I recently heard the great stage and film actor Ben Vereen speak with the students at the university where I teach acting and voice for actors. One of the things Mr. Vereen said to our students was that in live theatre, the audience doesn't come only to hear the story, they come to see the actor's soul. Mr. Vereen's comment resonated with me, and reminded me of what my wise and demanding acting teacher used to say: the actor's job is to explore and reveal.

When I meet the freshmen who are entering our professional actor training program, I find they often assume that acting means acting "like" someone else: putting on a character as if putting on a mask. But quite the opposite is true. Moshe Feldenkrais pointed out we all wear "masks of personality." In *Awareness Through Movement*, Feldenkrais writes, "The great majority of people live active and satisfactory enough lives behind their masks to enable them to stifle more or less painlessly an emptiness they may feel whenever they stop and listen to their heart." That pain and emptiness is just as common an experience for actors as it is for the overall population, but, for actors, to live behind a mask means never fully revealing the soul – never doing the work one is meant (and hired) to do.

The good news is that discovering and unmasking the true self can be thrilling, an act of risk and intimacy that makes live theatre truly unique. In working with actors, from accomplished professionals to beginners, I find that the greatest assistance I can offer is to be a supportive guide or witness who helps with that process of exploring and revealing the self.

I recall one actor whom I’ll call Beth (not her real name). She was a tiny, beautiful woman with impeccable hair and clothes. And a perfect smile. Beth had become so successful in presenting a pleasant face to the world, that not only did she smile when she was happy, she smiled when she was sad, she smiled when she was angry, she smiled all the time! We had several conversations that went something like this:

Me: What are you, as your character in this scene, feeling right now?

Beth: I’m really angry in this moment in the piece.

Me: Then why are you smiling?

Beth: Darn it! Am I smiling again?!? Why am I smiling?

Beth began a brave and diligent exploration of herself, motivated by her desire to be an actor who could live in a wide range of roles. I don’t have the space here to do justice to her process, but a
key component for Beth lay in giving herself permission to be something other than perfect. As part of our work together, I talked with her about something I had learned from the Feldenkrais Method® of somatic education: that if we can become really interested in what we are doing instead of being interested in whether or not we are doing it right, whole new worlds will open. Beth was able to explore this concept in a practical way through the Awareness Through Movement® lessons we did in my class. One important lesson for Beth involved subtle movements of the mouth and face—she was able to feel what she was doing in a way that allowed her to relax her habitual smile. Afterwards, her classmates told her that she looked like a different woman. In that moment, she was no longer “perfect,” but she was even more beautiful than before, because she allowed her inner self to be seen. Beth continued exploring, applying this lesson and others to her acting and by the end of our class, she was tackling emotionally challenging roles with ease—but not always with a smile.

Sometimes a “mask of personality” can be a full-body mask. One summer I was at Shakespeare & Company in Lenox, Massachusetts—a place that has contributed a great deal to my understanding of acting and teaching. I was teaching voice for actors and helping coach actors’ scenes and monologues in the Summer Training Institute. One of our students (“Sherrie”) was playing Kate in a scene from Taming of the Shrew. Sherrie was lively and funny with an engaging, sunny personality. Physically, she presented herself in a very contemporary posture. Her knees were hyper-extended (what people often refer to as “locked”), her pelvis was thrust forward but tilted back, her upper spine has an exaggeratedly rounded curve and her head was thrust forward. This curving, super-casual stance reflected her delightfully wacky image. It was her mask of personality—she seemed to be saying to the world, “I’m fun and I’m harmless; don’t take me too seriously.” This way of moving through life was satisfactory enough for Sherrie—but it wasn’t serving her as Kate. In her approach to the role, she kept banging up against a particular wall: Kate’s remarkable combination of strength and vulnerability. She could rant and rail at her Petruchio, but she could never truly stand up to him. And when she allowed herself to be affected by Petruchio’s boorish treatment, she just gave up—and became, not as Shakespeare would have it, a “bonny Kate and Kate the curst,” but a depressive and most bathetic Kate.

I had a hunch that if Sherrie could explore a more natural skeletal alignment, it could help her expand her acting options. In one rehearsal, she played the scene with her partner while I stood behind her and followed her around. I gently touched the back of her knees, reminding her to keep them available for movement; I lightly touched her hip bones, encouraging a more neutral use of her pelvis; sometimes as she stood or walked, I supported her skull so that her spine could find its full height. Near the end of the scene, I stepped away and she continued acting, incorporating the awareness she had been discovering. She stood tall and free—finally this Kate met her Petruchio as an equal. At the end of the scene, the actor playing Petruchio reported his amazement and delight in this new Kate; not only was her physical and mental presence stronger, but the scene was more fun, more engaging, because she was more present in it. I asked what she had discovered, and she replied, “I found Kate’s spine.” We discussed how a natural spine is both supportive and free. And how Kate, secure in her strength, her sense of self, can allow the vulnerability that makes this play more than just a physical romp. Best of all, Sherrie gave herself permission to borrow “Kate’s spine” for her own use.

Gwendolyn Schwinke, MFA, teaches voice for actors and acting in the BFA program at Coastal Carolina University in Myrtle Beach, SC. She is also a professional director, voice and text coach, playwright, actor, and a proud member of Actors Equity. She has been a Guild Certified Feldenkrais Teacher® since 1997 and a Designated Linklater Voice Teacher since 2007.

If Gwendolyn’s article piqued your interest, consider exploring these themes in her upcoming workshop, “Behind the Mask” at the 2013 Feldenkrais Method® Annual Conference in San Mateo, CA on August 31, 2013.

For more information, go to: www.feldenkrais.com/events/conference/2013_public/
The performing artist needs to develop a very high level of physical awareness in order to understand his capabilities as a performer. The finest performances are those where there appears to be no effort, where we do not ask questions, but believe in the world that has been created for us.

I became interested in theatre through dance and movement as a teenager. I studied dance in New York and theatre in London and Paris. But it has always been the physical theatre that interested me, rather than classical acting.

I first came in contact with the Feldenkrais Method® of somatic education in the 1990s while I was studying theatre in Paris with Phillip Gaulier and Monika Pagneux. During the morning sessions, Monika would teach a movement class where we would lie on our sides on the floor, and open an arm in an arch to the ceiling, (now a familiar Awareness Through Movement® lesson). It seemed like magic to me as my left side seemed to grow and transform. Monika didn’t mention Moshe at first, but I was hooked. I sensed the enormous impact the Method was going to have on my life. A couple of years later, I enrolled in a training.

During my training, I also created and toured a theatre show - a fun, high-energy version of The Three Musketeers, with only three performers playing all four Musketeers, as well as all the other characters--including chickens and horses! It was a revelation to me that whilst my two fellow performers run around the theatre and stretch to warm up, I would lie on the floor and do an Awareness Through Movement lesson. I flew through the performances with a greater presence on stage, jumping higher than I had ever before and even appearing taller, and I never even broke out in a sweat.

Since then, I have juggled my working life between the Feldenkrais Method and theatre work. Little by little, the Method has infiltrated my thinking and influenced the type of theatre I want to make. Over the past few years, it has led me to explore the balance between science and art with Wellcome Trust in London. The result has been several projects created in collaboration with neuroscientist Professor Jonathan Cole. Together, we have melded a unique fusion of art and science through personal narrative within a dramatic form, most notable “The Articulate Hand.” This performance examines the beauty and grace of hands that are impaired in some way: from spinal cord injuries to loss of proprioception. I have presented this piece in India and at the World Science Festival in New York. I have also performed short aspects of the work in three talks at TEDMED in San Diego, including teaching the audience an Awareness Through Movement lesson for the hand.

“The Articulate Hand” provides a bridge between the layperson and the medical profession. For the former,

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it provides a fascinating insight into neurology; for the latter, it puts flesh on the dry bones of theory. The work mixes live performance with interviews, recordings, old movie clips, and music. I weave a tissue of empathy between the audience and those who have lost a means of communicating in the world around them with their hands. Their loss of agency in their hands reminds us of how we take our hands for granted; the skills we have with them can so easily be lost.

As an actor, I am increasing intrigued by the way we inhabit our bodies. Working with actors is interesting, as they are not only looking at their own self-image but that of the characters they will portray. If their own image is not clear, then taking the step into someone else’s shoes is going to be tricky.

It was said of Mel Blanc (the voice of Bugs Bunny), that you could watch him in the recording studio and if one was to turn off the sound, you could tell which voice he was doing as his whole body, his whole self was that character. Such great actors are comfortable in their skins and experience no conflict between their self-image and the character they are playing. The portrayal becomes effortless and is a pleasure to witness for the audience. Working with actors through the Feldenkrais Method gives me the opportunity to help them feel that their skin fits, making them more comfortable in their process of inhabiting a character.

Andrew Dawson teaches the Feldenkrais Method in London and internationally. For more information about his work, visit:
www.andrewdawson.info
www.thearticulatehand.com

For the UK Feldenkrais Guild, Andrew made some short films promoting the Method:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKUSZsM3Tp8
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KrFMYtcVAC8
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v8LV9jOun3c
http://youtu.be/oIQuIR8RY00

Andrew’s interview on CNN

Andrew at the World Science Festival
http://worldsciencefestival.com/participants/andrew_dawson

Andrew’s three TEDMED talks can been seen here:
http://www.tedmed.com/speakers/show?id=6567
When it comes to performance, what can you expect from a Feldenkrais® lesson? Each performer is likely to have unique results despite the fact that everyone takes the same class. That is not too surprising, since everyone brings a different set of physical patterns (habits), movement history including possible injuries, and their own style of performance. Here are a few discoveries made by the performers in my “Feldenkrais for Dance” class at City College of San Francisco. Most of them are dancers (modern, ballet, ethnic, acrobatic, or hip hop), but not exclusively. We found some surprising effects, not only on individual performances but also similarities in how certain lessons affected several performances, even those of differing styles.

After the first few weeks of the course everyone is more or less used to the process of using their awareness to notice differences in their body sensation and movement quality. For instance, they might notice their head turns more easily after a small section of a movement sequence than it did before, that their shoulders rest wider and more relaxed on their ribs, or that their lower backs are closer to the floor after the lesson is over, compared to before we start. Then we begin weekly showings, with one to four performers performing repertory before and after that week’s Awareness Through Movement® lesson. The guideline is to show thirty-two counts (i.e., eight bars of four) or roughly sixty to ninety seconds of content. Afterwards, it’s fun to share what we observed as the audience and find out what the performer noticed. It’s easy to recognize the impact of the lesson on each performance and if there are a few performances, we can see if there is any universal effect among them.

This semester, one of the lessons involved unusual patterns for breathing. Another one focused on movements of the toes and ankles, and also bending to the side, while lying on the back. The week that Masha showed a belly dance performance in the Saidi (Egyptian Folk) style, her movements were beautiful and rhythmic. Then we did the lesson focusing on movements of the toes, ankles, and side bending. Some of her classmates commented that the first time she performed they mostly noticed the individual gestures of the movements. The second time she performed there was a dramatic shift in the dynamics of her dance. Classmates observed a finer sense of coordination, with a freer quality. “Her whole body seemed to be naturally in the flow of the dance and the movements of her trunk, feet and hands appeared more unified.”

Masha reported feeling more confident after doing the movement lesson, even though the changes were in some ways distracting, making it harder to remember the sequence. She reported enjoying the movement more thoroughly the second time since it felt lighter, with easier motion. The first time through, a repetitive percussive sideways movement of her hip was clearly accented. The second time, it really flipped up without having to try. A classmate commented, “the movements appeared larger, the weight shifts were really smooth, and her hips were speaking.”

Masha reported being interested in the side bending motion during our movement lesson. Only when she performed again did she realize it correlated directly with the ‘flip of her hip,’ improving both the range and the lightness of that percussive action.

You can’t always predict how a lesson is going to affect your actions. Once you try, it can feel so new—as though you’ve suddenly discovered some hidden aspect of your familiar work. A word of practical advice—be sure to take some time between the movement lesson and your second performance. Performers need time to integrate the new sensations. Get some water, take a short break, and collect yourself.
In his book, *The Potent Self*, Dr. Moshé Feldenkrais wrote, “The brain is capable of a greater variety of patterns of situations than we actively employ; only those patterns become operative that the personal experience of self and the world have facilitated and made recurrent or potentially available.” (p. 127)

When you experience new patterns during a *Feldenkrais* lesson, it takes your brain and body time to make it operative. The time between the lesson and the second performance allows you to start integrating the new information. Without adequate time for this, it could be so distracting that the performer could blank out on even the most familiar movements. This is because everything feels so different until the process of integrating is complete. Normally that can take from one hour to a couple of days, depending on the lesson.

By revisiting our sixty to ninety second performance in the earliest stages of integration, we are using the performance itself as a set of test movements. It helps to approach the second performance with an attitude of acceptance and discovery. Using it in this way, we can learn a lot about the new sensations that are being evoked and the benefits that the *Feldenkrais Method* of somatic education brings to our performance.

With this in mind, it’s best to use only familiar movement lessons on the week of an important performance, especially with technical choreography, such as balances and turns. Allow time to make it your own without the added stress of a performance. For highly technical performances, the *Feldenkrais Method* can offer a richness and maturity to your interpretation that makes it worth taking the time to integrate any new habits you are embracing.

The week we did a lesson on breathing, there were four performers: two sang, one performed hip hop, and one performed a sequence of yoga poses. The most surprising thing we noticed was how profoundly it affected each of the performances, regardless of the style. Without exception, the rhythm became clearer and the flow from one action to the next improved remarkably. A class member described, “All the performers did noticeably better on their second performances. For instance (the hip hop dancer) seemed to be enjoying herself more, was in rhythm, and moved more expressively.”

The phrasing for both singers and movers was more satisfying. Transitions became easier to perform, as seen with a challenging jumping transition in the yoga pose sequence. Sometimes the movement was affected, as with both the hip hop and the musical theatre song—perhaps from moving the chest in such a new way. Even those who didn’t perform that day per se could feel within their own ‘before and after’ movements a change in continuity. After seeing the effect, it made sense to me that Gaby Yaron (one of Dr. Feldenkrais’ original thirteen students) had dedicated her entire 1990 Chicago workshop, “*ATM*° for Health Professionals, Performing Artists and Athletes,” to working with the breath. She recognized the power of the breath when she was healing from a serious auto accident and continued to incorporate this theme throughout her years of teaching.
Try a few simple movements from this lesson on the breath. If you wish, walk around beforehand, or if you are a dancer, try sixteen-counts of easy movement and then repeat it again afterwards.

Lie on your back and notice your breathing. Take your time. Notice if you can pay attention to your breath without changing it, without trying to breath more deeply or slowly. Place one hand on your belly and the other on your upper chest. Which hand is moved more by the flow of your breath in and out? This will show you in which area your natural breath moves the most—the upper or lower torso.

Next, for a few breaths, purposely breath in only the upper chest, allowing the breath to move as lightly and easily as possible. In other words, don’t tense up. Then rest.

Next, for a few breaths, primarily allow the movement of your breath to flow into the lower abdomen, without the chest. Try a while, then let it go and continue breathing without trying.

Can you hold your breath momentarily and pull your belly in and out? Do this just a few times until you’re ready to breathe normally again. (If you have a serious heart condition, omit holding your breath and do the rest of the exercise without that detail, as holding your breath can affect your blood pressure.) Notice what your upper chest does.

Slow down the movement of the belly a little so that you can feel the pressure inside your trunk moving up and down inside your belly, ribs and chest. Breathe normally in between to relax and regain your natural breath. Rest, then try it again.

At first it will be easiest to feel the rippling movement while holding your breath, and of course taking breaks in between. Once you are familiar with this, try pushing your belly out while you are exhaling. Usually we think of the belly expanding when inhaling. This is backwards on purpose. Can you discover how to do the movement of pushing the belly out independently from the breath? Be sure to take plenty of breaks in between.

Then slow it way down, as if this was the normal way of breathing, with no exaggeration. Allow the chest to rise as you inhale, and the belly to rise as you exhale. There are other variations on this paradoxical way of breathing, as well. For now, be content to get as much relaxation as you can out of this very unusual breathing pattern. When you are finished experimenting with it, get up and walk around. See if you can feel a difference in yourself somewhere besides the breath, as you walk, stand, or sit. If you did a short sequence of “before” movements, take a break for a few minutes, get some water, and think through your sequence before you try marking through it physically. No heroics—just keep the movement quality easy and enjoy what you feel. You can revisit this practice even in very short segments, wherever you find it occurs to you.

If you have a favorite Feldenkrais teacher in your area and want to explore more lessons on the breath, ask them to teach “Gluing in the Lungs” from the Alexander Yanai series, Volume Five, Part A (red cover).

Jean Elvin has an MFA degree in Dance from Arizona State University and has been teaching Awareness Through Movement classes at City College of San Francisco since 2008. She has a private Feldenkrais practice in Palo Alto, CA. www.sweetagility.com
After forty years of surfing, it now feels like a dance with the ocean each and every time I go out into the waves. In 1994, I was learning to do a drop knee cut back, a seemingly easy enough trick to learn, on a longer board, and I felt a pop in my left knee. It swelled up and hurt for a few weeks, but ostensibly healed. That is unless I tried to run, golf or play basketball, in which case it would swell up and hurt all over again. I tried everything to make my knee better: physical therapy, massage, energy healing, rolfing, yoga, acupuncture, pilates, and finally surgery for a torn medial meniscus.

Nothing helped the pain that continued even after the surgery. Nothing until I found a Feldenkrais® practitioner, Mark Reese, who had a practice in San Diego. Not only did the Feldenkrais lessons he gave me make all the pain in my knee go away, but I felt better, younger and more vibrant! I was so amazed that after several treatments I decided to become a practitioner myself. I was going to be four years older anyway, I reasoned, I might as well be years brighter with a certification and new level of expertise.

Several years later, I hit a rock on my skateboard. My left foot stopped while my left leg continued forward. Ouch, @#$&^, that really hurt. I just knew I’d really injured myself. This time my knee swelled up hugely and the pain was severe. I went to my doctor and got an MRI that showed a severed ACL, and a torn medial AND lateral meniscus. Wow! I’d “blown it out,” as they say. My primary care physician offered me an orthopedic consult and physical therapy. Instead of conventional care, I used the Feldenkrais Method® of somatic education exclusively. Two weeks and several Functional Integration® and Awareness Through Movement® lessons later, I was walking well and biking a bit. Five weeks post-injury, I was surfing.

My knee is still “blown out” on x-ray: none of the injuries I documented are gone. It’s just that now my movements have been optimized and organized for all the tasks I ask of my body. Now it is many years post injury and my knee remains functional and pain free! And that’s why I immersed myself in the Feldenkrais Method all those years ago; it’s still the most empowering decision I have ever made.

Lori L. Malkoff, MD, MPH is one of only a few medical doctors in the U.S. to be trained and certified as a Feldenkrais practitioner. Specializing in chronic pain relief and providing pain treatment for athletes, seniors and others, Dr. Malkoff owns and operates the Feldenkrais Center of San Diego in Encinitas, CA.

“I used the Feldenkrais Method exclusively to heal the pain in my left knee.”
Improving Dance by Slowing Down

by Erica Trivett, GCFP

When I first encountered the Feldenkrais Method® of somatic education, I was recovering from a serious foot injury and reconstructive surgery. I feared for my career. I was a professional dancer, performing both ballet and contemporary dance internationally. I’d begun my training in classical ballet when I was seven and now I found myself unsure of my physical needs and abilities.

Following the operation and rehabilitation in Vancouver BC, I returned to Europe with the intention of finding some freelance work so I that could gauge myself better. I ended up working with the Basel Ballet in Switzerland. There, I met a woman in the company recovering from a herniated disc. She was in her third year of the Feldenkrais Method training in Amsterdam. I took an Awareness Through Movement® lesson with her and was hooked. The approach and effects of the work resonated with me. I enrolled in a training and throughout the process was dancing, choreographing and teaching.

The impacts this Method has had on my life on a physical level and an artistic level have been immense. I’ve developed new insights on how to approach movements and learned what was lacking in my artistic interpretation. The connection between the physical and emotional has become clearer.

Sometimes the way the Feldenkrais Method aided me was visibly huge, enabling me to break down larger movements onto a smaller scale. It has consistently helped my energetic level and my artistic interpretation, not to mention the many nuances that perhaps only I would be conscious of.

I have always been a good technician but the Feldenkrais Method has helped me learn how to move more slowly and let the body move, rather than make it happen. Not easy when you’ve spent your whole life training to be in control and have movement happen because you want it. The Method has also taught me how to be patient with my body and the learning process. I know understand that my body will ‘get it’ and that with intention, the body will follow.

Erica Trivett has been fortunate to pass useful information to dance students and professionals in Europe and Canada and as well as through her ATM® lessons in her current practice in Vancouver, BC, Canada.

Upcoming Issues & Deadlines

August - The Conference
Deadline: July 15
If you are presenting at the conference, this is your chance to shine!

November - Life Long Learning
Deadline: October 15
Articles on graceful aging, stories about recovery from age related injuries or issues, keeping the mind sharp.

Submission Guidelines & Queries
Contact Lavinia Plonka: laviniaplonka@gmail.com
It was a calm spring afternoon when *Guild Certified Feldenkrais Practitioner* (GCFP) Paulette Dolin, called me to share an inspired idea. From her experience working with clients, Paulette found that the *Feldenkrais Method*® of somatic education was a helpful recovery tool for breast cancer patients. She wanted to quantify what she was seeing. Being a *Feldenkrais*® practitioner myself, I was confident that Paulette was right, and as a physical therapist, I knew of measurement tools that could help us obtain data in the language and framework of the medical profession.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the second most common form of cancer in females, one in eight women will be diagnosed with the disease in her lifetime. Many experience debilitating emotional, physiological and functional limitations as a result of breast cancer treatments. In this project, our purpose was to investigate whether or not the *Feldenkrais Method* could provide a valuable contribution to the treatment regimen of women with breast cancer. We hypothesized that survivors would notice reduced pain, improved function (measurable and perceived), and improved range of motion in the affected arm after five *Awareness Through Movement*® (ATM®) lessons. Paulette suggested that we should use ATM lessons from *Unbound!*, a series created by Alice Brydges, GCFP, dancer and t’ai chi teacher, specifically for breast cancer survivors.

We cast a wide net for our student participants by contacting local support groups and medical practitioners for volunteers. Our final sample included 28 participants, (ages ranging from 43 to 76 years old, who had received a broad range of medical treatments for their breast cancers. Six San Francisco Bay area *Feldenkrais*® practitioners agreed to participate in the study. Their duties included performing the pre- and post-test measurements and teaching the ATM lessons. Measurements included the Disability of Shoulder and Hand Index (DASH), shoulder range of motion and pain scale ratings. The DASH is a questionnaire that asks about symptoms as well as one’s ability to perform activities that include the use of the arm. Participants numerically rated their ability from “No Difficulty” to “Unable.” Some of the abilities measured include opening a new or tight jar, carrying a heavy object (over ten pounds), and playing a musical instrument (e.g., “Are you playing your musical instrument as well as you would like?”; “Are you spending your usual amount of time practicing?”). The practitioner-researchers worked with me as a group to learn how to use a goniometer, a tool that measures joint motion in angles for the purposes of measuring range of motion while reaching forwards and sideways with the arm. The DASH, range of motion, and pain scale ratings were taken by the practitioner leading the class at the start of the first lesson and after the end of the last lesson.

We did not know what to expect from our adventure. After a long group effort of number crunching and some volunteer time from a physical therapist pal who knows his statistics, we had our results. Using a statistical tool called the Pearson test, we found a positive correlation: As the students’ pain intensities dropped, their self-rated level of disability dropped. When we compared the pre- and post-DASH data, we found a reduction in disability measurements for the students. Therefore, our hypothesis was supported: Participants had measurable improvements in function as a result of their participation in classes. (Our range of motion data did not show any obvious patterns of change.)

We created a self-assessment report in order to gather qualitative information from our subjects regarding their perceptions of body image. One student noted that after the series “the right side is still stronger, but the two sides becoming more connected and more equal.” Another student stated, “I feel I am more….balanced.” Another student mentioned, “I am more flexible.”

One of our practitioner-researchers offered this reflection about her experience with the study: “What I can say is that the lessons with the six students I had were very meaningful. The women told me they had been given no hope of improving function after completing physical therapy. But as a result of the *Feldenkrais* study, all of them improved in range of motion, but the best of all was the

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A First Approximation

(continued from page 10)

change in attitude, and self-esteem.”

In summary, this pilot study gives us a possible starting point for our Feldenkrais community to delve deeper into the research of how our method can improve the comfort level and functional skills of women receiving breast cancer treatment. We hope that our “first approximation” will inspire others to take this to the next level as a possible topic for a more complete research project.

Thank you to the many people who helped create and complete this project: Paulette Dolin, Karen Poplawski, Jeanette Cosgrove, Charlotte Chavez, Cynthia Calmenson, Susan Miller, Deborah Norton, Manny Bakis, Peter Boffey, Pat Buchanan and our amazing, brave participants who were willing to help us all learn a little more about how the Feldenkrais Method may just have an important part in the role of recovery from breast cancer.

Lori Thompson Sweet is a Feldenkrais teacher and physical therapist in Clayton, CA.

Unbound!

by Pat Buchanan, PhD, ATC, PT, GCFT, Chair, Esther Thelen Research Committee

Alice Brydges, Guild Certified Feldenkrais Practitioner (1996), is a former professional dancer and long-time t’ai chi and chi gong instructor. Soon after graduating from her training, Alice was invited to teach t’ai chi and chi gong classes at the University of California, San Francisco, to cancer patients at Mt. Zion’s Cancer Resource Center. Despite it’s slow, mindful pace, she found her students were having difficulties with many of the t’ai chi movements, and—most especially—with the energy demands of remaining upright for a significant period of time, due to exhaustion from chemotherapy.

“I knew I needed to get them inside and lying down on the floor—fast” says Alice. “So I transformed the class into an Awareness Through Movement-based class that could be taught in a variety of positions. Before I knew it, I had a completely new class, full of women in varying stages of recovery from mastectomies. It was a bit overwhelming, as I could only imagine what they were going through.”

One day after class, one of Alice’s students approached her to ask if she would consider creating a program for ALL women who were undergoing treatment for breast cancer, in order to experience the tremendous benefits of the Feldenkrais Method. “I immediately had the idea for Unbound!” says Alice. “It went through my mind like a lightning-bolt….Yes!!! Audio lessons that women could do at home!”

“We started the very next week, experimenting with lessons and specific portions of lessons to discover what movements and concepts were most beneficial. We went through dozens of lessons….the entire process took two years,” she recalls. “I learned sooooo much. It was a complete ‘Labor of Love’! I will forever be grateful to the wonderful, courageous women in my class. Without them, ‘Unbound!’ would not have been possible. I am excited and honored to see where others are taking the work—my program was presented at the Mayo Clinic a few years ago by fellow Feldenkrais practitioner Lisa Walker—and I am delighted that the lessons served as a source of inspiration and provided the foundation for the intervention in this study. Let’s keep exploring!”

Pat Buchanan, PhD is a Feldenkrais teacher, physical therapist, and athletic trainer in Des Moines, IA.