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## The Back

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# SenseAbility

A newsletter of applications of the *Feldenkrais Method*® of somatic education

## Feeling Whole Again, and Again

Five years ago, John Pollard, at age 46 had always felt himself to be strong and capable. He had been running his own successful but physically demanding business,– Pollard Shelving, in Mercersburg, Pennsylvania, for over fifteen years. Then he had a truck accident. He was left with troublesome back pain that threatened his ability to carry on with his work. His doctor, who was aware of the *Feldenkrais Method*® and knew that it could produce remarkable results, suggested John try *Functional Integration*® lessons and referred him to me. At the time, I was newly established as a practitioner and John was one of my first students. He came to his lessons with an open mind and an eagerness to learn. He made exceptional progress during a series of only five lessons and, pain free, returned to work.

Recently when I checked with John to ask how our lessons had affected him then and since, he reported: “At first I couldn’t see how the things we were doing -- movements that seemed far removed from and totally unrelated to the site of my pain – were helping me feel better. But I soon began to notice that I had been tensing myself in many ways against the pain and out of fear of further injury. I saw that my protective response, useful initially, was preventing normal movement and, therefore, complete healing. The *Feldenkrais* lessons taught me that **the body has a mind of its own** and that we often don't pay attention to what it is trying to tell us. I learned to stop and pay attention. I learned that when one is injured one tends to protect that injury, consciously and subconsciously and that sometimes this overprotection damages more than it helps.

My experience with the *Feldenkrais Method* helped me to apply these techniques to subsequent injuries. **I learned to look at the body and the mind differently, to see that neither is master, but that both work together to produce a unified whole.** Conventional approaches tend to separate the two; Feldenkrais says that they are inseparable.” John especially appreciated this new way he could view himself and his interaction with his environment, not just in the physical realm, but the mental and emotional as well, and the many ways in which protective behaviors inhibit full functioning.

John further told me of a remarkable follow-up to our work together. About a year after seeing me, he suffered a serious leg fracture requiring surgery, with a guarded prognosis for a satisfactory outcome. He worried that he would never walk normally again. During his prescribed rehabilitation, he sensed that, as before, his protective responses were hindering full recovery. Assessing his situation, he began to pay attention to himself in the ways that he had learned in our lessons together. He was soon able to put his fears aside, and on his own put into practice the principles he had learned earlier, and thus, he feels, greatly facilitate his recovery. “The *Feldenkrais Method* is the thing that most helped me feel whole again!”

– **Bob Hunter**, a GCFP, works with individuals and groups in south-central Pennsylvania and in Hagerstown, Maryland. Contact him at: 717.328.2363.

## Sean, Who Learned to be Tall

A charming six year-old, Sean had bright red hair, twinkling green eyes and a spray of freckles. This solid little boy reminded me of Garrison Keillor's description of his home town "...where all the children are above average." **Sean had been born with a marked kyphosis, or a humped back.** With guilty insight, his mother confided that she feared marital arguments had traumatized Sean during her pregnancy. I invited Anne to stay in the room as her son climbed onto the table.

I found Sean's neck muscles and jaw unusually tight; his small shoulder blades were stiffly held with the configuration of his curved spine. A healthy little boy who wanted to be outside running – he continued to wriggle, tightening and extending his body, locking his knees together, and gritting his jaw through much of the lesson. The tension in his jaw, neck and shoulders was as high as that of a CEO of a troubled dotcom firm.

I began with an infant developmental movement that invites a stage of crawling by organizing the upper back. Sean lay on his stomach with pillows beneath his chest and one leg drawn up alongside, bending at the knee. I slowly helped him slide one knee in towards his pelvis and then allow it to slide back out. I added gently compressing the tight muscles along his spine and his ribs until they released. As his mother led him out, he spontaneously flattened his upper back.

"His back is beautiful – and you didn't even have to hurt him!" his Mom exclaimed. I sadly realized that this devoted mother had entrusted her little son to me with the expectation that I would hurt him to "help" him. I gently explained that our work follows childhood's natural process of being stimulated by curiosity and pleasure, rather than any painful forcing.

I encouraged other family members to take an introductory course in the *Feldenkrais Method* so they can understand and support their child's process –and to address any of their own movement problems. Anne and her husband readily agreed, as they both suffered from severe back problems.

I encourage family members to take an introductory course in the *Feldenkrais Method* so they can understand and support their child's process – and to address any of their own movement problems!



I explained to Anne that the "flexion response" is a primary directive for our species and a natural response whenever we feel under attack, whether it be a grumpy parent, kids teasing at school, or any prolonged stressor. I also explained that the poor design of infant seats, children sitting in adult-sized chairs, and school desks all reinforce this slumping posture, as they force the children to sit rolling backward toward their sacrum.

Sean enjoyed the second session, which began with judo rolls. After we reviewed the infant movement from the first session, he sat on the table and I introduced rocking his pelvis forward onto his "Sitz bones." I showed him how rolling forward made him taller, while slumping made him shorter, explaining "Now you are a BIGGER boy, now you are smaller." (Sitz bones create a flat surface from the two ischial tuberosities meeting at the pubic bone. This is the only flat bony surface on the pelvis and sitting on that site immediately lines the spine up properly. Ask your *Feldenkrais* practitioner to show you how this is done.)

Sean and his happy mother came in for his third and last session. Sean announced proudly, "I know how to be tall and how to be short and how to be really tall!" Sean had retained his posture, and from his mother's reports through the years, **Sean never returned to his "humped back."** His parents also regained their own healthy pain-free backs as well.

– **By Felicia Noelle Trujillo**, GCFP, ND. Born with a spinal anomaly, Felicia Noelle Trujillo regained her mobility through sessions with Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais and ongoing Awareness Through Movement. See her website at: [www.backrescue.com](http://www.backrescue.com). or email: [BackRescue@att.net](mailto:BackRescue@att.net)



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**Your contribution enables FEFNA to support research projects and develop educational programs and materials to increase awareness of the *Feldenkrais Method*.**

The mission of the *Feldenkrais* Educational Foundation of North America is to foster education, research, and public awareness of the *Feldenkrais Method*® of somatic education.

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Adapted from *Feldenkrais: The Busy Person's Guide To Easier Movement*

Thousands of us undergo unnecessary surgeries in an attempt to restore pain free function to our backs. We suffer needlessly from pains in the neck and back, with irritated joints, sore muscles, and a feeling of stiffness. We spend thousands of dollars on pain medication, tranquilizers, or muscle relaxants, and countless hours on boring and ultimately ineffective back exercise routines that may leave us feeling as if we were robots or machines. Even worse, countless back pain sufferers live a shadowy existence in which quiet suffering seems like all that can be done about it.

We generally assume that all of our pain problems arise because our spine isn't able to withstand the stress caused by a certain activities or because we're not strong enough and don't have enough stamina, or because the activity itself is too demanding. We try to remedy this situation either by making our bodies stronger and more flexible and increasing our endurance, or by avoiding the activity in question. When we reduce things to the spine, the back muscles, or any other bit and part of ourselves, we miss out on how our posture and our lack of awareness contribute to, or completely create our back pain. **We deepen our understanding of anything by learning to make distinctions.**

In order to become a good cook, for example, you must learn to make taste distinctions. Unless you learn how to make distinctions in tastes, textures, and temperatures, you will never learn how to cook, that is, how to make a good dish under any circumstances. I believe *The Feldenkrais Method* is the most advanced and effective tool for improving the body's own capacity to learn to move intelligently. The lessons include all body parts in every action. The movements do not require mechanical repetition. Their positive results donot depend on stretching or softening your muscles, but on improving the effectiveness with which the brain coordinates and controls movements.

The lessons are not recipes for “correct” movement, they do not tell you how to breathe or walk, how to sit or stand. They teach you how to become your own measure for efficient movement – how to make distinctions that canlead to a pain free back You will learn to perceive consciously how you move, where there is tension in your body, where you exert unnecessary effort, and when you are not making use of your full potential. This knowledge will allow you to develop new and effortless movements... If you find yourself smiling while you are doing a lesson, you will know that you are doing something right.

– **By Frank Wildman, CFT, Ph.D.**, has designed and directed over a dozen *Feldenkrais* training programs. Frank is a faculty member of the American Back Society and designed the University of California back care program. He regularly presents the *Feldenkrais Method* at international and national symposia on issues relating to pain and other life phenomena and has produced several tape programs on the method in audio and video cassette form.



(Cont. from page 3)

Movement Lesson 9, from The Busy Person's Guide to Easier Movement:**LEG TILT: *Awareness Through Movement* Lesson**

1. With your arms and legs long at your side, feel your contact with the floor. Take a guess: of the entire surface of the back of your body, head to heels, what percentage is touching the floor right now? Now imagine you're lying on a balance beam that is along your spine, dividing you into two halves. If you started to fall, to which side do you feel you would roll off the beam? You might find that your pelvis would roll in one direction while your head and chest would roll in the other. If there were an emergency, and you had to roll out of the way as fast as possible, to which side do you imagine you would roll automatically?

2. Bend your right knee so the right foot can rest solidly on the floor, not too close to yourself and not too far. Find the balanced place where it takes the least effort to stay in this position. Push down through the right foot so the right hip lifts off the floor a little and you roll to the left. Let the movement be very small and make sure that the left leg is relaxed. The right knee should stay directly above the right foot during the entire movement of the hip. Experiment with the placement of the right foot to find the very best position to do this motion. Notice what the head is doing as you push down with the right foot.

3. Repeat the previous motion using the left foot to push, lifting the left hip. Check that the right leg is resting and relaxed. Position the left foot in different places until you discover the position that allows the most efficient push.

4. Bend both knees and put both feet on the floor while making sure that each leg is independently balanced. Place your arms away from your body. Slowly tilt your knees to the left. Note the shift in pressure across the soles of your feet as the legs tilt. What happens at the neck, chest, and upper back? Does your head want to turn right or left? Where does the work come from to tilt the knees? Notice what happens inside your mouth and throat when the knees tilt. If you feel an urge to turn your head in one direction as you tilt your knees, go ahead and exaggerate that motion. Let your legs go a little further each time you tilt them and feel the effect on your shoulders. Rest completely with your arms and legs long.

5. Repeat tilting your legs to the other side as you roll on your pelvis and roll across the bottoms of your feet. Rest.

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