

# In My Practice

Editor's Note: In this issue we profile two Rolwing® practitioners in Boulder, Colorado, which presumably holds the record for practitioner density per square mile. Interestingly, both of our subjects also have traveling practices. A key difference is career stage – one has been in practice for many years, the other is relatively new.

## Boulder... and Beyond

By Patricia Stepan, Certified Advanced Rolfer™

As I considered the invitation to contribute my story as a Boulder Rolwing practitioner of many years, my mind did a quick review of these past three decades. I've been in Boulder thirty-five years, twenty-five of those having included my Rolwing training and practice. My hesitation rested in how Rolwing has been an integral part of my professional path and it has not been the only part of my practice. My decision to train in Rolwing was not a sudden aha!; rather, it evolved from ten years of prior training and practice in bodywork and body-centered psychotherapy.

### THE JOURNEY AND ITS LESSONS

In 1969, my husband and I became corporate drop outs, joined the great hippie migration west, and bought a ranch near Durango, Colorado. An emerging spiritual inquiry had long been with me. Questions that remained unformed eventually grew into restlessness that needed attention.

"Go there, you'll like it," said a friend as she handed me a flier about something new happening in Boulder that June, a kind of spiritual summer camp called Naropa. That historic summer, 1974, was Naropa's beginning. Four hundred people were expected; two thousand showed up. I was one of them. That summer was the initiation of a spiritual revolution that became the path of my own evolution.

"You need to get Rolwing!" said the woman who saw me in my underwear walking



down the Naropa University dorm hall (a vision of future Rolf moments to come). What she saw was a young woman with an extreme idiopathic scoliosis – a source of great pain as well as adolescent self-consciousness. What she didn't see was the back brace and the muscle relaxants in my room. I wish I could thank her for her bold clarity and frankness. Following her suggestion, three days later I began Rolwing® with Tom West, completing my first three sessions that summer. Muscle spasms, pain and the back brace disappeared, giving way to physical freedom, renewed energy and a new focus. However, with no Rolwing practitioner available at home, I didn't have another session for four years.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch... My beautiful and tenacious daughter, Jovanna, was born two months premature in September, 1975. The doctors had dutifully informed me, "Your baby has a 10% chance of surviving this birth" to which I responded, "Take your 10% and leave the room. I have a baby

to deliver." Thirty-three years later, I am proud to say she is still very beautiful and very tenacious!

Later, the intensity of divorce led us to California for two years to heal and begin a new life. Explorations continued. Classical homeopathy, the concept of resonance medicine, captured me. I considered becoming a homeopath. Though it was not to be, classical homeopathy remains a vibrant part of my life. "Get license to touch" spoke an inner voice. A new massage school was being started by a friend of mine. We moved back to Boulder and I graduated in the second class of the Boulder College of Massage Therapy (BCMT).

At BCMT, someone new to Boulder, Ron Kurtz, was teaching a class called Body Centered Therapy, later to be named Hakomi Therapy®. As part of the original study group, I eventually became a Certified Hakomi Therapist. Hakomi and its principles have remained central to my explorations into the body-mind interface throughout these years. A great lesson from Ron:

"A client is not a problem to be solved, but an experience waiting to happen."

It was time to return to Rolwing. Four years had passed since having received the first three sessions that Naropa summer. I found Peter Melchior and resumed the Ten Series. Taking a skillful look at my structure, he said, "Let's move on." He commented that despite my extreme curvature, I was well organized. I had no idea what he was talking about but it sounded good and I was feeling great. I completed the series and was sold on the process. Peter's words moved me: "In the beginning, you were a body built around a curve. Now you are a body that happens to have one."

Occasionally, people ask if Rolwing straightened my spine. I forget that for many that may be their measure of Rolwing's efficacy. As a Rolwing practitioner, scoliosis has been my greatest, most consistent teacher. I experience no pain while working, even during weeks of many sessions. Effective movement at the table has become a strength, as my spine is quick to respond! Scoliosis as my challenge has taught me never to assume the purpose of another's limitations or uniqueness and to check any agenda regarding how I think he or his structure should be. Instead, the challenge and inquiry is toward what wants to happen next for that individual.

## THE WORK AND ITS LESSONS

My application to the Rolf Institute of Structural Integration® took two attempts. At the first interview, the Selection Committee's concern was how the physical demand of the work would impact my structure. At the second, they asked, "Why are you back?" "Because I no longer need your permission." They had me work at a table. Nicholas French said, "You may have something to teach us. Your system is lengthening as you work, despite your spine. Welcome to the Rolf Institute!"

I completed Basic Training with Peter Melchior and Emmett Hutchins in 1986, followed by Advanced Training with them later in Hawaii. Subsequently, six-day Rolfing® workshops fit into my schedule when possible, as well as two levels of the Rolf Movement Training. A favorite class for me was "Rolfing for Women" with Stacy Mills. "Rolfing helps people become more of who they already are" became the memorable Stacy quote. Years later, I had the privilege of being Teaching Assistant with Peter for two classes, which of course was the best training of all!

The Rolfing process continues to provide the ground for my endless fascination with the human structure and experience. Being witness to the infinite dance between form and function has maintained my focus and interest now for two and a half decades!

Professional life in Boulder during my single parenting years was busy with private practice and teaching: sixteen years at BCMT as Core Faculty, the beginning years of Pre-Req at the Rolf Institute, and seven years teaching the Pre-Req program at the Guild for Structural Integration. My focus and dedication these past ten years has been toward private practice and travel.

The foundation of my practice is the Rolfing Ten Series; also, within the core of my practice, quietly hum the Hakomi principles that I was taught in those early years: Unity, Organicity, Mindfulness, Body-Mind-Spirit Wholism and Non-Violence. When Hakomi as a therapeutic modality is indicated, I contract with the client before embarking on that journey, keeping the boundaries and focus clear. I am privileged to have received such good training from two such exquisite forms and from such great teachers.

Integrating different modalities may not seem so unusual now. Today many

practitioners enter training from very sophisticated backgrounds in body-related fields and continue on to integrate their modalities into their practices. Three decades ago such was not the case. There just weren't that many modalities and each was a living experiment in progress!

## BOULDER AND BEYOND... TRAVELING PRACTICE

With Boulder as home for thirty-four years, I remain an itinerant traveler – perhaps it's my Hungarian roots! Being a Rolfing practitioner and body-centered therapist/teacher has nourished this passion. Boulder is my hub, with many spokes that have reached out into the world. Both teaching and practice have taken me to outposts such as Ecuador, Australia, Canada, and Mexico, as well as various locations in the U.S.

One of those was Wilmington, North Carolina. In 1999, I relocated there to be nearer to my aging mom and to the ocean. Staying for four years, I had a great adventure Rolfing by the sea; yet, it wasn't home. I returned to Boulder late in 2003, and began reconnecting with the community. While renewing my practice, Dr. Jennifer McPeck, an osteopath and Rolfing practitioner, invited me to join her practice in Littleton. I still go there once a week. Even when at home, I seem to have wheels for feet!

Over the years, circumstances have called my skills as a Rolfing practitioner to areas that had none. I learned how much I enjoy the uniqueness of a traveling practice. Perhaps it's the intermittent and intense focus it requires that suits my nature, which over the years has included Bainbridge Island, Washington, Millbrook, New York and most recently Louisville, Kentucky, where I have been practicing Rolfing for the past seven years.

My Louisville experience began from student inquiries, when I served on faculty for the first Hakomi Therapy training there, 2000-2003. I since have gone there every six/seven weeks, staying two weeks – a rhythm that is now part of my life. I feel grateful for having been so welcomed into Louisville and have a strong network of friends and colleagues there. The healing arts community is strong, well-trained and integrative. Louisville is often referred to as the "Boulder of Kentucky." Being from Boulder, I experience a contrast, one that I have likened to birds: in the West, birds tend

to fly alone – the eagle, the hawk, even the magpie who hangs with his cronies in the backyard; in the Midwest/South, such as Kentucky, birds fly more in flocks, like the sparrows. There seems to be an awareness of the collective, of the effect of the one on the many.

If Louisville is the body of sparrows, Boulder is the hawk, the eagle or the cluster of magpies! Being a very vibrant, young town, much of its focus is toward creativity, change and transformation. This is often reflected through my clients here: young on-the-go people who may suddenly walk in and say, "How soon will we be done – I just found out I'm leaving for Tibet!" Boulder is the only place where I have had the experience of people "interviewing" six to seven Rolfers before making their choice. It's also one of the few cities that has that option! A friend from Louisville, when she visited here, observed: "it seems in Boulder, people gather around events and activities. At home, we gather around each other." Something in what she said felt true; each has its unique value and each has its limitations. I guess I am a hawk who is also learning to be a sparrow!

Wherever I am, I tend to be a talker and networker. It has been through my professional affiliations and referrals that people have found their way to me. In earlier years, I also ran one ad in Nexus, a community newspaper. Today, my website serves that purpose.

## A SUDDEN NEW JOURNEY... THE LESSONS UNFOLDING

There are no words for the moment when a cancer diagnosis arrives in one's life: a terrifying and humbling experience. Since July, 2006, I have been learning to live with an indolent (lazy) form of non-Hodgkins lymphoma. So far, so good. So far, no chemo. I try to re-frame the medical term "watchful waiting" to Mindful Living. No matter what it is called, living with cancer has both suddenly and gradually demanded a re-frame of my life. It is a new job. The payback is that I feel vibrant and essentially positive, thanks to providence, my wonderful practitioners, caring friends, partner and daughter. Where this part of the journey leads only time will tell.

I continue to practice in Louisville and Boulder/Denver, though here at a slower pace, due to this recent personal shift. Currently, I am feeling a renewed interest

in my local practice that had been set aside for awhile. A friend and Roling colleague, Paula Candler, has become my alter-Rolfer in Louisville should circumstances dictate that I can't go. As a trial run, last January, Paula traveled on my behalf and did a great job. Thanks for your support, Paula.

Boulder is home to some of the top Roling practitioners in the world. I make no pretense to be one of them. We each have our unique gifts and styles. My combined education in Roling® and experiential psychotherapy (which now also includes Internal Family Systems Therapy) offers a broad field in which to dialogue with clients in their journeys through their structures and psyches, from the unconscious to the conscious, conversing with the nervous system in its dealings with trauma and encounters with belief systems that have left their signatures.

I experience the body as metaphor, a poetic expression of one's life experiences. My most cherished moments with clients are the "I finally" moments: I finally gave it up, applied for it, married it, started it or conceived it! Then I know that both the client's body and life are finding "the Line."

"The body is not the only thing going on, but what you can get your hands on." Ida P. Rolfer

## My Practice in Two Cities

By Rob McWilliams, Certified Rolfer™

I was a professional dancer, dance professor and choreographer for over twenty-seven years before I started the Roling® training. I finished Unit III at the Rolfer Institute of Structural Integration® (RISI) about a year ago, in October 2007. There are challenges to starting a new career and practice at fifty. Quadruple that when you factor in staying in the Boulder area to do so, because of the number of practitioners of various healing modalities. After trying to start this without an additional side job, and failing, I took a part-time position at Vitamin Cottage. I worked there for about nine months. Seeing around six to seven clients a week, combined with working thirty-two hours at the store, was hard work! I did get good at moving objects quickly and easily on the job, and this became a valuable skill to teach to clients, as well. Nevertheless, moving fifty- to sixty-pound boxes and stocking groceries also had some deleterious effects on my hands, wrists, and shoulders, which made me want to get out of there should the opportunity arise.

One day I got a call from Dan Gentry, a Certified Rolfer in Oklahoma City (OKC), asking if I might like to come out and be his associate. This would mean giving him 50% of my fee in return for his funneling clients to me, and I would see upwards of twenty to twenty-five clients a week. Though this sounded really cool, I didn't want to leave my girlfriend and Boulder community for a purely work-dominated life in OKC. We came up with the idea of a half-time practice in OKC, and half time in Boulder, flying to OKC every other Sunday and returning to Boulder the following Friday night. No problem for an old touring professional dancer to travel to work, I thought.

After five sojourns in OKC, I'm seeing the pros and cons of being a traveling Roling practitioner. Working there has given me



the opportunity to expand out of the cultural confines of Boulder and see the benefits of Roling for much different, more conservative clients who are typically only seeking solutions to chronic pain. I didn't think of "fix-it"-oriented Roling as my strong suit, but this practice is making me better at it. I haven't

really had the expected volume of clients, but it is building. A typical week in OKC seems to be around eighteen sessions, after cancellations and last-minute bookings. This is compared to Boulder, where eight to nine sessions still equal a pretty good week for me. I try to market myself by sending flyers to area Pilates, yoga and dance schools, and have gotten some referrals from clients in both cities of late.

In OKC I'm alone a lot, which can be hard, and sometimes, with cancellations, I spend a fair amount of time just "hanging out." I try to make this time productive somehow by working on marketing, studying texts, videos and session notes, or working on developing release movement (for my own body and applications on the table) through various modalities. I do really enjoy my OKC friends, Dan and his lovely wife Teresa, and my roommate, Kevin, a sweet guy and a real character who I had the great good fortune to find on Craig's List.

Though the travel, lodging and food expenses add up, the hands-on experience and learning through mentoring from Dan Gentry more than justify the costs. Dan is the stepson of the renowned healer and friend to Ida Rolfer, Byron Gentry. Drawing on the lessons learned from Byron since childhood, Dan is now an extremely successful and