what to tell the student, because it hasn't felt the student. It has to come out of that communication between the hand, and the student's head (for instance). What that hand has to tell the student is primary control."

"Now if I have this uncommitted hand, this thinking hand, it picks up also various parts of the body that need a little bit of help. So we come back to our basic paradigm, that in the Alexander Technique we are maintaining in movement the length of the spine by maintaining the poise of the head, preventing the head from pressing down and compressing the spine. If we stay with that, I also pick up what the student does that prevents that from happening. Theoretically if you just stay with the head it is going to work, but sometimes I can speed it up by coming to other parts of the body, in helping that student, so that it's "there", and you just follow my hands, and I've gotten you to stand."

"Coming back to the hands. It is the hand that one puts on first. It is a hand that's there. It is making contact but it's not a heavy hand there. If I put a hand down, and my hand is

**"...I also pick up what the student does that prevents that from happening."**

(continued on page 5)

*(Continuing To Learn, continued from page 1)*

her workshop. Teaching groups since she graduated, June focused the class on working with groups of actors, dancers and singers. This included exercises and movement work that help facilitate awareness.

Barbara Kent (ACAT 1971) has been a teacher for 23 years, is a former director of the *Teacher Certification Program at ACAT/NY*, serves on the senior faculty of ACAT, and maintains a private practice in NYC. Barbara came to the Alexander Technique through singing and has an on-going interest in the Alexander Technique and the use of the voice. The workshop explored the use of our own voices, through reflex breath, whispered ah, making sounds, speaking, reciting and singing. She also discussed translating personal experiences into working with groups.

Jessica Wolf (ACAT 1977), has been teaching group classes since graduating in 1977. She has been on the faculty of the *American Dance Festival, Circle in the Square Repertory School, The Aspen Music Festival, and the Juilliard School*. In this workshop, Jessica demonstrated her way of helping musicians "tune" themselves. She incorporated partnering sequences based on the Alexander Technique and the principles of Carl Stough's Breathing Coordination.

The second series took the technique into the area of *'Working with Performing Artists'*. This series was taught by Jessica Wolf, Bill Connington and June Ekman. Both Jessica and June gave repeat performances of their November workshops. Bill Connington (ACAT 1984) drew on his acting training at the *London*

*Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts* and his experience working with internationally acclaimed singing teacher Ruth Falcon for the past six years. Bill taught the class through lively practical voice and movement exercises. This workshop was designed to keep groups interested and alive, while focusing on breath, resonance, humming, sound and movement.

The post-graduate training workshops provided an opportunity for an on-going exchange of ideas, communication and dialogue within the tri-state teaching community. The classes arose out of ACAT's continued commitment to excellence in teaching standards and to take advantage of the wide range of experience and talents within its alumni. The two series were a huge success and filled to capacity with a variety of teachers ranging from recent graduates to those in the field for many years. There are plans for an upcoming group of classes in the spring and ideas for their content are being formulated.

If you have any ideas on topics of interest to you, please contact Melanie Nevis, the program coordinator. ACAT looks forward to more projects such as the post-graduate training workshop to continue serving the membership. The more we as teachers of the Alexander Technique grow individually, the more we will grow as a community. And the spirit of community is in the nature of exchange, generosity of ideas and on-going respect for the process of learning. §

*("On the Use of the Hands", continued from page 3)*

moving away, it's not saying anything. I have to really allow myself to be there, and I like to think of my hand as a piece of material so it's a hand without bones that can really just take on the shape of what it's coming into contact with. So as much of my hand as is possible is there. If I'm lengthening and widening and I'm putting my hand on and I have that pattern going in me, what I'm not going to do is put a hand on which presses the student down. My flow, my energy flow, is length. It is length coming through the back. What I want is for that to continue with my hand in space. My hand is giving that thing, through me, of moving up. I have something in my hands that is going to move with me."

"When you're working on yourself, what you want is to start thinking, wherever you happen to be, not to get yourself into a position in order to direct. Let the fact that you are beginning to think make the impulse to make a movement, a change, take place. So often, people just get themselves all organized. They place themselves into a position before they direct. You are becoming aware of wherever you happen to be, from the thought, and from there you let something happen. I very deliberately use the word "let." You're letting something happen, you're giving your consent, not making it happen." §

*Editor's note: The full text of "On the Use of the Hands" will be available soon from the ACAT Library*

**"Jessica demonstrated her way of helping musicians "tune" themselves."**

*(How To Learn The Alexander Technique, continued from page 1)*

down-to-earth talk about relaxation, tension, emotions, and various experiences that Alexander students can expect.

Chapter IV introduces the Conables' special contribution: "body mapping", which helps students correct their inaccurate images of their own body structure. Have you ever had a student who simply couldn't move freely at the hip or ankle joints, despite apparent progress in freeing head/neck/torso? According to the Conables, this sort of impasse often stems from specific misconceptions about one's own structure – faulty body mapping. In fact, Barbara Conable proposes a Law of Human Movement which says:

*"When there's a conflict between the (individual's perceived) map and the reality, the map always wins in movement."*

In such cases, direct correction of the person's mapping error may be more sensible than waiting indefinitely for the student's kinesthesia to improve through indirect means.

Assuming one adopts this strategy, it then becomes a challenge to impart the needed anatomical information without compromising the focus on primary control, inhibition and direction. Conable says:

*"Mapping work is never instead of Alexander work. It is simply done at the same time, right in the course of hands-on work or work in activity."*

Here is an example of how Conable elaborates a classic Alexander term ("position of mechanical advantage") in connection with the mapping work:

*"It is in achieving mechanical advantage that mapping helps us most...Mechanical advantage...is both the easiest distribution of weight at the joints and easiest mobility. The rest relationship of any joint is that relationship from which movement is easiest. The head moves easily when it moves from a poise on the spine. The torso moves easily from a poise on the legs. If the rest relationship is compromised by downward pull, to that degree movement loses its ease."*

After the basic concepts of body mapping are presented, there follow a series of chapters focusing on specific occupations and areas of concern: "*Common Mapping Errors*" (Arranged by body part); "*For Teachers*"; "*If You're a Musician*"; "*If You're an Actor*"; "*If You're a Singer*"; "*If You're a Dancer*" "*If You Exercise*"; "*If You Have Suffered Abuse or Violence*". These chapters are a treasure trove, not just for students working in those fields, but for any Alexander teacher working with students in activity.

The illustrations are excellent, and the book would be wonderful as a supplemental text for anatomy classes in Alexander teacher training courses.

Do I have any complaints at all about the Conables' book? Frankly, there is one small passage on page 36:

*"We have a coin with two faces, and...you can think, 'I will free my neck and therefore my head will amove forward and up,' or you can think, 'I will move my head forward and up thereby free my neck.' Makes no difference."*

This seems to me a flagrant invitation to fall into the pit of endgaining – and it's the classic pitfall that we face in trying to write about the Technique. But it's only one small passage. I hope it's revised or clarified in the next edition.

In my opinion, this book represents a healthy extension of F.M.'s work. I am reminded of his famous lament about anatomists whose useless knowledge left them "walking deformities". To me, his lament receives a satisfying resolution when anatomical knowledge is applied in such a constructive way as this. §

**"These chapters are a treasure trove...for any Alexander teacher who works with students in activity."**

The American Center for the Alexander Technique regrets to announce the passing of Linda Babits, a graduate of ACAT and the Manhattan School of Music.

A scholarship fund in her name has been established through the Manhattan School of Music. Contributions can be sent to:

The Manhattan School of Music  
120 Claremont Avenue  
New York, NY 10027  
Attention J. Kraft  
*(Please indicate on check  
The Linda Babits Scholarship Fund)*

## News from the Center

**Telephone Interviews** - This Winter ACAT will conduct telephone interviews with many, if not most, of our members, ex-members and ACAT graduates. Topics for the confidential interview will include the business and economic side of a teaching practice, teaching issues and ACAT membership services. The phone bill for these calls will be covered by a coupon ACAT received for switching our long distance carrier to MCI. Look for summarized results in an upcoming newsletter.

**Marta Friedland** (ACAT 1987) ran a six week group class for the *Multiple Sclerosis Society*. She worked with three people who used either a brace or a cane to help with walking. She plans to write a paper on how she uses the Alexander Technique with the many different issues that come up with MS for herself and others.

**Victori Hyatt** is the new ACAT representative for *Living Earth Crafts!* LEC manufactures top quality tables and accessories, including the table designed by Urs Sauer for Alexander teachers. A 10% discount on tables only is offered to ACAT trainees and members. Call (212) 628-8583

**Available at ACAT** - **Goddard Binkley's Diary** is for sale at the very good price of \$30. It is entitled "*The Expanding Self - How the Alexander Technique Changed My Life*" and it is highly recommended.

**Glynn Macdonald** will be in New York City in June, 1995. Further details will be sent through a mailing. Lori Schiff, 212-222-0176, will be arranging private lessons and classes for Glynn.

**REMINDER:** Support Services Alliance offers Group Health and Group Dental for sole proprietors.

*Beautiful Teaching Space* available in Manhattan - clean, light, airy and tranquil room in a safe building. Located at 171 East 89th Street (on the corner of Third Avenue), 3 blocks away from the 4,5 and 6 trains. Alexander table and phone available on the premises. \$8.00 per hour, day rates are negotiable. Please call (212) 427-7492 for further information.

The January '95 issue of *Womens' Sports and Fitness Magazine* includes references to the Alexander Technique and its application in sports, quoting **Lori Schiff**. Lori has also been appointed to the faculty of the *Aspen Music Festival* for the summer of 1995.

**Hands-on Exchange** - Join fellow teachers for an informal hands-on exchange at the SOHO Center for the Alexander Technique. Teachers meet for a couple of hours once a month, generally on a Sunday from 12pm to 2pm. For the date and time of the next exchange call **Fran Robertson** (212) 567-7274 or **Jean Rashkind** (212) 941-5490.

**Patricia McGinnis** has been keeping busy both concertizing and teaching. *The Asbury Park Press* said she gave an "elegant delivery to this poignant piece...a pretty voice with lots of range and her stage presence added much." She is on the faculty of *The Ensemble Studio Theatre Institute for Professional Training*. She also taught workshops at *The Harvest of Light Festival* and at *Manhattanville College* in Purchase, NY.

**NEWS FROM THE CENTER:** Keep us posted. IF you have a brief item of interest for your colleagues, we will be happy to include it in this section of ACAT News. To submit your info, please contact **Kathy Miranda** (212)799-0468 on Mondays, other days call her at (201)861-7179.

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