Alice looked like the proverbial little old lady with her white hair, twinkling blue eyes, and cane. She sought *Feldenkrais Method*® lessons to address the peripheral neuropathy that had made the cane a necessary addition. Then 79, Alice smiled gently and seemed very proper as she inquired how *Feldenkrais Method* lessons might benefit her current condition.

I explained that the body was well-engineered with parallel systems, especially in the nervous system. The peripheral neuropathy might limit one kind of neural input, but she had another, the proprioceptive nervous system. The proprioceptive nervous system guides and informs movement via nerves located in the joints of the skeleton. However, I suggested, rather than theorize we could just begin and find out if the *Feldenkrais Method* could improve her situation.

After her third *Functional Integration*® session, Alice simply forgot her cane. Little did I know then what that meant in the life of this “little old lady”! Alice was an amazing student. She attended every *Awareness Through Movement*® class and did her “homework,” that is she continued to explore the movements daily at home. I should have known that her excellence as a student was a clue to her background as a well-known professor of anthropology.

She became the oldest student in my intermediate class and the 40- and 50-year old students were inspired to see the quality of human movement that has no category of age and were stunned at Alice's graceful ease, the velvety puma-like movements of the 80-year old.

It was several years after Alice began her studies with me that I happened across a newspaper article about Alice's renown as one of the first women anthropologists. Not only had Alice left her cane behind, she had returned to hiking around her beloved Indian reservations and published two new books!

I am reminded of once meeting one of Moshe's long-time students on a beach in Tel Aviv. Each day I would go to the beach after attending my training. Often I would do a little yoga on the beach before wading out into the warm Mediterranean waves. A 33 year-old American girl studying abroad, I felt fit and young and on top of the world.

Then one day I happened to walk down the beach and saw a woman who was neither young nor slim—in fact, she was in her 80s and quite round—standing on her head rather more easily than I had a few moments before. I strolled toward her and casually asked, “Where did you learn to do that?” “Oh,” she laughed expansively as she slapped sand off her thighs, “long ago I studied with a man named Moshe Feldenkrais….” She then showed me several other movements, none of which I can do to this day…although, just give me until I am 80.

Dr. Feldenkrais had said that those who have had pain or difficulty may learn this work more easily than those who have had no physical limitations. Certainly I have found that my older students often seem know their bodies and themselves better. Alice, now 88, is chuckling still at how she taught her 40 year-old teacher that an older nervous system can be a much more intelligent and capable nervous system.
Seniors in the Sunshine State

It’s been said that it’s not important how old you are, but how you are old. Of the more than 80 students taking class and private lessons at The Feldenkrais Studio in Sarasota, Florida, nearly 2/3 of them are over age 65. They attend consistently, as their schedules permit, and speak enthusiastically of their experience with the Feldenkrais Method.

Jane, age 75, was considering a hip replacement three and a half years ago, but has postponed the surgery indefinitely due to her Feldenkrais Method study which has “enabled me to climb mountains once again and even see the Parthenon!” Her classmate Melanie, at 79, travels to Japan, China, and Europe and feels she can “…out walk anybody with grace and ease.”

Looking to recover from a ruptured disc and a knee injury, Myra began her studies at age 69 and now, four years later, ballroom dances twice a week, saying that she has relearned how to pivot safely (and kneel again to clean out the lower kitchen cupboards). “Feldenkrais Method lessons have helped me return to golf with a freedom of movement in my swing that I never understood before,” claims Andy. “At age 83, I actually shot a 79!”

“I find that the Method and the philosophy are influencing every aspect of my life,” says Layne, age 74. “After 40 years of back spasms so severe I was unable to move, they have become only a bad memory. My posture is improving and I am making other changes too numerous to mention. I look forward to class as a special treat and it assumes a high priority on my calendar.”

Her partner, Hy, our most senior student at age 90, happily reports that he finds it easier to walk, to sit, to play golf (for the first time in years), and to breathe. He and Layne work out at the YMCA 2-3 times a week, walking 2 miles, and have begun enjoying dancing again.

These folks are my role models for healthy aging, a continual source of inspiration and friendship. 

By Barbara Leverone, GCFP, Sarasota, <Brlev@aol.com

How Much You Have  —by Lynn Turner, Ph.D., LCSW

This month when I went to the doctor for a check-up, the nurse said, “Let’s measure you, and we’ll see how much you have shrunken.”

As I am 56, it is natural for her to expect me to be losing height. “But no,” I countered, “You’ll see—I have gotten taller.” I stepped up onto the scale, she set the instrument and read off the measurement: 5’8”. Last year’s record showed 5’7”.

She was surprised, but I was not. I have been doing Feldenkrais Method classes for a year! I knew I would measure taller because I FEEL taller. My shoulders are down and back, my chest is lifted and forward, and I am surveying the world from an unaccustomed height. Before my shoulders were too knotted up to come down! Now they are all relaxed, and I feel great.

I really have nothing but praise for the Feldenkrais Method  —by Hermie Medley, student

When over twenty years ago, I overcame an addiction of long standing, I resolved never to abuse my body again. A little over a year ago, when I was eighty one, I discovered the Feldenkrais Method and began going to an adult education class taught by Laurie Paris (GCFP) in Santa Cruz, as well as having individual lessons from Seth Paris (GCFP).

The benefits of Feldenkrais Method lessons are remarkable. A chronic problem with the joint where my left arm and shoulder connect has disappeared. Not only is my posture better, but I am better able to improve movement patterns. The Feldenkrais Method, as part of a healthy life style, helps to make successful aging possible for me. Believe me, I am grateful.

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The Professor

In March 1999, this 72-year-old Brandeis University educator and Vipassana meditator limped into Wellspace, the integrative center where I practice the Feldenkrais Method, with a cane, a grimace of anguish and a “Beginner Mind.” His presenting malady was similar to a diagnosis of plantar fasciatis, compounded by fallen arches; his pain was excruciating. He could not weight-bear on the ball of his left foot, instead clunking onto his poor heel with each step.

He was caught in the vicious cycle of having developed movement foibles from early childhood; distorting his gait, posture and self-image. This in turn, throughout early childhood and subsequent development, created compensatory movement patterns, further warping his neuro-musculo-skeletal organization throughout his long and productive adult life. He had suffered through three painful episodes with his walking in the past; somehow, orthotics had gotten him through. However, this time, his podiatrist flatly told him that he had a deformed left foot and “there was no way out but surgery.” “I think not,” said the Professor, having academic knowledge about the Feldenkrais Method for years, he was ready to give it an experiential trial.

Towards the end of the lesson, after helping him roll sideways to sitting, then to standing, we found he could at least stand fully on his right foot, and a bit more on his left than when he limped in. We finished the session with his learning a more efficient cross-lateral use of his cane. He walked out in much less pain, still with a cane, but with a smile, not a grimace. He promised to return a few days later for his first Awareness Through Movement class, trusting that this would offer him ever more relief.

He has faithfully continued attending weekly Fl lessons and ATM classes, until recently when he took a break to go on long walks on the beach. His wife expressed heartfelt gratitude for getting her husband on his feet, and teaching him a process for standing from sitting without strain, effort, or assistance. His feet arches developed in six weeks, to the amazement of all concerned. He has proven for himself the Moshe Feldenkrais pronouncement: “There is never an end to improvement.”

By Deborah Lotus, GCFP, Cambridge, MA
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Feldenkrais® “Wings”

Be like that bird that, pausing in its flight,
Tarries for a moment on a bough too slight;
And feeling that it bends beneath it, sings,
Knowing it has wings. –Victor Hugo–

With the Feldenkrais Method, we learn to use gravity for easy alignment, not fight against it. With no feathers, still like that bird I sing, sensing my “Feldenkrais wings.”

Good balance is neither spinal extension nor flexion, but easing upwards and forwards like lengthening rope. Movements once learned may be practiced in the car, on the telephone, holding a child or groceries, or falling into or rousing from sleep. Here are a few ideas for the supermarket. Try this.

Choose a shopping cart that has free-rolling wheels. Place your hands on it as you would for shopping. As with a walking stick, it brings us UP TO NEUTRAL, as long as we do not “fix” it to the floor with pressure. Leaning may feel supportive, but slows movement, reduces choices. If someone leans upon a shopping cart, unbalanced, possibly squashing breasts, cramping breathing, clamping the cart downward, they place wedging forces upon spinal disks, inviting pain.

Notice each shoulder blade (held in place mainly by muscles), and ask “What can I soften?” “What can I allow to lengthen?” as you bring one forward, the other back. Pause, breathe into the lower abdomen, or into a rib area where either hand fits comfortably. Wherever your hand sits, begin a tiny tapping 20 times, followed by a pause to breathe, then repeat. Now, begin to nod the head down and up, first following with eyes, then reversing. How could you “dance” the mid-spine, or shimmy the sacrum? Imagine “conducting an orchestra,” airing armpits, as your elbow movement reduces its effort. Using your hips, sway weight from left to right foot. (If you fear thieves, use the babyseat-belt to click your handbag safely, handle gently in fingers. Anything held in the palm may become locked into it, hankie, chair arm, handbag etc.)

These easyful tiny movements assist circulatory flow, allowing a fuller, less painful, more joyful life. Self-assisted learning, like Hugo’s bird singing, has wings! Let’s fly!

By Bettina Morphett-Savage, Australia, <seyde@optusnet.com.au>
Kathy Whipps, a 70 year-old, down-to-earth, spirited British grandmother, came to the US two years ago to live with her daughter and son-in-law and care for their newborn son, Will. Kathy, who retired five years ago, had been a deputy warden at a sheltered accommodation for the elderly. She had crushed the lower disk in her lumbar spine in a fall about 30 years ago and began favoring her left leg since that time. About 15 years later, she slipped on the ice and re-injured her back, this time on the right side. Five years ago she had another major fall during a hike, again bruising the lumbar and ischial areas.

After each fall, she was prescribed complete bed rest. She also developed arthritis in both wrists, particularly her right hand. She began moving with great care and caution to protect herself against further injury. She developed significant kyphosis in her thoracic spine about 8 years ago, and began standing and walking hunched over. In fact, when she looked in the mirror, she felt as though she looked old and she didn’t like it at all.

My first lesson with Kathy was in April, 2000. She was curious, but skeptical, and willingly laid down on the table with a bit of difficulty and a lot of rigidity, wondering what would take place. I helped Kathy become aware of how her spine could lengthen and how she could hold her head differently. At the end of the lesson, which she said made her feel as if she were floating, she not only felt taller but felt a shift in her torso and legs and held herself very differently. Kathy decided to continue lessons, and except for several extended visits to England, comes for weekly Functional Integration lessons.

Kathy has been delighted with the changes in how she feels. For example, she noticed that when she pushed her grandson in the stroller, her back would hurt. As she became more aware of her movement, she easily reorganized herself and walked with greater flow and ease. Getting into bed was no longer a struggle; nor was getting out of a chair; into and out of a car, or bending down and playing with Will. She stopped having “pins and needles” and numbness in her left thigh. She became aware that she never extended her wrists when lying down, and was pleased when they became softer and nodules that had been in her right hand decreased or disappeared completely. Her gait is more balanced and easier and her body has met the challenges of caring for her grandson.

This past November, Kathy had another bad fall when she tripped over some toys while playing in the house with Will. Although she hurt her pelvis, wrist and leg, and needed a cane for a while, she regained her range of movement in a very short time. She is pleased that she became so flexible before the fall, and is delighted with how quickly she recovered. “The lessons have enabled me to enjoy being with Will more than ever,” said Kathy. “Coming here has given me a tremendous awareness of what my body is doing. I had accepted what had been happening to my body and felt that was the result of getting older. But now, each lesson recharges my batteries and I feel uplifted.” Kathy is delighted with all that she has learned and looks forward to continuing the process.

Kathy is one of the senior adults I have worked with who have discovered the pleasure of reclaiming muscular activity, transcending limiting habitual movement patterns that they did not know they had the ability to change and discovering the pleasure of freer, easier movement.

By Meryl Nadell, GCFP. MSW, Scotch Plains, NJ, <magicmeryl@home.com>