A Look at the Past and Future of Rolfing®

A Visit With Dr. Marvin Solit

By Marilyn Beech

I spent a wonderful and enlightening week this summer in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with Dr. Marvin Solit who was one of Dr. Rolf's earliest students and whom I'm sure most of you have never heard of. I certainly hadn't until Jim Oschman brought him to my attention. The earliest years of Dr. Rolf's teaching and explorations, from 1955 - 1965, are a blank page in history for most of us, so it's intriguing to start filling in that gap and to see how Rolfing has evolved with one its earliest practitioners.

In 1955 Marvin Solit, originally from the Bronx, was attending the Osteopathic College in Kansas City, Missouri. A friend of his, who had heard Dr. Rolf's lecture in New York earlier, had persuaded her to give a lecture in the midwest. Dr. Solit first met Dr. Rolf in Topeka, Kansas, at this lecture and from there she moved her operations to Kansas City for an extended length of time. While there she taught Structural Integration to Osteopathic students, processing five students and giving talks on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. On Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays she saw paying clients. Kansas City was one of the earliest "Rolfed" cities and I sometimes wonder if her early influence has been part of the reason that present Rolfers there have such healthy practices.

Dr. Marvin Solit with Marilyn Beech

During Dr. Solit's senior year at the Kansas City Osteopathic College, he participated in a contest sponsored by the Academy of Applied Osteopathy. Seniors from all schools were to write a research paper and a prize was always given to the best one. Dr. Solit decided to conduct research on the effects of the heretical new process called Structural Integration. The head of the Biochemistry department suggested he use cholesteral levels as a measurement. His subjects had to fork over $100 for the tests but they seemed to do it gladly enough. Cholesteral levels were tested before the 10-series, after session 5 and after session 10. The change in blood cholesteral levels was quite significant, and, this being the most original research being done at the college, Dr. Solit felt sure he'd win the prize, or at least share it with someone doing more standard Osteopathic research. It was in fact the best research paper for that year, but those in charge of jurying the papers decided to stop giving prizes in order not to give the prize to research that showed such a tremendous affect on health but had nothing to do with Osteopathy. I made a copy of his paper while I was there so it is now available to us.

After graduating from medical school, Dr. Solit went to Boston for his internship at the Massachusetts Osteopathic Hospital, and introduced Structural Integration to Massachusetts. He set up his practice which flourished and included baseball great Ted Williams at one point. He also wrote some of the earliest published papers on Structural Integration (called Postural Release at that time) which appeared in The Journal of The American Osteopathic Association, and General Semantics Bulletin. Dr. Solit's vision and per-

spective are vast and roam the fields of many disciplines. Eventually he began to feel that there was too much "gristle" in a body for a therapist working from the outside to ever get to. Like many of us who have been Rolfing for a while it occured to him that there must be a way to get at this gristle from the inside. There must be a way for this tissue to unwind without the direct help of a therapist. This idea intrigued him and he began to leave the hands-on mode of Structural Integration, but it was still Dr. Rolf who pointed him in another direction.

Dr. Rolf spent a considerable amount of time in England during this period—the Osteopaths there were very accepting of her work—and while there she encountered the very early Dianetics people (this was before L. Ron Hubbard turned these ideas into the religion now known as Scientology). Because of her interest, Dr. Solit began to look into these ideas and they became part of the grist for his insatiable mill. Over the last 30 years Dr. Solit continued to add grist from other disciplines such as physics, biochemistry, evolution and geometry to name a few, and spent some time studying with Lynn Margulis, one of America's leading evolutionary biologists. Over the years he and his fellow explorers developed many different hands-on tools for teaching and learning about geometry and mathematics. We still see these as educational toys in the marketplace, but many are beautiful constructions made from exotic trees of different colors that deserve a spot on the coffee table more than the toy box.

Over the last 30 years Dr. Solit and a core group of very well-educated and interesting people have been working with and developing his method of Non-Directed Body Movement. I experienced quite a bit of this method during the 7 days I was there and found a resemblance to Peter Levine's trauma work, Continuum, and other recent methods of unwinding patterns in tissue. There are major differences though: a therapeutic setting isn't called for nor is there a therapist involved. Much of it is done as a group so that the occasional and sometimes intentional contact gives you a reference point to access patterns that were set in as a consequence of human contact. Nor is there any sort of "setting of a scene," directional guidance or use of music. It's just you standing upright with your retinue of habits, defenses and unfinished traumas all wound up into patterns in the connective tissue. After standing there long enough suddenly some part of the body begins to move. It feels weightless, sort of like it's floating off into space on its own volition. It is a completely unintentional, non-thought directed movement that is the unwinding of connective tissue from a previously implanted holding pattern. Among all the different things I felt while immersed in this work was always one of intense curiosity as to where this movement was going to go and where it came from. At times there are some corresponding memories, sometimes vague and fleeting, as to the origins of the pattern that is unwinding, but sometimes not. And often I found anatomical connections that even as a Rolfer I would never have put together.

One of the tenents of Non-Direct Body Movement comes from taking a different look at the immune system. Dr. Solit sees that it has two functions: one part rallies the control, attack and defense mechanisms, while the other is responsible for repair. (Physiologists and doctors will disagree.) An overuse of one mechanism results in the atrophy of the other. Our culture is almost exclusively oriented to control, attack and defense. You see this in all aspects of our culture, not just in the healing arts. Much of the alternative medicine of today, including meditation, still works with this part of the immune system. The objective of Non-Directed Body Movement is not to resist pain, but rather stay with it. In so doing you discover the defensive postures, behaviors and thoughts you've developed, and at the same time begin to let the repair side of the immune system function again. The non-directed movements are produced by the tissue itself as it unwinds. Immersing yourself in this type of work long enough eventually necessitates a philisophical change in viewpoint and lifestyle. The development of a community of like-minded (like-tissued?) individuals is an organic outgrowth and perhaps a necessary one as the lifestyle runs so counter to our culture's norms. It becomes ponderous to learn things and live them on your own.

Dr. Solit sees his work as the next step in Rolfing, not a different direction. Part of his interest over the years has been evolution and the direction it will be taking in the future. Connective tissue, with its ability to become a semi-conductor, is one of the structures of the body that he sees as taking us into the next phase of human evolution. When it is laid out flat with more surface and less volume, and well-hydrated it is able to pick up and emit more photons and set up communication pathways. When connective tissue becomes stressed, rolled up in a tight ball and dehydrated it has more volume and less surface, and its functions as a semi-conductor are greatly diminished. It is possible that evolution will revert back to organisms that take energy directly from photons. In this light it is easy to see why connective tissue would be a structure highly

favored by natural selection, and having bodies that are highly adaptable to changing environments is a thing to be pursued. Dr. Rolf's writings make reference to her idea that our evolution was not complete. While she saw us as not fully upright and that Rolfing was a way to begin to achieve that, it is possible that it is the connective tissue itself that is important in evolution and uprightness is only a manifestation of healthy tissues.

Human evolution is only one of the topics Dr. Solit investigates. Theories of physics and how they explain (and don't explain) the origin of matter also come under his scrutiny. It was absolutely fascinating to watch him create the interface between the non-material medium of space and the earliest shape of matter using geometry.

To spend a week with Dr. Solit was to both step back in time to the early roots of Rolfing and to leap forward into its next incarnation that has already been carefully thought out, felt out and practiced during the last 30 years. This is a quiet man, but one look at the basement of his workshop shows the impressive activity of a curious, fertile and persevering soul. ❑