

Ask the Faculty

Lineage and Inspiration

Q: *Rolfing® Structural Integration (SI) is essentially passed on as an oral tradition through a lineage of teachers. Can you share a short teaching story or piece of advice from someone in your direct lineage? Something that was impactful to your thinking and way of working and that might be beneficial to others in our professional community.*

A: Here are three of my favorite Rolfing quotes/stories that have stayed with me over these many years:

Peter Melchior was my Rolfing teacher for the practitioner phase of the training. It was a large class with eight practitioners and twenty-two auditors held in the annex of the Rolf Institute® on Pearl Street. We were doing the Second Hour for our outside models. I was working with my client's ankle, and the retinaculum felt as dehydrated as a strip of beef jerky. I was working hard and getting frustrated . . . nothing seemed to penetrate or hydrate his tissues. Suddenly Peter was at my side. He put his hands over mine and gently sank my fingers into the depths of the client's ankle joint. I felt like I was suddenly jettisoned into deep space! My finger pads sank easily into this unique sensation with depth with ease. It was a dimension of contact I had never before experienced. I remember Peter saying to me "depth is a matter of intention." That moment of guidance served to fuel a lifelong inquiry into the art of Rolfing SI.

Megan James was one of my original movement instructors. This was 1981, a time when Rolf Movement® could be studied as an independent program separate from the Rolfing training. She was truly amazing. Her exploration of the body in motion encouraged both visionary imaginings as well as insight-filled sensorial moments. These experiences propelled me to see-feel beyond a secular understanding of the body and biomechanically driven movement. Megan often repeated the phrase, "bones are juicy and alive!" She spoke these words from her own embodied truth. In many classes, I repeat this phrase, citing Megan in honor of her sweet memory. Rest in peace, Megan.

In 1976, I began receiving the Rolfing Ten Series from Jack Donnelly. Luckily for me, we've maintained a friendship over these many years. Jack studied directly with

Dr. Rolf and often vividly described scenarios from his time with her. Jack is a very smart man with a PhD in mathematics, and is a practicing acupuncturist as well as an inventor and forward-thinking individual. I understood why Dr. Rolf liked having him sit next to her in those early classes. He grasped her vision. Their conversations must have covered a range of enlivening topics. It is not a specific quote, but more the highly respected genius of Dr. Rolf, that Jack transmitted to me during these reveries. Dr. Rolf was a most unique woman of her era: brilliant, outspoken, and possessing a scope of understanding on subjects as diverse as homeopathy, atomic physics and mathematics, yoga, and the general semantics of Alfred Korzybski. This diversity of perspectives cultivated a fertile ground for the early students of Rolfing SI. Jack's stories infuse me with awe and inspiration and the impetus to continue evolving her vision.

Carol Agneesens
Rolfing Instructor
Rolf Movement Instructor

A: On my way to becoming an Advanced Rolfing Instructor, I had the privilege of co-teaching two advanced classes with Emmett Hutchins. One morning Emmett gave a talk on a peculiar pattern of strain that he was seeing. He talked in some detail about the pattern and how it went from head to toe in most people. We took a short break after which the students went to work.

About ten minutes into the session, a very bright and very exacting student left his model and cornered me. He could barely contain his agitation and upset. He said he couldn't see or feel anything Emmett was talking about. He fussed and worried that he'd never make it as a Rolfer™. At his request, we went to see what we could see. As soon as we got in the vicinity of his model and tried to find the pattern Emmett was talking about, I couldn't find it. I had had no trouble seeing it before.

"What gives?" Then, I noticed I was getting agitated like the student. Not knowing what to do, I went over to where Emmett was, sat down next to him, opened up my sensorium, and just let what is show itself. Suddenly, the pattern popped out of the complicated, confusing pulls, strains, rotations, etc. Sure enough, there it was again – as clear as anything could be. I went over to where the student was working and said, "Let's try looking for that pattern again." We did and within thirty seconds the student saw the pattern emerge.

Sitting next to Emmett allowed me to find my way into the clear space again. I learned that a big part of my job was to metaphorically keep a constant rhythm going in order to entrain the student in the same constant rhythm of the session. When I went over to the student's table the first time, I unknowingly let the student's agitated rhythm entrain me. As a result, I had lost the rhythm and the ability to see. I also learned the importance of studying with teachers who teach beyond words.

Jeffrey Maitland
Advanced Rolfing instructor

A: What I can share is how much some teachers have influenced my way of being a Rolfer, and not only on a professional level. When I was certified in 1987, my instructor was Nicholas French. At the end of the training, giving me the certificate, Nicholas said: "Rita, every thing is all right. Don't take it so seriously . . ." At that time I didn't quite understand the meaning, but I let it in . . . and forgot. It took ten years before I could get the sense of what Nicholas had clearly seen at that time. I was simply too serious and concerned about being 'professional' – and too much relying on cortical understanding.

In 1997 I attended a Rolf Movement Certification Training with France Hatt-Arnold and Hubert Godard teaching. What an incredible, transforming experience! What deeply affected me was the sense of having been exposed to some 'contagious virus' that let the flow of knowledge between teachers and students happen as a living experience in my system. It was full of joy and vitality. Understanding through mind was only a part of the process. The teachers' clear presence, empathy, and connection strongly affected the whole process. In my experience, people coming for Rolfing SI are more and more motivated

by physical suffering and a sense of inadequacy at many levels. It is part of the healing process to find again the sense of the pleasure of being alive, what led us when we were children to playfully explore the inner and outer worlds together with achieving physical and coordinative order. In whatever form it is possible, what I offer to my client is the sense of lightness, possibility, trust. Their willingness and capacity to come and ask for help is already an expression of their potential for changing their condition. How far? Hard to say. But change can happen.

Other teachers have been so important for my development; among them, Harvey Burns and Pedro Prado. I assisted Harvey in some classes. He has a refined and sophisticated capacity to touch in a deep, global dialogue with the system (“touch local, think global,” to quote him). This is already a great teaching. What was even more inspiring for me is his capacity to cut more complicated content into little pieces, to make it ‘digestible’ and clear for students and beginning Rolfers. This capacity helps to create a safe container in which to research and experiment in an organic step-by-step process.

I also had the privilege of assisting Pedro in some classes. He has helped me to focus on one main factor: to reveal and understand the patterns ‘behind’ the model that frame the way that client express him/herself, that build the narrative of his/her story and give value according to the person’s subjective belief system. This applies to my own pattern too. To be able to connect to the modality, not to be caught by the appearance, is a powerful tool to support the client’s transformative process, and also a way to evaluate the results from both the client’s and the Rolfer’s prospective. And even more than that, when working with Pedro I could sense the power and the value of being in a group; his capacity to build connection, trust, and commitment is an extraordinary living experience.

Rita Geirolla
Rolfing Instructor
Rolf Movement Instructor

A: As I write this, it’s just two weeks since the European Rolfers celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the European Rolfing Association – which was in a way my own twenty-fifth anniversary of becoming

a Rolfer. I had strong impressions of my auditing phase with Peter Melchior when I realized that our party was at the exact *biergarten* (a Bavarian outdoor restaurant) where we had often sat with Peter for lunch or dinner. It felt as if it was yesterday – words, teachings, lectures, and a strong almost physical sense of presence. Through all the years, these impressions are still present in my work and my life, and I would assert that one strong base of what my teachers tried to transmit is embodiment. In my experience, Peter was an example of embodied knowledge, wisdom, passion, and love for Rolfing SI. I didn’t get all of what he was transmitting with words at that time, but I wouldn’t have tried to find out without the authenticity I sensed.

Jörg Ahrend-Löns
Rolfing Instructor

A: When I ask my students about their learning edges – what skills they’re working on now – I inevitably hear, “I still have trouble seeing.” Body reading is an important part of our work and something we learn to do with our whole self. We use all of our senses. We ‘see’ structural patterns and relationships with our eyes, but we also listen for them in gait, and feel them in our own bodies.

I hope I am attributing this correctly (all the good advice I’ve received over the years seems to mingle with my own thoughts), but I believe I was assisting Duffy Allen when I first heard her tell a class, “You already know how to see. The problem is you see too much.” What I do remember clearly was the impact it had on the room. You could feel the collective anxiety drop. In a workshop some years later, I heard Rolfer Art Riggs say the same thing with similar effect. We went on to practice seeing with exercises where we limited the scope of our observations. It’s hard to figure out what to do when you see everything. Imposing purposeful structure helps us to choose. That’s why the Rolfing Ten Series is such a great tool for learning the work – and why so many of us apply it throughout our careers.

One of the reasons Rolfing SI is forever interesting is because it’s dynamic. We are forever oscillating between macro and micro viewpoints. As you practice our art, macro and micro start to blend and you become able to hold them simultaneously. But, even then, there are days when it’s

easier than others. Use the concepts of the Ten Series to help you limit the possibilities in a meaningful way. If you only have one session, consider the concepts of the Third Hour – or maybe a combination, such as the Second, Fourth, and Fifth hours to address support. Then soften your gaze and your body and let yourself notice what you see that pertains to your session goals and your client’s goals. And, as you’ve probably heard a million times before, ‘trust the process’. Rest assured, you already know how to see.

Bethany Ward
Rolfing Instructor

A: I received my initial Rolfing series from then faculty member Stacey Mills, so when I trained as a Rolfing practitioner thirty years ago, I sought her out for mentoring and supervision. Two pearls still stand out in my mind from those sessions. First, when I admitted to her that I honestly didn’t care for a particular client, her response was something to this effect: “You’re not obligated to like every client; but it will help tremendously to unconditionally ‘love’ them during the time they are on your table.” The second pearl dropped as I was reproaching myself for having been moved to tears by my client’s experience. Stacey’s response: “It’s only unprofessional when the tears drop onto the client instead of the sheet.”

Sally Klemm
Advanced Rolfing Instructor

A: There have been instructors who have impacted me greatly – even when I didn’t appreciate or fully understand what they were talking about at the time. But their thought, words, or vision just kept bouncing around in my mind looking for an anchor. One of my most anchoring moments came from Hubert Godard.

Shortly after I became a Certified Rolfer, I had a chance to take a class with Hubert. I believe we were in class for nine days, and there were many gems that changed the way I thought about the work. One insight that has always stayed with me came from Hubert’s demonstration of the balance between front and back. What does palintonicity really look like? In this demonstration, he took off running across the floor and executed a perfect *grand jeté*.

Jumping with one leg straight forward and one leg straight back, he did a perfect split in mid-air, landing light as a feather. I was amazed at the beauty and grace of the move. But then he said, "That's only half of the picture." Instantly, he ran backwards, leaped into the air, performed a perfect split in reverse, and landed light on his feet again. If you had taken a picture of the airborne splits going in each direction, they would have looked identical. "That's the other half," he said. My memory is fuzzy from time, and words do not always convey exactly what I feel, but this demonstration struck a chord in me that has always remained. When I'm working with a client, I find I'm always looking for the 'other half'.

Larry Koliha
Rolfing Instructor

A: I first heard this from Emmett Hutchins, then from Peter Melchior, then from Jan Sultan, then from a couple other old-time Rolf Institute members: "There shall be three schools in Rolfing SI. These schools will develop as the work evolves. One physical, biomechanical; another psychological; and a third one, more metaphysical. There will be further specializations in these areas." Hearing this as an auditor, then as a young assistant, impacted me to pay attention to 'what belongs where', and made me respect the multidimensional perspectives present in Rolfing SI. It also helped me not to favor one over another, rather to perceive a whole. It helped me form a holistic view of the work, the unfoldings of the same core work, Rolfing SI. The 'specializations' part of the quote spurred my curiosity in all areas . . . I'm still seeking . . .

Pedro Prado
Advanced Rolfing Instructor
Rolf Movement Instructor

A: Here are a few sentences from my trainings that accompany me:

"The 'Line' is a space around which the body organizes itself." Annie Duggan and Janie French, 1985.

"There is no balance, the axis emerges out of imbalance." Hubert Godard, 2011.

"A primary holding pattern is an ego in expression." Annie Duggan and Janie French, 1985.

"It is often the pre-movement that puts you out of gravity." Hubert Godard, 2010.

"The expressivity of the one that moves depends on the receptivity of the witness." Hubert Godard, 2009.

"All of you is behind your touch, your touch becomes essential. As you go deeper you go slower. Allow your hand to sink in the bottom of the river. You want to ask for permission, but you don't always have to do it verbally." Bill Smythe, 1990.

"The more we take the compensations away, the more the inner strain tightens. It is about sensing space." Peter Schwind, 2014.

"The way I manipulate depends on my own corporeality, on the way I am touched." Hubert Godard, 2009.

"I am one that becomes, an individuation, which is at play on the surface of encountership." Hubert Godard, 2014.

"A reaction is automatic, unconscious, rapid, within belief systems. A response is noticing, delaying, putting experience into words." Janie French and Annie Duggan, 1985.

France Hatt-Arnold
Rolfing Instructor
Rolf Movement Instructor