

# An Awakening

## My History with Rolfing® SI

By Harvey Ruderian, Certified Advanced Rolfer™, Craniosacral Therapist, Aston Patterner®, as told to María Cristina Jiménez, Certified Advanced Rolfer

From María Cristina Jiménez: “The best way for me is to just talk and you edit it down. I want to tell the story, drop into the feeling and nuance of the time. I am now sixty-nine years old and practicing for over forty-three years . . .” Thus began my several-hour interview with Harvey Ruderian on January 24, 2016. I listened enthralled to his stories and his journey as he talks to me – a young practitioner – sharing about the old days, creating a picture of the embryology of this work. Thank you Harvey!

### The Beginning

I got into Rolfing [Structural Integration (SI)] because throughout my childhood and teenage years I had multiple impacts and compression injuries. Since the age of eleven, I was a performing acrobat and competitive gymnast. I fell and crashed trying to learn new tricks, often on my head. I never broke any bones, just compressed them. My body collected these impacts, and by the time I was in college I was suffering from terrible migraine headaches. I was in constant pain, and kept a vial of codeine #4 in my pocket all the time.

When I finished at UCLA (1969), I entered law school trying to keep my military selective-service student deferment. I was desperately trying to stay out of the army and the Vietnam War, although I was prepared to leave the country rather than participate in US war crimes. Sure enough, they dropped the graduate deferments that year – 1970 – and I was notified to show up at the army induction center for my physical. I immediately went to my doctor to investigate why I was suffering from migraines. Additionally, my first and second fingers on my right hand were numb, as well as my left index finger. I was also suffering from terrible sciatica pain. My neck hurt all the time. We took CAT scans because there were no MRIs at the time, and the scans showed three large bone spurs and floating spicules/boney chips in my neck, and bulging discs in both the cervical and lower lumbar spine. My right eye was partly closed and the right side of my face slightly contracted. The army doctors took one look at my scans and expressed their sympathy and gave me my ticket to freedom: physical deferment from serving in the military. Since I didn't have any actual interest in studying law, I dropped out of law school the next day.



Harvey Ruderian



María Cristina Jiménez

My doctor referred me to two neurosurgeons who wanted to do surgery . . . immediately. I was twenty-three years old. I asked my doctor what could have caused these spurs? The doctor said they were probably caused by inflammation and said, “If I you don't get surgery, it'll just keep getting worse until you become paralyzed.” I said “Thank you” and left. This was the beginning of my healing odyssey.

### The Healing Journey

I moved up to Malibu and joined an organic biodynamic gardening community. I started doing yoga and joined an Alexander Lowen Bioenergetics group, to try to free up the stuck emotions that might be causing inflammation. I began meditating. I was doing acupuncture. I tried chiropractic and osteopathy. I swam in the ocean every day. I did five-day fasts every month. Did lots of shamanic journeys on LSD and peyote and mushrooms, and all of it helped my soul and changed my inner life, but my body was still hurting.

It was summer 1970 and I was having lunch with Sam Keen (publisher and editor of *Psychology Today* magazine), who I knew through a good friend of his and a political revolutionary mentor of mine, Reverend James Donaldson. Sam was getting [Rolfing sessions] in Big Sur and [told me to try it]. At that time, my guess is there were probably less than fifty certified Rolfers, at the most.

Joe Heller (founder of Hellerwork® SI) was part of the Bioenergetic training I was doing and turned me on to his Rolfer, Hal Fink (now Harold Milton), in Santa Barbara. I got my first session on my fifth day of fasting. It was the most extraordinarily, painfully liberating mind/body experience I'd ever had, beyond what I could've dreamed of. I never had another migraine after that first session. I cried and screamed and vibrated on the table throughout the session. The concept of 'titrate' was definitely not yet a part of the work in those days. Personally, I loved every moment of it. My body was so sore the next day that I could hardly stand up. My lymph glands under my arms were so swollen that I couldn't put my arms to my sides. I hit a temperature of 105 degrees by the third day after that first session and without antibiotics I continued to fast and detox on a master cleanse for the next ten days. After the fourth session I started having energetic awakenings up the spine. I went to the Bodhi Tree esoteric bookstore to see what these 10,000-volt electrical explosions from the sacrum up to the top of my head might be all about. When I meditated flowers would flow out of my third eye. At that point in my life, I had never heard much about *kundalini* energy. I found one book on the subject by Gopi Krishna. In my training, Ida referenced the two *nadi* lines, *ida* and *pingala*, that converge at the ganglion of impar as the seat of the kundalini. She occasionally referenced

metaphysical nuances and subtle anatomy in the training. I have a suspicion she began to drop these conversations in future trainings so as to emphasize the science and not the metascience. Perhaps better for social acceptability.

Rolfing [SI], for me, was an extraordinarily transformative experience, which changed my life and exposed me to a potential of beingness that was truly an awakening. The numbness in my fingers, my horrific sciatica pain, the contraction in my face, all cleared by the end of my ten sessions. Additionally, I had the realization that I had been holding in my neck the deep tensions of fear and terror and anger and abandonment – confluences of belief systems and suppressed emotional expressions collected from family and school and religion and government that I had learned to accept as truth. Growing up I was forced to swallow and digest a lot of information that was not *dharmic* truth. Over the years, as a structural bodyworker, I've come to appreciate that much of what we are doing is trying to soften the deep gripping – the angst – both emotional/historical and psychospiritual – that is stored in our nervous system, organs, soft tissues, and bones. Our bodies contort to fit, to match all of those psycho-mental constraints. Suddenly I saw with Ida Rolf this visionary who had a system to help liberate the body from all of its history: social, cultural, ancestral, as well as all of the collected compressions and compensations from simply living in gravity.

So this is what it did for me. Being a yogi, I thought of Rolfing SI as a yogic practice. I had the wonderful privilege of driving Ida for many hours over many locations, and [had] conversations with her about various subjects including the evolution of the work. [Through this I came to learn] that while [the work] came from years of immersing herself into the exploration of hands-on impression of tissue and the quantum shifts that happened as she experimented to develop the sequence of sessions we know as the 'Recipe', she also told me that the work came to her through meditation and contemplation and pure insight.

Her son Dick Demmerle was teaching a class in New Jersey in the summer of 1974, in which I reviewed the practitioner training. He taught the entire training not as a Recipe but as a set of concepts, that he said is how he originally learned the work. He would say that the Recipe was designed as a template but the evolution of the Recipe

came out of concepts that became the first, second, etc., sessions as a map for learning. He wanted his students to understand the source of the Recipe. Mostly, nobody in class knew what he was saying or doing – way too advanced for first-time students to comprehend. The students convinced Maurice Paulson and I to hold evening classes and we taught the Recipe behind Dick's back. (He would have barbecued us had he found out!)

## The Rolfing Interview and Training

In those days you had to be twenty-six years old to do the training. [Ida] was looking for maturity and commitment. She was looking for people who were already successful at something else and preferably college graduates. You had to go through a notorious interview process. She didn't care about your title. She wanted to meet you directly. She had a selection committee but *she* wanted to meet *you* and she wanted to see your hands.

I was in Taipei studying herbs with my brother when I heard that I finally, after two years, got my interview with Ida. I flew directly to Colorado stopping only in Los Angeles to buy a blue blazer, cut my hair, and shave my beard. I looked a lot different than the hippie picture I had sent in with my application. Jan Sultan later told me that Ida had said right before I came in that we "were only going to take a few minutes before dismissing this next person." When I walked in, six Rolfers were seated behind me: Jim Asher, Jan Sultan, Peter Melchior, Michael Salvesson, John Lodge, and Emmett Hutchins. Ida was sitting on a throne-like chair, asking questions probably given to her by her then assistant Rosemary Feitis. Ida asked me, right off the bat – with a somewhat negative attitude – "What makes you think that being a Marine prepares you to be a Rolfer?" I told her I was never a Marine. In fact, I was adamantly against the war and was an anti-war activist in college. I could see she approved. One of the application questions [had been], "What makes you think you have the physical aptitude to perform the demands of a Rolfer?" I [had] answered that when I was in high school, John F. Kennedy – under the President's Council on Physical Fitness – tested all high school boys in the country for their level of fitness using the Marine Corps fitness test. Then they had regional runoffs, and I had the highest score in the country. I even broke the standing Marine Corps

fitness record, but I was never a Marine! Ida said, "That's impressive. Please stand up." She looks my body up and down and says, "Wow, I never would have thought it." Welcome to Ida Rolf!

Ida was looking for people who were going to be Rolfers for the rest of their life; not Rolfers as an adjunct of something else they did. She often said, "I only have a limited time left to train Rolfers. I don't have time for people who can't handle my teaching approach. I don't have time to train anybody who can't handle the rigors of the work for many years to come, because I only have time to teach so many people." She was very clear. Ida also didn't particularly want to train people who were going to set up an eclectic practice. She didn't want Rolfer/Gestalt therapist, Rolfer/rebirther, Rolfer/Reichian Therapist. She wanted practitioners who were dedicated to practicing Rolfing [SI]. At my selection interview, I shared with her that I had participated in Gestalt, rebirthing, bioenergetics, yoga, primal scream, and encounter groups. She looked at me and said, "Well, that is exactly what I am *not* looking for." I looked up at her, paused, and then said from my heart, "Rolfing [SI] is what got rid of my migraine headaches. Rolfing [SI] is what got rid of the numbness in my fingers. Nothing else did. Not osteopathy. Not chiropractic. Not any of the New Age therapeutic modalities. Only Rolfing [SI] healed my physical ailments and now I would like to change other people's lives. I can't think of a bigger honor."

"Thank you Harvey. That will be enough for now. You can leave the room," she said. I began to walk out, stopped, turned around and said, "And I will devote my life to Rolfing [SI]." Ida right then asked me to be a model in her upcoming Big Sur summer [Basic] and Advanced Training. She told me to [in the meantime] study anatomy, and closed with, "Harvey shake everyone's hands." That was special, because I knew at that moment that I [had] passed, but I could tell she also wanted everyone to feel my hands. So that was really cool. Everyone looked at me as I shook their hands as if saying, "Welcome to the family."

I went back to Malibu to write a paper that covered all the systems of the body including pretty much whatever I could find about fascia. Now in those days you couldn't find anything about fascia. There were no books or computers to look up 'fascia'. I had to go to a bookstore in Hollywood (Book Finders) where they

would try to find a book for you, and found one book on fascia in England. That's how little there was on fascia in those days. I got all my books, sat down, and spent the next three weeks writing. I wrote my paper on a typewriter and made carbon copies. I was typing my final draft when a fire came through Malibu and burned my house down, as well as all my books and the paper. I lost everything I owned at twenty-six years old, yet all I could think of was that I needed to get this paper done in the next couple weeks! I called Dick Stenstadvold – the [school] director [at that time it was called the Guild] – and told him my story. He said, "Well Harvey, that's a lot better than the dog ate it." We laughed and he said, "Harvey, what I want you to do now – with no books – is write the paper." I took walks. I wrote. I meditated. I wrote a poem to Ida (circa 1973):

*Primrose*

*Rolfing [SI] tunes, as it tones,  
the body, so that less static muffles  
the energy of love from manifesting  
from a place of scarcity toward an  
abundance. Where there is no need,  
but desire, which pours itself an  
endless cup of dry wine.*

*Rolfing [SI] is an instrument of sweet  
divinity shedding its light on those  
who ask, and the self-affirmation  
which already knows there's  
nowhere to go and nothing new to do –  
so let's do something different  
and you reach out for more.*

*And Rolfing [SI] sharpens your speed  
and accuracy while traveling thru  
time and space. The minute little tiny  
subtleties which travel from the navel  
to the sun as mankind's inner core  
and outer armor, kiss and die and  
kiss again. And sleeping serpents can  
again blow their fire without being  
crucified for loving.*

By the time I arrived in Big Sur for the summer class of 1973, Ida and I had discovered that we had a very dear friend in common. Additionally, her son, Dick Demmerle, and I became immediate good friends. I often was invited to dinner. First week of class, a leg of lamb, Ida's favorite dish, was being passed around the table on a silver platter with vegetables. At that time I was being a vegetarian. When the platter got to me I took some vegetables and began to pass the platter when Ida said, with her

green-blue turquoise hawk eyes, "Harvey are you a vegetarian?" Everyone got quiet at the table. I knew right away there was only one right answer and it was "No." Before she gave me the chance to answer, she politely, but firmly, told me that she did not think that combining essential amino acids from different sources could make a protein molecule strong enough to be able to withstand and endure the rigors of being a Rolfer over an extended period of time. Obviously, what she was saying was "I don't train vegetarians." I answered, "Ida, as an Armenian I was weaned on lamb. I love lamb." So I took the lamb. Then she went on to say, "I need your commitment Harvey. In order to train you must promise me that you will not be a vegetarian." Ida was 100% committed to her purpose. That's masterful. That is why there is Rolfing [SI] today. She wasn't trying to be nice . . . or not nice. She liked me plenty, but she had a higher calling. She was inviting me to be a part of something very special. That day I stopped being a vegetarian and found a special teacher.

In the practitioner class I, and others, had beards and/or long hair. One day she gave a talk before the seventh-session class and said, "I don't care if you want to wear your hair long or have a beard, but let me put it this way, I need to see your cheeks. We need to see the change in your jawline and in the back of your neck." She left it at that. And you walked away saying and thinking, "I believe she said we need to shave!"

A special Ida story happened with my dog, my white Belgian Shepherd, Shane. Someone shot him full of birdshot in his rear, probably a disturbed Malibu neighbor. About a year after removing most of the shot, his back legs stopped working. He could barely walk. I brought him to Big Sur during the 1973 summer class. Turned out Ida loved dogs, and horses. Ida and Dick worked on my dear friend. The two of them worked on him like a dance, a four-handed orchestra; no words, two Zen masters. I was worried he would bite them, but Ida and Dick reassured me that Shane would know that they were trying to help him. About fifteen minutes into the work, Shane, who could barely walk when he came in, walked around the back of the couch, jumped over the couch, and spritely walked up to Ida and Dick and just started licking them. He did what a dog does when he is joyously saying "Thank you." I asked Ida if I could pay her and she said, "Yes, you can pay me

by promising me that you will study dog anatomy and that you will work on dogs." During my next ten years of working in Malibu, people regularly brought their dogs and I worked on them. It was an interesting learning to work on animals. While they certainly learn protective mechanisms, they do not seem to carry the weight of grief and sorrow, the abandonment and longing, the resentment and fear and distrust that we see walk into our offices. So the change happens almost effortlessly.

Ida was a master. True masters are not known for their niceness. When I think of Ida, I think someone who is a tough lover; she was tough love. She said, "We are going to walk out into a world that has never heard of Rolfing [SI]. We will have people against us, and you will have results that are threatening to PTs and chiropractors and osteopaths and orthopedists, but actually, we are working in a whole other dimension. We are not doing fix-it work."

## The Work: Listening

Ida would say that Rolfing [SI] in its purest form is not found in books but it is in the deep art of listening and seeing. There's a beautiful saying: "Be still and listen. Don't even listen, just be still. Don't even be still. Just be." Ram Dass used to say the paradox is that when you find a master – a true teacher– you have to learn everything and practice everything s/he says without question or compromise, day after day, year after year, and if the teaching is true, the practice disappears and all you're left with is your knowing; and the knowing comes through listening, and listening comes through being. Ida, along with a strong influence from Judith Aston, taught me a practice that eventually 'disappeared' from formulaic to non-formulaic. She modeled the courage to deeply listen to bodies.

My personal experience informed that the potential of this work includes the possibility for transmutation. A year after I got a physical deferment from the army, I was called back to get re-evaluated. I went back to the doctor to get new CAT scans and there were no bulging discs, no spurs, no boney chips. My spine was completely rejuvenated. The doctor – who was the Chief of Internal Medicine at Cedar's [Cedar's-Sinai Medical Center] – said it was remarkable. I told him about my adventures in the alternative healing culture of that time, especially emphasizing Rolfing SI. He said, "Harvey, talk like that is very embarrassing for a

college graduate. Sometimes spontaneous healing happens and we don't have any explanation for it, but for sure you will get yourself in trouble if you keep engaging in those voodoo practices."

I believe that the Rolfing SI I received in 1971 was the catalyst to reintegrate the physical, gravitational realities of life in my aching body with my more subtle energetic bodies; that it was the integrative convergence of the physical and subtle bodies that created a quantum shift in my 'being' and allowed for a 'spontaneous healing' of the dense boney spurs in my neck. My early Rolfing journey drove me through the physical mythology of my underworld – my social rage, familial hypocrisy, my personal impotence – facilitating [my finding] the courage to express the voice that was me, and to expand my personal commitment to nature, to humanity, to love. There were moments in that Rolfing process where the time-space continuum seemed to disappear and a critical mass of physical and subtle energetics allowed the causal to express itself as a transmutational healing.

Rolfing SI is potentially a practice in which transmutation is possible if you hold that possibility in your own being. Transmutation comes out of beingness. That's the depth of possibility through which we can potentially learn to listen when touching bodies. Firstly, you want to learn to use your hands to shape and match to the layer and tempo and direction of the tissue – usually with a three-dimensional impression and/or distraction around and through joints. You work with the sequence around which you get a quantum change. The important piece is to learn to assess through palpation, as you're working, moment to moment. Then you want to learn to integrate and blend. That's what Rolfing SI is.

Miraculously, the body tissues, organs, bones, etc. have an embryological memory – which helps us in our work, especially when the compensatory holding patterns are functional. Structural holding patterns and structural limitations/lesions/fixations that are the result of injuries/birth/traumas, etc. and have seated themselves in tissue change (adhesions, shortenings held by scar tissue, etc.) often require us to work with more impression and a lot more intention. That's where Rolfing SI really has its place. Eventually, when you palpate tissue you want to learn to listen to tissue motility: to listen and distinguish the various layers

and dimensions of energetics and fluid and tissue and how they communicate with each other. As you learn to match and shape to inherent motion, you step into the energetics of the fluidic body. It's at this layer of listening that you often find that the direction of an energetic strain pattern is different than the direction of the tissue strain. The tissue might be holding a strain pattern in a direction and layer different than the force vector held in the fluid body. You want to learn to organize these vectors and tissue strains such that the fluid motility and the tissue strain pattern synchronize as one harmonic expression of grace.

So what we call 'indirect work' means we work in the direction the tissue takes you, whether it's the direction of the grain of the tissue, or direction of motility, or down into a deeper level of listening which is the potential of beingness. Being is where you step out of the direction of motility manifesting from the fluid into the tissue, and you step into the presence of a pure energetic matrix. That energetic matrix is the embryological organizing principle of the body. When you match the tissue grain with the fluid motility and then with the underlying energetic matrix, tissues not only organize, but they organize in a way that contains a deep energetic ground substance, a primordial ground substance that stabilizes the structure through this amazing and mysterious organizing principle often referred to as the Breath of Life. Listening from a deep place of stillness, this organizing principle presents with a wave-like motion that emerges, in my experience, from outside the body, particulates around the midline of the body, and then moves back out again. When you listen from that depth of presence you will, in a very real sense, organize the deep functional holding patterns that are the angst of our everyday life, integrating one's own deep nature of self with the egocentric world we live in. What potentially emerges is an alchemical harmonic convergence and re-patterning, of learning to negotiate and communicate from love in a world that is mostly based on fear. The *Course of Miracles* reminds us that "love is letting go of fear."

One day after class in Big Sur in 1973, Ida asked if I would drive home with Dick as she was too tired and would prefer to stay the night at the classroom house. That evening as I lay in a bed very close to the front door, I awoke to a sensory feeling of

terror that made my hair stand on end. A very dark energy blob came through the closed door and floated straight down the hallway to a room where Ida would have been sleeping, turned around, and returned to exit out the closed front door. Totally freaked out, I woke up Dick and explained what I had witnessed. He explained to me that there were very dark forces that that did not want Ida to successfully present this evolutionary work to the world of light.

I'm forever grateful [for this work]... Thank you Ida for having a 'love of purpose' that transcended [any] fears.

*Harvey Ruderian studied political science and economics at UCLA (1965-1970) and was certified as a Rolfer 1973 and as an Aston Patterner in 1983. He began cranial studies in 1985 and has studied with John Upledger, DO, Hugh Milne, DO (Visionary Craniosacral), and Scott Zamut (biodynamic craniosacral). He began visceral manipulation training in 1988 and has studied with Jean-Pierre Barral, Frank Lowen, Didier Prat, and Alain Gehin. He maintains a full-time practice in Santa Monica, California and lives in Malibu with his wife, dog, two cats, and fruit trees.*

*María Cristina Jiménez is a Certified Advanced Rolfer and a yoga teacher (ERYT 500) who has been teaching yoga since 2001. She was born and raised in San Juan, Puerto Rico. She's worked extensively with – and is deeply influenced by – Integral Anatomy's Gil Hedley and the great Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen and her Body-Mind Centering® work. She regularly mentors with Rolfers Jan Sultan, Benjamin Shields, and Harvey Ruderian, and has also mentored with Mary Bond and Bruce Schonfeld. She is training in craniosacral therapy and visceral manipulation. She completed her Rolfing certification in 2013 and has a thriving bodywork practice. In addition to her public yoga classes, María Cristina has contributed in over thirty-five different teacher trainings and immersions all around the Los Angeles area as well as nationally. She is known for her spiritual anatomy workshops, which help make anatomy accessible, relevant, and poetic.*