

Daring To Change Fifty Years With The Alexander Technique An Encounter With Judith Stransky

This is the first half of a two-part interview.

by Shulamit Sendowski

Over the course of a long career, Judith Stransky was a co-director of the American Center for the Alexander Technique (ACAT), co-founder of ACAT WEST, co-founder of the Alexander Training Institute of Los Angeles, and a Feldenkrais® ATM® (Awareness Through Movement®) instructor. Today she lives in an active retirement community in Palm Desert, California with her dogs, her cats, and a desert garden—peaceful surroundings full of life, movement, and color. Judith has many tales to tell of her experiences learning the Technique with first generation teachers and teaching the Technique in many countries and settings. As she talks vividly about past events, her voice flows on, mentioning names, places, and dates, as if it had all happened yesterday.

Where To Live, What To “Do”

Judith was born in Slovakia to a French mother and a Czech father. “When I was two years old,” she says, “we fled from the Nazis with my brother, and fortunately made it to England, where we lived in London, Oxford, and Wales. My earliest memories are the bombing raids of London and later of being an outcast at school for being a foreigner and a Jew. My whole childhood was in war-torn Britain. After the war, we learned that the whole of my Dad’s family had been exterminated in Auschwitz. We were the only survivors.”

In 1948, the family moved to Melbourne, Australia where her father was Chief Rabbi, and then in 1952 to Wellington, New Zealand, where her father was Chief Rabbi of New Zealand. Judith graduated from high school in New Zealand with honors. “I didn’t want to go to university, and I didn’t know what I wanted to do with my life,” Judith says. She worked as a secretary at the French Legation in New Zealand, and, after her family moved to New York in 1955, as Secretary to the President of Yeshiva University in New York.

A visit to Israel, on the heels of two months’ travel in Europe on a very strict budget, prompted her to stay and look for a job. She found an interesting job at the U.S. Embassy and stayed in Israel for more than two years from 1957–1959.

Israel

The turning point in her life was meeting Esther and Daniel Doron, a very sophisticated couple. Daniel was a member of the Prime Minister’s Office serving as Consultant to the U.S. Embassy while Judith was working there. Esther and Daniel

befriended Judith, and insisted that she join a small Feldenkrais® class they were starting in their home, for four people including the Director of the Ministry of Education. The class was taught in English for Judith’s benefit by Lee Macoosh, a disciple of Moshe Feldenkrais. The beginning was a struggle: “I was the youngest in the group and more of a klutz than the others. I felt awful and wanted to drop out. Within a short time, though, I began to experience more freedom in my body, improved balance and posture, and an unbelievable improvement in flexibility.” “It was incredible how effortlessly we all developed flexibility beyond what we thought possible, and we were never bored, because every lesson was different! When I started, Dr. Feldenkrais had created 500 lessons, and a year later—750 lessons. By the end of his life, he had created 3000 lessons!”



Judith Stransky

Daniel remarked to Judith one day: “You love this work so much and you have become so apt at it, you ought to teach it!” Judith realized, “That is exactly what I want to do, and I also want to teach the Alexander Technique.” Why the Alexander Technique? During class, Lee often talked glowingly of the Alexander Technique, quoting Feldenkrais describing his Alexander lessons at Ashley Place in London with F.M. Alexander and Walter Carrington. She also gave them a book to read on the Alexander Technique. “As a result we all wanted Alexander lessons. But there were no Alexander teachers in Israel. Shmuel Nelkin was still in training in London, and eventually he returned to Israel and was the first Alexander Technique teacher there, in Jerusalem.”

“I had not had any Alexander lessons, but the book that Lee gave us to read, *Inside Yourself* by Louise Morgan, contained a fascinating diary of lessons with F.M. Alexander describing in detail how he worked. If we had not had the Feldenkrais® experience of learning and understanding the principles of re-education of habits and of non-doing, we wouldn’t have understood the Alexander Technique and taken an interest in it.”

During that time, Lee also introduced them to Bates Vision Improvement work, and the Dorons convinced Judith to undertake Reichian Therapy. “When I left Israel at the age of 22, I had greater insight and understanding as to how we function physically and emotionally, I had a means of self-improvement, and a direction and purpose in my life. And I felt as if I had somehow been led onto this path.”

Chicago–Paris–New York

Judith returned to the United States to retain her permanent residency. She was living in Chicago, working as a travel agent for European and Israeli travel, when a friend told her he had met Ilana Rubinfeld, who was training to be an Alexander Technique teacher with Judith Leibowitz in New York. Judy Leibowitz had been trained by Lulie Westfeldt and Alma Frank, the two New York teachers who had trained with F.M. Alexander in London in the 1930s. “I couldn’t believe my ears! I was ecstatic.” Judith immediately gave a month’s notice to her boss and returned to New York.

At that time, Judy Leibowitz was the only person offering Alexander Technique teacher training in the United States. In May 1961, Judith Stransky met with Judy Leibowitz, who agreed to train her after the summer. She clearly recalls Judy’s final remark: “I think we have more in common than our name.”

Judith found a job working as secretary/assistant to Hollywood playwright, Harry Kurnitz, who had been living in Paris after being blacklisted in the United States. In 1961, Kurnitz was finally able to return to the U.S. and use his name professionally again. He was working on his Broadway play *A Shot in the Dark*, with Walter Matthau, Julie Harris, and a young William Shatner. After opening night, Judith traveled with Kurnitz to Paris and worked for him there. She knew that the opportunity to go to Paris would never come again, so she postponed her teacher training for one year, and started the course in October 1962, at the age of 25.

Judith Leibowitz

Judy Leibowitz’s work transformed Judith: “The changes in my daily use, in my appearance, and in the way I felt, both physically and emotionally, were phenomenal; it also influenced my social life. I became far more popular than ever before in my life.”

“The training was five lessons a week, and I was the sole trainee. Meanwhile I worked full time at Columbia University as Executive Secretary to the Chairman of the Department of Chinese and Japanese. Little did I know that 15 years later I would be living in China!

“Judy Leibowitz always gave only positive feedback. So when she was silent, I felt I was in the dark. I would wonder ‘What’s going on? Am I okay? Am I not okay?’ I felt privileged to be working with Judy. She was a kind and wonderful teacher—a warm personality, always cheerful, and just lovely to be around. Even after graduation, I continued to take weekly lessons with her.” With time their relationship developed into a warm friendship.

“A polio victim when she was 15, Judy had a severe limp. She walked slowly and with difficulty, having virtually no functioning muscles in one leg. She was petite (5’1”) yet she worked on people of all heights and sizes, taking eight people a day. She lived alone and took care of herself, and was always cheerful and upbeat. She attributed her ability to function this well to the Alexander Technique, which she started in her 30s. She was remarkable, and a great role model.

“If not for Judy and her devotion to the work, there would have been no Alexander teachers in New York at that time. Debby Caplan lived in New York, but had not been practicing as an Alexander teacher. It was Judy’s quiet passion and devotion to the work that revitalized Debby’s interest in being a practicing Alexander teacher in addition to her career as a physical therapist.

“During the last two summers of Alexander’s life, Judy had taken lessons with him in England. She said his hands were soft as butter, and in the chair work he never touched her below the waist, and when she got up she was walking with virtually no limp. She added that he would say to her, ‘Don’t care a jot, little lady, don’t care a jot.’

“Years later, I asked another teacher who had been trained by Alexander what it was like. She told me he often used a very firm touch with superb direction, and she demonstrated it on me.

“I also asked Rome Roberts (now Rome Earle) many years ago if Alexander had said to her, ‘Don’t care a jot, little lady’ and she replied that he would say to her, ‘Don’t worry, little lady, don’t worry.’”

The American Center for the Alexander Technique

Around the time that Judith graduated from teacher training (1964), Judy Leibowitz initiated the establishment of the first professional organization of Alexander Technique teachers outside of England. Five New York teachers—Judy Leibowitz, Barbara Callen, Debby Caplan, Frank Ottiwell, and Joyce Ringdahl—were the founders and Board of Directors of the American Center for the Alexander Technique (ACAT), a non-profit educational institution. Debby had been trained at the age of 16 by her mother, Alma Frank. The others had been trained by Judy.

“Judy asked me if I would attend the meetings and take minutes as none of the teachers had secretarial skills. I was very excited to meet the other teachers. I was shy, and sat there quietly taking minutes. Finally, at one meeting, I shyly asked if I could contribute a comment on a difficult issue. They were surprised, but agreed, and they found my input valuable. From then on, I was a participant in the discussions.”

The American Center for the Alexander Technique (ACAT) was located in a rented apartment with several rooms. “Each director pitched in \$60 monthly to pay the rent. All the teachers taught at home, but could teach at the Center any time they wished. This was the location of the first Alexander Technique Training School in the U.S. After Barbara Callen resigned from the Board, Frank Ottiwell said: ‘Let’s have Judith on the Board,’ and that’s how I became a Director of ACAT. The directors of the Center met monthly to work on each other, and to discuss and evaluate teaching issues.”

Judith, a recent graduate, did not teach at the training school, although she was involved in all discussions and decisions. The teachers who served on the Board gave her lessons as reimbursement for the time and work she put in at ACAT, and she attended Debbie Caplan’s weekly lectures at

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the training school. Debbie, a physical therapist with a senior position at the Rusk Institute of Physical Therapy in New York, taught anatomy and kinesiology from the viewpoint of an Alexander teacher. “They were marvelous lectures, and we all learned a lot. I was fortunate that I could call Debbie when I had a question about working with a student with a serious physical difficulty. She always gave superb advice—simple, clear, and precise. Her help was invaluable.

“At this time, Goddard Binkley, an American who had trained in London with Alexander and with Carrington, moved to Long Island with his family, where he was on the faculty of a private boys’ school as a math teacher, and he also gave the schoolboys Alexander lessons. Later, he moved to Chicago and opened the first Alexander training school there. We invited Goddard to participate in our monthly workshops, which he was happy to do.”

“Shaking”

Judith laughs heartily as she remembers “shaking” during table work. The other teachers had never encountered such a phenomenon before and tried different ways to prevent it. “One time they decided that five of them work on me at the same time, a teacher at every limb and one at the head. It was awful. I felt I was being drawn and quartered. I had to ask them to stop.” Judith believes that her intensive Reichian therapy “had opened me up significantly in a short period of time.” This “enabled my body to respond very rapidly on the table with a sudden release that made me shake briefly.” Judy Leibowitz also attributed Judith’s rapid Alexander progress to her Reichian and Feldenkrais® background. Years later, Judith occasionally had a student of hers shake on the table.

Dr. Frank Pierce Jones

“The first Seminar at ACAT was with Dr. Frank Pierce Jones—from Tufts University Institute for Psychological Research and the author of *Body Awareness in Action*—whom we invited to work with us. Meeting Jones was a great pleasure. It was very interesting for us to experience a different Alexander touch and to hear his experiences with the two brothers, F.M. and A.R. Alexander. He was an old-world gentleman who did very good, genteel chair work with our legs close together, and he never touched below the waist. He explained that his early students were prim faculty members, including women wearing skirts, and he had to be careful where he touched and how they sat. He did not know how to do table work. He had been trained in Boston by A.R., who was limited in movement because of a hip injury from a fall off a horse. Dr. Jones explained that A.R. sat on a chair while teaching (which is what Jones did) and was unable to do table work. We were intrigued to learn of A.R.’s image of lengthening and widening as a ‘cauliflower!’ Soon after, a picture of a large cauliflower appeared on the ACAT message board.”

Walter and Dilys Carrington

“When Walter and Dilys Carrington came to visit New York, we invited them to give a weekend workshop to the directors at the Center. In those days the British teachers talked

critically about the American teachers. This was a very sensitive issue for us, but nonetheless we invited the Carringtons, and, to our delight, they accepted.

“That was my first experience with teachers who had been directly trained by Alexander. Each of the Carringtons had a different style, but both had more powerful direction than I had ever experienced. Walter’s touch and direction were so firm, so powerful, you felt you had no choice but to go up, to lengthen, in any position. It felt very solid. It was amazing. Dilys was amazing in a

different way. She had a very light touch, it was exquisite, and you instantly felt direction flow throughout your body, in any position. With her it was as if you were floating, filled with air as well as with length—and with both of them the experience of very free joints.

“They worked on all of us, but did not do any training work with us. They also worked together on each of us—that was an extraordinary experience! They were tall and big, very serious and very British.

“I experienced them both taking the head more forward and up than I had ever experienced before, with the chin further in towards the throat to allow this, and I felt that this triggered the powerful upward direction. This was a new experience—very significant.

“Walter gave a couple of talks. He loved to talk at length about the work, and he would describe the work and explain direction in beautiful, poetic, flowery terms. We had never heard the work described and explained in this manner. We hung on every word he said. Dilys did not present a talk, but when working with you, she would guide you verbally in a soft, gentle voice, saying meaningful words that we had never heard before. The Carringtons’ Alexander work was magical.”

Patrick Macdonald

The weekend after the Carrington workshop, Judith went to Boston for her first experience with Patrick Macdonald. “He was teaching in the home of one of his graduates, Rika Cohen, an Israeli teacher. Israelis had been flocking to London to train as Alexander teachers. A few trained with the Carringtons, and most of them trained with Macdonald.

“I was very scared of going to Patrick, as we had heard that he was harsh in discrediting the U.S. teachers, denying that we were Alexander Technique teachers. I was a new, young, and insecure teacher and wanted other U.S. teachers to go with me, but no one would go. I finally decided to go by myself. Carrington and Macdonald had been Alexander’s two senior master teachers and had conducted his training program for many years, and I had such a strong desire to experience the work of both of them. I made the appointments, and went off alone to Boston.

“I arrived for my first appointment and stood in the doorway, and there were Rika Cohen and Shoshana Kaminitz staring at me. Both were known to discredit U.S. teachers. Patrick was working on somebody. I felt I was walking into the lion’s den. To my relief, the two women greeted me with a smile as I walked in. Patrick was running late, so I sat and watched him work, waiting my turn.

“Patrick was very different from the Carringtons. Walter and Dilys were like big teddy bears taking care of you. Patrick was skinny, medium height, very severe, kind of barking at the student: ‘You can’t call that direction.’ I was feeling worse and worse as I got closer to my turn. When my turn came, he worked on me in the chair for a few minutes, and then, to my surprise, and trepidation, he asked me to work on him! O God! I wanted to run away. I started working at his head, with Rika and Shoshana watching me. You could hear a pin drop. I was literally shaking, expecting the worst.

“Instead, he started to quietly guide my hands, very softly and gently. I couldn’t believe that he wasn’t barking at me. He continued in this manner, and at one point I blurted out to him, ‘Oh, Mr. Macdonald, sometimes my back aches after I’ve been teaching all day.’ I expected him to bark, ‘You can’t call that a back’ or ‘You can’t call yourself an Alexander teacher.’ Instead, he said sweetly, ‘That happens to all of us.’ I couldn’t believe this. He was being an angel to me. He must have understood and appreciated what guts it took to come and learn from him.

“Patrick asked Rika and Shoshana to work on me while I was between appointments with him. Both of them worked with a delicious delicacy, reminiscent of Dilys Carrington’s work.

“Patrick had the same powerful direction that I had experienced with Walter: the strong head forward and up, the feeling you have no choice but to lengthen and go up, or go anywhere he wanted your body to go in space. It was very interesting to experience Patrick’s strong, firm direction on one hand, and the delicacy with which he had trained his teachers on the other hand.”

Training with Macdonald

“Patrick started training me by having me work on him or on someone else with his hands guiding my hands or guiding my body. He used few words and was very precise in his movements. His hands and words conveyed great clarity about ‘Head Forward and Up’ and ‘Back Going Back and Up.’ Patrick focused a lot on teaching me to free the wrists, which was new to me, and he taught me to get a student’s body to go forward and up with a flick of the wrists. However, this was not instantly achieved. In order to do this, I had to have superb direction in myself, and my whole body as well as my wrists had to be free—it took some time to learn to get it all together. His training was precise and masterful—nothing was vague—and this approach caused my nervousness and uncertainty to disappear. I knew specifically what I was aiming for. It was clear to me that I wanted to continue training with Patrick.

“Patrick sometimes worked with a very firm touch and sometimes with a very delicate touch. When asked how he

determined which to use, he responded that when one works with direction, one can do anything.

“I returned to New York with my head in the clouds, a more advanced Alexander experience in myself, more clarity in my work, and with the certainty that I wanted to develop myself further as an Alexander teacher with Patrick’s training. I could not bring myself to move to England, even to work with Patrick, but I knew the direction I wanted to follow.

“There was a remarkable power, and absolute knowledge, in the hands and the work of those trained directly by F.M. Alexander. I felt privileged to have been in their hands, and to also have benefited from their superb training. The work with the F.M. Alexander-trained teachers rectified the defects in my body beyond what I had thought possible! It had been my dream to have lessons and training with those closest to Alexander—and when, over time, I was able to work with a number of them, the results were beyond my wildest dreams.”

“Take Inches Off Your Waist”

“In the early to mid-60s, all of us, except Judy Leibowitz, were struggling to build an Alexander practice. Virtually no one had heard of the Alexander Technique, and the medical world called it charlatanism. Each teacher aside from Judy had another profession or a job. I found very interesting part-time secretarial jobs to support myself.”

Judith eventually started advertising in literary, cultural, and educational publications. “Very gradually, after a few years of disheartening struggle, my practice grew until I had a full practice. I modeled my practice on Judy’s, taking eight people a day, and working five and a half days a week. The work was seasonal because during the three summer months most of the students left New York. So during the summer months I was

working again at my part-time jobs, and in the fall about 50% of my students would return. I would then advertise again, and by winter I would have a full practice and would take 10 to 12 people a day to compensate for the lack of summer work.

“At around that time, Edward Maisel, author and Director of the American Physical Fitness Research Institute, was taking lessons with Judy Leibowitz and wrote an article on the Alexander Technique.

“*Vogue* magazine wanted the article, but insisted on including exercises, which Maisel refused to do. He then took it to *Vogue*’s competitor, *Harper’s Bazaar*, who were so thrilled to get something that had been refused to their competition that they agreed to publish it the way it was, with one

request: Add something in the heading that would appeal to fashionable women. So the subtitle ‘Take Inches Off Your Waist’ was added, as well as one explanatory sentence in the article referring to a lithe figure and smaller waist as a result of



Patrick Macdonald and Judith Stransky

the lengthening effect of the Alexander Technique. It was the feature article in their April 1967 issue.”

Judith still sounds amazed and astonished as she describes the result: “Hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of letters poured into the Alexander Center from all over the country with by far the greatest number coming from New York and California. No one at the Center knew what to do with all these letters!

“I applied my ‘executive secretary’ skills and organized the letters, filing them according to state, and arranged for a form postcard to be mailed to each person. Those in New York received a card providing them with a list of the New York teachers. Those elsewhere received a card stating: ‘Unfortunately, there are no Alexander Technique teachers in your area. Your letter is being kept on file and when a teacher comes to your area, we will inform you.’ From then on, every teacher in New York had a full practice.

“When Virginia Copeland Wagner moved to Los Angeles in January 1968, I mailed out little postcards to the addresses in the Southern California file, and Virginia instantly had a full practice.” When Judith moved to California in June of 1968, she sent out her little postcards, and “in two weeks I had a full practice.”

Spreading The Word: The West Coast

Living on the West Coast provided Judith the opportunity to train as a practitioner of the Feldenkrais® Method and, together with Frank Ottiwell, to spread Alexander Technique and Feldenkrais® throughout California—as well as elsewhere.

“Frank Ottiwell moved from New York to San Francisco in 1967 to be the Alexander teacher for the American Conservatory Theater (ACT) and was the first Alexander teacher in Northern California.”

Judith came to Southern California in June 1968 at the invitation of Virginia Copeland Wagner. “Virginia asked me to teach her part-time practice during her summer absence. She found me a charming, small apartment in Santa Monica, and my little ACAT postcards instantly brought me a full practice. Instead of staying two months, I stayed in Santa Monica 41 years!

“My earliest Alexander contact, aside from Virginia Wagner, was Rome Earle in Ojai, who had years ago almost completed her training with F.M. in London. We had delightful meetings on a regular basis until she returned to London to train with Macdonald.

“The most fascinating person” that Judith met was “Dr. Douglass Price-Williams. He called me when he saw my solitary Alexander Technique listing in the Yellow Pages. Douglass, a tall, lanky Englishman, had trained with F.M. in the 40s. He told me that during those years Walter Carrington and Patrick Macdonald conducted the training program, and every day F.M. would come in for a while and work with each trainee. Douglass said that during the latter part of his training, F.M. was dealing with the South African slander lawsuit, and he was very stressed and not his usual self.

“Douglass told me that as there were already a number of Alexander teachers in England, after graduating he moved to Denmark to set up a practice. In order to encourage more people to come to this obscure method, he decided to get a psychology degree. He fell in love with psychology, made that his life’s work, and was currently a Professor at UCLA, where he worked with the Department of Psychiatry, and later Anthropology. He was devoted to the Alexander Technique and so pleased it had come to Southern California; and he referred interesting people to me.”

In Southern California, Judith enthusiastically offered lecture-demonstrations, workshops, and seminars wherever she could, presenting the work with her down-to-earth style of practicality and clarity combined with humor. She addressed all people and problems.

“I had many interests: the arts and performing arts, health and alternative health, martial arts, psychology, metaphysics, self-improvement, etc., that brought me in contact with a variety of organizations, institutes, and schools. I even presented the Technique at a mental hospital, resulting in an interest in including the Technique at the hospital! Californians were eager to experience something new that was effective.

“Gordon Davidson, founder of the Mark Taper Forum, met with me soon after my arrival and included the Alexander Technique in his actor training program. Staff members at the Taper, all theater folk, eagerly crowded into my introductory presentation to the actors, and most followed through by taking lessons, which they loved! Gordon also invited me to benefits at the Mark Taper, where I was surrounded by Hollywood stars and directors. I felt I was living a dream. When someone asked Gordon, ‘What is the Alexander Technique?’ he responded, ‘A Way of Life.’”

Soon, interviews with Judith were published, reaching a larger audience and bringing more students. The word spread to the growth centers of the human potential movement, which were “a new and growing phenomenon in Southern California,” and Judith was repeatedly asked to present seminars and workshops at the centers. These were “very popular.”

“Frank was simultaneously offering Alexander Technique workshops in San Francisco, and we realized that conducting weekend workshops together in each city would reach twice as many people. The workshops were very successful. This led us to form ACAT WEST, a non-profit educational institution, with Judith Leibowitz on the Board to fulfill the requirement of three Directors. Setting up ACAT WEST was very time-consuming for Frank and me, and very gratifying when it was accomplished. Subsequently, our workshops were under the auspices of ACAT WEST.

“After Giora Pinkas moved to San Francisco, Frank and Giora set up the first Alexander Training School on the West Coast, in 1974, under the auspices of ACAT WEST. This led to more training schools in Northern California.” Years later, in 1987, the Southern California training school—the Alexander Training Institute of Los Angeles (ATI-LA)—was opened in Santa Monica with nine directors, including Judith.

In 1972 Judith fulfilled her dream of training in the Feldenkrais® work. It was a five and a half week Feldenkrais®

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training program, the first in the U.S., housed at Esalen Institute in Big Sur with Dr. Feldenkrais himself. It was organized by prominent psychologists Dr. Stanley Keleman and Dr. Will Schutz (author of the best-seller *Joy*) for a hand-picked group of psychologists. “Dr. Keleman, a brilliant California pioneer in the psychological approach that includes body work, was an Alexander student of Frank Ottiwell. As a result, three Alexander teachers were included in the group of 14 participants: Frank Ottiwell, Ilana Rubinfeld, and myself.

“Upon completion, we were certified to teach Feldenkrais® ATM® (Awareness Through Movement®), and I soon added seven Feldenkrais® classes a week to my full-time Alexander practice. Also, Frank and I included Feldenkrais® ATM® in our Alexander workshops.”

Branching Out

“Dr. Camille Brown, Professor of Kinesiology at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) learned of the Alexander Technique and Feldenkrais® during an introductory meeting with me. Her response was: ‘This work leads to peace.’ While she was unsuccessful in fulfilling her desire to include the Alexander Technique in the UCLA degree program, she did succeed in bringing me in to teach at UCLA Extension. I opted to teach Feldenkrais®, which could be taught to large groups. The first course drew 100 people! The course was so popular that the professor who was department head and his wife joined a class. I taught there for many years. In the classes, I always explained the Alexander Technique, and many subsequently took Alexander lessons, including the department head’s wife (a psychologist), and the word spread even more.

“People were coming for lessons from all walks of life, from the rich and famous to ordinary folk—celebrities, performing artists, producers, directors, prominent physicians, psychiatrists and, psychologists (who also referred psychiatric patients)—with numerous types of ailments, some undiagnosable, and invariably the Alexander Technique brought results. I accepted everyone, without exception.”

Starting in the early 70s, “The Association of Humanistic Psychology (AHP) asked me to present both methods at their annual conferences in California. There was such a keen interest—about 500 people would show up for Feldenkrais® and about 200 for Alexander. This made me a popular presenter,” Judith says with a laugh. “I had been asked to write the brochure descriptions, which I made very appealing, and that helped draw the crowds—and they were not disappointed. It is the work that is so incredible, and I did my best to present it effectively.”

At the conferences, growth centers, and elsewhere, Judith attended presentations and programs “in many modalities of the human potential movement, which expanded my horizons on a personal level and also contributed to the continual development of my teaching approach and communication. I also trained in other modalities, such as Reiki, Radix, Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), Touch For Health, and later in Deepak Chopra’s Ayurvedic Mind-Body training, and others.”

Judith was also invited to teach twice-weekly classes at the Academy of Stage and Cinema Arts (ASCA) in Hollywood by the founders, David Alexander and Michael Dewell.

“John Houseman, the renowned producer, director, and actor who had brought Judy Leibowitz to teach Alexander in the Drama Department at Juilliard in N.Y. in the 60s, took some lessons with me for his arthritic back. He then brought me into the Drama Department at the University of Southern California (USC) to teach Alexander two mornings a week to the undergraduate actors. Oh, how they loved it! The subsequent chairman, Duncan Ross, asked me to add Feldenkrais ATM® twice a week for the Fine Arts grad students.”

In these various ways, an enormous interest developed, and Judith had an ever-growing waiting list. “As new teachers gradually came to Southern California, I would fill their practices by referring to them from my waiting list, as well as referring virtually all new ACAT WEST inquiries. The few additional teachers were now contributing, through their practices, to spreading the word in Southern California.

“All this activity was very heady and very exciting for me, and I was overwhelmingly busy teaching; making presentations in California and also in Washington, Florida, Texas, Hawaii, and Australia; giving Esalen workshops; and single-handedly administering ACAT WEST in Southern California, until 1980, when I left to live in China for two years.” That was after additional work with Patrick Macdonald and with Marjorie Barstow, and after writing her book.

Macdonald in California

In the winter of 1968, Patrick Macdonald was invited to teach at ACAT in New York. Frank Ottiwell and Judith went to study with him. “I took lessons with Patrick twice a day for two weeks. Patrick was very formal, always wearing a pinstripe suit, but no shoes. He worked in his socks. He worked with the teachers, the trainees, and the public, and he included training work with the trainees and with any teacher who requested it. He was very cooperative and respectful with the New York teachers. He encouraged everyone to watch, and there was always a crowd in the room; we could learn from watching and listening. One of the new things he taught was whispered “Ah” with different vowels. We had never encountered that before.

“I asked him to stay an additional week in the U.S. and come to Santa Monica, stay in my apartment, teach all my students, and give me two lessons a day. He said YES!” For 10 consecutive years Patrick Macdonald taught in California during his Christmas vacations and once or twice during Easter vacation. Judith and Frank Ottiwell facilitated his visits.

“He loved what he called the Mediterranean climate, and it was easy for Frank and me to persuade him to make annual visits to California, dividing his time between Los Angeles and San Francisco. Patrick was a hit! Groups of us would socialize with him outside of teaching hours. He basked in his popularity with his animated admirers and would loosen up and tell stories and jokes. He responded to the informal friendly Californians by becoming more informal himself—no more teaching in a

“He told us that in England he insisted on formality and on being called Mr. Macdonald, while in America everyone called him Patrick, and the atmosphere was jolly.”

pinstripe suit, only casual clothes, moccasins on bare feet, a twinkle in his eye, and a smile on his face. When he barked at a student, the Americans thought it very British and amusing, and he even sometimes played up to their idea of a comic British character. He told us that in England he insisted on formality and on being called Mr. Macdonald, while in America everyone called him Patrick, and the atmosphere was jolly. And—after a while—no more barking.”

On the third visit, an annual tradition began: Patrick lived and taught in the Beverly Hills home of Robert Fisher, a Hollywood writer, with constant onlookers. “Robert and Patrick were enchanted with each other. Robert was a smiling, garrulous, skinny, Jewish, bearded comedy writer on his fourth marriage who used to write for Groucho Marx. Patrick was a skinny, clean-shaven, Yorkshireman of few words with a ‘magic’ technique. When Robert was in the room, it was a party, as if Groucho were there—continuous, funny one-liners, usually relating to what Patrick was teaching: monkey, lunge, whispered ‘Ah,’ and fancy moves like ‘Yo-yo,’ ‘Swinger,’ and ‘Slap on the Back.’ Robert was writing for the sitcom *Alice*, and in one episode he had one character teach another character how to use monkey when lifting a five-gallon bottle of water! Both Patrick and Robert were in their element in front of an audience.

“Frank and I wanted Patrick to open an ACAT WEST training school in Los Angeles, including scheduled visits to the San Francisco training school. He was willing to leave England and do so. Unfortunately, we did not have the means or ability to comply with the Immigration requirements.”

Marjorie Barstow and Group Work

In the late 70s, Judith attended Marjorie Barstow’s summer Alexander Technique program in Lincoln, Nebraska. “Like the other F.M.-trained teachers, her touch gave you no choice but to go up, lengthen, and widen. Her touch was light, quick, almost non-existent, occasionally firm, and direction happened instantly. I would consider her style to be ‘minimalist’ with maximum effect. I saw people change noticeably in a short period of time.

“Marjorie specialized in groups, particularly for performing artists, and every year she taught groups around the

world. There was no table work, only chair work. She would work individually with each person, as well as involve the whole group. Experiencing the way she taught groups was invaluable experience. She inspired me to create a varied and interesting style when I was hired to teach Alexander to groups.”

Joy in the Life of Your Body

Judith’s book *The Alexander Technique—Joy in the Life of Your Body* was published in 1981 by Beaufort Books. “The few existing books of depth were excellent, but not an easy read for everyone. There were books by F.M. Alexander, Dr. Wilfred Barlow, Dr. Frank Pierce Jones, and Edward Maisel. My desire was to write an illuminating book for ‘Everyman.’”

Judith’s book included written endorsements by her students Paul Newman, Joanne Woodward, and Nina Foch, which stirred up a lot of interest. “Paul Newman had the most astonishing direction I had ever encountered in anyone, despite a tight body, after only a few minutes in his first lesson, even when I was not touching him.”

The publisher sent Judith on a five-city book tour, and her numerous TV appearances spread the word to a far greater public. This book, the forerunner of innumerable popular books on the Technique, was translated into French and sold in all French-speaking countries. Although it is out of print, it is available in libraries and from sources that sell out-of-print books.

Part II of this interview will appear in the next issue of AmSAT Journal.

Shula Sendowski (ATILA, 1991) teaches in Los Angeles County. Shula’s essay on “External and Internal Focus” was published in AmSAT News, Summer 2010, No. 83 and AmSAT Journal, Spring 2012, No. 1.

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