

# Tales from the Closet

## Interacting with the Ten Series in My First Year as a Rolfer™

By Melissa A. Dailey, Certified Rolfer



*Melissa A. Dailey*

**ABSTRACT** *The author considers her first year of practicing Rolfing® Structural Integration, and particularly the Ten Series. She reflects on how the Series gives a framework to much of her work, but also how a grasping towards its goals can hinder an attitude of neutrality.*

I graduated from the Rolf Institute® [now the Dr. Ida Rolf Institute®] in September of 2017 and was fortunate to have an office waiting for me at a fitness center of a college near Dayton, Ohio. This is a great start for me because the management created my website, advertised with flyers, takes payments at the front desk, and every member is a potential client. To be clear, my 'office' is an upstairs 9-foot x 5-foot storage closet with a small window overlooking the gym floor below. Besides learning how to cram two bodies in that space, I have to tune out the cacophony of dumbbells, whipping CrossFit® ropes, and thinking medicine balls. For the most part the clients understand, yet it does get a bit nerve wracking for me to give a session seven of the Ten Series while the windows are pulsating from the impact of runners on the five treadmills below.

As I reflect on this past year, a theme that keeps recurring for me is this elusive concept of neutrality. I have difficulty not getting attached to a result, not

getting caught up in my client's story and fixating on 'solving' his/her problems. I struggle with expecting my clients to fully experience the goals of each session of the Ten Series. I catch myself anticipating a specific result, i.e. the clavicles have more movement after opening the breath in session one, or a freer talus after session two. During a session this is the constant looping dialog in my brain: "I am neutral / breathe and find center / this pressure will (insert verb: free, lengthen, fire, release) this (insert body part) / oh great it happened / oh no it didn't happen / how do I know it happened / no I'm just supposed to facilitate this work / be neutral / stay connected / just allow / oh look something happened! / repeat. In seeking to do bodywork that is authentic and helpful, this seems to be incongruent with neutrality. This process of doing Rolfing work on others and helping them achieve their goals is also a process of self-discovery for me and how I respond and react to these experiences, which also challenges my

ability to remain neutral in my clients’ journeys in embodiment, because I really do anticipate and expect results.

I have really struggled with genuinely wanting to help each of my clients through the Ten Series, because I know how transformative that work is, yet with also trying to create the space for them to develop the language and experience to own it for themselves. I catch myself asking questions like, “Do you feel the length in the backs of the legs and how much more you can extend the arms back now?”. . . “Do you feel that you can move from a center between the bottom of the ribs and the tops of hips?”. . . “Can you feel the energy from the heels going up through the knees instead of being blocked?” Some clients nod in excitement, but others look puzzled and respond, “No, I don’t get that,” or “Um, I think so?” I think I’m being helpful by offering these descriptions, but it probably puts too much pressure on them. Perhaps I am subconsciously trying to influence their response and guide their experience which is the opposite of being neutral. I put tremendous pressure on myself to be a ‘good’ Rolfer. I need to learn to allow them the time and container to experience their own sensations without me inserting my perspective or assuming they know what to feel.

I’ve had a steady clientele of about three to four sessions a day, five days a week, and take some time off for my military reserve duty and downtime with friends and family. I’ve had clients with a range of issues such as scoliosis, strokes, PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), Alzheimer’s, fibromyalgia, nerve damage, and several hip and knee replacements.

Some of my clients are just curious about Rolfing SI and want only one session, but about 80% of my clients go through the Ten Series. Some don’t complete it due to finances, and a few have quit because it was too much change in their lives and they were not ready to move on from an identity of pain and stagnation. Once in a while I’ll get a call from someone out of town/state/the country who has had Rolfing sessions before and wants something very specific done. I get a little nervous about these sessions, because I only know the Ten Series and wouldn’t know much about Ida Rolf’s suggestion to “do what’s next.” However, after talking to the client I do a little improvisational mash-up of several

sessions and do my best to address his/her needs with intention, positive rapport, professionalism, and whatever movement and back work on the bench I think is appropriate. I would say that these types of sessions give me a deeper understanding of the ‘Recipe’ as a whole and how the sessions are both separate in their goals yet connected through the process of embodiment.

For sure, my biggest lesson in practicing neutrality came out of my worst fear coming true: I was inappropriately touched by a male client (right after we completed session seven). I was in shock, feeling vulnerable, sickened, and betrayed. At the time I was also giving Rolfing sessions to his wife. I observed myself vacillating in my neutrality from never wanting to work on anyone again to feeling bad because this incident would mean that neither he nor his wife would receive the rest of the sessions – how could I just drop them in this process and leave them so disorganized? This event has affected my neutrality every day I walk into my little closet. I find myself bracing physically and mentally with new male clients and build a protective barrier around me by emulating a more masculine version of myself and referring to my other job as an Air Force officer to bring about an ‘air of authority’, for lack of a better term. It’s interesting how we learn at the Rolf Institute that practitioners can wield power over our clients through our work, but the reverse is also true – we carry our clients’ interactions with us in small and large ways.

Other than this event, I have had a great experience as a Rolfer and the work is speaking for itself in the ways my clients respond and how they choose to embody their process. I would be interested in getting feedback from fellow Rolfers on this concept of neutrality and hear your experiences – both positive and negative – so we can all do our best to help others and continue doing good work while discovering ourselves in the process.

*Melissa A. Dailey first learned about Rolfing SI in 1995 and graduated from the Dr. Ida Rolf Institute® in September 2017. She has served in the Air Force for nearly twenty-five years and currently lives and practices Rolfing SI in Dayton, Ohio. Melissa has a BS in international business and French, an MA in bicultural-bilingual studies, and a Master of Military Art and Operational Science. Melissa is passionate about both Rolfing SI and*

*contributing to the military community. Her work has attracted the attention of the medical director of the Dayton Veterans’ Administration, and in April she will present a proposal to bring Rolfing SI there as an additional therapy.*