

An Interview with Joseph Heller

by Michael Kastris, Certified Hellerwork practitioner and President of Hellerwork International

Joseph Heller was born in Poland, June 15, 1940. He received his early education in Paris, graduated from Cal Tech in 1962 with a degree in mathematics, and worked as an aerospace engineer at the Jet Propulsion Lab in Pasadena, Ca. Heller became involved with humanistic psychology and eventually left engineering. He became the director of Kairos, a Los Angeles center for human development, and participated in year-long training programs in Bioenergetics and Gestalt, as well as shorter workshops with Buckminster Fuller, Werner Erhard, John Lilly, Virginia Satir, and Hal and Sinda Stone. He became a Rolfer in 1972 and continued to study through 1978 with Dr. Rolf. In 1973 he became a Structural Patterner after learning Patterning from Judith Aston. He received advanced training with Brugh Joy, a noted physician, author, and innovator in the field of preventive medicine and the use of energy as a means of healing. He became the first president of the Rolf Institute in 1975.

Q: How did you go from engineer to the director of a personal growth center?

JH: I volunteered to be a model at a Roling demonstration. I decided that was what I wanted to do. So, the transition was a way of getting out of aerospace engineering and doing what I wanted to do.

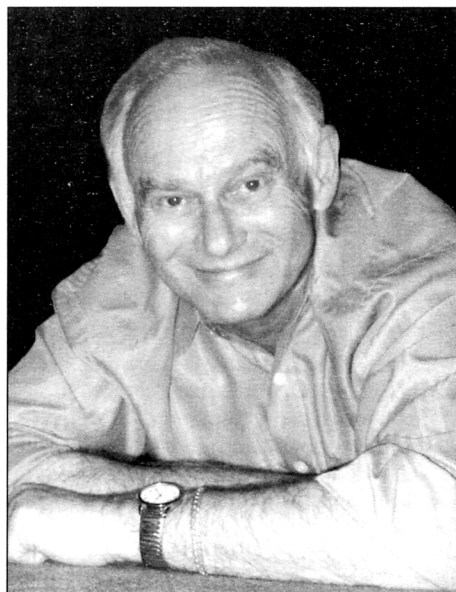
Q: What was it that led to your decision?

JH: It was how I felt after I received the session, which was so different. You have to understand, I was a very head-oriented individual. I was very spaced out. All of a sudden I had this experience of being in my body.

Q: What was the Rolf world like in 1972?

JH: When I became a Rolfer, there were only 60 or 70 Rolfers in the whole wide world. The organization was just getting started. Emmett Hutchins and Richard Stenstadvold had just moved to Boulder and decided to have the offices of the Rolf Institute in their house. All of that did not concern me. I was a new Rolfer, more concerned right then with: do I know how to do it; can I build my practice, and all that stuff.

Q: How was it building a practice?



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JH: I must say, I actually did build my practice fairly quickly. Not because of any great business acumen of mine. While I was taking the Roling training, I was the director of a personal growth center in Los Angeles, with a mailing list of tens of thousands of people, and it never occurred to me to send out an announcement to that list. The

reason my practice took off is I took the est training. This was a very important milestone in my life. It really opened things up for me on many different levels. But what it did for my practice was totally unexpected. All the est trainers were getting "rolfed," and they were talking about it in the training. Roling had hit the est world. I was the first Rolfer in Los Angeles to go through the training. So, when people would call the est office, and asked, where do I find this Roling, they would be referred to me. In a few weeks after taking the training, my practice was full.

Q: You became the first president of the Rolf Institute in 1975. How did that happen?

JH: I was a fairly successful Rolfer, and I was appointed to the Board of Directors of the Rolf Institute. At that time, Ida was working with a gentleman who had just retired as the head of Warner Studios. He offered his services as a consultant to further the organization, and Ida accepted. He told her the first thing she had to address was her succession. She was 80 years old at that time. There was this question looming in everyone's mind of who was going to lead the Institute when she passed away. The person she kept pushing to the fore was her son, Dick Demmerle. So, there was a series of meetings and interviews, and the net result was that I was recommended to become the president of the Rolf Institute.

At the conclusion of Brugh Joy's first workshop, which I attended, I took a red eye special to New York for a Board of Directors meeting. At that meeting Ida appointed me president of the Rolf Institute for seven years, without ever asking me. So, I gasped, and choked, and accepted.

Q: Why you?

JH: Frankly, to this day I don't know exactly why she appointed me. I did not have that much business experience. I had been an aerospace engineer for ten years. I did run the growth center.

My suspicion is that part of her motivation was that she wanted money for the Institute. She realized the Institute needed to have money in order to become any kind of growing organization. She thought, because I'm Jewish, that I would bring money into the Institute. Interestingly enough, some of that did happen. Not particularly through any of my doing, but during my tenure, people donated money, and we ended up buying a building for the Rolf

Institute in Boulder.

Q: What did you do first?

JH: At that point, I was sort of trying to figure out what to do with the Institute. I felt very committed to Ida. I was very, very loyal to her. I really wanted to advance the work.

Ida was still making her money teaching classes and doing sessions. By then there were 250–300 Rolfers. I thought it was ridiculous she should be doing that, so, I ended up negotiating a contract between Ida and the Rolf Institute, whereby, she sold the rights to Rolfing to the Rolf Institute for the sum of \$30,000 a year for ten years. The Rolf Institute gladly went along with that. We ended up paying two or three years, and the rest to her heirs.

Q: Could you tell me more? What led you to Hellerwork?

JH: At that time, I had several clients who were high-powered businessmen in Los Angeles. So I told them I had just become president of the Rolf Institute, and asked, “What should I do?” They asked me some intelligent questions, like, have you done a cost analysis of your classes? So I called Dick Stenstadvoid and asked him if we had. No, we hadn’t. So, we did a cost analysis and we found out we were losing money on the advanced class.

By bringing in these businessmen (I invited some to the Board meetings, and some to address the Board), I acquired the reputation of being the business-minded person, being the money-minded person. Rolfing, as many spiritual disciplines of the time, suffered from the belief that money and the gift don’t mix. Which is a belief I do not share. I do think that greed and the gift don’t mix. But money doesn’t mean greed. To be fairly rewarded for your efforts is part of a gift from God. So, I became the merchant in their temple, and started receiving a lot of opposition and resistance. I thought, I don’t need this. I wanted to advance the cause, not get in fights with the Board of Directors, and with administrators. So, after three years on the job, I resigned.

In that contract I negotiated between Ida and the Rolf Institute, I had Ida add a clause that the Rolf Institute would be responsible to create new schools of Rolfing. I pointed out to her that medicine did not have just one school, and that chiropractic did not have just one school. So, why should there

be just one school of Rolfing. She thought that was decent advice, and there was this clause.

So, I was scratching my head thinking what to do for the cause. At that time, I went to a workshop, the Berkley Business School. Ida was part of the faculty of this business school. Suddenly it became clear to me what I should do; the most direct way of advancing the cause is to create more Rolfers. I will create the first school for Rolfing other than the Rolf Institute. I started making plans for another school of Rolfing.

By that time I had done workshops with Brugh Joy, the est training, movement with Judith Aston, all kinds of things, and I really wanted to round out the work. By that time Ida had already seen that movement was important, and that the way she was passing it on was not very successful. She asked Judith Aston, who at that time was a Rolfer, to create what would become known as the Rolf-Aston Method of Structural Patterning in Stillness and Motion. Ida did create a movement discipline for Rolfing.

So, I said OK, what I want to do is add all these things together, and train Rolfers to be movement teachers, to do energy work, and to handle emotional things. The Berkley Business School, which took place in Vermont, was a six-week affair, and Ida was there for most of it. Each of the students was encouraged to create a business plan for their business. My business was going to be this new school of Rolfing. So, I started making my plans. I checked out my plans with Ida, and she liked most of them. Her main concern, which she voiced freely, not being one to mince words, was that I would make things too easy. She was a very hard teacher. Her way of teaching was trial by fire. To give you an idea of the kind of teacher she was: I watched many a Rolfer come up to her, at classes, at annual meetings, or Board of Directors meetings. They would get their courage up, walk over, and say, “Dr. Rolf, I thought that perhaps sometime I could become a teacher.” She would take one look at them, look them up and down, and say, “NEVER.”

I asked her one day why she always did that. She said, “Listen, if that is all it takes to discourage them, they don’t deserve to be a teacher.”

That was her main concern. “You can’t take a man’s challenge away from him.” I thought there wasn’t much chance that I

was going to take away the challenge from the student, given what they were learning.

So, I kept on going with my plans.

It became time to get my plans approved by the Board of Directors of the Rolf Institute. That became a tremendously lengthy and tedious process. In their defense, I must say, with hindsight, I was presenting them with a huge challenge. Not only were they going to have to administer a whole other school, with different trainings, but Rolfers that were qualified in different ways. It was a really big thing. They wanted to take their time, and talk about it. I was an eager young beaver, and I wanted to get going now. I could see it was going to take years.

On one hand, I was eager to get going, and on the other hand, I was loyal to Ida. I did not want to do it without her approval. I was in communication with Brugh Joy, and he said, “The world is big enough for both of you. Why don’t you just do your own thing and leave them alone?” I kept trying to iron things out. By this time I had already begun a class. Don St. John and I had written a letter announcing a pre-training, and sent it out. We did not want to call it training because we were still in negotiations with the Rolf Institute. To our immense surprise, 28 people signed up. And so, I have been running to catch up ever since.

Here I had a training going, but no name for what I was doing, since I was going to call it Rolfing. Time was becoming critical, and it looked like it was going to take years for anything to happen. I did not have years; I already had a class going.

So, I wrote a letter to the Rolf Institute saying thank you very much, but I was going to go off and do it on my own. Two weeks later I got a letter from Ida saying don’t do it, I will give you all the support I can from within the Rolf Institute, and so on. Two weeks later she died. So, that is how Hellerwork started. Originally I really did not mean to start another work. I was just going to start another school of Rolfing.

Q: What did you do differently, and why?

JH: You mean compared to the Rolfing training I went through? Well, I would say the main difference is the training is more inclusive. The Rolfing training, which I want to emphasize was a very competent training, was strictly focused on the Rolfing technique, and subjects associated with it, like anatomy, structure, and so on. I felt I

wanted practitioners to have some exposure to movement education, so our training also includes movement. Because I felt that most of the stresses that we are subjected to are more psychological and emotional in nature rather than physical, I wanted the practitioners to have some idea of the workings of the psyche. Not that I expect the practitioners to be psychologists or psychotherapists, but to be able to dialogue with the client about these emotional and psychological stresses.

Q: What excites you most about structural integration today?

JH: Well, what excites me the most is that it is one of the most effective and economical health modalities available. And I strongly believe that as the health system crumbles into disarray, as it is about to do, and people are going to be in a position where they will have to pay for the services more out of their own pocket, then they will pick something like Hellerwork or Rolfing because it is so effective and so economical.

Q: You attended the recent Rolf Institute annual meeting, the Origins and Evolutions of Dr. Rolf's Work. It was somewhat of a family reunion, with different generations and family branches together. What stood out most for you?

JH: Well, the thing that was most remarkable was the fact that there was this kind of meeting happening in the first place. People from different schools, and different traditions were welcome, and the dialogue was begun, which to me began to erase some of the differences and ill feelings of the past.

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