

# EXCHANGE

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## From the Chair

February 27, 2009

From this Chair,

Hello once again to my friends and colleagues throughout the worldwide Alexander Community.

I come to you all at time of great trepidation and also great hope. It is clear that we are facing an international economic crisis, but at the same time I believe the world is still hopeful that change in the United States government will result in a turn-around for the global community.

And I don't just mean changes in economic policy. I believe most citizens of the world feel that a change in the U.S.'s relationships, with governments throughout the world, will create more good will and positive energy.

At the same time, I also believe that we are all fearful. No one quite knows what is going to happen around the next corner, or in the next Unemployment report, Gross Domestic Product figures, or International Monetary Fund report. Frankly, I can't even claim to understand all of these reports and figures. I listen to the news diligently. Receive it. (Try not to let it scare me.) Breathe. Notice. And then I observe my immediate community and myself and ask, "How am I being affected, and how are my friends, neighbors and small town being affected, as well as the larger global community?"

I have noticed that my U.S. dollar doesn't stretch as much at the market as it used to do. This has been changing since June of 2008. I have noticed that cut backs are being made in my department, as well as campus-wide at The University of Mississippi where I teach. And, from communicating with colleagues across the United States, I find that we



## ATI Vision and Mission

Alexander Technique International is a worldwide organization of teachers, students and friends of the Alexander Technique created to promote and advance the work begun by F. Matthias Alexander. ATI embraces the diversity of the international Alexander Technique community and is working to promote international dialogue. Our mission is:

1. To create and sustain open means of global communication for people to discuss apply, research and experiment with the discoveries of F.M. Alexander.
2. To encourage the use of the F.M. Alexander Technique in both human and environmental relationships.
3. To embody the principles of the F.M. Alexander Technique in ATI's structure and means of operation.

are in better financial shape than some and in worse shape than others. I have noticed friends being laid off, not just factory workers or retail sales people, but also lawyers and architects. I have noticed local factories closing and no other businesses moving into town to fill the void.

But I have also noticed myself really examining what I need, when I'm shopping at the market, as opposed to what I want. I have also noticed my colleagues pitching in to save the department and the university money. And I have also noticed my community opening to enfold those most in need. Case in point; financial donations to the church that I attend are way down. However, time donations and volunteerism are on the rise. The congregation is intensifying its commitment to communicating with individuals who are in need, as well as providing meals for those who need a gentle lift up, or just sitting listening when someone needs to release the pressure of the emotional stress that comes with not knowing how you're going to pay the mortgage or put food on the table for the children.

It is in times like these that the world truly needs us — the practitioners and teachers of the Alexander Technique. I believe it is imperative at this moment to use our knowledge of the Alexander Technique to help the world get through this global crisis. And as an International community, ATI is uniquely poised to have such an influence.

Every spring I teach Alexander Technique, within the confines of an academic structure. This is not the easiest fit, but over the years I have found a way to allow the two areas to complement one another. As I introduce my students to each Alexander principle, tiny piece by tiny piece, I find myself back as a beginner in the work. Once again, I am learning and experiencing the principles for the first time.

As I have been introducing AT concepts this spring I am struck by the concept of faulty perception: "That if it feels different, it must not be right. I know this to be right. So anything different is wrong!" Besides the whole notion of defining anything simply as right or wrong, it is always an interesting challenge to help my students understand the idea that different is OK, and perhaps even wonderful: that to change one's use, one has to take a new pathway, make different choices, and embrace the unknown.

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# EXCHANGE

*ExChange* is published three times per year by Alexander Technique International (ATI), the purpose of which is to promote and advance the F. Matthias Alexander Technique. *ExChange* is designed to disseminate information regarding the Technique to ATI members and the public.

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As the world goes along a new pathway, being led by President Obama, I do sense some fear and panic among those who are fearful of change or the unknown.

I believe our responsibility as AT practitioners and teachers is to live the principles, and model a different kind of response to change.

Greenpeace got it right: “Think globally – act locally.” By employing our good use, we can as knowledgeable Alexander practitioners and teachers, guide the whole world through this crisis, with grace and ease.

Now who knows; maybe by the time you read this message, all of my worries will prove to have been for naught, and everything will be going in a more positive direction. Maybe: maybe not. And perhaps all I have written above is absolutely irrelevant to the positive changes needed to re-route the financial state of the world.

But maybe, just maybe — if we all employ our principles together we can change the world.

From this Chair,

Jennifer Mizenko, ATI Chair

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## Alexander's Gift to the Evolution of Mankind

by Jan Baty

*The following is an edited transcript of an interview about the Alexander Technique with Jan Baty conducted by Tony Maxwell on the University of Delaware (WVUD) student radio program, Radio Alchemy. A pod-cast of the whole interview can be heard by going to WVUD.org*

### **Tony Maxwell:**

Our guest this afternoon is Jan Baty who came to the University originally to join the Delos String Quartet, artists in residence at that time. After the group disbanded, she remained in the area teaching what's called the Alexander Technique, locally and around the country. Our topic today is – *Alexander's Gift to the Evolution of Mankind*.

Jan, Welcome to the program! What exactly *is* the Alexander Technique?

### **Jan Baty:**

It's a study at once practical and profound, and it's difficult to put into just a few words. That's why I'm glad we have a whole hour to talk about it! It is named after F.M. Alexander who spent his life developing this approach to human potential. He died fairly recently, in 1955, which might be why relatively few people know about it. Also the teaching is often done one on one, although many of us also do teach in small groups. So it takes a while for new ideas to get out there.

Even though many people in the expressive arts have studied this, I didn't find out about it until I had my first job in the Montreal Symphony. I went to study with a woman who gave me what is called a *table lesson*. While I was lying on a massage table she worked with me very gently to allow my body to release out of held excess tension. She said very little. When I got off that table, I experienced walking in a way I never remember having experienced before. I was floating, truly floating, and I thought "Ye Gawds, can life be like this?" However, I didn't have any idea what I had just been through or how I could help myself in the future, which was what truly interested me. Then when I came back to the States, I began going out to Nebraska to study with a remarkable teacher named **Marjorie Barstow**, who became a legend in this field of human growth. As a young woman she had gone from Nebraska to study with F.M. Alexander in England, and she graduated from his first teacher-training program. I learned so much from her – not only about myself, but about how to teach, how to work deeply with something that is this subtle. My first lesson with her, again, made such a strong impression on me. With some trepidation—not knowing what was going to happen — I got my violin out and as she brought her hands very gently to me, guiding me to release delicately through my neck and my body, I played in a way that I hadn't played before. The experience was as if I weren't holding my violin, as if it were floating in front of me yet somehow the sound was coming out. That's what I call an *a-ha* experience, when you release more tension than you normally would, and your whole nervous system is blown away by it. After such first time experiences, and when you begin receiving more touch guidance, and start to help your own self, the change is less dramatic, but those first dramatic changes give you an immediate insight into what is possible—more ease, more delight, greater appreciation in life.

### **Tony:**

You said that typically the Alexander Technique is used by people in the expressive arts. Is it also applicable to someone in business or to an engineer?

### **Jan:**

Absolutely! As much as I love working with people in the expressive arts, *everyone* is an expressive being, and we each take our own instrument, which is *our self*, with us, no matter where we are. The beauty of this study is that as you work through your awareness and your body – since they are interconnected – that affects your state of being, your state of mind, your availability to life, how well you learn. It is very important in the educational

process. You begin learning simple ways that you can work with yourself at any moment of the day. When that exquisite design becomes more readily sensed by you, and available to you, it helps release excess tension so that *any* activity becomes available for further exploration. When I teach, I help people learn about walking, how they use their arms, how they nod their heads. All of these things can either be done with extra layers of interference, or they can be done more easily, so that each motion becomes a way to improve what an Alexander teacher would call your *use* -- the way you are moving through the world—taking excess pressure off your body.

**Tony:**

So as a study in movement, does this affect presence?

**Jan:**

We are working with the whole person. As you release extra tension held in your body caused by habits, not only of moving but of thinking and feeling too, your ‘presence’ is deeply affected. We talk about the *startle pattern* that comes from fear and about the *freeing response*—these are both innate in us. Of course, we have all experienced the startle pattern. If I suddenly clap my hands, your eyes would close; your limbs would fold in towards your body for protection. Then ideally, on the other side of that, you release—that’s the freeing response — when you feel safe, when you feel loved, when you are comfortable. However, often we don’t free as deeply as we could, carrying some of that layering of startle, of effort, of holding, around with us. Some of that efforting also comes from well intentioned suggestions from years of having heard teachers or parents saying things like “Sit up straight!” when they have seen you slumping. In response usually you push from the torso with effort, which is not the way you are designed to release into your free length. That torso pushing feels uncomfortable, so then you are getting a crossed message saying “You are not all right the way you are” but if you sit up straight, you feel terrible and that gives you another message saying “I am *still* not all right. This is even worse. When I try to do what people want me to do, I become even more uncomfortable.” Also cultural interferences come from our image of what is considered “beautiful” — holding in our stomachs, tucking our seats under. In fact, if people have had dance training, they can be taught to do this to achieve a certain look.

Do that right now, Tony, just hold in your stomach, and notice how that feels!

**Tony:**

I think I do that all of the time.

**Jan:**

Exaggerate that somewhat so you can sense what happens to movement through your whole body, to your breathing, to your availability to yourself.

**Tony:**

Everything tightens up. As, anyway, I am not in the greatest shape, I probably try to hold my stomach in just for the look of it.

**Jan:**

You and everyone else! Once you begin to notice that extra tension, then you can also release it. We *need* habits, but part of the Alexander Technique study is to find out which habits are interfering with our natural design, so we can check on ourselves many times a day, notice what condition we are in, and then elicit the freeing response that allows us to release into balance.

**Tony:**

This freeing response is something one can learn by going through Alexander’s movement techniques?

**Jan:**

The freeing response is something you *don't* have to learn as it comes with the territory. What you *are* doing is learning to *elicit* it by releasing out of interferences, so that your ongoing freeing response, which is latently there as long as you are alive, can move for you. Sometimes I use the image of being in the bathtub with a rubber duck and you press down on the duck. When you release that pressure – *doink!* There goes that duck, floating to the surface. We are a water system; we have cushiony discs between our vertebrae, and yet all of the pressing and holding in we do on ourselves keeps that natural resilience from expressing itself. What I love about this study is that we do not have to put more layers onto ourselves to “correct” ourselves: rather, we are, in a way, doing an archaeological dig to take away those acquired habitual layers to discover our beautiful design underneath. *That is who we are.* The more we experience this freedom, the more we *want* to experience it. The more we check in, the more we release delicately out of the unnecessary layers; a virtuous cycle!

Let me talk you through the kind of sensing I do for myself and with others. First I will ask you to simply bring awareness to yourself in this moment in an easy way; not what we would call being self conscious, but simply notice your way *in* for noticing yourself. Are you noticing touch, sight, sound, discomfort, tiredness, ease, smell? Take *time* to notice that. Simply come to where you are without any idea of holding on to notice, because, if you hold on to notice, you are already creating extra tension, which can become a new habit of interference. Our kinesthetic sense is the sense that lets me know where my feet are in relation to my head, that lets me know if I am moving or not. It is an amazing sense that gives us feedback about ease or effort in the body, and yet, in school, we are taught that we only have five senses, and our kinesthetic sense is not even mentioned.

To enliven this sense, you can start by noticing where the feeling of weight is going through your body and into the earth. If you are sitting it goes through the sitting bones, through the chair and then into the earth. If standing, fan your awareness through your body gently down through your legs, your feet, and again into the earth. *We are designed to rest*, although we hold ourselves away from, squeeze into, press down into any available surface. This lovely quality of rest is not heavy like a collapse, because, after resting in relation to gravity, you then send awareness gently up through your whole body, through your spine, out through your whole head, across your upper torso and down into your hands.

Then you become very light—resting and light at the same time.

You *are* doing this, Tony! And it looks like you are falling asleep! What do you notice?

**Tony:**

That did help me relax! In general when I do this radio show I am slightly on edge as I need to listen attentively to come up with questions or tie what the guest just said with something said earlier. Being slightly on edge allows me to have more energy for the program. While you were going through those instructions and I was sensing myself in a wave from top to bottom, I sensed relaxation: I stopped twirling my pen for a while as I was listening to you.

**Jan:**

In life, I find that quickly I become over-stimulated and start “twirling my pen” as it were, but, if I can bring awareness to myself even for a few moments and let some resting happen in easy ways, then I am not wearing myself out. By the end of the day I have accumulated more ease and more depth of my “being” nature. Our “doing” natures are very easily over-stimulated. We overwork no matter *what* we are doing. When we walk we pound the sidewalk. I still have a bump on my middle right finger from when I first learned to write by over squeezing my pencil. There I was, hovered over my paper, squeezing away like crazy. Did anyone come along to say, “You know Jan, you don’t need to work so hard when you do this?” No!—nobody did. This is the kind of awareness we can bring into our everyday activities so that we begin to let go of any extra tensions we have. Then we are more able to appreciate being alive.

**Tony:**

I recently heard someone distinguishing between being a human “being” and a human “doer.” Most people today are human “doers” because we are all so busy. There’s so much going on at home, there are family issues, pressures at work. As a result, there is little time spent contemplating, or being introspective about anything. We are just doing stuff all of the time.

**Jan:**

I agree with you and, sadly, this culture lets us know that this is a good way to be; that if we are *not* doing that, there must be something wrong with us! In Alexander’s time (1869 —1955) his discoveries were considered revolutionary. They still are — because our culture is even more bound into endless doing! However, the beauty of this study is that as you begin working with yourself, you can continue to do all the things you want to do, except with more ease. As this happens, you might begin to make different choices and actually let some things fall away; gradually beginning to change how much of your life you spend doing things you don’t need to do.

**Tony:**

Now I want to ask you—*Gift to the Evolution of Mankind*—what do you mean by the title you gave me for this interview?

**Jan:**

As we use less effort in moving through our daily lives, we also affect the availability to our emotions, because our bodies, minds, feelings and spirit are all interconnected. We might not always sense this; however, the more we work with the Alexander Technique, the more we experience that wholeness. There is much we can’t affect directly in the world, yet, as we change and grow, we affect those around us, and this continues spiraling out, so that by coming back to a deeper sense of ourselves in this way every day, moment-by-moment, we become catalysts for the changes we would like to see in the world. I am often frustrated by what governments are doing, by what communities are doing, by such issues as global warming. Surely anyone watching Al Gore’s film *An Inconvenient Truth* couldn’t help but be deeply moved by what he is doing to better the condition of the planet. I may not be able to do what he is doing, however, each of us, as we find through the Alexander Technique more freedom within ourselves, will know that we are being effective. This is a powerful way of making change. It doesn’t have to happen hierarchically, it can spiral out from each person. Often this is something we don’t hear about in our culture. We can feel unworthy; we fall into the trap of exaggerating, of over-efforting, of trying to be larger than life. Whereas, when we come to sense the inner beauty and exquisite grace that is *who we are* – not only each one of us but also every living creature, every tree, everything on the planet, we acquire such respect for ourselves and for others that violence falls away. We become deep ecologists because, with that kind of love and appreciation, how can we destroy? This is a *reclaiming* for me. A practical way of reclaiming, step by step, day by day, as we live, more of an understanding and appreciation of what life really is on this planet, of coming more deeply into the present, because that is all the time we have.

Some of us scurry into the future, or dwell in the past, yet, right now, Tony, as you and I sit here; we are all living on the cusp of the unfolding universe. That is powerful knowledge. That is exciting to me. This brings a full awareness to the very degree we are present to it; otherwise we might as well sit and watch TV or drink beer. Many students spend a lot of time doing such things, possibly because they are not experiencing themselves very deeply—otherwise they might make other choices.

**Tony:**

You spoke about the inner balance that one may gain from studying the Alexander Technique. How would this differ from practicing meditation or yoga, *reiki*, or any other type of esoteric movement study?

**Jan:**

All of those are wonderful paths into awareness. What this study has to offer is that, since it is helping you learn about how you are designed for ease of movement, you can take that into your *reiki* as you put hands on, you can take that into your yoga class and organize those movements, so that you don't interfere, to acquire more benefit from the postures. In a way, bringing awareness to yourself as you go through your daily life becomes a meditation through living. You don't necessarily have to slow down and sit quietly. You begin to do that internally as you go through your life. It becomes a kind of meditation that can be ongoing to the degree that you choose it to be. Does that explain it to you?

**Tony:**

It does. What is fascinating is that we have gone through the industrial age, with people pursuing practical professions in order to make money and take care of families. Within the last twenty years or so, I have noticed a growing interest in learning about self-help studies that can help people be more than just their job, that there is more to life than those practical things we were taught to do and were expected to follow through on. We are entering a time of deeper spiritual awareness, more so than ever before outside of organized religion.

**Jan:**

I agree with you. That is a deep hope that I have in this troubled world. There is such a yearning in human beings for love, kindness, compassion, to be listened to, to share. So the interference, when exaggerated, can sometimes be a gift in that it helps you see, "I am not that; I do not want to choose that. What other options are there? There must be something else." So that voice in us becomes stronger, that voice that is always there, that is guiding us. There are some students I have worked with who have panic-attacks because they are under a lot of stress. I look at this tendency and say, "What are we doing in our education? Is it a gift to heap people with such stress? What are the students learning from that burden? What if the basis of our education was to help us learn how to value ourselves—how *easily* we could learn if more of ourselves were present? Learning is natural: little children are so curious, wondering, wanting to know and experience everything. We don't need to *make* ourselves learn, it comes with the territory. The job of educational institutions is to create environments where natural learning can happen. Part of that is a healing process, a letting go of what we thought we needed to do that is not helpful, in order to begin to be in touch with our deeper selves and bring this practically into our environment.

**Tony:**

Historically, the purpose of our public education system was to create workers, "doers," not sensitive human beings.

When talking before our program today you mentioned interferences, and that there is a relationship between all things. What did you mean by that, and can you give some examples of interferences?

**Jan:**

Interferences in our body can happen for any number of reasons. With the Alexander study we start by learning how we are designed for ease and support, and then begin discovering habits of excess tension that interfere with that design. As I watch people move, I am looking for ease and effort, not posture. Interference shows up as excess tension and I can see that appear in the quality of a person's movement, then quite easily help them reorganize that movement, so that the tension falls away. As they move with more ease, they become more sensitive to noticing themselves; their feelings, their attitudes, their belief systems. Everything begins to emerge to them so they can begin to explore their own inner territory. That is a revelation, step by step — a fascinating journey!

Let me talk through some experiential anatomy. This may sound gruesome, but it really isn't. Imagine taking away (from your bone structure) your arm structure, your pelvis and legs, ribs too—then you'd have left only your head and spine. So we are organized like a snake really, around head / spine. When you experience the startle pattern,



it travels through the spine to hold you in a momentary state of tension for the sake of protection. The release of that affects our whole body. The web of your whole body is also affected by how your head moves on your spine. How we nod (think how many times we do that in a day) either accumulates tension or ease depending on how the movement is organized. When most of us nod our heads, extra tension comes from leading with the jaw. However the jaw is an appendage, draping beautifully from the skull. It is designed to follow where the skull goes, and to move freely for yawning or eating or singing! Leading with the jaw creates a pattern of tension going through the whole body—just like pushing down that rubber duck in the bathtub.

**Tony:**

What do you mean, “Leading with the jaw?”

**Jan:**

It is when the impulse for movement comes from under the jaw. People do this habitually. If instead of that, you get your awareness going through your *whole* head, —and let the *desire* for movement come from the top of the head (that doesn't mean that all of the muscles are up there, but that the *desire* comes from there) then the head, following that desire, allows a beautiful sliding and gliding on the top joint of the spine, which is pretty much in between your ears. Most people don't experience that sliding and gliding, because they are nodding their head by tightening the neck and leading from the jaw. That's one way of organizing, however it is not helpful and every time you do that you are creating tension not only in your body but you are also taking away some of your emotional availability to life: you are creating some anxiety, some extra stress you don't need. As people learn to move their heads freely, with the desire coming from the top, not holding tension in the spine, they begin to slide and glide on that top joint, and they feel the vertebrae through the spine moving so exquisitely, it is like an internal massage. That is truly the response we are supposed to be getting. However, if you are sitting up straight, holding in your torso, even if you move your head beautifully, the movement will not go through the whole spine because of the extra tension you have created in your torso.

**Tony:**

I have been practicing moving my head leading both ways. It is distinctly more comfortable to lead from the top of the head. This is a strange concept: I have never thought about it before!

**Jan:**

This allows your head to be light, and it lets you release the interference from your jaw's thinking that it needs to hurry up and do something. That's your old habit, right? “Oh. Oh. Tony is ready to move. Let's get in there and help him!” As you've just experienced, this is not really helpful. You can *thank* your jaw for all of that extra work it has been doing over the years, and say, “Hey- you know what? Your job description is that you drape easily from the skull —which is above you — and you're designed to drink, laugh. You don't need that extra job of moving the head around; you are just going along effortlessly for the ride.” That is a very different kind of experience. We begin to reclaim our territory. The more sensitive you become the more your body becomes the instrument, the sounding board, to give you accurate feedback as to what is happening. You will begin to find out, “When I nod my head that way, my whole body tightens. As I move my head easily, my whole body is freeing, to the degree that I am not tightening in my torso.” That means that *everything is connected to everything*. Each one of us is more like a water bed than a stick figure. Our thoughts affect us, our feelings affect us, and how we use our bodies affects us. They are all interacting. We can get feedback from ourselves, and, the more feedback we get, the more sensitive we become.

Let me give you another example. When people move their arms, I notice that the main interference comes from pushing the arm out from the elbow area, creating unnecessary tension that affects the whole body. You will notice, “My neck is tight, my back is tight, I am not breathing freely. I am cut off from the earth.” Actually, you are cut off from support. It's uncomfortable, and you build up extra tension every time you do that. Our *hands* want to experience the world; our *hands* that are feeding us, are touching things, are gesticulating wildly if we find ourselves in Italy. So the *desire* to connect to the world, the *desire* to sense, to touch, comes from our hands.

Why not sense the whole body, allow the spine to be free, continue that ease, and invite your hands to guide you. Let the desire come from your hands, and allow the elbows to simply fit in and be free to follow. These are things people can explore easily, and begin to experience how they can use their awareness to say “Yes” to their innate design for support, ease and grace.

**Tony:**

When you teach, how do you work with people, one-on-one or in groups? What is the process, how does one study this technique?

**Jan:**

I work with people one-on-one and I also teach in small groups. I love the small group format. As people watch each other change, and begin to understand how those changes are happening, they then can try those changes for themselves. The energy of the class is raised by the shared awareness of the group, creating a powerful learning environment. I have a class I teach on campus that is highly experiential.

We move in this class, we explore anatomy; we explore our habits of thinking, our habits of sensing. I like to help the students see how much they already know, how sensitive they already are, and join them with that. Often, during the first class, after I talk them through this wonderful sensing where they are beginning to release the tensions of the day, and they are very aware, I then say, “Now we are going to move around the room—in a big hurry!” They all know how to do that. They rush around: no one is paying attention to anybody else; we are all in one another’s way. It’s a lot of fun, a lot of energy, and a lot of *effort*. After we do that, because they all know only too well how to do that, no problem, I ask them, “What was that experience like?” I get a lot of feedback from them. They can tell me about this: they know what it was like. Sometimes they like the energy of it, yet they can also feel the strain, and usually I hear from the students, “That’s the story of my life!” So then I simply invite them to walk around the room as if they have all of the time they need. What happens? It is very different? Simply with that permission, “as if you have all of the time you need,” a lot of extra push and anxiety falls away. They can move quickly if they need to do so, but they don’t need to grip, push, squeeze, tighten up to do so, they simply move faster — and with ease. So I guide people through such experiences. This is very much experiential learning, hardly any book learning at all, experiential learning from observing and teaching ourselves.

**Tony:**

Sounds fun!

**Jan:**

It is so much fun. I love it. If I could I would be teaching classes like this all over campus, because people want to learn experientially. Our body is our instrument—we don’t often think of it like that. I also do this kind of exploration one on one as well. There is a body of knowledge I want to impart that comes out of the relationship with each person. What are their interests, what are their concerns? With this study you can join from wherever the student is, and keep coming back to the basic principles that inform our basic design. After each lesson students have much to practice during the day. From that, they make their own discoveries. We reclaim what I call *learning from the inside out*. In the inside, we really know: if we can listen, and begin to trust our own feedback, we can recognize what is helpful and what isn’t.

This is the kind of study I like to do with children. They are great to work with because they aren’t yet interfering very much. The older they become, the more the interference sets in. Why not work with them to help them appreciate their basic delight, curiosity, adventure, ease, and help them learn how to continue to do that, so that, as they get older, they can ride on that. That would be my idea of a revolutionary educational approach, to work with teachers and children, so that they don’t grip their pencils like I did as a child, but, through movement, experiential learning, connecting to nature, creating gardens around schools, we could all embody the process of learning. Self-awareness of the relative ease or effort of our bodies could so easily be a large component of this approach to learning.

**Tony:**

It sounds so idealistic.

**Jan:**

You know what? I guess it is, and yet, it is also practical. It is just a matter of perceiving in a different way. We have tons of resources. *How* those resources are used, we could have some choice about. We could bring this kind of awareness into every class that is taught on campus if teachers simply knew how to talk to students initially to help them release, to become more present to their learning. That could transform a whole campus quite quickly, in this way affecting the learning environment, and how people relate to each other.

**Tony:**

When you and I first met, Jan, we had talked about how great it would be if neighborhoods and communities could be closer to each other—and perhaps have small group gatherings for an hour a day, maybe at lunch or in the evening, to be in a motivating but safe environment, where you could share the experiences and challenges of the day, to help create a better life for yourself. Wouldn't that be amazing?

**Jan:**

Just imagining what you describe, I can feel my freeing response in my body creating more sense of rest. My spirit and my person say, "YES to that. Absolutely!" *How* have we managed to grow so far away from that? We *have* gotten far away from that, however, it is not rocket science to bring those qualities back into our lives. We can make those choices and begin to do that, even if it is just ourselves, that's already making a difference—if it is just myself and one other person when we are having a tea break, we can do that. Anything people learn from this study they can always share with others. Right now let's decide again to simply sense our whole body, rest on our sitting bones, and allow our necks to be free. Now, receive with our eyes — because sight comes to our eyes, and is received into deep pools — the interference being pushing out to see, which stiffens the whole body. If we change *only* this; if we *only* receive images with soft eyes, and let that direction feed through the whole body kinesthetically, we would turn around how we function during the whole day. Once we experience this, we can share it with anyone, and they can do the same immediately, because that is our design — another- *a-ha* experience!

Alexander teachers spend a good deal of time learning how to connect to others through touch, with the intention of listening to the ongoing ease underlying any movement. In this way we can amplify the learning experience. From experiencing the teacher's touch, students can learn more readily to release on their own. Your own sensing and thinking can do this for you. It's wonderful to have a teacher, *yet* there is much that you can do on your own.

**Tony:**

How can people learn more about the Alexander Technique? Are there books or organizations that would be appropriate?

**Jan:**

Yes. I belong to an organization called Alexander Technique International. They have a web-site with a lot of interesting articles and information, including up-coming events, workshops and lists of certified teachers in different localities. There is another Alexander organization called AMSAT, the American Society for Alexander Teachers, which also has a fine web-site. There are similar organizations in many countries.

There are a couple of books I would like to recommend. One is Glen Park's *A New Approach to the Study of the Alexander Technique*. She is a wonderful woman from England whom I have met. Another is Michael Gelb's *Body Learning*. It helps to read about this study, and, of course, it is wonderful if you can work with a teacher to gain feedback about what they are noticing, what they are seeing and sensing.

**Tony:**

What have been some of the greatest changes you have seen in others after they have been studying the Alexander Technique?

**Jan:**

Oh my! There have been so many. I have been fortunate to work with some people over a long period of time—and have watched their transformations as they have become more aware. However, changes can happen quite quickly. There is one student I have been working with lately whom I have really come to appreciate. He had had a car accident, and had some metal put into his back. He is in pain. One of the most obvious characteristics of his *use* was that he walked somewhat like a duck. His legs were turned way out. Yet I saw that this pattern was happening because, before he would begin to move or did anything with his arms, he would push back his shoulders. Men are often encouraged to do that, and he said, “Oh yes, in the martial arts I have studied, I was taught to do that.” It had become very ingrained in him. Once he noticed the habit, he began to let it go. That in turn released muscles in the whole back of his body, which then allowed his legs to release. He told me then that he had since gone to New York, spent several hours walking around the city, with no pain. He came back and saw his regular physical therapist who noticed his change and asked, “Have you been doing your physical therapy exercises?” And he replied, “Oh, No, I am practicing the Alexander Technique!” When I first began to work with him I didn’t say, “If you continue with this study you might begin to find your perceptions in life begin to change.” I didn’t say that— *he* made his own discoveries, and shared them with me. He told me, “You know I’m beginning to notice that, when I am in class, and I am sensing myself with ease, my learning is changing. I’m beginning to appreciate more about life. I’m noticing beauty: I’m taking time to smell flowers. I’m relating to my friends differently, and I am noticing how *they* walk and move, and all of the effort they bring to themselves.” That was illuminating to me because I didn’t expect him to sense such deep effects so quickly from the habits he was changing. Finding more freedom and ease *does* affect everything we do. I am constantly encouraged and delighted with the sensitivities of people.

**Tony:**

How can our listeners get in contact with you so that they can learn more about this study, and any courses you may be offering?

**Jan:**

There is a wonderful event each year which I help to organize in Virginia during the third week of June. For me this is five days of what it could be like to live fully on this planet, just what we were talking about earlier — the ideal. Our website for that is [www.theVillageGreen.net](http://www.theVillageGreen.net). My e-mail is [janbaty@yahoo.com](mailto:janbaty@yahoo.com), and my phone number is (302) 368-5141. I am always eager to talk with people about anything that they have found in their lives that is transforming, because it’s through sharing and working together that transformation really happens.

**Tony:**

Can you leave us with some parting words of wisdom — or perhaps you already have!

**Jan:**

The power of community, the continuing discovery of our own inner resources, the ongoing magnificence of being alive, on this planet, at this moment – such a GIFT!

**Tony:**

Thank you very much for being our guest today. We have been speaking to Jan Baty; the topic, *Alexander’s Gift to the Evolution of Mankind*.

**Biography:** *Jan Baty is a founding member of ATI. Her inspiration for teaching draws from the spontaneity, flexibility and skilled team-work developed over her years performing with the Delos String Quartet. Her music study includes Eastman, Yale and the Julliard School, and her Alexander background includes apprenticing with Marjorie Barstow, with further study at the Alexander Alliance in Philadelphia, where she then taught for many years.*

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## Performing with Ease: a Percussionist's Introduction to the Alexander Technique

by Rob Falvo



*Note:* This article was previously published in *Percussion Notes* (August, 2008) and is re-printed here by permission of the author. The line drawings are taken, with permission, from David Gorman's *The Body Moveable* as modified for publication in Robin Gilmore's *What Every Dancer Needs to Know about the Body*. Robin Gilmore also grants permission to re-publish these drawings.

Rob Falvo places his *hands-on* Tommy Smith, a graduate percussion student, as he performs on marimba. *Hands-on* is a way of teaching Alexander Technique.

We all have habitual patterns of movement, but we're not all conscious of these patterns. This results in resistance to movement, and performing becomes stressful to the body. When we are aware of our movements, we can sense both the ease and stress in our body. When we are unaware, we may not feel excess tension until it becomes painful.

Virtuosity is moving with balance and lightness—in other words, moving with presence. In that moment we are connected to the audience, the size of the hall, the percussion instruments we are playing, and the ease with which we are playing them. Typically, our favorite performers are those who make it look easy because it *is* easy.

Percussion playing can be big, loud, and full of energy, and is typically exciting to hear and to watch. However, the performer who plays with power can do so with balance and ease. Playing with the least amount of tension throughout the body is key.

### What Is The Alexander Technique?

The Alexander Technique deals with the conservation of energy. It is a practice that encourages people to notice the quality of their movement. F.M. Alexander used the word psychophysical to point out that the mind and body are not separated; how we think is how we move. Normally, people move with some resistance to the body's natural way. Conditioning that begins early on sets up habitual patterns that typically are not natural. These habits are passed down from generation to generation and go unnoticed until questioned.

For examples: "Do I need to walk this way or is there an easier way?" "Why does my lower back ache after a long day at work?" "Why does my arm ache after practicing this piece?" When one becomes conscious of excess tension in the body, it can be released. Many musicians are not aware of the tension they bring to their playing, which causes a great deal of forcing and pushing.

A simple exercise that you can do now is to notice, as you are reading this article, if you have tension in your neck area. Your neck is probably pushed a little forward from your body, thus creating a strain on your neck muscles. This tightens your back and prevents you from breathing fully and easily.

When this happens, think about allowing the journal (or computer print) to come to you rather than you going to it. This change in perspective can create a profound shift in how you read and is a simple way to allow your neck muscles to come into their natural length and width, thus allowing your head to balance easily on the top joint of your spine. This, in turn prevents the pull on your neck, which prevents the strain on your back and allows you to breathe effortlessly. This also works while reading music, no matter how far away the music stand might be.

F.M. Alexander was an actor in the late 1890s in Australia, whose specialty was reciting Shakespeare. He kept losing his voice on stage and did not know why. His doctors did not have a cure for him, so Alexander decided to observe himself in mirrors to find out what was happening when he spoke.

He found, after years of observing, that every time he spoke he tightened his neck muscles, which made his head drop back and down. This, in turn, shortened his neck, back, and chest muscles and put a strain on his larynx. He began to understand his habitual way of moving and found that if the tension in his neck were released, his head would move forward and up (or slightly away from his body), allowing his spine to lengthen and his back to widen, which in turn would allow his hips, knees, and ankles to be free (unlocked). He discovered the way to move with ease. Later on, scientists found that all animals move in this manner normally.

### Why Is This Interesting?

Virtuosity is performing with ease (which includes an ease of expression). To understand this is to be aware of the whole picture, which includes:

- (1) the quality of your movement;
- (2) the percussion instrument(s) on which you are performing;
- (3) the music;
- (4) the other musicians;
- (5) the resonance of the instruments in the hall;
- (6) the amount of people you are performing for; and
- (7) the size of the hall.

When the performer is aware of the whole and not concerned with wrong notes or judging if the next passage coming up is hard or easy, he or she is in the moment, and the performance happens effortlessly. The feeling is typically one of freedom, lightness, not noticing time passing. It is a wonderful, magical moment.

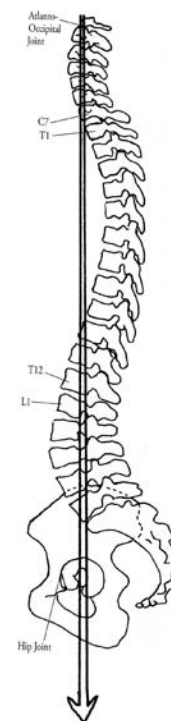
Alexander Technique supports this understanding. It encourages the performer to notice unconscious habits, thus allowing the releasing of those habits, permitting free and easy movement. With this, a musician can achieve his or her highest potential.

### Observational Mind And Intellectual Mind

In the previous section I mentioned seven basic observations that constitute virtuosity. I have had students comment, "How can I think of all these things while I need to concentrate on reading the music? I cannot do all these things at once." Often times this is referred to as multi-tasking. Actually, I see this as expanding the depth of your observational skills so that eventually you begin to sense each of the seven parts all at the same time.

Your observational mind does not judge something as right or

Figure 1



wrong, good or bad, ugly or beautiful. It observes what is happening and does not include a judgment. Your intellectual mind judges everything. How many times have you said to yourself or others, “This is good or bad, this is right or wrong.” Your intellectual mind is trying to get the music right and judging your performance every step of the way.

In my experience, the key to creating change is not just in getting the movement right or adding on more information to what you already know (although sometimes more information can help), but in seeing the tension in you and allowing change to take place. This means observing the interferences that get in the way of fluid, easy performing.

We understand by observing what is there and having change happen through us. Alexander Technique is about clearing your mind/body and thus letting go of excess tension. It is about teaching ourselves to take notice and to educate ourselves about how we move. It is about becoming conscious of what is happening and stripping away habits.

### Body Mapping

Body Mapping, discovered by cellist and Alexander teacher Bill Conable, is the way your mind diagrams your body to perceive structure, function, and size. If our maps are faulty we interfere with the way we move naturally because we have learned to think of our bone structure, function, or size differently from the way it really is.

For example, many people point to the top of their pelvis when asked where their hip joints are located. As a result, they might be creating excess tension in their body when they bend. When people find that their hip joints are much lower, they tend to move more easily.

Many teachers use Body Mapping as an adjunct to teaching the Alexander Technique. It enhances the learning experience and can increase students’ understanding of how they move.

### Mapping Your Spine and Four Main Joints

The human spine typically has 24 vertebrae. The cervical spine starts at the top joint that connects your head to your neck, called the atlas or C1, and ends at the bottom of your neck at C7. The thoracic spine is where your ribs connect to your spine, starting at the top rib at T1 to the bottom rib at T12. The lumbar spine, which has the largest vertebrae in your body, begins after the thoracic spine and has five vertebrae from L1 to L5. Following the lumbar is the sacrum and coccyx, which is at the tail end.

When viewing a person from the side, the spine is not straight; there are four curves that allow for flexibility and stability. Your line of gravity goes through the lumbar spine and cervical spine; your thoracic and sacrum are naturally found behind it. (See Figure 1).

Compare your spine to a water hose and your energy to the water. The more you bend the hose, the slower the water will come out; if you bend the hose too far, the water will be cut off. Energy in your body works in the same fashion. If your back is bent, creating a main joint where there is none, energy will be cut off, making it difficult to perform at an optimum level. If your back is bent too far, injury may

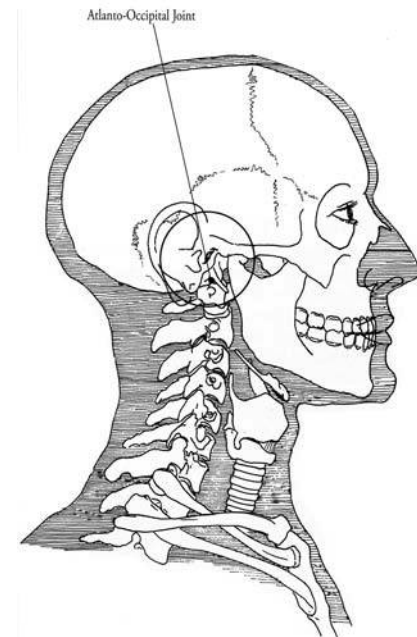


Figure 2

occur. Many backaches stem from this scenario.

How practical is this understanding for performing? As percussionists we move around our instruments all the time. If, for example, you are playing drumset and you begin to slouch over the drums, you will become tired more quickly and not have the same quality of energy for playing as when you are aware of the natural curves in your back.

Your back has all the flexibility it needs to reach the cymbals and drums, and if you need to reach farther you can move forward from your hip joints, leaving your back and arms free and relaxed. By slouching over to reach or to “coast” at a late-night gig — when everyone, including yourself, is just drop-dead tired — you create unnecessary tension in your body.

The first main joint in your body is between your ears and behind your nose. It connects the spine to the head and is called the Atlanto-Occipital joint or A/O joint (see Figure 2). When you nod your head to say “yes” you move primarily from this area. Begin to notice whether you are actually nodding from there or nodding from an area lower down on your spine. Many people will find that they are actually bending from the bottom of their neck. If you do that, you may begin to change when becoming aware that your top main joint is higher up.

When performing, begin to notice if you are primarily looking down at the music on a music stand from your A/O joint or if you are pushing your neck forward and down to bring your eyes closer to the music. You should bring the music closer to you rather than you going to it. Musicians rarely see the music any better by straining their necks.

When you need to look up or side-to-side, the same type of observation will help. For example, if you are playing chimes and need to look up to see the striking area on the tubes, are you moving primarily from the A/O joint or are you pushing your chest out, thereby narrowing your back in a way that causes excess tension throughout your body? In the Alexander Technique the neck area (which includes the front and back of your neck) is where movement begins, regardless of what you are doing. So, in any movement, begin to notice whether you are tightening your neck or letting it be free. I do not know of any activity where your neck needs to be tight!

Your hip joints are another major joint. Most people move as if their hip joints were located at the top of their pelvis—at the waist. However, no bones or joints make up the waist! The hip joints are located lower than what is generally thought. When you sit in a chair you can see the fold that is created by your thigh and upper body. Your hip joints are found deep within the center of that crease. The hip socket faces outward to the side of the body, not in front. When moving down toward the marimba, snare drum, or timpani, notice if you are moving forward from your hip joints or bending down from the top of your pelvis area. A lot of fluid movement is available if you change your body map and move where the body is naturally designed to move. When this is discovered, movement on instruments (easily observed on marimba since it is so long and you need to move quickly) becomes easy, light, and fluid. Many people perform activities with excess tension in the pelvic area, which tends to look as if the pelvis is pushed forward. This puts a strain on the whole body, particularly the hip area, creating resistance, and cutting off energy throughout the whole body. When energy is blocked it is like driving a car with your brakes on. Explore your pelvis/hip area to understand where your hip joints are and how your hip joints move.

Your knees are the third main joint. People often lock their knees when standing or walking—or when performing on almost any percussion instrument. It is like standing or moving on stilts. Your mind thinks of your legs as straight boards, and your body does its best to move. When you are standing, walking, or performing, notice if your knees are hyper-extended or flexed in a locked position. Or, is there a dynamic balance in the upper leg and lower leg that allows for flexible movement? If you find yourself locked, keep in mind that the stiffness created in your knees might be because of tensions found in your upper body. When you notice tension in your torso you can let it go, and, as Alexander put it, allow your neck to be free so that your head can move forward and up, so that your spine can lengthen and your back can widen.

Your ankles are the fourth main joint. Become aware of any tightness in your foot as you glide or step from the top end of the marimba to the bottom. When you lift your leg, are you holding tension in your ankles? A misconception is that the ankle is located at the back end of the foot at the spot that forms the shape of the letter “L” with the leg. Actually, the ankle joint is more centered and allows your weight to be distributed evenly from the front of your foot to the back. This understanding can help you move with less tension.



### Studying with an Alexander Technique Teacher

This article is an introduction to the Alexander Technique for percussionists. There is no substitute for taking lessons from a teacher. Lessons vary in nature depending on the teacher's understanding and creativity. The teacher's hands can be placed on your body to encourage the releasing of tension, or the teacher may not use his or her hands at all. Many lessons with performing artists include having the artist perform while the teacher observes and gives feedback on the quality of the performer's movement.

Many people have noticed extraordinary changes in the way they move by studying Alexander Technique. Many have lived a happier and healthier life because of it. Alexander Technique does not just pertain to performing artists, although they tend to have a vested interest in what it has to offer. In my case, it has become a way of life—a way of understanding myself that perhaps I would not have found without it—and performing and teaching music has taken on a whole different dimension.

### Recommended Books

Conable, Barbara. *What Every Musician needs to Know about the Body*. Portland: GIA Publications, 1998 rev. 2000.

De Alcantara, Pedro. *Indirect Procedures – A Musician's Guide to the Alexander Technique*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.

Gilmore, Robin. *What Every Dancer Need to Know about the Body*. [To purchase contact Robin Gilmore at [rglimmer@mindspring.com](mailto:rglimmer@mindspring.com)]

Barker, Sarah. *The Alexander Technique – Learning to Use your Body for Total Energy*. New York: Bantam, 1878, rev. 1991.

Gelb, Michael. *Body Learning – An Introduction to the Alexander Technique*. New York: Henry Holt, First Owl Book ed. 1987.

Alexander, F.M. *The Use of the Self*. London: Methuen, 1932; reissued Orion Books, 2001.

Oysler, Linnie. *Observations – Journal 1991-2003*. Unpublished. [To purchase, contact Rob Falvo at [falvorj@appstate.edu](mailto:falvorj@appstate.edu).]

**Biography:** Rob Falvo is a professor of music at Appalachian State University, where he heads the percussion department, and he is a member of the Philidor Percussion Group. In May 2007, Falvo graduated from the Chesapeake Bay Alexander Studies – North Carolina Teacher Training Program, and in June 2007 became a certified teaching member of ATI. Falvo earned a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in percussion performance from the Manhattan School of Music.

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## Exploring Alexander Technique Principles through Contact Improvisation

### by Joan Gavalier

*At the Lugano Congress of the F. M. Alexander Technique in August 1908 Joan Gavalier led a workshop examining complementary aspects of Contact Improvisation and the Alexander Technique. The following is Joan's report on the workshop.*

The inspiration for this workshop was a discovery made during my Physical Theatre course that Alexander students tend to become more kinesthetically aware, with a greater sense of inhibition, after a round of Contact Improvisation. My experience has indicated that Contact Improvisation work leads to an easy, open, un-braced connectedness through the body. It helps to activate a full sense of self without over-thinking and stimulates a non-judgmental attitude toward oneself and other people. The experience has a strong physicality without being manipulative. My goal for this workshop focused on my exploration of teaching the Alexander Technique using elements of Contact Improvisation.

I am not trying to blend the Alexander Technique and Contact Improvisation, and I do not wish to dilute either form. Contact Improvisation encourages movers to follow an open-ended point of contact with at least one other person and with the floor. This contact has a listening, responsive, and playful quality that can build to a very high energy level. The Contact Improvisation concepts highlighted in the workshop were presented to create an opportunity to uncover insights about teaching the Alexander Technique. The workshop was open both to those who had previously experienced Contact Improvisation and those who had not done so.

We began with something common to the Technique and Contact; touch. Sitting on the floor in a circle, close enough to be touching the people on either side, we noticed any urge to apologize, retract, or hold ourselves in. We experimented with whether or not we could change the quality of touch into one that was more responsive and accepting. We extended this concept to a walking and pausing improvisation. Participants walked though the room, made contact with another person (using any part of the body except the palms of their hands), and paused. Each pause was an opportunity to release holding patterns and to make the contact simpler and more open before moving again. Participants found a wide variety of ways to touch and be content.

Group members then found partners with whom to exchange *hands-on* Alexander work. Within these short exchanges, there was a heightened awareness of the underlying quality of touch. Members of the group responded to the experience with pleasure and also shared their thoughts about this movement experiment.

We returned to exploring Contact principles through a movement series that brought attention to how a single mover works in partnership with the floor. We began with the 'small dance.' Standing with eyes closed, we sensed our breath, our weight, and ourselves. The reflexive action of balancing came more fully into awareness. From this small dance we let our eyes open slightly and played with "falling" and righting ourselves. Participants were then invited to improvise a transition to the floor, which allowed them to find many points of contact in addition to the bottoms of their feet. I offered the image of water molecules that flow slowly while participants played with rolling, sliding and observing how freely bodies can change shape to accommodate movement. We let the imagined river flow with increasing energy, experimenting with ways of smoothly moving from lying, sitting, kneeling, being on hands and feet, and standing, and moving back down to the floor again. The "river" flowed and supported movement in all orientations from the horizontal to the vertical. This process stimulated a number of responses: awareness and inhibition were heightened and the sense of direction became truly multi-directional and open, rather than being caught in a grid of joints working at right-angles to one another.

The participants found new partners for another short Alexander work exchange. The movement experience with the floor encouraged a great deal more openness and playfulness as the Alexander exchanges progressed. We noticed a willingness to respond to a teacher's touch that was less about "doing the right thing" and more about curiosity and authenticity in discovering how the directions wished to unfold within us. The

Contact Improvisation process interrupts the tendency to try to force the “right” thing to happen (either as a teacher or as a student). During the Alexander exchanges, we could also more fully appreciate the moments of transition when contact is first made by a teacher and when the teacher releases his or her hands from the student.

Our final experiment was the “lead-follow” game. This game separates two ways in which we might respond to a point of contact with another mover. Typically, both people make use of both responses as needed, but this game lets each person try one aspect at a time. The leader can initiate any movement impulse he or she chooses for the follower with the understanding that the leader is listening very closely in order to sense what the follower is capable of doing. The leader can play with, coax, and surprise the follower while using this listening quality. The follower responds to the provided impulses as honestly as possible. When an impulse dwindles, the follower will pause and wait for the next impulse to be initiated by the leader.

Half of the participants experimented with the two roles and the other half observed. The energy in the room built to a strong and beautifully expressive level, with free connections forming and dissolving between partners. In order not to interrupt the quality of movement that was unfolding, we switched groups improvisationally, using the river image to allow the moving group to flow out, and the observing group to flow in.

When the two halves had switched roles, the observing group was able to begin applying their new point of view to an Alexander lesson. The roles of student and teacher took on an interesting quality within the Alexander exchanges as a result of the heightened physical experience of Contact.

Contact Improvisation is a strongly physical experience that makes use of deep support muscles and inherent reflexes. The Contact experience helps to remind the Alexander Technique teacher and student not to be overly careful in an Alexander lesson – careful to the point of creating a blockage in communication.

There is one strong similarity between Contact Improvisation and the Alexander Technique. In Contact Improvisation, we can trust the point-of-contact to be self-correcting if we follow it honestly. In the Alexander Technique, we can trust that any “error” of awareness, inhibition, or direction will correct itself if we stay attentive and true to the process.

**Biography:** *Joan Gavalier is a Professor of Dance at the College of William and Mary and an ATI-certified Alexander Technique teacher. Her teaching encompasses three areas – dance, theatre movement, and the Alexander Technique. This workshop was based on her Physical Theatre course, drawing on principles of both Alexander Technique and Contact Improvisation. In addition, she teaches courses in dance technique and composition. Joan has created over 25 dances for Moving Arts Company, Gavalier Danceworks, and Gravity Optional, presenting throughout the United States and at Alexander Technique congresses in Freiburg, Oxford, and Lugano. Joan received The College of William and Mary’s 2002 Alumni Fellowship Award for Teaching Excellence, and was the 2005 Distinguished Guest Artist at the Southern District American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance convention [AAHPERD].*

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## The Alexander Technique and Dancing Tango in Buenos Aires

by Sabine Heubusch



*Note: A version of this article was first published in the Newsletter of the American Center for the Alexander Technique, New York, in Spring 2007. The author wishes to thank Jane Tomkiewicz, Executive Director who inspired her to write this article.*

Next to New York City, Buenos Aires had the largest immigration boom in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. By 1920 Argentina had grown from a small settlement to one of the richest nations in the world. Until 1950 tango was an important expression of Argentine culture, at which time Argentina underwent a military coup. Tango music and culture tended to be replaced by Rock and Roll. In 1983 the fall of the military junta saw tango make a come-back in popularity, which has continued to the present time. Despite having undergone a massive economic crisis in 2001, Buenos Aires remains an elegant, charmingly cosmopolitan, functioning city with strong ties to its traditions as well as to more modern influences.

Because it was the working class poor that created tango in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, the origins of this dance form are not well documented. Dancing in houses of prostitution and around the port district was a way of compensating for the misery of long, hard labor. Tango has elements of European dance forms, especially flamenco, waltz and polka, but also incorporates and modifies African and Cuban rhythms.

My experience of learning, practicing and teaching the Alexander Technique has nourished my desire to learn new things. I began to study tango eighteen months ago, just before my first visit to Argentina. Later, realizing that it was better to learn this difficult form at the source, I returned for a second stay of two weeks. It was difficult to avoid sight-seeing and other distractions in order to devote my time exclusively to studying tango, but doing so gave me the advantages of being grounded and focused. I spent every night in *milongas* (dance-halls) and stayed until the early hours of morning. Otherwise, I slept late, did some yoga and meditation in my room, walked a little in the beautiful late summer weather, and took one or two classes in the early evening, before indulging in the Argentine custom of eating a fine dinner at the standard time of 10.00pm. Then back to the *milongas*. What a life! Yet in Buenos Aires many *tangerinos* /*tangerinas* live this life-style as well as working a day job, with only an occasional nap and coffee to help them recover.

I had no idea what a complex form tango is, how much it requires; walking technique, step combinations, embellishments, balance, strength, and, most importantly, the skill to improvise, to be able to respond to a partner and to the music. The male partner decides how to put the steps together: this is the skill of improvisation, and the woman follows, but she cannot anticipate the movement before he initiates it. A good leader brings pauses into the dance; these are the moments of stillness. When I was a beginner most men would have to tell me to wait because I was too eager to figure out what to do next. They wanted to make sure that I would be a good follower. I noticed how I started to hold my breath and build up tension in my torso and elbows. By noticing what I did, I was later able to use the pauses as opportunities to renew the flow of energy, breath and connection. The advantage of knowing and living the Alexander Technique is that patterns of compensation come into my awareness more quickly, so that I can use my kinesthetic intelligence to remember the patterns, and use inhibition to avoid repeating old habits over and over again.

One of my first teachers, of the older generation, taught me that I should never allow a man to squeeze my hand, and that, if he did so, I should gently move my hand out of his grip. For the most part men seemed to be open to this feed-back, yet, a few minutes later the grip would return, which can often be quite painful to the hand and wrist. At first I believed that only the man could end the dance, but later I learned that the woman has a choice, after only one dance, she can smile, say “Thank you,” and move away.

In the beginning I was eager to learn embellishments, but no teacher would instruct me in them. Always I heard the same answer, “As you get more relaxed, they will come by themselves.” Other teachers taught me not to worry about which steps to do, and encouraged me to make the floor my friend, so as just to let my feet walk and glide along. Other directions I was given were to be upright and allow my shoulders to be open, to move my back into my partner’s hand, and to keep my arms free. Since the Alexander Technique shares these concepts, my hearing them immediately gave me the ability to relate to the tango teachers’ corrections. I found myself knowing what to do, knowing how to undo, reminding myself that learning is about expanded awareness, while trusting that the right thing will happen by itself.

Besides the Alexander Technique, I also teach Eurhythmics, Pilates, piano, dance and yoga, all of which help me to dance the tango. The Alexander Technique makes it all come together, and helps me discover over and over again new lights in all of these subjects. It gives me the freedom to choose and to experience being in the moment, connecting to all my different partners by staying at ease even if a particular partner is tense; keeping myself willing not to know what’s next, and, most of all, being the dance.

My last few nights in Buenos Aires became such a pleasure. My brain relaxed as my legs did all the work and continued to surprise me with new steps I had only seen till then in others, but never till then experienced myself. I had my eyes closed most of the time, feeling the unity of two dancing bodies while the music resonated through my entire body.

**Biography:** *Sabine Heubusch is an ACAT / amSAT certified Alexander teacher, certified Dalcroze Eurhythmics teacher, certified Yoga, and Pilates mat teacher. Sabine teaches children of all ages, and adults in private and public schools, fitness studios, and in her private practice. She dances Modern Dance and Tango, and focuses on site-specific, out-door performances.*

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## A Conversation with Paris Ballet Master Wayne Byars

by Clara Gibson Maxwell

*Clara Gibson Marshall wrote about going home to teach in West Virginia in the February 2006 ExChange (vol.14, no.1). Now living in Paris, she finds that her ballet teacher, Wayne Byars, loves the Alexander Technique, while she loves ballet. Celebrating her ten years as an ATI-certified teacher, Clara interviews Wayne about their shared enthusiasms.*

### Slaying the Dragon

**Clara Gibson Maxwell:** How did you come across the Alexander Technique and how do you feel it makes you a better ballet teacher?

**Wayne Byars:** Like many dance teachers, I often find myself feeling like the hero in the story where he is trying to slay the many-headed dragon. You cut off one head triumphantly only to discover another one quickly growing in its place. This just goes on and on. Finally, you realize the only way you are actually going to kill the dragon is to put a dagger straight through the dragon's heart.

It would be the same story when I was teaching ballet. I'd correct one thing; and then something else would go—the hand, the foot. And I'd always get frustrated with that, looking for that. What *is* that? Where is the heart? How can I find a way to get to the essence of what becomes a whole body experience, and not just putting one little body part on top of another?

Of course, I'd heard of the Alexander Technique for many, many years. And I would ask people about it. "Well, what is it?" I'd ask. And they would answer, "Well, you know, you go, and you sit in a chair and you stand up." And I would say, "Well, you *pay* for that? I can do that at home!" I spent many years looking at the parallel techniques. I got deep into Iyengar yoga. I studied Pilates, Gyrotonics, meditation, and Feldenkrais technique. All of them were interesting. All of them were fascinating. But I always felt something was missing. Always, I'd joke with my friends how what my students needed was not a dance teacher but a psychiatrist.

Even though it was just a joke, in a way it was nevertheless pointing at the truth. Many of these techniques do not address the mental aspect going on in the body. Many of these techniques do not point directly at this.

### Serendipity and Synchronicity

Then something very serendipitous occurred. Maybe it was synchronicity. One of my students became an Alexander Technique instructor. I had not seen her for years. We met on the bus. And I'd say, "I'll give it a try." And I went for an appointment. Yet I, who had always been working so hard on my body, had regularly been doing two hours of yoga daily, was talking about realignment and about relaxation, and using the body correctly, was in a lot of pain. I was stiff.

After my first lesson, the pain was all gone. And I thought, "Something really interesting is happening here." Then I found a wonderful DVD by an Alexander teacher at the Juilliard School named Jane Kosminsky. She had done a lot of work applying Alexander Technique to dance; all forms of dance. I had an opportunity to speak and work with her in New York City. I was determined to work this into my classes.

The big question is that I am *not* a certified Alexander Technique teacher. I am a practitioner. I cannot stop my ballet teaching to do a three-year certification program. I called teachers and discussed this dilemma at length with them. I asked, practically speaking, what is possible for me to do?

I cannot do *hands-on* work. This takes years of training. But what I was encouraged to do was to share the

Alexander Technique principles. I can teach applying the principles of inhibition, direction, and primary control in my ballet classes. This I started doing, and continue to do so. The results were immediate, extraordinary. I have been teaching for twenty-five years. I have taught over 20,000 ballet classes. And I have never seen my students — be they beginners or professionals — make so much progress in so little time.

So, I have become the standard-bearer, in the Parisian dance community, for the Alexander Technique. And I cry it from the rooftops to get the information out there to dancers who need the Alexander Technique so much.

**Clara:** Among the reasons this interview thrills me is that this year is the tenth anniversary of my certification in the Alexander Technique. The question for me is always the same. How can I continue to live the Alexander Technique principles? This is a big looming question for me.

While I was a philosophy student at Harvard University, I got the call to be a dancer. It was really just that, and I wanted to move to New York City to embark on my vocation as a dancer before my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. Both my parents and my Harvard dance teacher thought I was cracking up. They thought I was having a nervous breakdown. They all strongly felt that you do not drop out of school and you do not walk away from a Harvard education. But I was interested in a different caliber of education. As a means of finding a compromise, I agreed to consult a therapist, but only if the course was psychophysical. I knew a little bit about Alexander Technique at the time, and I'd gotten the idea in my head that what Frederick Mathias Alexander had fallen into was precisely the reality of psychophysical unity. My teacher in Cambridge who started me off in Alexander Technique was Tommy Thompson.

Tommy educated me about Alexander and John Dewey. Thanks to Tommy Thompson, I read John Dewey about education, aesthetics, and the primacy of experience in the artistic act. Tommy raised my consciousness about all this; Dewey's books were all out of print at that time and the Harvard Philosophy Department found my interest in Dewey laughably antiquated and outmoded. Time has proved them wrong. Tommy Thompson also loaned me his copy of Tielhard de Chardin. This got me interested in what consisted of a spiritual life in a secular world. Eventually, in my 25<sup>th</sup> reunion class, I was profiled (alongside Caroline Kennedy) as one of the graduates who had realized the life they envisioned for the future while at Harvard, despite my having dropped out. But my real education in Cambridge was studying with Tommy Thompson.

I really enjoy your class in particular, because going through the rigmarole of certification, I discovered that being an actual certified Alexander teacher was very different from what I envisioned it would be. It was like an anniversary cake. I found out that being an Alexander teacher, well, it was kind of icing on the cake. But the cake was life. In retrospect, I had a misconception that studying to become an Alexander teacher was learning a vocation. I was wrong. Life is the vocation. Alexander Technique is a practice, irrespective of teaching officially, that brings meaning to . . .

**Wayne:** [*finishing Clara's thought for her*] . . . it enhances all different aspects of your life. This is what is so exciting about the Alexander Technique.

### **In Activity, and Sneaking in the Back Door**

**Clara:** And so for me, coming to ballet class and looking forward to it was and is — well, when you're using the Technique applied to a specific task you are *in activity* — you have the principle of the Alexander work and then you apply it to *something*, a task. This is why, when you find a description of the Alexander Technique, for example, on the ATI website, it is described as a *pre-technique*. So, what was amazing to me when I took your ballet class—which is, after all, kind of secondary to my main purpose, which is being a contemporary choreographer—was an opportunity for me to practice what I always assumed would be happening only in a training course. But it was applied to something else. Suddenly, it seemed like “Oh, God! We are going to jump now and this is something *I cannot do.*” And Wayne, you did this very sneaky thing. Suddenly, by obliging me to

concentrate on something else, that stuff started to work — jumps, I mean, for example — not because we were working on it, but because we were talking about something else in ballet class.

**Wayne:** Yeah, I was kind of sneaky about it. I think your experience is a related one. I have seen a lot of people who have different issues with classical technique. I have succeeded not by talking about positions but about thinking about movement in a new way. All of a sudden, they are doing beautiful ballet work. I've gotten them to do it when usually I would have met with resistance. So, I've gotten the result I wanted through the back door — not only the heart of the dragon but the back door! But how was I to get people to understand this? For example, here you are using your Alexander Technique in my ballet class: you walk, you dance, there is no difference— there is no difference between your life and your dancing.

Always, you are using your body in the same way. The “directions” in Alexander are the same in life or in a dance studio, except, in the ballet studio, the stimuli are bigger. Our reactions are bigger, but our directions are the same. Whether we are eating at the dinner table or we are at the computer. So, what is really exciting is that I feel that I am not only helping my students with their dancing, I am helping them with everyday life.

### **Ballet and Alexander Technique**

**Clara:** I would like you to talk about how Alexander Technique applies specifically to ballet.

**Wayne:** As far as I'm concerned, it is a perfect match.

Let me go back to the Alexander Technique teacher with whom I work, my student, Luiga Riva. She is a contemporary dancer-choreographer. Running into her while on the bus she was busy with her certification course in London. She'd say, “Wayne, you just would not believe it; it is incredible! It is *everything* you were supposed to do in ballet.” And I was, “Yeah, yeah. Maybe I should look into that some day.”

So, where do I start? Head moving forward and up, for example. Back lengthening and widening, legs and arms moving away from the torso. That is what ballet teachers have been trying to get across to their students for centuries. The particularity about using it in Alexander language is that it is so simple to understand. Perhaps the missing element I needed as a ballet teacher was the use of the mind to bring about change.

Of course, the one thing that all ballet teachers are up against is people's bad habits. We ballet teachers are always working against people's bad habits because ballet involves so much repetition over so many years. Bad habits accumulate over so many years. So, all of a sudden I found a cohesive system to help people recognize their bad habits and to correct them. And I have found nothing else — be it Pilates, Feldenkrais, yoga — I've tried them all. They are *all* interesting. But not one of them provides a technique to help people change bad habits.

What happens in a dance class is that the stimuli are just stronger. So, when using our bodies poorly in our daily life, the music and the dance and the people watching in a dance class, we have all these poor habits as in daily life but they become even bigger. Being able in these circumstances to use Alexander directions and the principle of inhibition, deep changes occur in the ballet student, provided, of course, they are willing to change!

### **Contemporary Dancers Taking Ballet**

**Clara:** One of the joys of taking your ballet class is watching the contemporary choreographers. Perhaps, I am only speaking from my own experience. Yet I can read it in the faces. I am far more relaxed about being in a vulnerable place to allow myself to learn something new. They seem to be, too.



There is a prickly argument that a great deal of contemporary choreography is just somebody's eccentric bad habits. So much about being a choreographer is repeating certain gestures over and over, especially if you are teaching your repertory. Certain gestures mean something to you, so it behooves you to dance them. But what you also discover over time is, though their genesis is from a place of meaning, this place of emotion very often is the very stuff you have to express as a "reaction" in the negative sense!

**Wayne:** I certainly have no problem with that, so long as it is consciously done. I am OK with it just so long as it is not a bad habit unconsciously done. If it is somebody realizing that this quality of emotion provokes your body into doing this or that, well, I do think it is a shame that so many dancers remain unaware and unconscious.

Now, I agree with your observation about contemporary dancers allowing themselves to be in a vulnerable place in my ballet class. That is because ballet dancers come from a different conditioning. What happens with ballet dancers is that, very young, they learn to protect themselves. They are often subject to aggressive treatment by poor teachers. Their ballet teachers can be violent. Ballet dancers have been insulted sometimes, or as students they are belittled. They are driven to hate their bodies. This sort of stiffness is not inherent to ballet. It comes from poor training — that is all. It is poor ballet. It is not ballet.

There is not a problem with ballet. Good ballet actually implies all of the principles of Alexander Technique. Without a doubt, classical dancing postulates all the rules of Alexander. That is not a revolution. Good usage of the body is not a revolution.

Alexander Technique is simply an incredible discovery for me. Because I know that in so many contemporary-dance companies and professional dance schools Alexander Technique is incorporated as a matter of course. But, Alexander is a far rarer occurrence in the world of ballet. Where there is that beautiful sense of working on verticality — and all ballet technique works around the principle of verticality — I think too that this is something unique, indeed, in the application of Alexander Technique principles.

**Clara:** My experience with Alexander and now after a decade of teaching it, I find it might be an exaggeration to claim that Alexander can rid you of your neuroses. But in my case I'm in touch with my neuroses on a level I would not attain without the assumption of my own fundamental *a priori* psychophysical unity.

**Wayne:** [*nodding his head*]: I agree. The Alexander Technique allows you to become so much more aware. Maybe the one most difficult aspect of it all is that there is no turning around once you have started down that path. There is no turning back. When you start becoming aware, then you start seeing other people and yourself differently. I have benefited enormously from my Alexander work. And not just as a tool for ballet technique or enhancing my skills as a classical dance teacher.

For example, to be in my back inside myself gives me a much better perception of what is going on in the room. I am more aware of everything. Instead of [*Wayne exaggeratedly presses his chin into Clara's face in a caricature mode*] jutting my head forward and my spine forward, dispersing all my energy, I can center myself. Being in my back makes me more centered and more focused. And I had to let go of a few neuroses to do that.

**Clara:** Particularly in the last eight to ten months, your class has taught me how to stand at a *barre*. You are standing in professional class in Paris like sardines in a can. Everybody is stacked and, generally speaking, highly strung. Ballet class in Paris is a watering hole for high-maintenance personalities. There is something special about the way you have integrated Alexander Technique in your teaching and in your classes. I can find a comfortable place in myself in them. I am somewhat at a loss as to how to describe this. I feel you create an atmosphere through your presence that allows me to create a space inside of me. When this occurs, it makes it possible for other people to approach me.

This was not necessarily the case in the past. Always before, at the beginning of ballet class at the *barre*, I

would think to myself, “Oh God! Am I positioning myself to avoid hitting the person in front of me when I’ll do *battements*? Lately, standing there became another form of sensitivity training, standing there. I’ve been sensitized to accommodate other people without having to directly address the issue.

**Wayne:** When you are working on your Alexander directions and you are inside them comfortably, [*Wayne’s exhalation seems to radiate an aura of good humor*] you create a space that makes meeting others equitable. [*Clara giggles and smiles in response*]

What happens, even as performers? [*Wayne pushes his face into Clara’s*] I’ll tell the students that they are jutting forward and, in their desire to give it their all, the audience members are, of course, sort of cringing back into their seats. So, from the show-business point of view, you sort of pull back. You give the audience the opportunity to join you some place. Or in your case, standing at the *barre*, the other dancers can come to you. We sort of meet each other. Instead of me forcing my presence on you, something else is actually permitted to happen. Words that struck me as trite in the past, for example, “Dance is the way you live,” well, these words are actually true. That is in fact what is so beautiful about it all. In truth, the way I walk into ballet class *is* the way I’m going to dance. The way I am going to go home and eat dinner is the same dance. There is really no separation between these activities. It is just that the stimuli are different.

**Clara:** I feel stupid talking about space. I am not sure what I mean. Is it a physical place, a space for my psyche, a meeting point for joining up with someone else’s psychological makeup? I am not sure. One feeling I know for sure, though. The fact that neither of us strikes me as a particularly dogmatic person about dance, classical ballet, contemporary choreography, or even Alexander Technique — the path of Alexander has given both of us an opportunity to synthesize both our thoughts and our gestures, because thoughts and gestures are very often the same thing!

**Wayne:** Exactly. I do not remember if I said this before. There is no disconnection between body and mind: they are the same thing.

**Clara:** For example, how natural it is that you would be an acknowledged master in all this, for the simple reason that you work diligently, and love deeply what you do. Now, that might come across as an obvious and silly thing to say, but it is not.

Wayne: It is not silly in the sense that a good teacher never stops learning. So, I consider each class a sort of laboratory for myself. I am always trying to find out how I can help my students and how I can help the people who come to see me, how I can set them in the right direction. Ever since I was introduced to Alexander Technique, there is no doubt in my mind that this really is the most globally encompassing system that enhances all aspects of my students’ dance work and also their lives.

**Clara:** Alexander Technique has taught me how not to shoot myself in the foot. It keeps me from getting self-destructive, which is, you know full well, the hazard of being creative. You want your neuroses to be fodder for your own self-knowledge in a conscious, constructive way, like what Freud meant when he said this was the stuff of which art and civilization are made ...

**Wayne:** [*nods his head as he finishes Clara’s thought*] ...because it is gentle.

**Clara:** [*laughing*] Chaos, too! But good things come out of it. In this respect, a study of Alexander Technique is comparable, or even preferable, to years on a psychoanalyst’s couch.

**Wayne:** [*exclaiming*] Oh, yes! I have had people testify to the fact that Alexander lessons were far superior to their ten years of psychoanalysis. Absolutely! I feel this myself: just my weekly lessons have so helped me to become more settled in myself and listen better to other people.

**Clara:** Alexander Technique helps me live the contradiction of belonging, of being in it, and feeling that I have a bird's-eye view, a perspective, as well.

**Wayne:** Absolutely! That's beautiful.

**Biography:** *Wayne Byers has been teaching professional /advanced ballet in Paris for over 20 years. On a typical day in Wayne's open classes one can spot dancers from the world's leading ballet and contemporary companies, musical theatre, cabaret and television. Wayne has been using "alternative methods" to explain the dynamics of ballet technique over the years, but once he was introduced to AT, he completely revised and centered his teaching of ballet technique around Alexander principles, such that he is now convinced of the necessity of utilizing AT as a core for all professional dance training.*

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**Biography:** *American dancer-choreographer Clara Gibson Maxwell is Artistic Director of Mon Oncle d'Amerique ([www.kaloskaisophos.org](http://www.kaloskaisophos.org)), a Paris-based arts organization that catalyzes site-responsive, multi-arts collaborations, often in architectural environments. She was certified by ATI in 1998, having studied with Tommy Thompson and Gilles Estran. Her current interests revolve around experimental film and movement from a cinematic point of view. She continues her private AT practice at her Paris studio home.*

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## Learning How to Stop by Robert Rickover

### A Story:

*A man enjoys life. But it isn't perfect. He sometimes experiences pain, frustration, and suffering. For a while he gets along okay. But the suffering builds over time, over a number of years. The suffering becomes a major intrusion in his life. He exclaims, "Something has got to change!"*

*He goes to the wise man and explains that, although he was okay with life for a while, more, and more it has been growing on his mind that he's not happy with the way things are, and that he's really quite sure now that something must change. "Could you help me to change?" he asks.*

*The wise man says, "Thank you for coming to me. You did the right thing in coming here. And now I will give you my advice: change nothing."*

The End

When I first read this, a part of me thought to myself, "Well, being a wise man seems pretty simple. Maybe I'll take up the profession myself. All I'll have to do is tell people seeking my wisdom: "Change nothing," and my exalted place in society will be assured. I might be able to make more money too!

But as a teacher of the Alexander Technique I had to admit that the wise man's advice was pretty profound. In my field I often work with people who have come to believe that the solution to problems with their physical functioning lies in trying to do something different – to just change something.

Take posture, for example. Some people believe, or have been told, that their posture is poor. Sometime's they've been warned that they face serious health risks – perhaps due to the restricted breathing that often goes along with poor posture. Or, for older students, the greater likelihood they'll lose their balance and fall with

potentially serious results. Maybe they've come to realize that poor posture just doesn't look good, that their personal or professional lives are being adversely affected. They want to improve their posture and, more often than not, are quick to demonstrate just how they might go about doing just that. Someone who is a sloucher, for example, will demonstrate "standing up straight" by lifting the head and chest, probably in very much the way they did as children when a parent or teacher told them to "stop slouching, stand up straight."

This procedure was effective in getting the parent or teacher off their backs – at least for the minute or so until they returned to the old pattern. But it did absolutely nothing to improve their posture. All that happened was that they rearranged – changed – the harmful tensions in the body into a different, equally dysfunctional, arrangement.

Professor John Dewey, the American philosopher and educational reformer, had a fair amount of experience with the Alexander Technique. This is what he had to say on the subject of posture:

*Something happens when a man acts upon his idea of standing straight. For a little while, he stands differently, but only a different kind of badly. He then takes the unaccustomed feeling which accompanies his unusual stance as evidence that he is now standing straight. But there are many ways of standing badly, and he has simply shifted his usual way to a compensatory bad way at some opposite extreme.*

**A Final Note:** The wise man did NOT say, "Give up. Your problems will never be solved. You might as well resign yourself to having them forever. Don't waste your time being interested in improving your situation." No, he merely said, "Change nothing."

His advice is very, very simple, but not always easy to follow.

In my teaching practice, I'll often ask a new student simply to notice, as best he or she can, what's going on with their head, torso, arms and legs, and do this without making any changes. Just notice – nothing more. I've hardly ever met a student who was able to actually follow this instruction at first – to simply observe his or her self, without making some sort of instant change in their way of standing or sitting. These changes often involve quite large movements of the student's head or shoulders, for example.

And yet this sort of simple "just noticing" is precisely what's needed as a first step in learning how to make a useful change in their posture so that, in Dewey's words, they don't end up with a different way of sitting or standing badly.

In the field of posture – and indeed in all areas of our lives – we need to become conscious of our habitual patterns of behavior in order to reason out how we can best make changes that will actually improve our situation.

As another wise man once said: "You need to know where you've been, if you want to know the best place to go next."

### **Biography:**

Robert Rickover is a teacher of the Alexander Technique living in Lincoln, Nebraska. He also teaches regularly in Toronto, Canada. He is the author of *Fitness without Stress — a Guide to the Alexander Technique*, and creator of *The Complete Guide to the Alexander Technique* at <http://www.alexandertechnique.com>

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## Book Review

by Karen Marshall

**Locke, Jessica. *Rescue at Engine 32*. Watertown, MA: Jessica Locke Firefighters' Fund, 2007.**

Many people were moved to travel to NYC after September 11, 2001. They sought to help, to bear witness, to participate in collective healing. Jessica Locke, composer and Alexander Technique trainee, was one of these people. Despite deep fears of travel, of New York City, and of the unknown, she went to New York in January of 2002 and found herself at the front door of a firehouse.

Determined to give something, she described the Alexander Technique as a kind of “special massage” to the firefighter who answered the door. This unplanned meeting began an almost year-long experience of working with the men in the firehouse. Her book, *Rescue at Engine 32*, is the story of this experience.

Ms. Locke describes the initial reluctance and then gradual acceptance of both her and of the Alexander Technique by many of the firefighters. She writes of their reactions to September 11, and includes a powerfully written description of one firefighter's experience at the Towers on 9/11. She gives a flavor of the firehouse — some of the daily routines and of the men's interactions.

But the book is primarily a story of the self-discoveries she makes along the way. It is a year of enormous growth and change for her. Growth and change she credits to the firefighters acceptance of her, and of her determination to live up to the qualities she sees in them.

Ms. Locke describes herself as a scared, lonely person, with low self-esteem when she first begins. She describes in detail her fears and anxieties. She recreates experiences from her childhood, almost all painful. She recounts how various events and exchanges in and around the firehouse begin to change her views of herself and of the world.

She writes very openly of her crushes, her thrills — riding a fire engine turns out to be a mind-blowing event — and of her embarrassments and insecurities. By the end of the experience, she is more confident, happier, and re-engaged in her composing work. And she begins to work as an advocate for firemen, work she continues to do today as the head of the Jessica Locke Firefighters Fund, a non-profit support group.

While the book communicates a real sense of journey — and I was happy for Ms. Locke by the end — I did find that aspects of the tone and content of the memoir made me uncomfortable at times.

I found myself squirming at her description of buying perfume to impress the firefighters, and at her attempts to get approval and admiration as an attractive woman. I also felt some impatience with her description of seeming slights or rejection, and with her over-the-top adoration of the firefighters, who are described as unfailingly wise, generous, and straightforward in all aspects of life and interaction.

As an Alexander Technique teacher, I was also disappointed at how little Ms. Locke included about her AT teaching sessions. I wanted to know more about what she discovered as she worked. I wanted to learn about how the firefighters' bodies expressed and reflected what they had gone through, and I wanted to learn how the sessions affected them. I wanted to hear which teaching methods worked best, and which language was most effective. She does describe some of the words she used to convince reluctant men to try the experience, and that was interesting and helpful. I wanted more of that.

Despite these reflections, I did find myself pulled along by the story and interested in learning what happened next. I came to root for Jessica: I wanted it to end well for her.

If Alexander Technique teachers are looking for an exploration of AT applied to people under great stress, this isn't the book for them. But AT teachers looking for a personal exploration and journey to greater wholeness and health will find a very honest, detailed, and open account here.

**Biography:** *Karen Marshall has been teaching one thing or another for most of her adult life – as a museum educator, writing for educational publishers, and, for the past ten years, teaching the Alexander Technique. She teaches at the Boston Conservatory, and privately in Brookline, Massachusetts. Her greatest satisfaction comes from coaching people to achieve moments of joyous self-discovery.*

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## From the Editor

Many of you responded with alacrity to my call for materials for this issue. For a time it looked as if we might not have enough submissions to publish this copy of the journal, but, when I put out the call, many of you found that indeed you did have ideas and *the means whereby* that you wanted to exchange with your fellows. Allow me to express my heart-felt thanks to all of you who have made this issue possible. I'd also like to maintain this momentum. Please keep your suggestions and articles coming. Jennifer Mizenko's *Letter from the Chair* reminds us of the need for all of us to pull together in times of economic difficulty. One fine on-going way to do so is to publish your thoughts and accounts of your teaching experiences so that other members might benefit from your knowledge.

It has been a particular joy for me to be re-united with a former teacher and life-long mentor, Jan Baty, in this issue, with our publication of a version of her recent radio interview with Tony Maxwell. I have known Jan for over twenty years, since those stimulating summer workshops in Craftsbury Center, Vermont. Having telephone conversations with her about editing her interview has been a true Spring treat for me. Taking Jan's interview as a springboard, I have dedicated most of this issue to the creative arts. It is my hope that future issues might have a wider focus. It is sometimes all too easy for me to assume that most of our members also teach in theatre, music, or dance programs in colleges or universities. On reflection, I know that this is not the case. While I don't wish to discourage submissions from any area of study, it would be interesting to have potential articles from fields other than the arts, such as the use of AT in gymnastics or sports.

Jan Baty has also suggested that it would be helpful to publish more information about teaching in groups, particularly from anyone who can remember having group work with Marjorie Barstow. For myself, I would like to compare my syllabus with those of others teaching AT in college and university programs. I would be particularly interested in assessment of what our students are achieving in any general introductory level course on the Alexander Technique, a class they might share with another dozen or more students at any one time. After two or three hours each week for about thirteen weeks and, perhaps, one or two individual lessons, most students have an understanding of the basic principles and, probably have improved their own *use*. How long do these effects last? Of course, one might ask this about any undergraduate course. Yet, to pursue this work at all, one has to take an optimistic outlook: to do it in the first place, one has to wish to have a lasting impact on the students. I'd be interested to hear from any other teachers who had experienced these same nagging doubts.

We hope to mail the next journal early in July. The deadline for submissions for that issue will be the 1st of June. One again, in preparing the present issue, I have been guided patiently and ably by my student assistant Derek Cash, and I wish to thank him for his gentle assistance. I look forward to hearing from you and to receiving your suggested articles.

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**Alexander Technique International (ATI) is a worldwide organization of teachers, students, and friends of the Alexander Technique created to promote and advance the work begun by F. Matthias Alexander.**

ATI embraces the diversity of the international Alexander community and is working to promote international dialogue.

Our mission is:

1. To create and sustain open means of global communication for people to discuss, apply, research and experiment with the discoveries of F.M. Alexander.
2. To encourage the use of the F.M. Alexander Technique in both human and environmental relationships.
3. To embody the principles of the F.M. Alexander Technique in ATI's structure and means of operation.

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## **About the Alexander Technique**

Experience of the Technique has led to praise from George Bernard Shaw, Aldous Huxley, Prof. John Dewey, Sir Charles Sherrington, Julian Bream, John Cleese, Kevin Kline, Roald Dahl, Robertson Davies, and many others. It is taught at the Juilliard School of Performing Arts in New York, the Royal College of Music and the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London, the Stratford Shakespeare Festival and the Shaw Festivals in Canada, Boston University, Brandeis University, and many other centers.

The common factor in all aspects of life is that how we are using ourselves—the way we do things—affects the result we get. The Alexander Technique is a means of improving that use. It has been called a “pre-technique” that people can apply to furthering their own special skills and activities. It is also essentially a preventive technique with which we can learn to improve and maintain our health.

The individual is the focus of the Alexander Technique. We are all unique, with different bodies, different experiences, and different problems. We go about the process of change in different ways and at different rates. For these reasons, what happens in an Alexander Technique lesson depends very much on the needs of the student at the time. In the basic sense, though, you will learn an attitude of not trying to gain your ends at any cost, and, at the same time, how to prevent your harmful habits that cause unnecessary stress and restrict your capabilities. Obviously, since what you are changing are patterns built up over many years, a permanent change will not be brought about overnight. However, the person who learns to stop and take time, to think constructively about how he or she uses him- or herself in everyday life, will find that this simple procedure can have far-reaching results.

Further information about the Alexander Technique can best be gained from a teacher near you (see the list on the next page for the nearest ATI office, or visit [www.ati-net.com](http://www.ati-net.com) for teacher listings), as your changing experiences through lessons are the only real way to understand the nature of the work and what change is possible.

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