Everyone Is a Dancer
—by Louise Vesper, GCFP

Learning is concerned with the unknown becoming known, which is realized after its discovery. - Moshe Feldenkrais, The Elusive Obvious

Michelle is wearing a Jonas Brothers t-shirt, talking about the Hannah Montana & Miley Cyrus concert movie that she saw recently. She is 13 years old, a dancer, and middle school student in a San Francisco Bay Area suburb. Michelle was born with spina bifida, developed scoliosis, and uses a wheelchair or crutches. When it’s time to dance, she radiantly skips across the floor of the large dance studio, her head turning left to right. She does wheelies in her wheelchair to embody skipping.

Annie also skips across the room using her eyes and her power wheelchair, coordinating her movement with the other teens in the class. Annie is a 20 year old community college student in Oakland, CA. She is a longtime fan of competitive figure skating, following Sasha Cohen and Michelle Kwan, her all-time favorite skaters. She watches skating events on TV and roots for new skating stars like Caroline Zhang. Although Annie is legally blind, she understands conversation and communicates through a communication board and by pulling a person’s pinky finger or thumb to answer yes and no.

Annie and Michelle attend a weekly creative dance class for teens with and without disabilities ages 12–21 sponsored by AXIS Dance Company in downtown Oakland. They also both participate in regular Functional Integration® lessons with their respective Feldenkrais® practitioners, resulting in positive effects in their dancing and daily movement. I know them both through my weekly volunteer activities as an Assistant Teaching Artist at AXIS for the past four (plus) years. I’m Annie’s dance partner in the class, guiding her through movement.

Examples of Dance Instruction in the Class

Dance instruction is given by suggestions such as:
- Find the easiest, smoothest curving pathway to float through the room.
- Move through the space and stop when you see someone else stop. Then, change one thing—your head, your eyes.
- Skip across the floor, in your imagination, on your wheels, with your eyes or your breath.
- Say your name and dance a movement with your head, your face, your feet, that shows your mood today.
- Walk or roll, slowly milling around the room, making eye contact and smiling when you pass another dancer.

Michelle, Annie, and the other students have a wide range of abilities. Through dancing as a group and supporting each other, the students learn about acceptance of each other and self-acceptance. This has changed their self-image and growth as dancers. Michelle and Annie experience additional change and growth through the Feldenkrais Method®.

Annie and Michelle- Functional Integration

Naffie Fischbacher is Michelle’s Feldenkrais practitioner. They have been working together since Michelle was nine years old, with some breaks in between. Describing Michelle, Naffie says, “Michelle’s family surrounds her with...”
The guidebook had forewarned me that the twelve hour bus from Arusha to Mwanza via Singida was NOT a comfortable one. It was barely tolerable - the most outrageous travel on horrible roads. Arriving at 4:30 AM to my assigned seat at the window in the next to last row, skinny me, I couldn’t squish myself in front of a pole beside the aisle seat, so I climbed over the raw metal arm of the seat, behind the pole to enter the row. I was wet through to my skin before I jumped out of the soaked seat- rain I presume- paused in the next seat to ponder, then worked my way slowly around passengers getting on and baggage in the aisle to the front to inform the conductor that I could not sit there. He was midway through some other dilemma and upon finishing it, he led me to the back of the bus, where I was given the center right seat. It was dry, I could sit there. I nudged firmly to push the boy on my left off a portion of my little seat he had usurped. My neighbor on the right arrived; she was 25 and wide. To her right was a young man who seemed to avoid looking at me. We departed in the dark at 5:00 AM, city activities on the verge of beginning. So far so good. The bus horn went off for ten seconds of melodic trumpeting, like a soprano elephant’s call. On the trip the horn was used to alert prospective travelers of our approach, but more often to warn bicyclists and pedestrians carrying goods on their heads to clear the way. As soon as we were out of town the bumps began. I held onto the pole in front of me with my left hand and the seat in front of me with my right hand. My left sacroiliac joint slipped out a bit. After the second huge jerk painfully smashed my internal organs together, I stood up.

It was clear that I must use all of myself to manage the day’s travel, including my Feldenkrais training. My large neighbor laughed at me, getting other passengers to turn around and grin at the white person STANDING on the bus! I told her: I am old, I am taking care of myself, you shouldn’t laugh at me. The sympathetic young man who took the wet seat, declaring it wasn’t a problem, turned back and said I would get tired standing. I told him that after twelve hours we would all be tired. I knew it was the only way to protect my spine, joints and organs.

Eight and nine years ago, I suffered tremendous spinal pain due to injuries to the top and bottom of my spine after which I continued to work full time in a physically and emotionally demanding job. I did not give my body the rest it needed to heal. Consequently, the pain lasted years and now I must continue to be vigilant.

On the bus, I bounced and I swayed. When the bumps were greatest, my feet left the floor, sending me up into a jump and my neighbor into another fit of laughter. When we stopped for moments to let off passengers, I sat down on the seat briefly. After a couple hours, we stopped in the middle of nowhere for people to relieve themselves in the bushes. I sat and did leg and foot movements.

One woman put a plastic bag on her head; others had their hair in cloth wraps or under a cap. The rest of us conceded to the flying dust; my hair got darker, theirs got lighter. Half way through, on a brief stop in Singida, I cleaned my nose– mud came out.

The wet seat turned out to be a blessing that got me to a new location where I could stand up. Even though it was at the back of the bus, where the movement was most extreme, it was also away from the coming and going traffic and buckets and bags of grain or whatever people stored in the aisles, where others sat on the baggage. It also gave me a vantage point for viewing the countryside. The large window was diffused with a greenish plastic on the top, an amber plastic in the middle and a space of plain glass at the bottom. The times when, maintaining my grip on the pole and seat in front of me, I bent down to peer out of the “clear” window for color reference and a different perspective, the girl next to me laughed. We saw a herd of zebras right next to the bus that didn’t even flinch as we passed. I said “beautiful” in English and Swahili. That seems to have been the moment of my finding commonality with the girl and the guy next to her.

To keep from banging into the exposed metal bus parts required a balance between moving with the prevailing forces, whether side-to-side or up and down, and keeping sufficient solidity of muscle and soft tissue, flexibility and tone.
positive influence. The Feldenkrais Method and dance reflect that. She first came to me, at a physical therapist’s recommendation, for scoliosis and limited range of motion in her shoulders due to using crutches. When Michelle was younger, we did a combination of Functional Integration and Awareness Through Movement® lessons through play. Now that she’s older, she’s much more engaged. I generally work with Michelle lying on the table so that she can have a sense of a length. I’m amazed at Michelle’s focus and motivation. She has done Awareness Through Movement tapes at home in the past.”

Michelle says, “When I see Naffie, I come home happy and hungry. She makes me laugh. My shoulders feel better, my arms don’t hurt and my hip has less pain. I feel long! I dance better.”

As Annie’s dance partner, I have observed significant changes since she began receiving Functional Integration lessons with Jennifer Lee, her Feldenkrais practitioner. Jennifer works with Annie in many different positions, allowing Annie to take the lead while supporting her. She has given Annie the experience of contacting her feet to the floor, a new sensation for Annie. I have been privileged to observe a session with Jennifer and Annie. My observation has greatly helped with the way Annie and I work together as dancers.

In describing his work with a young girl with cerebral palsy, Moshe Feldenkrais wrote in The Elusive Obvious, “I therefore substitute myself for her early environment, both gravitational and human, by making movements of her head which are similar to one another so that even the erratic functioning will, in the end, reorganize an orderly possibility.” Jennifer Lee uses this approach with Annie and says, “I want to provide Annie an experience of sensing her body and herself, moving and interacting in her environment, and a sensation of connection of her feet to her environment. I am the environment during our Functional Integration sessions and Annie’s guide in the natural world of movement. Annie is then able to sense who she is within herself in relationship to her environment, and then the ‘I’ intention can come out and move.”

At the Dance Class

I observe that Annie’s quality of movement continues to expand; she is more present and focused with me and the other teens in her dancing. She is able to follow movement instructions in a quicker manner. Her mother, Deanna, has observed that these benefits have translated to her daily life.

(continued on page 5)
Featured Region: Southwest/Rocky Mountain Region

by Sissel Svano Rhyme, GCFP, SW Regional Representative

Whether you are in the high plains, the desert or the Rocky Mountains, the Southwest/Rocky Mountain region inspires year-round joy with its sunshine and clear blue skies. Being under these vast skies with far horizons creates a strong sense of community with distant colleagues. Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Wyoming, Colorado and the western part of the state of Texas make up the Southwest/Rocky Mountain Region of the Feldenkrais Guild® of North America. With a square acreage of over 490,000 square miles, which contains nearly 150 practitioners, the region offers marvelous opportunities for learning for every interest group.

Centers of concentration of practitioners are in Phoenix, Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Denver, and Salt Lake City. Especially in these areas, you will be sure to find a group class, called Awareness Through Movement® on any day of the week. Of course, Feldenkrais® teachers can be contacted to work individually with you at your convenience. To locate a teacher in your area, visit:

www.feldenkrais.com

Click on the Find a Practitioner (teacher) segment and type in your location. Using this site will assure you that you are working with a Guild Certified Feldenkrais Practitioner® who has had 800 hours of professional training.

The broad areas that Feldenkrais teachers work in are Performance, Care/Wellness and Self-Discovery/Potential. A sampling of some of the specialists in the SW region are:

**Specialty**
- Dance
- Golf/Ballroom
- Horseback riding
- Ice dance (skating)
- Kayak
- Music
- Running
- Skiing
- Tennis
- Yoga

Feldenkrais practitioners work at the following universities:
- University of Utah in child development and drama
- University of Arizona with athletes
- University of New Mexico in physical education

A number of Feldenkrais practitioners have specialized experience working in the areas of Care/Wellness, for example:
- post polio
- amputees
- Thoracic Outlet Syndrome
- brain injury recovery
- sleep disorders.

Currently there are two professional trainings in the region. Denver students will graduate in 2009, and Santa Fe 4, which is still open for enrollment, will begin on May 30, 2008. For more information about the opportunity to become a Guild Certified Feldenkrais teacher®, go to:

www.feldenkrais.com/classes/become_a_practitioner/

In our Region, the largest concentration of Feldenkrais® group classes and workshops will be offered to the public this summer—as part of the 2008 Feldenkrais Method Conference in Boulder, Colorado. For more information, see the Conference article in this issue.

Sissel Svano Rhyme, GCFP, is the Regional Representative for the SW/ Rocky Mountain Region of FGNA

Interested in DVDs, CDs and books about the Feldenkrais Method?

Check out the FEFNA Bookstore at: www.feldenkrais.com/shop/
The teen class is taught by Annika Nonhebel, AXIS Dance Company Education Director, and Rodney Bell, Company dancer and avid wheelchair basketball player.

Annika says: *I see people dancing with their elbows, their eyes, and their feet. I see people laying on the floor at a low level and dancing at a high level with their arms.*

Rodney gives prompts, such as: *Come together in a group shape, connecting with each other using one body part. Breathe!*

At the end of each class, I teach a short *Awareness Through Movement* lesson to bring awareness and focus inward. The quality and focus is already present due to the level of attention from dancing together.

One of the goals of the dance class is to provide an opportunity for the teens to experience many options for movement, using curiosity and listening to themselves. They experience movement from the inside, finding individual creative ways to move, sensing themselves in relation to the room and the other dancers, and developing a curiosity about their own movement and sensation.

**Benefits of Feldenkrais lessons for Michelle & Annie**

I have observed that Michelle’s movements have gotten bigger and more adventurous and she has become more self-confident through her *Feldenkrais* lessons. According to Linda, her mother, Michelle’s doctors have remarked that for the severity of her scoliosis, they are amazed with her range of motion and mobility, especially her ability to walk.

Annie’s continuing *Feldenkrais Method* experience is evident as she travels through the room as if flying with joy and abandon. When I asked Annie if she loves dancing, she answered *Yes* without hesitation.

As a lifelong ballet dancer and *Awareness Through Movement* teacher, assisting in teaching the teen class has dramatically changed my view of dance and movement. Each week, I have witnessed how small and subtle movement can have a profound effect on a person’s life. I recently taught a series of *Awareness Through Movement* classes for AXIS dance company members.

The teens say: *You can make dance from everyday movement. Create shapes. Be yourself. Dance alone or with the group. Showcase your dance without fears. Have fun!*

**About AXIS**

Since 1987, AXIS Dance Company has created an impressive body of work developed by dancers with and without disabilities. AXIS is known internationally for setting high artistic and educational standards in the field of physically integrated dance.

For more information, go to:

www.axisdance.org

Louise Vesper, GCFP, can be reached at glitterandlace@hotmail.com
twisting left instead of right.

I used driving skills, knowing the feeling of a vehicle increasing and decreasing speed, the quality of movements relative to the terrain and how to anticipate how the rear end of the vehicle would respond to what the front end passed first. I determined whether to flow or to brace for best support of myself.

My back was supported not only by my sitting bones, but also by my entire pelvis, hip joints, my knees, ankles joints and all the joints in my feet. The shocks went through all of me; my spine flowed with the motions, smoothing out the roughness of the rugged bus.

Riders were praying to Jesus.

Wildness, a greener dip – a crater.

We saw many different tree species. In the savannah, there were acacias dotting the plains. In a lower area, acacias grew closely, their canopies intertwined like a thicket. There was farmland with corn, sunflowers, and a patch of wheat. In some places, euphorbia grew tall. There was an occasional massive baobab, its trunk looking proportionally too large for the branches.

Hours into the journey, at a transfer town, I sat for five minutes. When the hawkers circulated around the bus, I bought plain cookies, peanuts and an orange through the window. A guy at the window translated prices, so we became friendly. Later, I bought a banana and water.

I bent down to look as we passed a large wetland – white flamingos! I had to hold on constantly; it was impossible to take pictures.

An escarpment that went on for a hundred miles.

When we came to a treacherous hill late in the afternoon, all trucks around us had stopped. One truck was disabled below and blocking the road. Another, trying to pass around it on the hillside, got stuck in the soft soil. Several people were trying to help the driver get out by putting stones under tires to act as blocks. Most passengers got out to stretch. It was good to be on terra firma again. I walked over a rise to pee. Finally, a truck in front of and below us maneuvered around to descend in reverse. It slowly hauled the stuck truck out and up the hill. Vehicles began to move. There were only a few curves on the hairpin wind down, but two large trucks had dumped over the side of the “road.” People there were figuring out what to do about their accidents.

In spite of a feeling that the trip would go on forever, my primary focus was staying in one piece.

Every joint was in movement. My entire nervous system was in constant preparation, like the study of self to know what happens in you before you make an action. The experience was applicable to hundreds of Awareness Through Movement lessons, including the interaction of self with a given environment. No place for strain, prevention of pain. Fully present in each moment/movement. The ride was like a Functional Integration session- I moved with the bus’s movements. I organized myself for the easiest POSSIBLE ride.

Fourteen hours later, we arrived at Shinyanga, where unbeknownst to me we were stopping for the night. I asked the boy next to me how many more hours to Mwanza and he told me in Swahili that we would get there tomorrow. No, no, I said. I went to the front of the bus and spoke with a middle aged man in English; he verified that the bus had stopped for the night. We had the option of renting a room or staying on the bus. It would depart at 5 AM. I thought it was 10:00 PM so I would just wait it out on the bus, but walking into town to buy water I found out it was two hours earlier, so I got a room, ate a meal and slept a bit. How deeply can you sleep when there is a TV on all night in the lobby outside your door? I learned that the answer is very deeply, if you are tired enough.

Much of the three-hour bus ride the next day was not as rough, so I was able to hold my two anchors from a sitting position. Once settled in my hotel in Mwanza I walked to town. I bought three 1-liter bottles of water. Stooping to pick them up, my back began to give out. I needed the flexibility that helped me survive the previous day’s most outrageous bus ride. I needed to do what a Tanzanian would do – get help from the nearest unoccupied youth. I waved to a boy across the street and asked him to carry the water for me to my hotel. He knew no English, but courteously joined me, stopping at a hardware store to get a friend to accompany us.

Dr. Feldenkrais said he was not interested in creating flexible bodies but flexible minds. I’ll take both, thank you.

Margot has recently returned from three years of living in Rwanda and will resume her stateside Feldenkrais practice in the San Francisco Bay Area. She can be reached by email at: margotschaal@yahoo.com

SenseAbility  Spring 2008
Would you like to REALLY know what the Feldenkrais Method is all about? What better time than summer in the Rocky Mountains? Come to Boulder, Colorado for an incredible week-July 25th through August 1- of immersion into the world of your senses and mental stimulation that will keep you talking for months afterwards.

This year's conference is going to be exceptional:

We have invited some of the world’s leading teachers of the Feldenkrais Method to offer a wide variety of workshops. It is an opportunity for pleasure and learning that can change your life! For information on the presenters, go to: www.feldenkrais.com/events/conference/2008_public/presenters

The conference is being held on the beautiful campus of the University of Colorado in Boulder. For more on the university, go to: www.colorado.edu

Boulder is a delightful destination – from shopping to outdoor activities. Check out the city at: www.bouldercoloradousa.com

Our Keynote talk, Mending the Mind: Bridging Awareness and Healing, will be given by renowned author Joan Borysenko on Sunday evening, July 27. Joan’s New York Times bestseller, Minding the Body, Mending the Mind, is one of many contributions that she has made to the field of body-mind research. Her talk promises to stimulate and educate as she shares some of the latest scientific research that supports the work of Dr. Feldenkrais as well as many other body-mind disciplines. For more information, go to: http://www.joanborysenko.com

Please join us at the Keynote at the University Memorial Center on Campus at 7 PM. Register soon, as this will surely be a sold-out event. Go to: www.feldenkrais.com/events/conference/2008_public/conf_event/856

The conference starts on Friday, July 25, with several different workshops. Moti Nativ, one of the premier practitioners of the Ninja arts, is coming from Israel to give a three day workshop exploring how the Feldenkrais Method is rooted in martial arts. To read more about Moti Navi, go to: www.bujinkan-israel.co.il

This same weekend in a 2-day workshop, master ski instructor Margret McIntyre shares her knowledge of the Method and how it applies to skiing and snowboarding. For more on Margaret McIntyre, go to: www.integratedmovementmaui.com

If you prefer a wider sampling, during this same Saturday and Sunday, you can choose a workshop on the following topics: Support for Sports, Yoga, Movement of Self-compassion, Fly casting, Healthy Hamstrings, and Cycling. To read about the offerings, go to: www.feldenkrais.com/events/conference/2008_public/

Monday through Friday, you can start your day with a free Awareness Through Movement class. There will be seven different themes running simultaneously with the topics of: Yoga, Pilates, Running, Voice, Tango, Rolfing®/Structural Integration and recordings of Moshe Feldenkrais. Take your pick, mix and match or follow one thread.

During the week, we have something for everyone. Daily workshops will provide a large variety to choose from. The topics being covered are: voice, horseback riding, musical performance, running, authentic movement, breath, tango & dance, walking, Pilates, G.I. Gurdjieff’s teachings, evolution of movement, sports and research.

To plan your summer vacation of fun with the Feldenkrais Method in the beautiful Rockies, visit: www.feldenkrais.com/events/conference/2008_public/

Public registration: www.feldenkrais.com/events/conference/2008_public/register

Practitioners wanting to register, visit: www.feldenkrais.com/events/conference/2008/
Recovering Freedom from Breast Cancer: The Bay Area Feldenkrais Method® Pilot Research Project*

—by Paulette Dolin, GCFP

The effects of breast cancer treatment can be challenging. For many years, Feldenkrais® practitioners have successfully been working with cancer survivors with great results. Now a research project is underway in the Northern California/Northern Nevada Region of the Feldenkrais Guild® of North America that has been designed to measure the improvements while providing a service to local communities. Practitioners throughout the area are offering a series of five Awareness Through Movement® lessons to people recovering from breast cancer.

The first set of classes is already underway in Half Moon Bay and more classes are being organized in other locations. Participants are given self assessments and will be tested for range of motion both pre and post the lesson. Susan Miller, who is teaching in the Half Moon Bay series said, “I have been pleased with the response to the Breast Cancer Research Project that I have offered on the coast of Half Moon Bay, California. I have five participants in the study and they tell me that they are so encouraged to have a sense of hope for returning function and use of their affected arm/arms.”

These lessons were pre-selected from the Unbound!™ series developed by Alice Brydges, a Feldenkrais practitioner who has been teaching classes for cancer survivors for several years. “[The] Feldenkrais [Method] offers a surprising approach to movement- that of ‘pleasure and ease’ rather than ‘no pain, no gain’. Its gentle exercises help me move without discomfort,” said Julie Barrow, a Breast Cancer Survivor and one of the participants in the project.

The gentle movements of Feldenkrais lessons provide many benefits for women recovering from breast cancer surgery, treatment and breast reconstruction. Women who have participated in Awareness Through Movement® classes have reported these results:

- Greater comfort and ease in everyday activities
- A greater sense of vitality and well-being
- Reduced pain
- Improved range and quality of movements
- Deeper relaxation and fuller breathing
- Relief from post treatment symptoms such as numbness, fatigue and lymphedema

Preliminary results will be compiled in time for the Feldenkrais Method Annual Conference in Boulder, with more complete results written up in time to have press releases for Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October. Our hope is to expand the project to other Regions.

*Anyone recovering from breast cancer is invited to participate, although a medical release is required if less than two months post surgery. For more information, contact Paulette Dolin at 650-329-8629 or ezmovement@yahoo.com

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Upcoming Events

Rocky Mt 1 Feldenkrais® Training Program
Alan Questel, Feldenkrais Practitioner, visiting Trainer
Public can visit the training for a day
May 12-23 2008
Denver Turnverein, Denver
Call Movement Educators at 877-533-6933
trainings@movement-educators.com
www.movement-educators.com

Santa Fe 4 Feldenkrais Training Program
Alan Questel, Feldenkrais Practitioner, Educational Director
May 30- June 11, 2008
Segment 1 - open for enrollment with workshop option
National Education Assoc, Santa Fe
Call Movement Educators at 877-533-6933
trainings@movement-educators.com
www.movement-educators.com

Power of the Pelvis
Taught by Lavinia Plonka, Feldenkrais Practitioner
Discover the freedom and spontaneity at the core of yourself!
June 7, 9:30 AM- 1 PM $45
Asheville Movement Center, Asheville, NC
828-258-7220/ www.ashevillemovementcenter.com

Effortless Gardening™
Cathy Butler, Feldenkrais Practitioner
Make gardening easier and more fun by learning to improve body mechanics.
June 14, 9:30 AM- 4:00 PM
Amherst, MA
cathy@cathy-butler.com www.cathy-butler.com
707-840-0413

Barstow Summer Institute
Nancy Forst Williamson, Feldenkrais Practitioner
Residential seminar focuses on learning and applying principles from the Alexander Technique, teachings of Moshe Feldenkrais, and Tai Chi to daily activities.
7:1 student/teacher ratio/ $300/500/550 tuition
June 14-21 2008
Doane College, Crete, NE
402-432-9181, ATinfo@aol.com

Find Your Voice!
Gabrielle Pullen, Feldenkrais Practitioner
Presenters, singers, actors, teachers: learn to project your voice with ease!
June 20, 6- 7:30 PM $15
Wild Mt. Yoga Ctr., Nevada City, CA
530-263-3323 www.focusmindandbody.com

Your Mouth and Jaw and TMJ problems
Eve Strauss, Feldenkrais Practitioner
Clarify mouth and jaw functioning, to relieve neck, shoulder girdle and back tension.
June 21, 2008, 10AM- 12PM $20
Kapiolani Women's Center, Artesian Plaza, Honolulu
Register at the Center: 808-535-7000

Intro to the Feldenkrais Method®
Gabrielle Pullen. Feldenkrais Practitioner
Discover a simple means of moving with less physical discomfort, improve as you age!
Sat., June 28, 10- 11:30 AM
Spa Therapy Wellness Ctr., Yuba City CA $25
530-263-3323 www.focusmindandbody.com

Improve Posture through Easier Breathing
Eve Strauss, Feldenkrais Practitioner
Discover where you restrict your breathing and watch the improvement in your posture.
July 5, 2008, 3- 5PM $20
Kapiolani Women's Center, Honolulu
Register at the Center: 808-535-7000

Interested in Upcoming Events in Your Region?
Visit the Online Version of SenseAbility and Click on “Upcoming Events in North America”
www.feldenkrais.com/resources/senseability/