

## *Awareness Through Movement*

### *Testimonial by Kim Ferguson*

What if someone told you that an increase in the awareness of your movement could help you deal with pain and perhaps even eliminate that pain? That awareness of movement could increase your strength and coordination, decrease the damaging effects stress has on your body and improve your sense of well-being. Would you be interested?

Perhaps, like me, you would be skeptical. Awareness of movement could produce all those benefits? Oh, really.

But then again, like me, you might be a little intrigued. Movement, huh? Well, it couldn't hurt to hear a little more about this.

Those were my exact thoughts when Pat Siebert first told me about something called Feldenkrais, a method he teaches at a community center, Casa de Luz, in downtown Austin. Although I had never heard of the therapy before, I have since learned that Feldenkrais is a highly respected method of treatment practiced throughout the world.

The treatment was developed in Europe during the 1940's by Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais, a degreed engineer, doctor of physics, judo practitioner, professional soccer player, linguist, and author (what a combo!). Resisting the recommendation of surgery for a chronically painful knee injury, Feldenkrais set out to discover alternative methods of healing his knee. Using his vast knowledge of physics, cybernetics, and the human nervous system, Feldenkrais began using various movements to retrain and restore function to his knee. The knowledge he gained through these movements eventually developed into the therapy known today as The Feldenkrais Method.

But I knew none of this when I went for my initial session with Pat at the Feldenkrais Center of Austin.

We started our conversation with the normal pleasantries and then Pat asked how long had I had the pain in my lower back. My jaw fell open. Just that morning I had developed a strong, painful ache in my lower back. But I hadn't mentioned it to him at all. How did he know? Pat explained that by observing the way I walked, stood, and carried myself, he could tell I was experiencing the pain. I sheepishly found my skepticism decreasing while my curiosity increased tenfold.

Pat asked me to lay face down on a padded table and then to push my head and torso up with my arms. Then he asked me to lower myself back down. After watching me do this a few times, he asked me to raise and lower my head only. After a few repetitions, I started to feel a bit smug. Using these actions as a

starting point, I assumed that because I could do these movements with such ease, Pat's other clients must be really messed up.

Pat then placed his hands lightly on either side of my spine and asked me to continue the movements. Each time I lowered my head back to the table, Pat moved his hands up or down one vertebra. I was taken by surprise when I discovered the changes in my ability to perform the simple movement. Although Pat exerted no pressure with his hands, I sometimes found it more difficult to move my head and body. When he moved his hands to a different spot on my back, the movement became even more simple and fluid than when we began. As we continued, I found myself becoming more aware that the muscles required just lifting my head extended all the way to the end of my spine.

A few minutes later, Pat moved to the head of the table and asked me to relax completely. He took one of my arms and began to slowly move it up and down and side to side with gentle movements lacking force or pressure. While I thought I had "completely relaxed", it was soon clear that I had not. Pat explained that he wanted to move my arm, and that I needed to let it fall limp in his hands. I tried! I promise! But the muscles in my back and neck and shoulders kept trying to assist. With incredible patience, Pat continued to move my arm. He would stop halfway at times; I think to highlight the fact that my muscles would try to kick in to complete the movements. Unknowingly, I was resisting my own efforts to relax. As he continued, ***I realized that the more I could relax my mind's focus from the resistance I was feeling, and focus on letting him lead the actual movement, the more fluid the movement would become.***

After a while, Pat repeated the motions with my other arm and then with my head and neck. Finally, Pat moved to the foot of the table and repeated similar motions with my legs, moving them back and forth at the joints of my knees. I found myself drifting into a deep state of relaxation as he gently moved me. Oddly, this relaxation was coupled with a heightened sense of the interaction of the other muscles in my body.

As the session ended, I sat up and Pat asked me to walk around in the room for a minute. It was amazing! My head was held high; my shoulders were no longer in their usual slightly hunched position. My spine felt loose, fluid, and movable. The backache was gone! I felt great--and strangely, I felt taller. Pat explained that the simple movements had worked to release the contractions of the muscles, allowing my body to move more freely and naturally. I felt that wonderful rejuvenation that follows a full body massage, although I was fully clothed and no pressure was exerted on my muscles.

Pat cautioned me that experiencing Feldenkrais could change my life, and I had

skeptically nodded my understanding of his words. Sure, this felt great, but change my life? I must now admit that I am beginning to grasp the magnitude of his statement.

In the days following our session, I found myself noticing certain movements I made and the chain reaction of the muscles involved throughout my body. I noticed when tightness in my lower back would cause an adjustment in the way I turned my head to the shoulder after I rested my head on the pillow at night. I found myself integrating what little I had realized from this first session to other movements my body makes. I found myself noticing the slight adjustments my body makes almost continually. I truly found a new awareness of my body, which continues today.

In a subsequent session with Pat, we explored strength and coordination questions to help me as I competitively race sailboats on Lake Travis. He helped me understand that my true power and center of movement comes from my lower torso, the hips, and pelvic area. Learning how to use this power again helped me realize we were working with more than physical strength.

Pat is really a facilitator for learning. In a non-invasive, non-stressful session he gains your trust and confidence. There is a level of non-threatening intimacy achieved in which one is open to exploring their movements and developing a greater sense of self-awareness. I can say with certainty you are in for a "treat" if you visit Pat for a treatment.

Kim Ferguson