

Half Full or Half Empty?

By Michael Vilain, Certified Advanced Rolfer™

When I was asked to write for this column I had the same reaction you see in the Cathy comic strip (“ACK!”). When the editor approached Matt Hsu and me to write for *Structural Integration* (née *Rolf Lines*), I didn’t know where to begin. Past issues had really interesting historical takes on what Rolwing® was like back in the early days or talked about being the second Rolfer™ for 1000 miles. I didn’t think I had anything that interesting to say (contrary to popular belief, it’s not always about me). Other than my fascination with technology, I can’t think of how my practice might be that different from many other Rolfers out there. How did I get here – from chemistry nerd in high school and college, to computer nerd in the 1980s, to studying bodywork, eventually to become a Rolfer? So started my existential journey: am I a techie who is a Rolwing practitioner or am I a Rolwing practitioner who is a techie?

Matt Hsu suggested we write our articles in iambic pentameter. He’s the trained professional having studied English literature. I wanted to be Mr. Wizard. Sadly, UCLA didn’t have a degree program for being a mad scientist. So, I ended up studying chemistry and being paid to play with computers as a computer operator.



When I graduated, I really wanted to do something with computers and chemistry, however the sparkling labs and shiny equipment in “CSI” weren’t invented yet. I ended up getting a job slinging code for a living. I felt like a hamster spinning inside a wheel.

I’d taken many human development seminars over the years. They led me to enroll in a three-month, 120-hour massage class. This was partly for personal growth and partly because I wanted to give back to the AIDS support community that helped my partner and me during the last two

years of his life. Learning to live in my body was a new and fascinating bonus.

I was paid big bucks to live in my head, think, and “figure it out.” The experiential learning of massage training was very different from just sitting in a classroom taking notes on “data.” You have to get the information into your hands and not just your head. I kept taking bodywork classes, learning from each one. Eventually I decided to go through the Rolwing Ten Series. Halfway through, I wanted to know how to learn to do this work.

A year later I was in Boulder taking Unit II. A year after that, I was a newly minted Rolfer. During my training, I tried “debugging” my client’s structure in a very strange Eighth Hour. I chased the symptoms around my client’s body and it felt like I was whacking at a gopher in a field of holes. That session just did not work on so many levels for either of us. When I heard the Ida Rolf quote “Wherever you think it is, it ain’t,” I thought immediately of this session. By the end of my training, it became very clear to me that “knowing” was not where Rolwing lived, yet it was what I was paid for when sitting in front of a computer. “Knowing” was something I had to give up to do this work and the hardest thing for me to do. Another thing I learned was to “dance on shifting sands.” I had to totally rearrange my life to take the training and rearrange it again when both classes were cancelled. Both these things were valuable life lessons.

I went on to take continuing education classes so I could qualify for my advanced training. After five years of struggle, I finally “got” cranial touch and started “hearing” the movement of tissues with my hands. That led me to Liz Gaggini’s visceral training and a 120-hour cranial training. I recently learned of Don Hazen’s nerve work after listening to James Schwartz talk about it at a workshop. I tried some of the things he talked about and found it to be incredibly useful. I can’t wait to take Don’s classes.

After my training, I continued to work full time as a computer consultant by day and as a Rolfer at night. After five years, it became very hard for me to do both. Yet I managed to do some local advertising, build a web site, create a brochure, and attend a few health expos with other Rolfers.

My career had changed from being a computer techie to a Rolfer. My techie background carried over into my practice. I worked on a web site right after I got home from Boulder. I’d read through the book *Web Sites That Suck*. I designed an informational site with all sorts of articles about Rolfing from my membership packet and the Rolf Institute® store. I wouldn’t have to mail stuff out to prospective clients asking for information. My clients were the cubicle dwellers of Silicon Valley. I know just where they’re coming from.

With the advent of Google, rolf.org has become a key referral for clients finding my web site. I stopped publishing a weekly ad in a local paper because Google finds my site just fine. I also get 50% of my referrals from rolf.org. Some Rolfers have “opted-out” of the \$75 listing fee for the directory and web listing. Here in the Silicon Valley, most people look for information via the web. They find me via my listing on rolf.org just as much as through Google.

I joined the Rolf Forum as soon as I got home from Boulder. Prior to December 1995, Alan Kaplan maintained it as an email list on AOL, but it grew unwieldy. Vicki Egge’s husband Doug Mauer, our white knight, rode to the rescue and offered the services of his business. We’ve been hosted on Doug’s systems ever since. I think we all can offer many thanks to Doug for his kind generosity over these years.

I found the Forum invaluable to post questions and get answers from literally all parts of the planet. And it’s become a lifeline to places where there aren’t many local Rolfers. I have so many practitioners

in my area that I actually built a regional search on my web site for “added value” to potential clients. It was also fun to attend the International Association of Structural Integrators (IASI) 2005 Seattle symposium and hear “Oh, you’re Michael Vilain” over and over.

In December last year, Vicki sent me an email saying she wanted to retire as Forum administrator and offered me her job, “passing the tiara.” So, I’ve been familiarizing myself with the system, its capabilities and limitations.

In 2003, a Reno Rolfer complained about our “archaic and unwieldy” email-based Forum and didn’t even bother to stick around to listen to the discussion. Email has its limits. You’re restricted to text-only messages with no attachments. Also, lots of Forum traffic can cause unattended mailboxes to overflow. And the Forum’s messages can get flagged as SPAM by ISPs seemingly for no reason. There were clearly better alternatives, although they would likely cost money.

A couple people have suggested Yahoo Groups as an alternative. I won’t go into why, but they’re much worse than what we have now. I think the best compromise is to read the Forum using Gmail by obtaining a Gmail account to use solely for the Forum. Gmail’s web-based interface automatically threads the many messages into conversations, making it easier to sort through all the posts. There’s also a huge storage limit (2GB+) and Gmail is rarely considered a SPAM source by ISPs. It’s easy and it’s free.

Topics often resurface on the Forum. It’s hard to search through the archives unless you keep the Forum’s entire contents on

your system. As of March 2009, there were 36,000+ messages. In October 2008, Matt Hsu, a smart, sassy, and tech-savvy Rolfer up in San Francisco posted a call to arms about our antiquated email Forum. He offered to us our very own web-based bulletin board, RolfBB, totally for free to the Rolfing community (structuralintegration.info/rolfbb). He asked me to help porting over the Forum’s archived messages and I said yes. To date, we have 1995-2004 imported into the site. This makes searching the archives for past discussions fast and easy. We’ve got some 15,000+ left to import, but it’s a good start. I’ll let Matt expound on the bulletin board (maybe in iambic pentameter).

What does all this technical gobbledygook have to do with Rolfing? It helps me stay in touch with my peers and my clients. It allows stuff that, prior to the ‘Net, required a pilgrimage to Boulder to look it up in the “Tute” archives. Now, my dabbling on the Internet is just part of my hobby since I’m no longer paid to do technology. Thank god for my Rolfing practice. I get to live in a whole other place that I never even discovered until I was forty: my body.

As to “who am I – a techie Rolfer or a Rolfer who does tech?” – I give the “Standard Reply™”: “That depends.” I think in the end, you’ll have to pry the keyboard out of my cold, dead fingers. And I’ll be working on people in the retirement home, pointing to people in senior yoga classes saying “he needs more support in his legs through his pelvic floor.”

An optimist thinks that the glass is half full.

A pessimist thinks it’s half empty.

An engineer thinks the glass is twice as big as it needs to be.

Ray Bishop, Ph.D., passed away on December 5, 2008, of complications from cancer. His spirit lives on in his many contributions to the community of Rolfing and Structural Integration.

In his honor, his website remains as a resource for Rolfers and others interested in Rolfing.

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<http://www.idarolfsbrahms.com>