



A newsletter of applications
of the *Feldenkrais Method*®
of somatic education
Issue # 62
Life Long Learning

Seriously, for a Moment

Sleep Well

by Pat Buchanan, PhD, ATC, PT, GCFT,
Chair, Esther Thelen Research Committee

Sleep is that golden chain that ties health and our bodies together.

*Golden slumbers kiss your eyes,
Smiles awake you when you rise.*

-Thomas Dekker, writer, 1572-1632

-Quoted by The Beatles in "Golden Slumbers" on *Abbey Road*

I love a good sleep. Sleep could come in the form of the traditional nighttime repose; I especially love it when I sleep the seven to nine hours recommended for adults. Less frequently now as an adult, sleep may come during the day as a cherished nap.

After a solid sleep, I sense the liveliness and responsiveness of my body. I acknowledge my emotional brightness and resilience. I am grateful for my attentive and creative mind. Conversely, I miss it and I feel it when I don't get a good rest. I notice that I am slow on the uptake, quiet, cranky, and achy.

Even though Decker penned the opening lines for this article five centuries ago, he captured many of the benefits of sleep that scientific studies are now confirming and explaining. Two feature articles in the April 2013 issue of [NIH News in Health](#) summarized the importance of sleep. Sleep has positive effects on physiological and psychological well-being through its widespread effects on nearly all tissues in our bodies and systems, including endocrine, cardiovascular, and immune functions. It keeps us on our toes and out of accidents. It impacts our digestion and weight. It promotes learning, memory, and decision-making. "Sleep on it" is truly good advice. Researchers are gradually figuring out how sleep does all this. We recently learned one important mechanism: it seems that sleep helps cleanse the brain.

Articles in the October 2013 issue of *Science* (see references) put a positive spin on "brainwashing." Researchers (Xie et al) used special methods to confirm with mice the brain cleaning process that happens during sleep. The interstitial spaces between brain cells increase, as does the circulatory exchange between the interstitial fluid and the cerebrospinal fluid bathing the brain and spinal cord. The result is a flushing out of waste products from the brain. Theoretically, the accumulation of these waste products triggers our sleepiness and encourages us to enter a state that clears our brains. In the long run, failure to regularly wash out these wastes disturbs normal neural function and can result in various health problems, including migraines and Alzheimer's disease. Xie

SenseAbility is produced by
the *Feldenkrais*®
Educational Foundation of
North America (FEFNA).
ISSN: None

Content Editor:
Lavinia Plonka, GCFP
Managing Editor:
Carla Feinstein
Executive Director:
Bruce Day

Email correspondence to:
news@feldenkrais.com

Find practitioners at:
www.feldenkrais.com

For information on
advertising, contact
news@feldenkrais.com

The following are registered
service marks, collective
or certification marks of
the *Feldenkrais Guild*® of
North America: *Feldenkrais*®,
Feldenkrais Method®,
Functional Integration®,
Awareness Through Movement®,
ATM®, *FI*®, *Guild Certified
Feldenkrais Teacher*®, and
The Feldenkrais Guild®. The
following are trademarks,
service marks or certification
marks of the *Feldenkrais
Guild of North America*:
L'intégration Fonctionnelle™,
*Prise De Conscience Par Le
Mouvement*™, *Friends Of
Feldenkrais*™, *Guild Certified
Feldenkrais Practitioner*™,
*Feldenkrais Awareness
Through Movement Teacher*™,
Feldenkrais™ and *The
Feldenkrais Journal*™.

Contact us at:
FEFNA
5436 N. Albina Ave.
Portland, OR 97217 USA
1.800.775.2118
503-221-6612 (local PDX)

...Sleep Well

et al reminded us in their introduction, "Sleep deprivation reduces learning, impairs performance in cognitive tests, prolongs reaction time, and is a common cause of seizures."

Sleep is a necessity, not a luxury. Readers can explore the [US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention site](https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/) for basic information about sleep disorders, recommended sleep needs, tips on falling asleep, and in preparation for visiting a physician if lack of sleep is a persistent problem.

So, what does one do if sleep is not coming easily? And why am I writing this column about sleep? Figuring out the reason(s) for the difficulty is important and may require the assistance of a health care provider. The *NIH News in Health* ("The Benefits of Slumber") reported, "Sometimes medicine is prescribed. But consult a doctor before trying even over-the-counter sleep pills, as they may leave you feeling unrefreshed in the morning." How about another option, something that might resonate with the *Feldenkrais*® community? The article also stated, "Common therapies include relaxation and deep-breathing techniques." Aha! There's the connection with the *Feldenkrais Method*® of somatic education.

As a *Guild Certified Feldenkrais Teacher*®, I know from repeated experience that *Feldenkrais* lessons can create relaxation and lots of deep breathing, including plenty of yawning. My students and I can be guided to relax and fall sleep by many *Awareness Through Movement*® or *Functional Integration*® lessons. That response is usually quite welcomed by fatigued, stressed, injured, or ill persons. The much-needed sleep may occur in the midst of the lessons, later in the day, or during the night. Some *Feldenkrais* Teachers specialize in assisting students with sleep problems.

Take the Sleep Survey!

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/fefna_sleep_survey

The *Feldenkrais* community has many reports from students and teachers of the relaxing and often sleep-inducing effects of *Feldenkrais* lessons. We do not as yet have systematic studies confirming all these anecdotes that *Feldenkrais* lessons can positively influence sleep patterns. Let's see if we can change that and inspire some formal research studies by starting our own informal project here and now!

I have put together a very short survey about sleep and the *Feldenkrais Method*. Really, it only takes a few minutes to complete. If you have experienced a *Feldenkrais* lesson as a student through a live, recorded, or printed lesson, or if you are a teacher, I invite you to share your experiences of the effects of *Feldenkrais* lessons on sleep. [Take the sleep survey](#) between December 13, 2013 and January 11, 2014. I promise to share the results with readers in the next issue of *SenseAbility*.

Researchers continue doing the hard work of connecting the dots and identifying the mechanisms to clarify that relaxation and sleep are not simply feel-good luxuries. Indeed, sleep is a necessity that clears waste from our brains, contributes to

healing, helps us learn and remember, restores many aspects of health-promoting homeostasis, and enhances our feelings of well-being and love.

With a little help from the Beatles, I wish for you *Feldenkrais* lessons that bring you sweet dreams and lots of love!

*Oh yeah, all right
Are you going to be in my dreams
Tonight?*

....
*And in the end
The love you take
Is equal to the love you make.
-The Beatles, "The End" on Abbey Road*

Pat Buchanan, PhD is a Feldenkrais teacher, physical therapist, and athletic trainer in Toledo, OH.

References:
Herculano-Houzel, S. "Sleep It Out." *Science* 18 October 2013: 316-317.
Underwood, E. "Sleep: The Brain's Housekeeper?" *Science* 18 October 2013: p. 301.
Xie, L et al. "Sleep Drives Metabolite Clearance from the Adult Brain." *Science* 18 October 2013: 373-377.
[NIH News in Health](#), April 2013
"The Benefits of Slumber: Why You Need a Good Night's Sleep" and "Sleep On It: How Snoozing Strengthens Memories."

Age, Aging, & Agency

by Joshua Wyatt, GCFP

In January while practicing Aikido, I suffered a lateral meniscus tear in the right knee. A few days later, while sitting on the front steps of my home, reaching across myself to the left with the right hand for my backpack, which was sitting on the ground, the right knee seized up painfully. I was unable at the time to extend the joint, and the slightest movement in the lower leg was excruciating. I scootched my way back inside, propelling with the left leg, sliding on my bottom, slinging the right knee with my right forearm and trying to keep the right ankle from moving at all with the left hand. A few hours later, after much experimenting in new ways of locomoting, and without any reduction in pain, I got stuck on the toilet and realized I would need assistance of some sort. After a trip to the emergency room, where I experienced the sweet relief of straightening the leg out somewhat, I was given a brace, some crutches, and for the first time in my post-toddler life, was left to figure out how to get around without weight bearing in both legs.

The next time I saw my Aikido teacher he teased me, "You're not a young man anymore." I am 33 years old.

My teacher's statement has given me the chance for some interesting reflection. Of course I'm not six or twelve or twenty years old anymore, but where exactly is the line between young and old? And more importantly, who is it that gets to say? What about aging is there no resisting, and where in fact do we have some agency?

...

Right now I can sense the contact of the bench that I'm sitting on and each foot on the floor. These sensations of contact, I am expending caloric energy both to create and to recognize them, and they indicate to me that there is something so much larger than me underfoot that I am drawn invariably toward it. In spite of the sense of stillness in the contact with the bench and floor, knowing that I am falling in the direction of the center of the Earth, and able to sense



it, is sufficient to demonstrate that I am moving. Given that the Earth itself is moving around the sun, and that the sun itself is moving in its own trajectory, it is clear that even though I may move away from, and then back to, the same place, in fact I do not return to the same place ever. Here is an asymmetry: I am always moving, and never in the direction of returning. Of course I may speak about returning, as it is convenient and helpful to work within a smaller frame of reference than the universe entire.

Aging is saying that something is moving in this asymmetrical way. When I am no longer able to sense any movement, or move in any way

under my own agency, then indeed, others will say that I have stopped aging altogether.

In this manner there is no real ability to remain alive and resist aging. Furthermore, I am always moving and so long as I live, I have some possibilities to do something coordinated with movement.

...
Friends of mine, about my age, are more and more frequently beginning

to speak about themselves as being old, past their prime, not able to do what they used to. Sometimes they even say that they are past the point of learning new skills, as a friend of mine did when I asked him about pursuing his fascination with dance.

In my neighborhood are two billboards advertising a medical office nearby, each depicting someone in their

30's. One is a man pushing a stroller uphill, the caption: "Morning walk, meet lower back pain." The other, a woman jogging: "You just ran past our office, tendonitis followed."

I am cognizant that I am now older than many incredibly popular celebrities, some of whose work even I highly respect. I saw the end of the last World Series last night, and I think probably almost all of the players were my junior. I harbor some fantasies of accomplishments in some specific fields of interest which I have barely begun, and notice some very successful people in these arenas my age or just a little older.

If I choose, I can establish a criterion

...Age, Aging, & Agency

of judgement in relation to the accomplishments of these others, and I can foster beliefs about aging in relation to things outside myself. I will then have no viable way to be content with how long I have lived, and what I have done in the meantime.

... The philosopher C.S. Peirce said that belief is that upon which we are prepared to act. In this sense, I propose belief about myself to be analogous to Feldenkrais's idea of the self image: that aspect we understand about ourselves, upon which we base our actions. I can believe practically anything I wish about myself, but that which I believe in the sense I am speaking of, I will act in accordance with.

In my work with the *Feldenkrais Method*® of somatic education, I am usually setting out to clarify the self image, and construct it into something more realistic. I improve the thinking, sensing, and moving in a symbiotic fashion. Improvement in the accuracy of my sense of what is involved in a particular task allows me to enact a task with less counter motivation or parasitic activity. This reduces the amount of effort involved in a task, freeing me to be more spontaneous, creative, to do more actual work, and to go about developing pleasure and beauty. As I clarify the self image, I may also become aware of the previous image, as well as, at times, the previous rationale for it. I discover my previously sensible beliefs by learning even better ones.

Now, every individual has an age. At every instance they have had an age. Given that age is so potentially inexplicable from identity, it warrants that beliefs around what it means to age, be aging, or have a particular kind of age, can have profound effects

with regards to how one goes about living.

One belief is that aging is to be resisted. As a culture there is a great deal of education, explicit and implicit, reinforcing this belief. As I stated above, there is no real ability to remain alive and resist aging, as aging

**Aging, I'm
learning, is
a practice.**

is in fact a way of speaking about our constant movement, a quality of which is never returning. Therefore, a belief that I resist aging will result in a parasitic effort against my own process of living. It will be like trying to enact a movement, and its opposite at the same time. Furthermore, while I can count the years, and remember the past, these are just that: counting and remembering. If in my self-image, I organize around the concepts of a count, or a memory, with regard to the task at hand, then again I bring extra effort to a situation which does not call for it.

The belief, however, that aging is no more and no less than moving, that it points towards an inextricable link to living and motion, creates an opening for me to structure my belief around aging in the same way I would go about improving the self image at any other time. Where is my age apart from what I can sense and think and do about it now?

Little by little, practicing *Awareness Through Movement*®, and receiving *Functional Integration*® lessons, I learn better how to enact movement with pleasure and potency at the expense of some long-sustained efforting. Even during the time of my injury, I've had many interesting discoveries and improvements. Lesson by lesson I learn and practice and express awareness, always through movement-movement that is more precise, has more to do with the task at hand, and less to do with any abstract conception of myself that cannot be enacted presently. Through this committed practice of the *Feldenkrais Method*, I am developing this process as a habit, and I am understanding myself more and more as something in motion, who can always improve. I am growing the habit of framing my inquiries into digestible, observable frames, and expecting pleasure and gracefulness and potency, just as I do while practicing *Awareness Through Movement*. Aging, I'm learning, is a practice. Aging is something to improve on.

And so the question of my age is no longer something I have to try to solve. Trying to decide for certain whether or not I'm young or old is weighty, anxiety provoking, and irreconcilable. At the least it is unpleasant and boringly familiar. Instead, I'm playing with a moving target, where I can mix adventure with skill, and uncertainty with curiosity. Asking myself about my aging now, the habit of practice presents itself: I am going to find something pleasurable, by means of my own agency. The question of age, of a number to wear as a name tag for my identity, it is superfluous.

Joshua Wyatt is a Feldenkrais Practitioner in Oakland, CA.

Learning Moments

by Joel Roth, GCFP

Among the most powerful, transformative experiences are developmental ones. We see the pride, excitement, and sheer exhilaration of babies appreciating their first steps. One of the reasons it's so interesting to be around babies is that there are so many of these moments.

It is a cycle that builds on itself. Our capacities expand when our body parts and their functions come together in new ways, in better ways, as an integrated whole. We become more potent humans, with an expanded vision of our own possibilities. Confidence follows ability, with the effect that all learning -- especially the developmental functions that support our autonomy -- improves the parameters of our emotional climate as well.

Each of us carries the code of this essential optimism. It belongs to the species.

One reason that the *Feldenkrais Method*® of somatic education is effective is because we place developmental learning as the primary focus. Both group classes and private sessions provide an environment where the brain's remarkable abilities to adjust, associate, and adapt can exhibit their creative magic.

Each day provides opportunity for many hours of this learning... if all the ingredients are there.

I remember one baby, six months old, who seemed quiet and inward at an age we'd expect him to be vigorously exploring his environment.

After a few minutes of squeezing and tapping his limbs to clarify his body image, he was introduced to a rattle,

a simple, traditional toy that fit nicely in his hand. He soon discovered it would make a sound when he happened to move his arm. In a few more minutes, he developed these small motions into intentional whole body movements that produced a loud sound. The auditory feedback of the rattle synchronized to the rhythm of moving his limbs gave him a satisfying sense of agency. He began to vocalize, connecting his diaphragm to his movements. This created yet another layer of feedback and reward, including the smiles and murmurs in those who were watching. He had found a new passion for interacting with the world around him and had become energetic and happy.

What is wonderful is that this learning can happen at any age, and any level of functioning, which I'd like to illustrate with the story of one of my clients.

She was ninety-two years old, a mother of five children and a pharmacist who had worked vigorously up to age 86. She had remarkable, knowing eyes, dark marbles that looked at you quietly with a discerning interest.

Those who had seen her at her worst three months prior, could hardly believe this person was now sitting at the table, intently focused on eating, using a busy pincer movement of her chopsticks on the dish, while finding opportunities to gesture humorously at



her family.

Although limited by her condition, she had regained the ability to feed herself. She had a healthy appetite and appreciated good food. She closely observed people around her and found unique ways to communicate with each one.

She could say a lot with a pointed word and facial expression, could speak up for herself whenever she needed to, and told vivid stories about her childhood. Sitting on a chair or at the edge of her bed, she could play a game of catch, which she enjoyed. She could write the names of her children, a task she undertook with characteristic focus. It was a remarkable transformation.

After inflammation from a stroke destroyed most of her brain's right hemisphere, I was honored to have watched and assisted as she repeated the basic human developmental sequence, including such primary functions as chewing and swallowing.

It was humorous and a little eerie

...Learning Moments

6

to see her right hand with a mind of its own, a week after she came out of a coma. It seemed like an animal that lived under the blanket. It would come out and patrol the edge of the bed. It was energetic and could move quickly through a sequence of tasks, straightening her pajamas, straightening the blanket, plunging back underneath the covers. It could also socialize, shake hands, greet and gesture. It was surprisingly strong. You wouldn't have believed it was connected to an old person.

Quite a contrast to her head, which was stuck. It was turned to the right, with the back of the head pulled back, eyes looking up at nothing.

A person's head is meant to be stable. Moving it provokes defensive reactions, so I used the *Feldenkrais*® approach of touching and moving parts connected to her head: her shoulders, arms, chest, pelvis, and legs. I used touch to wake up her sensations of herself, and also to influence her upper spine, neck, and head.

To talk to her head directly, I used a strategy of gently moving her scalp, which allowed me to suggest movement of the head without directly challenging the muscles that were keeping it frozen in place.

Eventually it became possible for her to look downward, bringing her chin closer to her chest. The freeing of her head and neck led the way to further improvements. Significantly, it allowed the rest of her body to enter her visual field.

Fortune and opportunity were with us one day. Her right hand was doing its usual busy routine. I had worked with her for a while, so she was calmer, softer, more aware. In a moment of inspiration, I said, "Please look at your hand!"

I'll never forget what happened. When her eyes met her hand, it was a moment of intense fascination. She stared as she moved the hand this way and that, this way and that. It became her hand. She became a person with a hand. The hand became part of her.

Later, I taught her to bend and twist her wrist in different directions using a back scratcher with a round handle the size of a tennis ball. Lying in bed and holding the back scratcher, she could look at, reach, and tap objects nearby on the nightstand, and then parts of her body, even on the left side, which she had been neglecting. (Learning to reach across the midline is important for babies as well, and its necessary for them to be able to roll.)

Although she never recovered voluntary use of the limbs on her left side, this exercise brought her left side into her awareness, and she gradually recovered the ability to face left of center. Considering the level of damage to her brain, the improvement was remarkable. She had a good quality of life at home with her family for the final three years of her life.

All of us all can repeat the steps of development when we come out of an illness or injury, and can benefit enormously when this process is facilitated in an *Awareness Through Movement*® class or private *Functional Integration*® session.

Joel Roth works in Hawaii as a Feldenkrais practitioner and a teacher of the ChildSpace Method for supporting early development. A longer article on this client is available at <http://freeshell.de/~bolangi/Sono.pdf>. He invites email at jroth@pobox.com.

FELDENKRAIS® SANTA FE

THE NEW SANTA FE FELDENKRAIS® TRAINING PROGRAM
PROFESSIONAL & PERSONAL TRAINING IN THE FELDENKRAIS METHOD®

Educational Director: ALAN QUESTEL

Trainers: DEBORAH BOWES, JULIE CASSON, KATRIN SMITHBACK, ALIZA STEWART & ARLYN ZONES

STARTING MAY 2014

One month segments twice a year
May/June & October/November

FOR MORE INFORMATION, COURSE GUIDE
AND APPLICATION VISIT OUR WEBSITE:

WWW.FELDENKRAISINSANTAFE.COM

FELDENKRAIS® is a registered service mark of The FELDENKRAIS GUILD® of North America.
Accredited by Feldenkrais Guild® of North America ("FIGNA").
www.feldenkrais.com/profession/international_training_accreditation_guidelines



7

Ankle Flexibility Trumps Working Harder

by Pamela Kihm, GCFP

"My friends have noticed I'm walking better." Miriam mentioned this to me one week after her introduction to the *Feldenkrais Method*® of somatic education. That first session she had learned that, instead of tightening through her "weak" ankles, she could let her ankles relax so her heels could peel off the ground; and that, instead of gripping her toes, she could let her heel-peel relax and lengthen her toes. That 91-year-old said, "This is what I've been waiting for my whole life."

The idea that you "can't teach old dogs new tricks" definitely does not apply to the *Feldenkrais Method*—unless the student doesn't want to widen his or her movement repertoire. "But dear, I always do it this way" is what another ninety year old said every time I offered to increase her movement options. She was smart and strong, but insisted on pulling herself up stairs with her arms instead of propelling herself up from the step below with a heel-peel.

I've helped many people in their nineties, but one of the most memorable was a lady who came to me with balance and walking issues. She was tightening through her abdominal muscles causing her

That 91-year-old said,
"This is what I've
been waiting for my
whole life."

spine to round into a C-shape, and was stepping way out ahead of herself. During some table work where she learned that her torso could relax and lengthen, I thought to myself, "She is learning fast, but has years of habits to overcome."

After she sat up, I kind of talked with my body while explaining that, instead of pulling herself forward by stepping way out ahead, she could use the natural heel-peel of each foot to propel herself forward. I also wiggled through my ribs as I mentioned that balance and walking are easier when the torso is relaxed and mobile. She stood up and wiggled through her ribs

saying, "You mean like this?" She then walked the length of the room (later down the sidewalk) efficiently and comfortably with perfect balance!

The *Feldenkrais* lesson on the following page is an excerpt from *Walking: Nature's Perfect Exercise*.

Pamela Kihm, GCFT® has had a continuous Feldenkrais practice since 1991, and is the author of Walking: Nature's Perfect Exercise. All of Pamela Kihm's books are available through: www.feldenkrais.com/bookstore

Foot & Ankle Flexibility

1. Stand with your feet parallel to each other, not quite as far apart as the distance between your shoulders.
2. Peel one heel off of the ground and then allow it to return to the ground. The front third of the bottom of that foot (“ball” of the foot and “toes”) remains on the ground.
3. Slowly alternate peeling one heel, then the other, off the ground. Wait until the first heel returns to the ground before you lift the other heel.

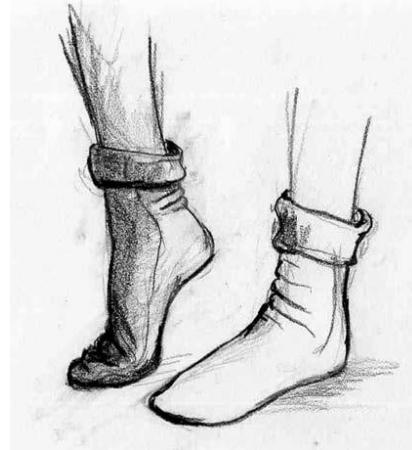
- Each time one of your heels peels off the ground, allow that knee to move forward. (If you don’t allow the knee to bend as the heel below it peels off the ground, you’ll end up “standing on your toes” instead of relaxing through your toes.)
- When one of your heels peels off the ground, allow the front of that ankle to lengthen.
- Allow the length of the 4th metatarsal to lever you onto the “ball” (heads of your metatarsals). Each time one of your heels peels off the ground, allow a space between your “big toe” and 2nd toe and between your “little toe” and 4th toe — to allow your middle three toes to support your knee.
- Allowing your 1st (big) toe and 5th (little) toe to allow your middle three toes to support your knee means allowing relaxed lengthening through all of your toes.

The human foot is designed for relaxed lengthening through the toes and for bendability where the heads of the metatarsals meet the phalanges. Both of these enable your heels to peel off the ground for comfortable, powerful walking.

Make sure every pair of shoes you own has enough:

- » toe- room to allow your toes to spread into relaxed lengthening, and
- » bend-ability to allow you to move onto the ball of your foot every time your heel peels off the ground behind you.

If you want to walk faster — instead of making your legs work harder, allow your feet and ankles to be more flexible.



MicroMOVES.com

Free Samples Ergo Tips

Benefits For
Wrists
Back
Shoulder
Neck
Knee

info@micromoves.com
Ph: 780-414-0273
Toll Free 1-877-414-0505

Sherry Ogg
BGS-Kin, RMT., GCFP
Jacquie Ogg
MA GCFP

Imaging Oneself into Existence: Recovering from the Trauma of War

Margot Schaal, GCFP

Everybody’s aging; Moshe Feldenkrais said that we get to choose how we age. The mind can become clearer, daily actions easier, and one can access improvements on a daily, hourly basis for oneself with regular *Feldenkrais*® lessons.

David* served in the Vietnam War, and then turned around 180 degrees to live a natural life, working the land and building structures and community. During the war, he tuned-out, like many soldiers, with the help of drugs. For a long time afterward he stumbled about, still using drugs. Nonetheless, as a young man, he met an elder, a 75 or 80 year old, who was alert, very fit, energetic, and positive. David identified this man as who/how he wanted to be at that age. When I met David, he had spent decades learning to feel and be.

After many years and many kinds of therapeutic treatments, improving along the way, David arrived at my office. He lived with nearly continual headache and neck strain, which was tedious and interfered with his work and personal life. He benefited from chiropractic adjustments, but his neck always went out again. He stood with his head far in front of his torso, and lay on his back with arms pinned to his sides, legs taught, taking in small breaths of air.

After the first *Feldenkrais* session the headache reduced and a chronic hip pain was gone, to David’s astonishment. Over time the headaches became less intense, and progressed to headaches without his neck going out of alignment and into severe pain. “I feel like a different person. My posture is really changing. It’s been a long time coming. This has taken years!”

Several months into our working together and after revising his exercise regime, his body re-connected with its capacity for smooth, easy movement and resting. His breathing had deepened and he had learned to use it consciously. He described that his whole life was improving – he was able to let go of emotions that weren’t helpful and expressed great gratitude for everything and everyone in his life. “I no longer live in fear of the next headache.” He used the awareness developed in *Functional Integration*® lessons while he worked, in scheduling his life, and managing the fluctuations in relationships. While standing for hours pushing boards through a table saw blade, he attended to how he was standing and learned to do it without subsequent back or shoulder or neck pain, and did the same with simply walking. For David, all the modalities he worked with had helped him, yet the *Feldenkrais Method*® of somatic education made the greatest, deepest impact. One day, he gave an impassioned declaration of how helpful the *Feldenkrais Method* had been, and, said he was not continuing the work.

When David decided to resume lessons, he no longer lay on the table with a soldier’s stiffness. Ease was more rapidly accessible. He experienced alignment throughout himself most of the time, and indeed, his head eased toward his torso. “I don’t recognize myself,”



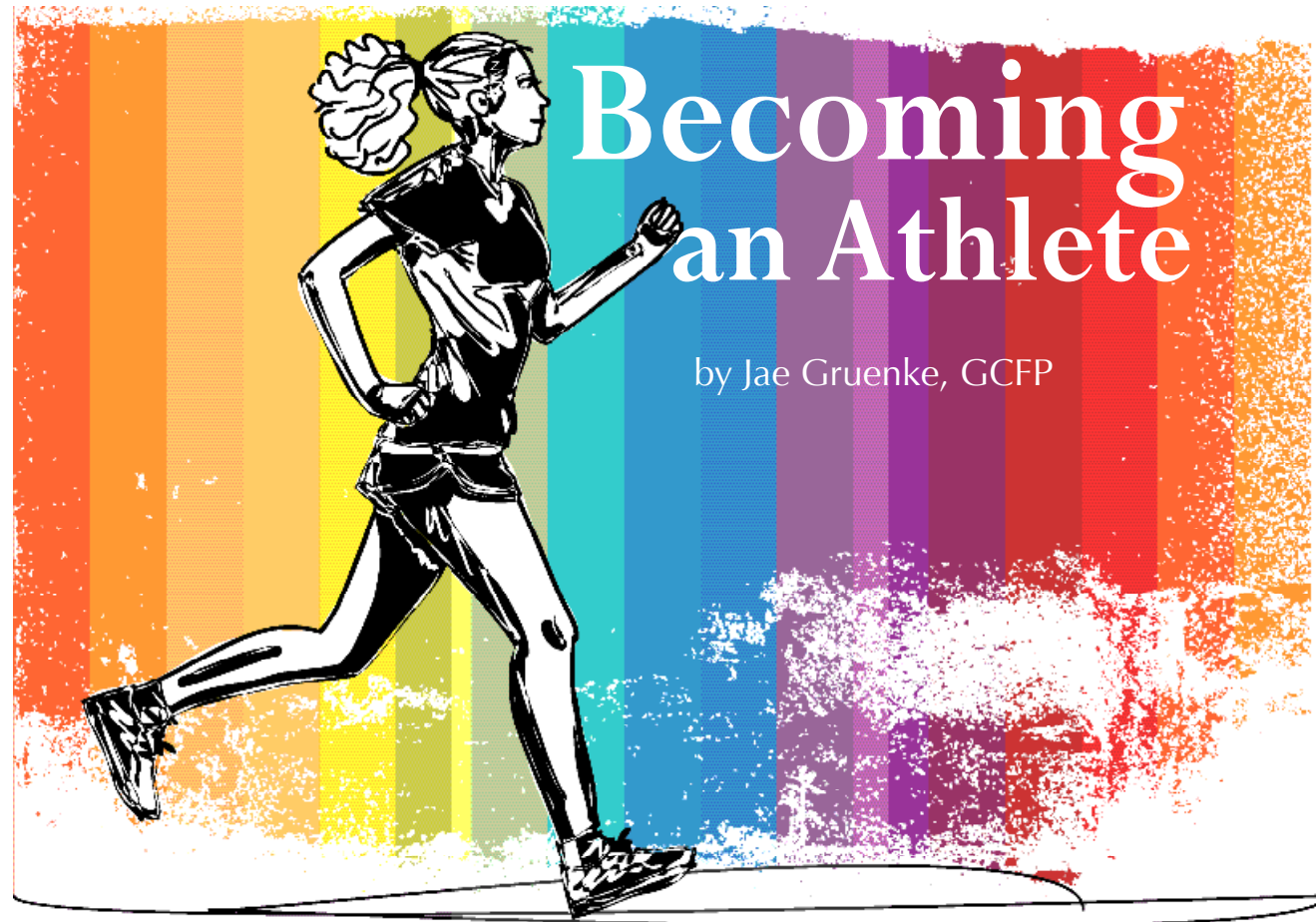
he said. He looked healthier and younger and he recognized that he had become the gracefully aging elder who shone for him at 25. “I haven’t had a headache for 1.5 months. I enjoy my body now!”

“I have so much awareness in my body now - when I go about my business, if I feel discomfort or something is off, I notice it, and within a minute or two, it’s all fine. A change happens spontaneously without any conscious attempt to do it.”

I am grateful to be in the cadre of teachers and healers who have shared David’s path of growing and aging gracefully.

Margot Schaal practices the Feldenkrais Method in Sonoma and Marin Counties in Northern California. www.MargotSchaal.com

*David’s name has been changed for this article.



Eileen was struggling with her training for a 10K race she'd run annually with a group of friends for many years. Her left leg was stiff and achy, running felt difficult and unpleasant. She was worried that she wouldn't be able to complete the race, and she wondered whether she was getting too old for running. Her goal was to be able to finish without getting hurt and enjoy her group's tradition of post race carrot cake and champagne. Curious about the *Feldenkrais Method*® and hearing that I specialize in helping runners and folks over sixty, she sought me out for help.

She wasn't a "serious" runner, organizing her life around training and races, but rather a generally active woman who ran the same 10K and half marathon with friends every year. In between, Eileen rode her horse, cycled to get around town, and took the occasional Tai Chi or Pilates class. She decided she would treat herself to *Feldenkrais*® lessons to celebrate

turning sixty and retiring from her career as a social worker.

Over the course of the lessons, we discovered that the movement habits that resulted in frequent injury to her left leg and hip also lead to a lopsided seat on her horse. Improving her running form also improved her seat and her ability to move with the horse — something she'd been taking Pilates to rectify without success. As a result, her horse needed fewer massages.

After eight lessons, she ran her 10K comfortably and with a better finishing time than in several years. Once she'd eaten her carrot cake, she decided she was enjoying running enough to continue doing it a few times a week rather than taking a break prior to her fall race training.

Eileen joined my weekly *Awareness Through Movement*® class and came for periodic *Functional Integration*® lessons over the course of the

following year, keeping me updated on her adventures. She completed her other annual race, the half marathon, quite comfortably, followed by her 10K again the next spring and a few other races as well. She also began to explore sailing.

This summer she purchased a small sailboat from another woman whose doctor forbade her to ever sail it again because it was wrecking her shoulders. We worked on the movements needed to move around the boat and control the sheet and the tiller in ways that distributed the effort through her body rather than stressing her shoulders. We also explored the strongest and easiest ways to pull herself back into the boat from the water.

During a recent lesson, Eileen reflected that maybe what she'd wanted all along was a career in physical education, but when she was at university it somehow hadn't

...Becoming an Athlete

seemed acceptable to her. "Now," she said, "I think I'm doing what I always wanted to."

Like many of my older clients, she'd come to me in an effort to avoid losing her abilities due to advancing age. But through the *Feldenkrais Method*, she'd found that so much more was actually within her reach. She began to

develop from active woman to athlete.

A few weeks ago, Eileen ran a 10K that she biked to an hour each way. To her astonishment, it was easy. As I write, she's on her way to another race in the mountains this weekend—17.46 kilometers in the Scottish Highlands. I can't wait to hear about it.

Jae Gruenke is a Feldenkrais practitioner and fitness professional. She is the founder of Intelligent Exercise, which offers in-home fitness and movement education to seniors in the New York City area, as well as practices in London and Edinburgh. www.intelligentexercise.com www.balancedrunner.com



**GET A FREE ATM® LESSON...
EVERY MONTH...
FROM NOW ON!!!**

You can get a free ATM® lesson, as an mp3 download, every month simply by subscribing at my website, www.uncommonsensing.com and filling out the subscription page.

Once you subscribe you will automatically get an ATM® each month from one of my different workshops!