

First-Generation Gleanings

Compiled by Deanna Melnychuk, Certified Advanced Rolfer™

First-generation Rolfing® practitioners—those who studied directly with Dr. Rolf—are a tremendous resource. They created a strong foundation for the Rolf Institute of Structural Integration® and a path for us to follow. Their memories of Dr. Rolf's comments still impact their work today—and we can use their memories to enhance our own work. Several here share a “moment” with Dr. Rolf.

IMPRESSIONS

Bob Robinson

I was in Dr. Rolf's Advanced class in Boulder in 1976. She was in her seventies at the time and an interesting paradox of Grandmother serving cookies and a focused, determined, all-business woman. When she worked, her intent and presence was palatable; she did not speak except to point out various things she was doing. This time was toward the end of her life, and she had a limited amount of energy having spent her entire life to create and build this work. She was not interested in deification; hence, she called the work Structural Integration. For those who were not taking the training seriously, she had less time. Her main push was to train those whose passion matched hers and who could carry on the work for many years after she passed. In the end what I remember most was Dr. Rolf's clarity, intelligence and, maybe most importantly, her intention.

Allan Davidson

This excerpt is taken from a longer piece on Allan's introduction to Rolfing.

My Chicago Rolfing practitioner (Bob Hinds), who was attending an advanced class, had arranged a meeting for me with Ida Rolf to see if I could sit in on the class—as a sort of unofficial auditor. I showed up at Adams House (down the road from Esalen), and Ida came out at the break to greet me—if greet is the proper word.

“What do you want?” she asked.

“Well,” I explained, “Bob Hinds had mentioned that I might be able to sit in on the class.”

“What for?” she more or less growled.

“Because I'm interested in Rolfing,” I said.

“So is the whole damn state. I've just turned down twenty-five people—why should I accept you?”

Now this is a very intimidating old lady. She was stocky and powerful-looking even though she wore a fresh flower in her hair. I thought, well hell, I didn't realize this would be such a problem. I figured I would apologize for not knowing any of this and for taking up her valuable time. But instead I decided to lie.

“I want to write about Rolfing,” I told her.

“Oh?” she said, mildly interested. “Well, what have you read?”

Now here I was on slightly firmer ground—I had read everything—I had even written an article on “Human Energy” for *World Book* that mentioned Rolfing. The lie was that I had no such intention when I showed up. But maybe it wasn't really a lie after all—why not write something grand? Ida studied me.

“Stand up,” she commanded. “Where did you get such a messed up body?”

“But Ida,” I protested. “I've received Rolfing.”

I was catching on. This gruffness was a bit of an act. I had three aunts in their eighties, so I was familiar with this cranky old lady style.

Ida smiled. “OK, Allan,” she said, “you can be in this class. I want you to pay attention, and I want you to write something important. And I want you to come to

breakfast on Sundays and show me what you've done.”

Well now, I thought, who's conned whom?

WISDOM SHARED

Hal Milton

I was blessed with the opportunity to live on the same property as Dr. Rolf as I was studying with her. I recall a time during a weekend when I visited with her as she was doing some gardening. She said to understand Rolfing, it would be helpful to realize that this dirt that she was cultivating and nourishing would allow the plants to grow and develop aligned with their nature. She went on to explain the same was true with Rolfing; we cultivate the body through nutrition and movement exercise. By having the understanding of plant growth, we are able to cultivate and nourish the soft tissue so the body has the freedom to align itself with its nature in gravity. As an eager student, this message was profound and remains profound to this day after years of practicing this art and science of Rolfing.

HOW SHE WORKED

Tom Myers

In my advanced class—fall of 1978 in Philadelphia—I watched Dr. Rolf scratching about the ankle of her model, seemingly with her fingernails. Puzzled, I went home and tried it on some clients; but all I did was leave fingernail marks on their ankles. It was only some years later that I found myself working very specifically about the ankles—but this time, I was sorting out the tendons and tendons sheaths north of the malleoli. Suddenly I caught on: “Oh, that's what she was doing!” Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery; but without the proper intent, the flattery is devoid of meaning. With the meaning in place, the intent is devoid of flattery.

Nicholas French

(taken with permission from the Rolf Forum)

Dr. Rolf said from time to time she thought one of the most productive kinds of work was “worrying,” which I understood as leaning into the proper depth and using very small movements of the fingertips (or whatever) to free an area. The real key, of course, is the proper depth.

Eric Jacobson*(taken with permission from the Rolf Forum)*

Do cross fiber with your contact as you are moving very slowly along the length of the fascia. [I have] a memory of Dr. Rolf in class doing that and looking up and saying to us, "See? See what I'm doing here? I'm 'worrying' it."

SAGE ADVICE**Nicholas French**

When I applied for Rolfing® training, some friends who knew I was a psychotherapist asked, "Is that what you're going to be —just a Rolfer?" I smugly assured them: No, I wouldn't be just a Rolfer. I would no doubt create my own (terribly brilliant) synthesis of therapy and Rolfing. But later, face-to-face with Ida P. Rolf, I realized I had finally stumbled into an arena of infinite possibilities. The woman was pointing to

unknown but exciting new worlds, and she was providing tools for exploring them. I was a kid in the biggest candy store ever.

One day she quietly asked us to make a simple commitment to the work. "There are all kinds of other therapeutic methods out there: and I know it will be very tempting to add them to what you're learning here, especially when you feel frustrated, ineffective and lost. They will be very attractive, and you'll want to grab for them. What I ask is that for the first five years, you stay with this work, and this work alone. If you have the discipline to search for answers in what you observe in each person, using the methods learned here, you will be astounded with what you will eventually discover. Then, after five years, if you want to, feel free to add whatever other techniques you like. Just remember that confusion, painful as it may be, is a very fertile energy. When you feel as though you're drowning, it's natural to grab

for any piece of debris that looks as though it might keep your nose above water. But if you have the courage not to grab for easy solutions, and instead let yourself sink into deeper, unknown waters, you can find firm, new ground beneath your feet. Such discoveries are worth the uncertainty and pain."

I had the sense that clever woman knew that anyone willing to go deeper with the tools she gave us, even when scared and desperate, would break through old limitations and find that the human beings under our hands offer infinite learning. To focus on learning Rolfing, I withdrew from practicing psychotherapy for years. Perhaps it's just my personal peculiarity, but though I've studied other methods, I keep coming back to discover new appreciation for the work and for that bright, funny, far-sighted woman.

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