

ExChange

Journal of Alexander Technique International

Winter 2012

Volume 20, Number 1



Moving Forward



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*Cover Photo: John Allen January, 2012 Michigan, USA*

## From Co-Editor MaryJean Allen



I entitled this issue “Moving Forward” in honor of my dear friend and co-editor, Kathy Privatt, who recently completed her rigorous cancer treatments. Kathy and those who know and love her are eager for her to move forward! I asked Kathy to write an article to report how Alexander Technique has helped her. Kathy’s article: *Actively Resting in Support* begins on page 8.

For this issue’s cover, I chose my husband John’s photo of a winter river, for even in the seeming stillness of the winter season, the river maintains forward momentum.

Finally, Alexander Technique teachers, teacher-trainees, and folks interested in the Alexander Technique will appreciate the title as well as the first sentence of Rainier Maria Rilke’s poem:

### Moving Forward

The deep parts of my life pour onward,  
as if the river shores were opening out.

## From This Chair



Fiona Cranwell

My name is Fiona Cranwell, and I live in Dublin, Ireland. I get around, so don't be surprised if I show up at a workshop near you.

This is my first time to write a "From this Chair" article for the Exchange, and its theme is *Moving Forward*. It is also the theme for this year's AGM.

In Colorado at the end of the 2011 AGM, we performed the traditional ritual of your incoming Chair, (me) inviting your outgoing Chair, (Jennifer Mizenko) out of the Chair. While it seemed to happen with relative ease that day, I know for Jen it was like releasing a child she had nurtured for 4 years into another foster family. As Jen and the last Board cared for ATI, they taught and molded me into a family member who could continue raising ATI for another few years. And so on that day in Colorado I eased myself into the Chair as "head of the family."

November and December were a bit hectic with transitional stuff. Change had occurred, and there were consequences. The new Board members have new minds, new goals, and different personalities. We each think differently about how the last Board worked. And, new protocol had to be learned and relearned.

Remember, 5 out of 7 Board members changed over. We went from 5 US citizens, 1 Hungarian, and 1 Irish to 3 US citizens, 1 Irish, 1 French, and 2 German. The balance has certainly swung in the International flavour! Plus, we are a decidedly younger Board: younger in age, length of membership, and history connected to ATI.

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## From This Chair

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In December we went through more change when two Members realised their personal workload was more than enough for them, and chose to regretfully stand down. So we sought two more volunteers for the Board, and our office personnel changed. All in all, it has been an interesting time.

So here we are in February with a renewed, excited and energetic Board. The talents of each member I have yet to truly tap. Although we are young as members of ATI, our society will soon be 20 years old. We are interested in the history of what made Alexander Technique International: how her seeds were planted, nurtured and matured from teething to teenager, and thus brought us here to a young adult. We are interested in how twenty years has shaped us, our ideals, our practicalities, and our principles.

The truth is, this future is frightening. We are in a climate where business and economy are failing all around us. This affects our individual businesses and so ATI's membership. It shakes the way we do business and the way we actually feel connected in this world. We've noticed overstretched AT teachers turn back to other means of financial reward, taking them away from teaching and therefore letting go their ATI membership.

It's at these times we need to ask for help. Ask our neighbours and friends to help us out. Ask our family. ATI is our family. We know this work works. We know this brings us back to the truth of movement, co-ordination, and to life making sense. That's why we were attracted to the Alexander Technique in the first place. That's what will stand to us in this world of confusion and doubt and debt. This work will take us back to our hearts and talents and expression.

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## From This Chair

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We all need support. The nature of our work means we support others in their lives. Our students demand a lot while they find their feet. We stand on our own supportive structures to inspire and to work supporting others. But who is supporting us?

We are. I'm inviting you to get the most out of your ATI membership, your ATI family. Use ATI's All Together website to talk, to ask questions, and to connect. Let the ATI family support you. You might be surprised that connection with your community of AT teachers helps embolden your spirit, feel supported. You are ATI.

All of this has been in our minds as we members of the Board pondered over a theme for this monumental year. Themes that we explored included: Looking Back, Moving Forward, Being Present, Longevity and Maturity, and Hearts, Talents, Expertise.

At the end of the day *Celebrating 20 Years* says all that. *Celebrating 20 Years* means we have had 20 years of work, support, growth, and life in order to have something to celebrate. Looking back into history, what have we learned? What can we share that we know to be true and that may help each other? What surprised us as we travelled our road that we want to tell others about? What can a young generation give back to our educators, our forefathers?

There is a continuity that stretches from our inception in 1992 out into the invisible future. 20 years will role into 25 and so on into the future as we constantly move forward.

I invite you to join us in making this year's AGM an extra special occasion as we acknowledge this milestone. The theme for this year's ATI AGM to be held next October in Papenburg, Germany is **Celebrating 20 Years Moving Forward.**

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## From This Chair

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Susan Sinclair will be inviting you via the February 2012 Communiqué to submit workshops based upon this theme. Jan Seeber and his German comrades are working to compile information and contacts should travelers wish to combine some vacation time with their travel to Germany. This will most likely be worked out using Group pages on All Together website, so please keep an eye out.

The past Chairs of ATI on our Vision/Mission Committee are making plans to commemorate and acknowledge the celebration of this anniversary. They may approach you and ask you to share your experience with ATI. Look forward to a trip down memory lane and an education on your ATI family tree. All will be revealed in Germany.

This current generation of ATI family leaders (the Board), look forward to bringing you with us, as we are all Moving Forward. Thank you for reading.

*The Members of the Board introduced themselves to you in the November 2011 Communiqué. The new Board Members will do so in the February 2012 Communiqué. Please feel free to contact a Board Member if you have a question or information about the business of ATI. Your All Together website is where you can find past Communiqués, reports, contact information, and groups for discussion. We encourage you to familiarise yourself with and use this valuable asset.*

### **Members of the Board:**

|                     |                |         |
|---------------------|----------------|---------|
| Directors           | Henrieke Gosch | Germany |
|                     | Irene Schlump  | Germany |
|                     | Gilles Estran  | France  |
| Treasurer           | Robert Lada    | USA     |
| Executive Secretary | Daniel Bell    | USA     |
| Assistant Chair     | Angela Leidig  | USA     |
| Chair               | Fiona Cranwell | Ireland |

## Actively Resting in Support

By Kathy Privatt

I am the kind of person who, when faced with anything “big,” immediately starts gathering information and resources to help me make my decision and take action. This research process gives me a sense of security, even though – ironically – it frequently supports my earlier intuitive response to that “big” thing. Getting a breast cancer diagnosis at the end of this past summer was definitely a “big thing,” and I did, indeed, respond by gathering everything I could to face this challenge – including my Alexander Technique training. In fact, AT has become the foundation that links all the other resources.

The resources I’ve chosen to support my journey through surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation draw on a variety of traditions and approaches, revealing my very Alexander view that we are unified creatures. Treating the body as if it is separate from the mind is simply not reasonable. The lovely, interconnected web that has resulted from my searching has been reassuring in its connections.

Early on, I connected with my very dear friend and co-editor, MaryJean Allen, gaining from her family’s multiple experiences with cancer. She helped connect me to guided imagery, meditation, and acupuncture. Another friend also recommended acupuncture, and, with beautiful symmetry, suggested the same practitioner MaryJean had found online. Yet another friend delivered a meditation CD. As a result of asking my Radiation Oncologist about the mechanism of action to help me with my guided imagery, she offered a referral to an integrative medicine doctor. That integrative medicine physician helps me with side effects, and helps me make “anti-cancer” choices for my future. She literally prescribed guided imagery, yoga breathing, a bit of Tai Chi I’d learned this summer from Martha Hansen Fertman, and Active Rest. The oncologist I chose is in the same practice with the integrative medicine doctor, so we’ve also had conversations about guided imagery and using “non-proven” methods to relieve chemotherapy side effects (as she says, even the placebo effect is a real effect that must be accounted for in studies).

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## Actively Resting in Support

By Kathy Privatt

*Continued . . .*

The massage therapist I've seen in the past is also a Reiki master and has done some Reiki and cranial sacral work with me, both of which are serving me well. All of these approaches have been surrounded by support from friends and family, which included many of you, particularly through my *Caring Bridge* website.

While I'm happy to have contact with anyone interested in the specifics of these various approaches, I've also learned and relearned some lessons that Alexander Technique offers us all with or without a cancer diagnosis:

*Active Rest and the Whispered Ah are very flexible tools.*

*Habits form quickly.*

*Revisiting the basics is always good.*

*The self is a unified brain and body.*

*Active Rest and the Whispered Ah are very flexible tools:* Many of the approaches I'm utilizing involve lying down or "getting comfortable." They also frequently suggest some sort of breathing that will release tensions. I've consistently used Active Rest/Semi-Supine and the Whispered Ah for all these situations. Granted, some of this choice is driven just by the comfort of familiarity. However, I also find it to be a great starting point, whether what follows is acupuncture or guided imagery. The AT principles, embodied in Active Rest and the Whispered Ah, really do serve as a pre-technique, preparing me to receive the work that is coming. I consistently substitute soft focus open eyes for the suggested closed eyes. As we know, this keeps me connected to my environment rather than trying to separate from it, and I find it much easier to carry forward the benefit of what I've just done by avoiding the potentially jarring sensation of moving from a closed-eyed, inward gaze back to the world around me.

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## Actively Resting in Support

By Kathy Privatt

*Continued . . .*

*Habits form quickly:* Part of my initial surgery involved a small incision under my arm to check for lymph node involvement. Thankfully, there was none. However, that incision “spoke” to me every time I reached forward with my arm. Within 3 days, I had a whole new habit of keeping my upper arm closer to my side and using a movement of my whole shoulder area to accomplish a reach forward. To be fair, in those early days of healing, this accommodation kept me from some pain and protected the healing incision. However, the new habit also quickly increased discomfort in my back, and was still with me when the dressing came off 2 weeks later. I had a habit that had served me well in the beginning, but now no longer did. Exploring my growing range of motion, without judgment or self-punishment, became the order of the day until it began to fade away. As with most, if not all, situations, how I got the habit was not the important thing; instead, my response to noticing the habit was the most important.

*Revisiting the basics is always good:* A couple of weeks after my last chemo treatment I was lucky enough to have a visit from my AT teacher, Brian Martz. By then, the cumulative side effects had appeared, and I was struggling to keep sight of my positive healing trajectory. I’d had a Reiki session the day before that focused on nurturing balance, and that put me in the perfect place for the table lesson Brian suggested. I knew that, to some degree, I was walking around in startle. What he discovered was that I was holding on so tightly to my neck that I didn’t allow any release, even with his hands on me. With continued work to help me “connect all my pieces and parts”, I was finally able to allow some freedom in my atlanto-occipital joint. At that point, we talked about what Brian had noticed, and I was able to carry a bit more of this very basic freedom with me into the days that followed. While I’m certainly not a master AT teacher, I will admit that I thought I was past being oblivious to something so fundamental in my own Use. Thus, the lesson was that the foundation is always the foundation, and always a good place to start.

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## Actively Resting in Support

By Kathy Privatt

*Continued . . .*

*The self is a unified brain and body:* I preach this, I teach this, and yet found myself with a habit that suggested otherwise. Reiki was relatively new to me prior to this diagnosis. I'd had a couple of sessions that I found interesting, and had done level 1 training, but hadn't explored beyond that. My Reiki master had suggested that it could be particularly helpful dealing with the stress and fear associated with my treatments. That was particularly appealing for chemo, because thinking about and trying to deal with its side effects was, in some ways, worse than the cancer diagnosis itself. Then I reacted to the steroids given to me prior to receiving chemo. When it first happened a couple of days after treatment, I didn't know what it was, just that my pulse was very fast and I felt a very negative electricity buzzing through my body. A single Reiki session brought my pulse down, and I felt much more myself again. As I continued to use Reiki, I found myself wondering if it was working because it calmed me down emotionally or if it really was having a physical impact – I was actually thinking as if those were separate. Ah – my whole self!

Obviously, none of what I've written about is a new discovery, and therein is its significance to me. Because AT deals with the self, it is always relevant, and because it addresses such a fundamental level of use, it can always guide other techniques. For me, AT has been the constant that helps me integrate and benefit from all these different types of support.



**Kathy Privatt** is an Associate Professor of Theatre Arts at Lawrence University. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, specializing in 20th century American theatre. In her 13<sup>th</sup> year at Lawrence University, Kathy teaches acting, theatre literature and history, and directs departmental productions. Kathy completed her Alexander

Technique Teacher Training at *Chesapeake Bay Alexander Studies* with Director Robin Gilmore in 2010, and is pioneering Alexander Technique at Lawrence U. with workshops and course offerings. She serves on the Executive Board of the Mid-America Theatre conference, and as co-editor of ATI's Journal the *Exchange*.



## Free Plane Tickets

(Sorry, we needed your attention)

### We Need Your Submissions For the Spring ExChange!

Submissions for the spring issue  
due by June 1, 2012

Please share the wealth of your Alexander Technique experiences from your life, your teaching, or your learning by writing an article, essay, book review, poem, etc., and submitting to the *ExChange*.

Please email your article to:

[kathy.privatt@lawrence.edu](mailto:kathy.privatt@lawrence.edu)

1. Email your article in a MS word or plain text format. (Not PDF)
2. Important: please do not use text boxes in the article.
3. If you use pictures or graphics in your article, please attach each picture or graphic to your email.
4. Please put your article in the body of your email, in case the attachment becomes corrupted via email.
5. Include a brief biography, and attach a clear photo of yourself.

Thank you!

### Please Submit the Following:

#### Articles

We accept articles of varying length and on a variety of topics.

#### Essays

Put your experiences, teaching, or research into essay form to share with your Alexander Technique colleagues.

#### Book, DVD, Video, or CD Reviews

Please describe what these sources offer.

#### Poetry, Art, or Photography

All art forms are welcome, especially if relevant to Alexander Technique.

#### Workshop Experiences

Write a brief description of an insight or exercise from a workshop or training session you attended.

#### Humor

Please share any humorous moments pertaining to Alexander Technique.

***Submissions for the spring  
issue due by June 1, 2012***

## F.M. Was a Neuroscientist

By Kay S. Hooper

*Scientists describe our brain in terms of its physical details; they say we are nothing but a loom of electrical cells and synaptic spaces. What science forgets is that this isn't how we experience the world . . . It is ironic but true: the one reality science cannot reduce is the only reality we will ever know.*

Jonah Lehrer, author of  
*Proust was a Neuroscientist*

Jonah Lehrer read snatches of Proust during periods of down time in his neuroscience laboratory. What started as a diversion became a search through the creative works of artists, authors, and composers who tapped into the workings of the human mind without the benefit of modern scientific technology. The result was his book, *Proust Was a Neuroscientist*<sup>1</sup>. I suspect Lehrer would have included F.M. Alexander (1869-1955) if he had known of his discoveries.

Neuroscience as we know it today is a complex study of the impact of myriad scientific fields - chemistry, biology, and physics, to name a few - in order to develop an understanding of the nervous system. Many elements of neurological activity are being measured with technological tools that were fantasies at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a time when neuroscience was an immature mix of anatomy and observation, with some observers being keener than others. In this article, I will compare F.M.'s understanding of inhibition with current explanations of this process.

The word *inhibition* has many meanings, and it had multiple meanings when F. M. Alexander chose it as part of his teaching jargon over 100 years ago. At the time, none of those meanings could be backed up by solid scientific evidence, making it a bold choice for a process that F.M. had discovered largely by self-discovery and intuition. Incredibly, by today's understanding of how the brain works, F.M. got this word right.

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## F.M. Was a Neuroscientist

By Kay S. Hooper

*Continued . . .*

One physiological definition from Dictionary.com is “the reduction of a reflex or other activity as the result of an antagonistic stimulation.” Inhibition on a neurological level is the direct result of making a choice from a field of choices, here referred to as antagonistic stimulation. A person who chooses one action or focus of attention is thereby inhibiting other possible actions or responses to stimuli, whether or not that inhibition is in his awareness.

Let’s put this concept into an every day activity – driving a car. The brain of the driver is very busy prioritizing huge amounts of sensory information. This sensory information is received globally, meaning it is coming into her awareness constantly and simultaneously. Information that is not vital to survival is prioritized as unimportant to the task, allowing the brain to focus on the critical input from other vehicles, the weather, and traffic alerts. Becoming aware of a large truck ahead may well be antagonistic to watching the GPS screen, and therefore the action required to look at the GPS screen is inhibited by the nervous system.

A more concise definition of neurological inhibition from science writer Kathleen Stein fits in with the way F.M. used this word: “Inhibition – the PFC’s [pre-frontal cortex] ability to curtail rote in favor of new behavior”<sup>2</sup>. Many behaviors are learned by imitation, what Ms. Stein calls rote, and these behaviors become habits by repetition. The only way to curtail this behavior is by deciding to do something else via the pathways in the pre-frontal cortex. The pre-frontal cortex, the brain’s seat of abstract learning, is also considered to be the place where the confluence of neural activity influences a decision to act.

F.M. described his tangle with his habits in the chapter called “Evolution of a Technique” in *The Use of the Self*.<sup>3</sup> He realized that he had to suppress his usual way of responding to a stimulus in order to respond differently.

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## F.M. Was a Neuroscientist

By Kay S. Hooper

*Continued . . .*

He also discovered that his most important decision was to continue giving the directions for primary control “until I believed I was sufficiently *au fait* with them to employ them for the purpose of gaining my end...” (p. 33). This understanding is in agreement with modern neuroscience: choosing to act differently is all it takes to inhibit a habit.

What this means for us is that inhibition is not a process that needs to be taught. In a normal, healthy brain, inhibition is going on all the time. As Jonah Lehrer implies in the opening quote, inhibition on a neurological level is not in our experience, even though neuroscience accepts it as a major function of the brain. Directing, however, we can teach because we do experience the quality of movement that comes about by letting the head lead the body. Notice that F.M. himself emphasized that he, in his own italics, “*would continue to project the directions*” (pp. 33-34) even after choosing a different end. He does not describe continuing to inhibit the old pattern, but rather that his habits “*remained inhibited right through, whilst my directions for the new use were being projected.*” (p. 35, F.M.’s italics.) And, neuroscience agrees with F.M.’s statement.

What F.M. recognized was how quickly the old pattern – the rote behavior – surfaced. It was for this reason that he chose to refuse to act toward his end immediately: “...if I was ever to be able to change my habitual use and dominate my instinctive direction, *it would be necessary for me to make the experience of receiving the stimulus to speak and of refusing to do anything immediately in response.*” (p. 27, F.M.’s italics) This pause, or taking time to refuse to act habitually, is how Alexander teachers often define inhibition.

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## F.M. Was a Neuroscientist

By Kay S. Hooper

*Continued . . .*

And inhibition is a very useful tool, speaking as an Alexander Technique teacher who was once called a “jumper” by none other than Elisabeth Walker! When we allow our students and ourselves to take time to experience the power of good use as a choice, we are training the nervous system in a very positive way.

However, any suggestion that there is something to sense about inhibition can be an obstacle to free movement, unless a student is actually able to sense this activity of the nervous system, which is most unlikely. For some AT students, there is a good deal of “doing” connected to inhibiting, resulting in a pause that stiffens rather than a pause that refreshes.

What a student may be sensing during a lesson, speaking from my personal experience, is the wide range of options for movement that appear when he refuses to choose a habitual pattern of movement. This may be temporarily confusing, but once the decision to act has been made and the directions applied, the confusion drops away, thanks to the neurological inhibition of all other options. The chosen action becomes more fluid, not more restrained, if the process of inhibition is understood to be necessary but imperceptible – as Jonah Lehrer said: not in the reality we know.

Students of Marjory Barstow tell me that she explained her work as talking to the nervous system. In light of current scientific definitions, her explanation is spot on. She knew that F.M. got it right.

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## F.M. Was a Neuroscientist

By Kay S. Hooper

*Continued . . .*

1. Lehrer, Jonah (2007). *Proust Was a Neuroscientist*. Boston/New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.
2. Stein, Kathleen (2007). *The Genius Engine*. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., p.39.
3. Alexander, F.M. (1932, orig., 1984) *The Use of the Self*. Long Beach, California: Centerline Press.



**Kay S. Hooper**, B.M., M.M., is an ATI Certified Alexander Technique Teacher and a Licensed Andover Educator. Her book, *Sensory Tune-ups: a guided journal of sensory experiences for musicians of all ages*, published by AllSense Press, has been heralded by musicians around the world. Kay is a frequent presenter on Alexander Technique, Body Mapping, and sensory integration. She has contributed articles to numerous journals, including *Direction* and the *American Music Teacher*. Kay owns and operates the Kay S. Hopper Piano and Alexander Technique Studio in Selinsgrove, PA.

## Teacher-Trainee Contribution:

### Already There

By Corrie Danieleley

Most all of us are familiar with *The Wizard of Oz*. Beyond singing along with our favorite songs, we sympathize with the plight of Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Lion as they search and seek out what they most want. We believe, as they do, that when they finally receive their one treasure they will feel whole and complete. What a dream come true! Oh, how many times I have been on a long, winding, scary path just waiting to get to the end of the rainbow for my pot of gold.

More often than not, however, the Wizard doesn't hand me a diploma with a pretty ribbon, or a new and improved heart, or even a shiny medal for courage. In fact, I cannot think of one specific moment when I instantly felt smarter, or healed from my broken heart, or courageous. Many times I find myself like Dorothy at the end of her long search – very sad and disappointed that no one was able to fix my problem.

For those of you who love happy endings, you are in for a treat. Over recent years, The Alexander Technique has helped me understand that I have and have always had the ability to access my Kansas home. Please don't misunderstand my analogy. I do not mean to imply that The Alexander Technique has helped me solve all of my problems, but rather it has helped me rediscover, explore, and embody my whole Self, which in turn, helps me in practically every aspect of my life.

Sometimes I might become confused or lost when applying The Alexander Technique to my everyday life. More often than not, I remind myself to "stick to principle" – to keep following that yellow brick road - and not worry too much about the scary forest or the field of poppies.

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## Teacher-Trainee Contribution:

### Already There

By Corrie Danieleley

*Continued . . .*

But sometimes I need extra guidance. I have been very blessed with many knowledgeable and encouraging teachers who remind me to click my sparkling, ruby slippers three times (allow my neck to be free while my head moves forward and up as my spine lengthens and my back widens and deepens). Their caring and directing hands support and illuminate my path. And before I know it, I open my eyes and I'm home again.

Even now, it is difficult for me to comprehend this technique without the aid of patient teachers. I am in awe of F.M.'s ingenuity and persistence. And I am thankful for those teachers who carry on his technique as well as pursue new discoveries. But the most amazing thing is that even in my few years of experience with The Alexander Technique, I finally figured out that I already have what I need within myself to guide me Home. But it sure is a lot of fun to wear those fabulous shoes!



**Corrie Danieleley** is currently in her third year of Alexander Technique Teacher Training at Chesapeake Bay Alexander Studies in Greensboro, NC, under the direction of Robin Gilmore. Corrie is an actor and also teaches acting and performance at North Greenville University in Greenville, SC. After Corrie becomes a certified AT teacher, she looks forward to teaching privately as well as teaching classes at her university and to other groups of people who are interested in the technique. Corrie is the proud Mama of her two-year-old son, Finn, who is known at her AT Teacher Training School as one of the "master teachers". Feel free to contact Corrie through her website: [corriedanieley.com](http://corriedanieley.com). Or, you may want to check out her AT blog: [directyourthought.blogspot.com](http://directyourthought.blogspot.com).



## Report for Freedom to Act Conference

By Constance Clare-Newman

The first Freedom to Act conference, held in NYC January 13-15, 2012, developed by Teva Bjerken, Belinda Mello, and Ann Rodiger, was produced by Balance Arts Center. The conference weekend was marked by warmth, personal connections, and inspiring teachers. The fact that it was organized by Alexander Technique teacher members from both AmSAT and ATI helped bring a wonderful variety of teaching styles and an acceptance of lineage that I have not always experienced.

As an Alexander Technique teacher who teaches in an acting program, I was immediately drawn to this conference. I signed up as soon as I read about it in AmSAT News. All the workshops I attended during this conference were directly applicable, and I took away many helpful practices. From experiential exercises (or procedures, if we prefer) to pedagogical understandings, to personal connections, I came away with much to process and integrate into my work.

I had so many great conversations with colleagues, some who I knew already and some who I met for the first time and look forward to working with in the future.

I learned that some of us work in an integrated way with other faculty, for example, when we teach Alexander in the context of rehearsals and production. And others work in relative isolation, not even knowing what other Alexander teachers at our school are doing in their classes. Most of us work somewhere in the middle of this continuum.

I learned that there are as many ways the Alexander Technique fits into a program as there are programs, from integrating Alexander into all aspects of actor training, to group classes with no private lessons to private tutorials only, from 1 semester required to 3 years required, and everything in between.

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## Report for Freedom to Act Conference

By Constance Clare-Newman

*Continued . . .*

I learned that most of us develop our own curriculum, sometimes by trial and error. Many of us relish this work of finding our own voice and what works for our particular student body.

I came away excited for our field, both for the general teaching of the Technique and in the training of the actor.

With so many workshops to choose from, which all looked fascinating, I chose mostly what seemed relevant for me, but did a couple of workshops in areas where I have little experience (Masks and Film).

List of presenters: Meade Andrews, Sarah Barker, Teva Bjerken, Bill Connington with Karen Braga, June Ekman, Judith Grodowitz, Kim Jessor, Cathy Madden, Babette Markus, Kelly McEvenue, Belinda Mello, Judith Muir, Cynthia Reynolds, Ann Rodiger, Ruth Rootberg with Christine Stevens, Greg Seel, Carolyn Serota with Richard Feldman, Daniel Singer, Mona Stiles, Jean Taylor, and Tom Vasiliades.

Here is a brief summary of each of the workshops I attended, in order of attendance:

### **Inclusive Thinking for Actors: Being in the Back**

Presenter: Judith Grodowitz

What a wonderful way to begin this conference! While her work focused on being in the back, with experiential work on the floor and in movement, Grodowitz shared her years of experience and punctuated her presentation with inspiring quotes and how they are relevant to the work in acting.

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## Report for Freedom to Act Conference

By Constance Clare-Newman

*Continued . . .*

### Inclusive Thinking for Actors: Being in the Back

Presenter: Judith Grodowitz

My favorite was a quote from Daniel Nagrin, dancer and choreographer, "A task of self-knowledge for the performer: to find what liberates your strengths ... One must ask — what am I doing to keep me from my full potential/powers?"

What an Alexandrian question! What a profound but simple way to approach the teaching of Alexander Technique to performers. As Grodowitz led us through gentle warm-up movement, and into connection with partners, her focus was on spatial and three-dimensional awareness. As we practiced several partner exercises, we compared and contrasted what it was like to be in our backs versus what it was like to be less aware of back, and more aware of the front/face/personality that is typically two-dimensional.

One of Grodowitz's lovely teaching tools was the image of Athena's crown, which is a large headdress that, with imagination, can be accessed to sense fullness of head direction forward and up. After we looked at the image of a sculptural Athena with her curving headdress, we moved in the space with more access to our own regal three-dimensional bearing.

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## Report for Freedom to Act Conference

By Constance Clare-Newman

*Continued . . .*

### Image Rehabilitation for the “Electronically-Raised Actor”

Presenter: Catherine Madden

Child development research and correlating experience in Madden’s classrooms infused this workshop with a heady mix of information and practices designed to respond to the current predicament of working with electronically-raised actors. Rather disturbing information about youth that have been and currently are being raised with so much digital media was presented with quotes and references. Integrated into the research and stories from Madden’s classrooms were practical methods to bring students into their senses and train their image-making from two dimensional to three dimensional.

Given the deterioration of sensitivity to all stimuli that is occurring at a rapid pace (research shows that every year there is a decline in human sensitivity), all acting work must include presence work, or exercises to bring about fuller embodiment for the student.

At the same time, since much of current media feeds responses rather than encouraging the brain to creatively develop in imagination and ideas, images of the electronically raised are often flat, two dimensional, small, and disconnected from sensory reality.

As a way to build new neuronal pathways, Madden led us through several exploration experiences that can be built upon as students advance. One of the ways Madden excels as a teacher seems to be that she continually asks questions of her students to find out what they are seeing, what they are sensing, what they are thinking. Then she devises practices or explorations that help to broaden those visions and feelings and thoughts.

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## Report for Freedom to Act Conference

By Constance Clare-Newman

*Continued . . .*

### The Latest Breath "That Gave the Sound of Words . . ."

King Phillip – King John III-I

Presenter: Greg Seel

Wow. The 3 young actors that Greg Seel brought with him to the workshop were already excellent when they showed us their first version of their monologue. The hands-on and verbal coaching that happened during each next recitation was impressive. The students all had a strong understanding of the Alexander work and were able to work with Seel in his "shorthand" gestures and verbal coaching to deepen and change the way they performed the text. Next, Seel upped the ante by asking each actor to respond to the (imaginary) character from very close, and then from very far, and then from several (imaginary) roles of being a servant, soldier, son. The actors responded with immediacy, sensitivity and depth. It was wonderful to observe each monologue become fuller and more moving each time.

Several times during the workshop, Seel said that he believed actors should be able to change on a dime, and his actors certainly showed that skill. When a director wants something different, how can the student use the Alexander Technique to change pathways and respond in a new way?

As Seel discussed his statement, "All acting is some combination of Use of the Self and Use of the Text," he also showed us how he works with hands-on so that the actors could release their own personal habits and develop more options and choices. Habits like head nodding, jaw tightening, chest thrusting are so pervasive that the undoing of habit and just "letting the text out" is hugely beneficial.

*Continued on next page*

## Report for Freedom to Act Conference

By Constance Clare-Newman

*Continued . . .*

### The Latest Breath "That Gave the Sound of Words . . ."

King Phillip – King John III-I

Presenter: Greg Seel

Another of Seel's emphases is summed up by his statement: "Breath is where the audience meets the text." Seel's hands-on work clearly changed each actor in his or her ability to let the text out while staying emotionally, energetically, and mechanically centered and coordinated.

### Using the Alexander Technique to Help Create Film Performance

Presenter: Bill Connington and Karen Braga

What a treat to watch a film actor (and Alexander Technique teacher) perform in his own film and then discuss how he uses the technique in his acting for film and theater.

After watching Connington's very scary short film, "Zombie," Connington shared how much his Alexander work was necessary.

Before "Zombie" was a film, it was a stage production. For the stage production, Connington dealt with fully inhabiting this dreadful character, night after night, and then needing to un-do and release back into his own self and life.

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## Report for Freedom to Act Conference

By Constance Clare-Newman

*Continued . . .*

### Using the Alexander Technique to Help Create Film Performance

Presenter: Bill Connington and Karen Braga

He used the principles to inhabit the “C curve” that his character slumped into, while still breathing and remaining present. Remaining curious was important to Connington so that he could continually respond to the director and allow for subtle changes during the run.

Connington mentioned that for both stage and film, the actor must often spend time waiting around, while being ready to go at a moment’s notice. By staying with the back, with the breath, with the directions, Connington remains in a place of semi-readiness, rather than dropping the energy or staying too energized to sustain it.

For film, Connington emphasized that the main issue for many is a fear of the camera, or excess tension, which makes an actor look forced. Stimulus of the camera can be met with staying in one’s back, breathing, and imagining that the camera is a good friend.

When it came time for group practice, Connington and Braga led us in a fun exercise that helped many of us experience what an actor might feel in a stressful situation. In groups of four, one person played the actor and three people played hair and make-up person, lighting person, and director, with each simultaneously talking over and around and to the actor, who was being poked and prodded and directed with more stimuli than he could possibly respond to. We did a few versions, and of course, the actors found that staying in their backs, while breathing, and not tightening was the only way to be able to respond to anything.

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## Report for Freedom to Act Conference

By Constance Clare-Newman

*Continued . . .*

### Using the Alexander Technique to Help Create Film Performance

Presenter: Bill Connington and Karen Braga

For the last hour of this workshop, a panel answered our questions about using the Alexander Technique while working on camera.

Panel Participants: Bill Connington, Karen Braga, Jorge Luna, Rutanya Alda, Valda Setterfield, Gary Cowling, Cathy Madden.

Consistent with all the conference presentations, the discussion centered around being present to self, fellow actors, and the environment—not tightening into contraction, not blocking energy. Several actors spoke of Constructive Rest being an important part of their preparation and that they practice the technique in their life, so that it is organic, and doesn't have to be called up as a "technique" in rehearsal. Regarding the camera, using the imagination to experience the friendliness of the camera, or imagining the camera as a sun that is beautiful and warming helps you to stay in your back.

Gary Cowling, from Brooklyn College, suggested that actors practice letting themselves be a conduit for the work, letting the camera come to them, receiving the camera, while remaining a living breathing person.

Cathy Madden emphasized that the camera will pick up non-constructive thinking. So, again, invite the camera to be with all of you, as you stay aware of the psychophysical environment, and can, therefore, fully respond.

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## Report for Freedom to Act Conference

By Constance Clare-Newman

*Continued . . .*

Playing with Defensive Actions: Alexander Technique and Masks  
Presenter: Belinda Mello

This mask workshop was so engaging emotionally that I have little in the way of notes. The beauty and profound humanity of the mask work had many of us almost hypnotized.

Before we got to play with masks though, Mello led us through several exercises that had us explore following another persona. We paired up and partner A put a hand on partner B's back. Partner A was the leader, or the "Mask" and partner B followed, or played the "Actor." Sensing the wishes of another being, while staying with self, was one of the explorations. This was rich work that could be applied in any acting class, masks or not.

Mello's mask collection was created by her and consisted of representations inspired by the Four Defensive Actions: Attack, Submit, Withdraw, Freeze. Each "Defensive Action" had a male and female mask version and was evocative of those emotions but included many qualities of a human face.

When two young actors put on the masks and Mello coached them carefully and sensitively into movement, the room went still with fascination. The movement seemed to stem from response to one another only, unlike so much movement that actors think they should or must do. And it was quite beautiful. Discussion of this work was rich with questions about how putting on a mask enables an actor to let go of some of their own personality and "stuff" about being a performer, and how allowing response to emerge from a centered, three-dimensional presence is facilitated by the masks.

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## Report for Freedom to Act Conference

By Constance Clare-Newman

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Playing with Defensive Actions: Alexander Technique and Masks  
Presenter: Belinda Mello

For the next exploration, four Alexander teachers put on masks, and responded to each other and to the audience reaction, while being coached. Mello is sensitive in allowing space for the actors to find their way, and the four actors were sensitive with each other and with their own inner responses. This exploration played out in about twenty minutes, and it was deeply moving and mesmerizing.



Ann Rodiger teaching at the Conference

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## Report for Freedom to Act Conference

By Constance Clare-Newman

*Continued . . .*

### Working with the Actor in Classical Repertory Theatre – The Alexander Technique as an Actor’s Tool

Presenter: Kelly McEvenue

McEvenue began by making the distinction of Training the Actor versus Coaching the Actor. Her own work includes both, but is centered on coaching actors as they prepare and rehearse for a play.

I found this to be a useful distinction, as my classes are in training actors, but so many actors really want quick tips of how to deal with some of their typical conundrums (wigs, masks, period costume, specific movement); they want detailed strategies that help them in their work.

McEvenue gave us some ideas and practices that directly address some of the common questions. She showed us that it is possible to give them Alexander Technique principles in clear, digestible experiences. We were led through a simple walking in the space exercise, in which we compared and contrasted meeting each other with awareness of our breath and holding our breath. As with many other workshops in this conference, we experienced that holding our breath led us to see others as two-dimensional and lacking connection. When we kept breathing and even breathed *to* the other person, we experienced a fuller self and a fuller other person.

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## Report for Freedom to Act Conference

By Constance Clare-Newman

*Continued . . .*

### Working with the Actor in Classical Repertory Theatre – The Alexander Technique as an Actor’s Tool

Presenter: Kelly McEvenue

As we got into twos and practiced breathing and directing spatially, we experienced more possibilities. Breathing just half way kept us feeling withdrawn from our partner. Including our partner, yet breathing up and over and around them felt very enlivening, and three-dimensional. Breathing into one another’s heart/center brought a sense of intimacy. These stimuli and responses may sound obvious, but in my experience, these are exactly the kinds of clear concrete exercises that my students need. Using spatial direction with sensory awareness builds access to emotional states that can be used in their acting.

McEvenue also gave a demonstration of how she coaches actors on gender in walking. Since the female pelvis is wider and the hip sockets are placed slightly lower, a man directs his center of gravity lower, which immediately seems to widen as well, and brings a swing to the hips. A woman can direct her center higher and narrower, and suddenly the movement changes to a more masculine gait.

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## Report for Freedom to Act Conference

By Constance Clare-Newman

*Continued . . .*

### Working with the Actor in Classical Repertory Theatre – The Alexander Technique as an Actor’s Tool

Presenter: Kelly McEvenue

We ended the workshop by moving through the space, attending to our front and side space, and contrasting that to attending to above, behind, down, and all around space. Expanding our field of attention clearly changed the quality in which we moved and saw one another.

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What all the workshops had in common was a heightened focus on three-dimensional presence. At the time, I was struck by the different teaching styles, language used, and varied ways into the work. But once I looked back at my notes in preparation for writing this article, I realized that all the teachers were unified in their focus on three-dimensionality as a way into Alexander Technique for actors.

This is not an unusual place for me, as in my own training with Frank Ottiwell—whose program included equal teaching time-shared by Frank, Bob Britton, Rome Earle, Simone Biase and Larry Ball—I experienced a wide range of teaching styles. My teachers each had distinctive practices and priorities, which caused some confusion, but ultimately taught us many paths towards a unified self. Similarly, in this conference a wide range of practices and language all led to the goal of accessing fuller three-dimensional presence and the ability to direct voice, breath, and energy spatially. These are exactly the skills my young students need most.

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## Report for Freedom to Act Conference

By Constance Clare-Newman

*Continued . . .*

One of my favorite aspects of the conference was realizing that the pedagogy of the Alexander Technique—teaching better Use of the Self through Awareness, Inhibition and Direction—shines through all the presenter’s work as well as my own. Keeping to that simplicity and purity in our many variations is profoundly important to the training of the actor. All the presenters demonstrated their own path to teaching better Use of the Self. These main principles that F.M. gave us so many years ago are more applicable than ever in an actor’s life, especially in this digital age. Awareness of an embodied self has become a basic acting skill to build upon, and cannot be assumed. Most students arrive at classes having excelled at pushing and striving, not paying attention to their own signs of discomfort or pain. Or, on the other hand, they arrive completely disembodied, unable to discern the most basic senses, and go through life collapsed. Learning to experiment with themselves, reason things out, and come to more conscious choices demonstrates how (and why) this work is needed more than ever.

### Creating Collaboration as a Future

Teva Bjerken brought us all together on Sunday for a closing circle and conversation. After acknowledging the delight and warmth many people had expressed to her about this convergence of talent and sharing, Bjerken declared that the first step has been taken. By strengthening our communication, expanding our horizons and engaging with the many approaches we have each developed in our teaching and practice of the Alexander Technique, we have opened the dialogue.

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## Report for Freedom to Act Conference

By Constance Clare-Newman

*Continued . . .*

### Creating Collaboration as a Future

As preparation for the conference and the coming semester, Bjerken re-read articles and books (several of which had been written by conference attendees) and encouraged us to write about our work, continuing the dialogue.

As we strengthen our own work, building relationships with other faculty/theater directors is essential if the Alexander work is to continue to thrive in acting programs. Co-teaching with Voice faculty and other movement disciplines, as well as building trust with acting faculty and directors, are natural progressions and represent an ongoing process.

Bjerken invited participants to share their experiences about what has been helpful or effective in this kind of collaboration.

Cathy Madden responded that it is important to teach both the actors and the faculty how the Alexander work can be integrated into what they want and need. Sarah Barker agreed and expressed that studying AT, Voice, and Movement *is* acting training. Sometimes they can get pigeonholed into separate skills, but we can help fellow faculty to see how the whole acting process depends on all the aspects being integrated. Kathryn Armour remarked that she used the term Integrative Awareness Practice, which resonates with acting faculty.

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## Report for Freedom to Act Conference

By Constance Clare-Newman

*Continued . . .*

### Creating Collaboration as a Future

Jed Diamond reminded us that actor training is the meeting of Use of the Self with Use of the Text. This work is essential. And, it is important to support each other as individuals in programs far from each other geographically. He recommends “chasing teachers” that you resonate with, and learning from the old-timers.

Richard Feldman observed that this conference, this collaboration, is exactly what we need. He suggests that AT teachers go to scene study classes and offer their help (after praising the excellent work of the scene study teacher!). Each Alexander teacher must negotiate with each director, to find the best ways to work together.

Belinda Mello shared that she finds it helpful to take photos or videos of students, before and after. Even if it’s a little reductionist, these tools make it easier for students (and faculty) to see how the work makes such a difference.

Julie Edwards (one of the young actors in attendance) said that in her training, guest artists made a huge impression on her. And that might be a great avenue to explore in supporting and collaborating with each other.

In closing, I’d like to extend a big thank you to the organizers and all the presenters! I encourage anyone interested in the field to join us next year for more stimulating and inspiring collaboration!

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## Report for Freedom to Act Conference

By Constance Clare-Newman

*Continued . . .*

Comments? Questions? Ideas? Go to the Facebook page, and communicate! On Facebook, search for "Freedom-to-ACT-2012"

Also, to see all the presenters and the workshops they offered, and to watch for next year's flyer, go to Ann Rodiger's Balance Arts Center page, [www.balanceartscenter.com](http://www.balanceartscenter.com)



Constance Clare-Newman has practiced the Alexander Technique since 1990. She graduated from ATI-SF (Frank Ottiwell, Director) in 2001 and has been teaching full time since then. With over thirty years of extensive experience in various movement disciplines, Constance especially enjoys working with performers, currently teaching in the actor training program at Academy of Art University. A former dressage trainer, Constance also gives Alexander workshops for riders around the country. <http://www.constanceclare.com/>

## Malibu, California Winter Workshop Report December 27, 2011 – January 1, 2012

By Carol Chung

The 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual West Coast Alexander Technique Residential workshop took place at the idyllic Serra Retreat Center in Malibu, California.

Meade Andrews, Michael D. Frederick, Lyn Charlsen Klein, Frances Marsden and Carol Prentice were on the faculty, with visual artist and AT teacher Jane Brucker also offering two lectures centered on the sense of sight.

The two themes for the week were The Four Corners of the Room and Contact with Material Objects.

There were thirty-one participants, ranging from newcomers to the Technique to certified Alexander teachers, drawing from eleven US states as well as Canada and the Netherlands.

The participant occupations represented spanned the gamut, from psychotherapists, business executives and engineers to musicians, visual artists and dancers.

The workshop provided one and all excellent opportunities for rest, renewal and growth.

The website is: <http://alexandertechniqueworkshops.com/>



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## Columbus, Ohio Winter Workshop Report December 27 – 31, 2012

By Corrie Danieleley

I had a wonderful experience attending my first Alexander Technique Columbus Residential Workshop this past December. I learned a ton of information – more than my little notepad could keep up with! Although I thought the workshop dates would be an overwhelming time of the year to attend a workshop, it was a fantastic way for me to close out 2011 and begin a brand new year.

The highly skilled faculty included Dale Beaver, Diana Bradley, Bill Coinable, Robin Gilmore, Donna Doellinger, and Martha Hansen Fertman. In addition to their rich AT heritage, and 20 – 50+ years of experience, I felt they were all on the same page with each other as well as with the attendees. They not only listened to our needs, but they responded, changed plans when needed, and made every effort to make this a healthy and positive experience for all.

Those who attended the workshop had a wide breadth of AT experience, some having only a few lessons all the way to experienced teachers. Each attendee was assigned a Home Group and a Rotating Group. I found the groups to be very helpful in creating a nice rapport with a small group of people as well as streamlining specific information. Personally, I did not feel overwhelmed or scattered with all of the glorious information I was receiving, but rather I felt like I was on a path that had clearly marked guideposts.

In addition to the Home and Rotating Groups, there were other classes offered such as, Tai Chi, Developmental Movement, Medicine Wheel, Yoga, Performance Activities, Teaching Practicum, and each attendee also received three private lessons.

The residential workshop is located on the campus of Ohio State University in Columbus, OH, and offers a plethora of dining, entertainment, and local attractions within walking distance or a short drive. It takes place the week after Christmas and just before the New Year. I found the cost to be quite do-able even in this economy. The website is: <http://www.alexanderworkshops.com>



## Upcoming Workshops and Events

Please click on the following links to view

2012 Workshops and Events:

ATI Notice Board of Workshops and Ongoing Events

[www.ati-net.com/atiwshop.php](http://www.ati-net.com/atiwshop.php)

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## 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:

To create and sustain open means of global communication for people to discuss, apply, research and experiment with the discoveries of F.M. Alexander.

To encourage the use of the F.M. Alexander Technique in both human and environmental relationships.

To embody the principles of the F.M. Alexander Technique in ATI's structure and means of operation.

To provide a means for recognizing Alexander Technique Teacher competence and providing certification for those teachers who qualify.

## ATI Website

<http://www.ati-net.com/index.php>

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