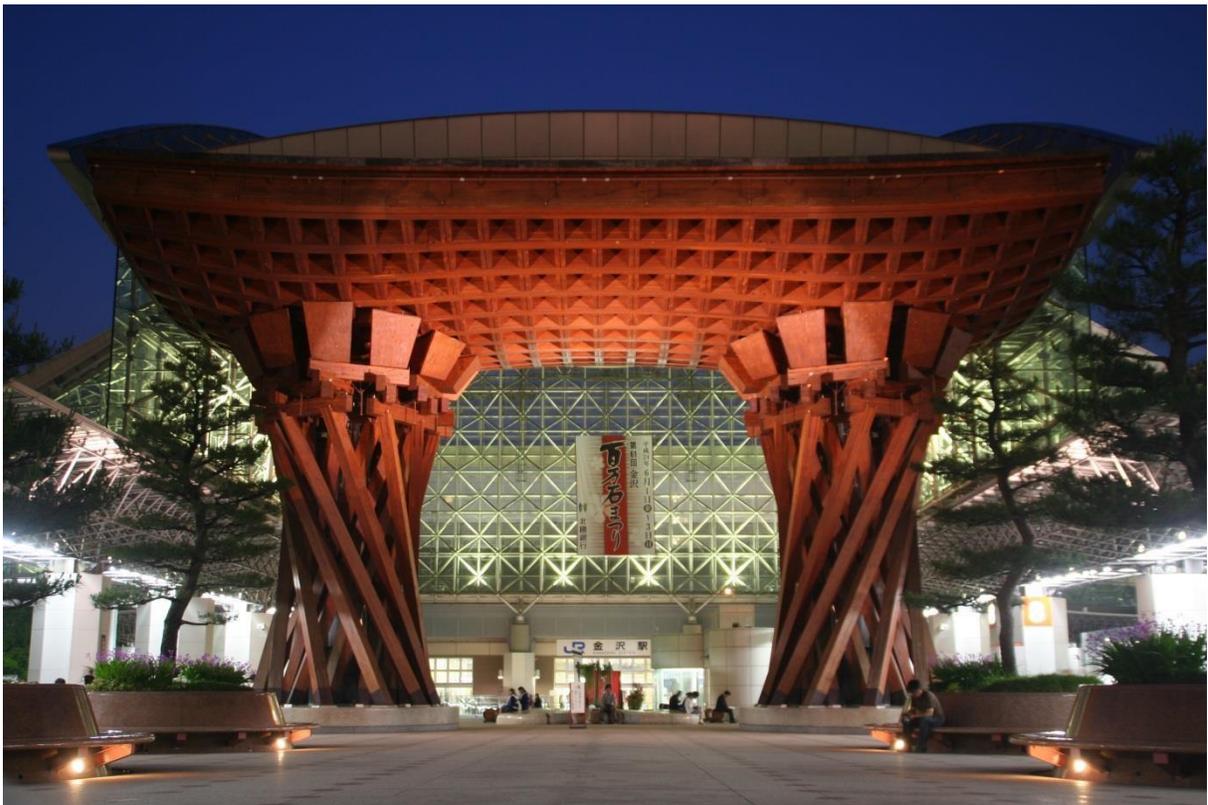


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Traditions and Innovations

From the past to
the present to
the future
we send our wishes to the sky.

Discovering My Potential for Movement: “Because I Could”

By Carol Pino

“I won’t be available that day.”

“Why not?”

“I’m going to be attending an Alexander Technique Workshop.”

“What’s the Alexander Technique?”

As an Alexander Technique Teacher Trainee, I’ve needed to formulate my personal answer to that question. After years and months of blustering my way through an answer that did not seem to convey what I wanted or even meant, an answer suddenly popped into my head and seemed to “feel” right. The Alexander Technique is discovering your potential for movement with freedom and ease.

I’ve been retracing my thoughts as to why I needed to discover my potential for movement. As someone into my eighth decade of life, shouldn’t I know this by now? Apparently, not.

As with most everything, there is a reason or number of reasons why we never really know our inner potential for many of life’s activities. My experiences with the Alexander Technique began several years after I underwent 13 hours of surgery to correct scoliosis, kyphosis and an underdeveloped lower back 13 years ago. My surgeon told me I would have to develop a new posture after I healed, but she never gave me any direction as to why or how.

Since college days, I had occasionally heard the Alexander Technique mentioned. After reading a magazine article praising the technique’s benefits, I did a Google search and located a teacher about 30 miles from my home. Several years of intermittent lessons and workshops later, I decided that the best approach to

understanding and applying the technique would be embarking on the path to become an Alexander Technique teacher.

During lessons, workshops, and teacher training, I have become aware of my habitual body use patterns and have attempted to direct my thinking to adopt new, easier patterns of use.

Being predominately a left-brained person, I have a need to understand the whys and hows of my habitual patterns. One idea came to me early on in my study that has colored my understanding of myself. To make a long story short, my mother was embarrassed to find herself pregnant again after 16 years. To keep me a secret from family and neighbors, she gradually tightened her corset and let out the seams of her dresses. No one knew of my existence until 6 weeks before my birth! I was struck by the idea that if I did not have the usual movement capabilities while in the womb then no wonder I had always felt that I was a stiff, ungraceful person. With this understanding, I could proceed to discover ease of movement I had never known.

One article I read stated that, while in the womb, a fetus has a tendency to turn one way or another. Therefore, we are born to spiral to the left or to the right. In utero, did I spiral to the right leading to the development of kyphosis on my right side? Is this propensity why I tend to list to my right even after the surgery? Was my prebirth restriction a partial cause of my inability to develop a fully functional kinesthetic sense?

Too much self-analysis can sometimes lead to focusing only on the problem and not the means whereby to solve or diminish the situation. I am, I hope, able to use my self-understanding to seek further for more freedom and ease in movement.

During one of the earliest workshops I attended, I made another startling discovery. During a private lesson with a nationally known teacher, with her guidance, I was able to bend over from a sitting position in a chair and touch my toes. How was this possible with two long rods in my back? Her understanding of anatomy and the attachment points of the rods enabled me to realize how much potential for movement I still had at my disposal.

In light of everything written, what has the Alexander Technique done for me? Through an understanding of Primary Control/Movement, I have discovered the innate relationship between the head, neck and spine and its effect on overall freedom and ease of movement. Thinking of the Primary Movement enables me to release excess muscle-tension and move in and out of a chair with grace and ease. Understanding that my Body is an Indivisible Whole, enables me to perform strength-training

exercises with more freedom and ease by not focusing simply on the triceps and tensing body muscles, but by allowing my whole body ease to release excess muscular tension. Realizing that my Functioning will worsen or improve depending on my Use enables me to improve my ability to walk. Thinking of my pelvis being part of my legs when I walk has given me more potential for movement.

Understanding Faulty Kinesthetic Sense shows me that sometimes I think I'm doing or not doing a certain movement when the opposite is true; for example, failing to realize that I often still tend to drop my head as I begin to take a step. Understanding the concept of End-Gaining allows me to be aware of trying too hard to achieve my goal and instead to stop to realize that I need to think of freeing my neck, allowing my head to move forward and up, and my whole torso to lengthen and widen. As an example, when I want to walk with more freedom and ease, I can easily focus too much on the act of walking to the next sign-post or large rock, and go into a slump instead of simply allowing myself to enjoy the scenery. By Inhibiting (redirecting my movement) this tendency through Thinking in Activity (thinking neck being free or up), I can come out of the slump and continue.

Being of a certain age, my congenital predisposition to osteoarthritis has become a factor inhibiting my freedom and ease of movement over the past 20 years. As with many people, my tendency is to over-use certain muscles at the expense of others.

Thinking of the body as a whole instead of separate and unrelated parts allows a greater freedom and ease. Instead of focusing on the hand, finger or thumb that is problematic, indirectly allowing the primary control/movement to further overall body ease, enables me to chop vegetables, brush my teeth or open a stubborn door with less muscle tension and effort.

One helpful aspect of my study of the Alexander Technique has been the workshops I have attended. From the very first workshop to the latest, I am amazed by the fact that I can observe in the other participants movements, changes, etc. and I can see how those changes can apply to myself. The technique is a discovery of my potential and it is my responsibility to improve my freedom and ease of movement. A teacher's guidance in leading me to discover and challenge has to be balanced with my desire to accept the challenges and embrace the practical outcomes. Comparing and contrasting teaching techniques informs me that even though the principles are the same, there are as many different ways of teaching as there are teachers and students.

By becoming more aware of my anatomy, I have been better able to understand how my entire body works as a whole and which muscles, etc., of my body structure are responsible for various movements. When my outer muscles are freed from excess tension, my inner muscles can then perform their intended support functions.

Understanding that movement is continually changing, has led me to realize that what I learned one day may not be the best the next day. There are other examples, of course, that I could delineate. Overall, indirect intervention by consciously preventing interference with my use leads to better functioning with more freedom and ease.

Through the expert guidance of private Alexander Technique lessons and the intensive weekend workshops with my trainee sponsor, I have been guided to further understand, clarify, refine and adapt the principles of the Alexander Technique as I proceed through my daily activities. Exploring with them the possibilities for movement with freedom and ease has been an enriching and rewarding experience. Their patience with me as I progress thorough my journey of exploration has emboldened me to continue to seek the freedom and ease of movement within myself and to eventually share my understanding with others.

As a future teacher, I must be able to use all the Alexander Technique principles myself as I teach. I need to be able effectively to use my hands for kinesthetic learning, while demonstrating what I want to convey and to communicate verbally the intellectual aspects of the technique.

My experience through attending varying workshops, receiving lessons from different teachers and experiencing different teaching styles has led me to the place where I now have to develop my own Alexander Technique teaching style. Teaching someone to discover his/her potential to move with freedom and ease is far different than prescriptively teaching someone how to write a five-paragraph essay to pass a required exam. Being in the Present and reminding myself "that was then, this is now" will ease this transition. Focusing on myself and another individual as partners in discovering and sharing a dynamic flow of energy will further aid my becoming the teacher I desire to become.

As I have progressed in my study of the technique, I have come to the conclusion that my definition needs an alteration. My thought now is that the Alexander Technique is really rediscovering your potential for movement with freedom and ease. Why "rediscovering" instead of "discovering"? The Primary Control/ Movement is an innate mechanism. As a baby and toddler, we all use the Primary Control/Movement while we are learning to turn over, creep and crawl, sit, stand and walk. Our

environments lead us away from this delicate balance of our heads on the top of the spines. Therefore, when we study the Alexander Technique we are actually rediscovering something that has been there all along but has been overshadowed by our societal interactions with others. Will this be my final definition of the Alexander Technique? Only time and experience will tell.

A number of years ago, before I had any exposure to the Alexander Technique, I wrote the following poem during teacher training in the New Jersey Writing Project. While studying the Alexander Technique, I have thought often about the poem. F. M. Alexander progressed chronologically from a rather literal to a more subtle development in his skill. For me, my poem has made the same progression in my mind, from literal to subtle with deeper layers of meaning.



Biography

Carol Pino is a teacher trainee under the apprenticeship model with Bob Lada and takes lessons with Jane Bick in Austin, TX. Carol is a retired public school Home Economics/English teacher and Evaluation Systems Pearson consultant who is involved with the League of Woman Voters and enjoys working crossword puzzles, researching genealogy, reading and cooking in her spare time. Her time is divided between Wimberley, TX and DeTour Village, MI.

Because I could

Because I could free myself from the embryonic tightly-laced
corset and let-out seams of worn and frayed dresses
I entered a world – a surprise to everyone.

Because I could do nothing but listen to the weepings and
wailings of siblings and significant others
("poor mother" – "I didn't even tell my own mother you were on the way, let
alone anyone else" – "those poor people, at their age")
I knew my presence, my life, was unwelcome.

Because I could not find the post-embryonic nourishment to grow,
to blossom into a flower of acceptance
I floundered, wallowed, and withered in self-pity, insecurity,
and doubt.

Because I could shed my own tightly-laced corset of being through
painful understanding, acceptance, and forgiveness
I, in time, lived, grew, risked, and accomplished. Because
I could,
I am.

Carol Willett Pino

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