

# Memories of training with Ida Rolf

An Interview with Gael Rosewood and Sharon Wheeler

This interview was conducted In October 2014. Gael Rosewood taught a class “**Uncoiling the Spirals: Back to the basics of working with connective tissue with tactile and visual assessments**” in Seattle, and Sharon Wheeler and I participated. The idea of getting these two luminaries together to talk about Rolfing® Structural Integration (SI) and their histories with Ida Rolf seemed like too good of an opportunity to pass up, and fortunately they both agreed to sit down for a conversation one evening after class.

Anne Hoff: Let’s start with how you two know each other.

Sharon Wheeler: From Esalen, we were both at Esalen.

Gael Rosewood: Yes.

AH: And what time frame are we talking about?

SW: New Years of 1968 was kind of when I started being there.

GR: And I was there the summer of 1968. I thought I was just staying for the summer, and then I thought I was going to go back to college.

SW: Me too.

GR: But as the summer progressed I decided I was at my college and that I wasn’t going leaving to go back to college. Sharon and I saw each other, but in fact my perception was that Sharon hung out with the adults [laughter] because she had a boyfriend or a mate who was older.

SW: That’s right.

GR: So she hung out in that intellectual adult crowd, at least that was my perception of you, and I was hanging out with the hippy fringes there. We were more or less the same age but we were in different strata.

AH: So you were like twenties?

GR: I turned twenty-one that summer.

AH: So the right place at the right time.

SW: I would have been twenty-two or twenty-three, something like that.

AH: Were either of you connected with Dr. Rolf at that point?

SW: Not really. She'd do sessions down in the baths. And I remember the first time I saw her she was in one of the little massage rooms, which is a private room. Usually people would go soak in the tubs and then you would collect them for a massage. She was in the massage room with her clothes on and I was thinking I would go tell her that she should take a bath first. Then I thought nah, she's not my person, I'll let whoever is going to do the massage sort her out. But then somebody came in and Ida took charge of the situation and started directing the session. I thought oh she's giving a session, cool.

GR: That was your first meeting?

SW: I didn't know who she was. But that was the first time I saw her. She was in and out of the baths a lot, and the baths were my territory. I taught all of the massage workshops. That was my job.

AH: Was she on your radar as a person? If somebody had said Ida Rolf would you have even known who that was?

SW: No, not in '68 I wouldn't have.

AH: So she wasn't teaching there yet?

SW: Nope. She wasn't teaching there. She was teaching in Los Angeles and other places outside of Esalen. I think in '68 she did a class at the Riverhouse, Ed Maupin's class. The Riverhouse was in Big Sur proper which was a half hour up the road.

GR: Whereas in my case, my mother came to visit toward the end of the summer of '68. She took a Gestalt workshop, and one of the leaders, Bob Hall, had just been trained by Ida at that training. So as part of the workshop, everybody in the Gestalt workshop got two Rolfing sessions. Ida was there, so Bob and Ida were doing Rolfing sessions for everybody in the workshop. When my mother got her sessions Ida fixed her fallen arches. My mother said to me "this is good stuff." and she gave me the money for a series.

Then I saw on the message board that they were looking for a model for sessions. Ida Rolf wanted to mentor a man who was half way through his training. They needed a body to work on. And so I signed up for that and was the model. He was so painful. I spent the whole session biting the pillow. I didn't know anything about anatomy but before and after the session they'd stand me up and she'd do the body read. And I would wonder, "how does she see that? She's talking about my spine but she's looking at the front of my body. Does she have xray vision? I don't get this" He would work on me and then in the last fifteen minutes she would push him off of me and she would put me together. So I got the contrast. I got the feeling of what his work felt like. Her work could be pretty painful too, because she was working fast and she was going straight for it. Those sessions weren't like a walk in the park, but they rocked my world, and all of this psychological material would come out. I'd be sorting it out for days afterwards - dream life and everything. We hadn't even finished the Ten Series.

She was getting ready to do a training. Peter Melchior was going into practitioner phase along with Judith Aston. Mary Bond and Emmitt Hutchins were auditing. I really feel like there were

little angels on my shoulder because I said I don't want to be a Rolfer and I meant it. I thought, 'I don't want to hurt people all day like this.' But I did feel as if I was going to go down the road of some kind of somatic practice. So I said, "I don't want to be a Rolfer but I'd like to learn how to see, so do you think I could audit your training and learn how to see?" And little did I know. I'm sure if I had said, as a twenty-one year old, "Would you train me as a Rolfer?" she would have said, "Come back in five years." So that's what initiated me into the auditing. I want to hear what initiated you (Sharon) into the auditing.

SW: Well, I was hanging around with Hector Prestera, and Hector was a physician. We were playing with John Lily, Dick Price and all these other people. We were on that kind of level, which really was above the run-of-the-mill stuff happening as people came in and out of Esalen. [We] were sort of like upper tier staff. And I had the job of teaching all the massage workshops. Ida wanted to train Hector. She sort of picked him out because he was a physician, and because he was at Esalen. Her comment was that he might have an open mind. That's why she wanted to train him, because she wasn't fond of training doctors. She would say, "there's all this anatomy, so you never get them to see anything, work with anything. You can't train them. They're impossible." So she wasn't looking forward to a physician, but she was looking forward to a possible Esalen physician. We went down to Los Angeles, the class was in Los Angeles, six weeks, eight weeks, whatever it was. And I went down with him to keep him company. The first time I went in, he introduced me to her. She pretty much grabbed me by the arm and we went off to the kitchen to have a cup of tea. Now I didn't have anything to say to her. What am I going to say to her? I'm a complete idiot. I didn't even know how to make tea. She had to do it. I'd never had a cup of tea in my life. [laughter] A cozy on the pot, what? And so she made small talk for a little bit of time; asked me a few questions. It was really sweet. I think she was using me to get away from the class, truthfully, because nothing of any great import went down. And then I went about my business and left the class. But then I was thinking; 'well this work would be more interesting than the massage work that I'm doing because I get to do something. I'm not just doing a pattern all over the body. I'll actually get to do things and that'll be interesting, a lot more interesting than what I'm doing.' I didn't think much more about it though, because with the class that Hector was in she announced that she was taking nobody under twenty-six years old, no more women, nobody under 140 pounds, and no more nonprofessionals. And I do believe she meant Esalen people by saying nonprofessionals.

So, that was me, I was all those things that she didn't want. And I was not thinking that she would put me in class. I was thinking that if she would accept me, then she would send me off to do whatever it was to prepare. She had just sent Jim Asher off to get a college degree, and I thought, 'well that will probably be me.' Like Gael I had dropped out of college. When I got to Esalen I realized it was the best college in the world. I wasn't going to get anything that was better than that, so I quit going to college and went to Esalen. It doesn't count on your resume, but that's what I did. So I thought that maybe she would take me to train up later, when I hit twenty-six and managed to get 140 pounds packed on me. So I asked her if she would train me, and I stood there for a very long time with her looking me up and down. I really came close to bailing on the whole thing; maybe saying, "that's ok, I've changed my mind." She took such a long time. I remember people would say that no matter what she said you'd remember it,

because she had a way of phrasing things. So I thought, 'well I'm just staying right here, because whatever she'll say, I'll remember it the rest of my life, whether she turns me down or accepts me.' She turned to Rosemary [Feitis], who had just started working for her, and she said "I'll train her, put her in the next class" which was in two weeks! That's all! That was it, right there!

I didn't realize I wasn't supposed to know anatomy. She didn't tell me that. I thought I was supposed to read five anatomy books and write her a paper in two weeks. So I started out to do it. But then I realized, reading the first four pages of the anatomy book, [that] to really understand the first four pages you have to read two-thirds of the book. You can't understand it unless you do that. So I wasn't going to get through it very fast. I went up to her (and I swear if I were Ida Rolf I would have really had second thoughts about taking me) because I told her, "Gee Dr Rolf, I'm not going to get that paper written for you on time." And she looked at me and she said, "Well, I didn't think you were. You can write me the paper afterwards." That was a relief. Still, I was trying to get into the anatomy because I thought I'd need it. I didn't know any because Esalen massage used zero anatomy. A head is a head, a foot is a foot. We didn't talk about anything else, right? Just plain simple English. So the next thing you know, two weeks later I was in class, which was a big surprise, and I was with a whole bunch of people who were way more educated and a lot older than me. We had Al Drucker in class, he was an aerospace engineer. We had Hector who was a physician. Fritz Smith was hanging around. He was her model and sat in for all the mornings. And we had a PhD psychologist . . .

GR: Was Peter Levine in there?

SW: No. Peter Levine came around during that class though. He showed up and wrote something for her. She presented him to us, saying: "This man can think." So she thought the world of him right from the beginning and he was sort of a golden boy to some extent.

AH: At that point, was she teaching everything herself or did she have people helping her?

SW: There were no assistants.

GR: She was doing it herself and she was seventy nine years old then. So, I'll catch myself up to that point and then pass the story back. Judith Aston was practicing. Peter Melchior was practicing in my training. Emmett [Hutchins] was auditing. Stacey Mills was around as an unofficial assistant, as well as Dorothy Nolte who was there to mentor Judith Aston as a smaller person. I would go off into a different room in order to learn how to work with children. Meanwhile I was getting the rest of my Ten Series in class. So I was a model sometimes. I was also crying a lot, for who knows what reasons, due to the influence of the work. Yet I started to be able to see. I started to see the models go through changes. I loved the theory. I got really excited about this evolutionary vision. I felt more intelligent sitting in the room with Ida and listening to her talk. And this was particularly gratifying during a, you know, sort of marijuana fog of that moment at Esalen. It was like, "Hey man, are you cool, man? Yeah I'm down with that." [general laughter] So just to be in the room and have a real conversation that went somewhere was food for me intellectually. As the training was coming to an end, I decided I did want to be a Rolfer. I also was seeing people like Peter Melchior or Judith or Dorothy Nolte being much more elegant about this [work]. Not everybody was screaming on the table. So I

screwed up my courage and approached her. Unlike Sharon - very different - I said [little voice] "I'd like to train." She went [slaps her forehead, rolls her eyes] (laughter). That's all she needed to say for me to run out of the room. So I'm sitting on the stoop, out there, and Peter comes out and asks what's wrong I said, "she won't train me." Peter said, "Oh, don't worry. Just hang out... She'll train you". So that was the end of that interaction.

At the end of the training I went back to Esalen and picked up my life there [the training had been in LA]. I was back, engaged in what I was doing and I was sort of forgetting about the whole thing. A couple of months went by, when I got a call from Rosemary who was Ida's secretary. Rosemary said, "Ida would like to know if you would come over and clean her refrigerator." [general peals of laughter in the room] I said, okay. So I went over and I cleaned her refrigerator. Then Rosemary said "Its lunch time, why don't you sit down and have lunch." And so I had lunch and Ida was asking me a lot questions. I don't remember very much, but it was in the vein of "what are you doing here, what are you thinking? What are you interested in? ". The other thing I have to say is that she was very impressed with my father [Huston Smith]. She said "That man speaks the King's English with the golden tongue." She really did want these people who were going to add credibility to the profession; doctors, psychiatrists. What was she suppose to do with these other people like Jan Sultan, Sharon, me, who had no career, no education? So, anyway, I think I slid in a little on my father's coat tails.

AH: Had she met your father?

GR: She had. She had heard him lecture. This is a divergence - There was one night when we were at Esalen and my father was interviewing the Dalai Lama on a video. I was sitting right next to Ida. As we are watching, she does this [pokes me] with her elbow and whispers, " psst - How can he be enlightened with a back like that?" [more laughter] In those days - I don't know - I had nothing to say to her. So anyway, at the end of lunch, she said "So, do you still want to be a Rolfer?" "Yes, yes, I do." She said class starts in two weeks. So that was how I got in.

AH: The test by refrigerator.

GR: The trial by refrigerator cleaning. And everybody was older, and I was petrified. So this is where our stories of how Sharon's relationship with Ida started, and how I was hiding. I was just afraid to open my mouth. I was afraid to say the wrong thing. I was in that deficiency model of "I'm not going to get it right. I don't know." She called me the mouse. She was seeing my terror but somehow tolerating my presence there. So I just sort of got through the way I got through. Maybe she was thinking that at least there were an even number of students in the class. And life would tell which way I went I guess. Or maybe she saw something deeper because in fact I've been very loyal to Roling and to her. I'm going to hand the story back to you, Sharon. So there you are - you're in your practitioner training. . . .

AH: Was your training then at Esalen?

SW: Yeah, I did a Riverhouse class.

GR: Me too, but a different class.

SW: The Riverhouse was in Big Sur, but not at Esalen. We had to travel to it. So yeah, I did my auditing and practicing at the Riverhouse. I didn't get to learn the anatomy between classes either.

GR: And I heard she didn't even like to see you flipping through the anatomy books...

SW: Oh...I wasn't allowed at all. Now the first time I picked up an anatomy book, it was about a week into class, because I just was overwhelmed with trying to see...I wasn't seeing anything particularly and I...well I figured she must have seen something in me and I've been given sort of a pass in my life for various reasons because I'm supposedly a little bit brighter than your average, supposedly. I've often not had to do the things everybody else had to do...I've always gotten a pass because I'm bright. I sort of assumed that maybe she saw something in me, I must have had some quality or she wouldn't have put me in class, right? My thinking was that if I just stayed true to who I am that's what she was after. So if I didn't see anything. Everyone else would say, "oh I saw that." and I would say "umph...didn't see a thing...nothing," you know. I'd be totally honest about it because I figured if I were to say I saw something when I didn't then I would never ever learn. Unless I was absolutely honest I wasn't going to get anywhere because I didn't know anything else. All I had was myself. I had to be straight forward with what I was, so that's how I played it. I didn't hide I was out front and I was absolutely dead honest about what I saw and what I could do. So I remember the first time I saw something change. Ida must have rolled a hip over... something like 3 inches. And I actually grabbed the leg of Bill Williams who was sitting next to me and shook his leg saying, "did you see that! Did you see that!" That was the moment when everything changed for me cause then I started seeing. I couldn't get enough of it. I couldn't stop watching. So whenever she'd work I'd watch extra hard because she was the one getting changes. People would get a little change here and there but she was the one getting change after change. She was unbelievable and I just sat there with my jaw dropped watching her do this stuff.

AH: So it was like something opened up with your seeing

SW: I just saw something shift...and she said "there did you all see that?" and I went "YES! I saw that!" I was so excited and she saw that I saw that. I saw her look at me when I got so excited. So that was the start of my seeing. After that it got so that I knew where she was going next almost every time.

AH: Humm....interesting.

SW: She had a method of working. She would triangulate. She would look first at the places that were in trouble and then she would give the body a little characteristic shove (to GR-remember her giving a kind of shove?) and she'd see what would happen to the reverberation of that shove through the system. So she would set it up in order to triangulate on what was the problem. Then she would head straight for it through the tissue. She'd go after it in various ways. She'd iron out the tissue and work with the tissue and then she'd get that shift. Then she'd give another little shove and if it was good enough for her she'd move on. Then she would pick the next tightest place. She'd pick the next place to work always, over and over. So

when she cleared one there'd be something else and she'd move on to that. So that's how she worked. She had a method to it.

AH: So she was doing a kind of physical assessment to try to triangulate. ...It sounds very much like what you are teaching, Gael.

SW: Yes, she'd move the body. She would have them move. She would watch and she would hang on in order to track as she was working. She would do all kinds of things to get the body to change, most of which has not been passed down very well.

AH: So she didn't talk about this as she did it. People just watched.

SW: Well she named some of her techniques, but people didn't pick them up very well.

GR: And I just want to interject; I don't know what she saw in me. I didn't see clearly like that. She told Judith (Aston) to go develop the movement work and she told me to go train with Judith. So she saw something in me that was about movement I guess. And in spite of my fear. Well I didn't have a good time in school because I am so not visual. I'm very kinesthetic. In Roling training it was so satisfying to me to have a subject talked about intellectually, shown visually, then you get to touch it, then you get to see what it does when it moves. So this walking around the subject and using all my sensibilities was just huge for my learning, such an AH HAH for me, because I wouldn't forget. When I got it, I got it and it was so different than trying to remember all the capitals of all the states. So during the training, I would watch her do this jiggle, this shove, and at first I didn't know what she was doing either. I was too intent on wondering what I would do with my model. But as I relaxed that sense of listening through jiggling, through moving, through testing just started to come back through and started to expand for me. It's really true that it got dropped out of most of the demos in the first decade. It sort of became, I don't know, probably this isn't totally fair but the sense of knowing what you're doing before you even start and the certainty of where you put your hands on and then producing magic was an unspoken template of the mastery of the profession. And so this sense of checking and jiggling seemed like you didn't really know what you were doing. My perception was that laying it out with strategic certainty took some of this play out of the tissue. For me, without the play in the tissue I had only half a deck in terms of information. So it had to come back for me.

AH: So other people, even though they saw her do that, they didn't try to figure out what she was doing.

SW: Most of the time people would pick up a style of working from maybe one or two of her techniques that she used.

AH: OK

SW: When they got that, they understood that and it fit their body type and their personality. Then that's what they would do. For years (although his style is very different now) Jan Sultan, all he did was ironing. He'd go zip up the body like that and Peter would do all this little stuff like this (shows shorter smaller movements) and you'd look at them work together and you'd

go "what the"?? They aren't doing the same thing. (Reference to another teacher that was missed)

SW: He had such large hands and could work such large spaces. You'd sit there and go "I wonder if they are even doing the same thing?" They are talking the same language but they are not working the same at all. There were a couple of those technique things that nobody picked up....the one where you flip back and forth over something, back and forth. People don't know about that and she used that all the time.

GR: She did use that.

SW: I remember I was trying to do it once and I was flailing around and somebody said, "what are you doing?" Because, you know, I don't have any idea what I am doing with this elbow thing - you bounce off it and wobble all over the place and you look like an idiot. I'm thinking- what the heck am I doing? Ida looks up at me and said something like "you look like you don't know what you are doing" and what I said to her was "Dr. Rolf, I'm just trying to do what you do" and she said "well I wish you would". (Peals of laughter from everyone)

SW: that was my first fumbling attempt at trying to flip back and forth through the tissue

AH: it didn't occur to her to try to articulate what she was doing?

SW: She expected you to pick it up and, by God, I did.

GR: There was this sort of blank stare. People would ask, "how do you see it?" Ida would say "Well you just see it." Or will you show me what you're doing..."Well do it already." I am trying to feel back into that time in class. I don't know if it was a conserving of her energy. When I think of what it felt like to teach those Rolfing trainings day after day. The feeling of it, the teaching of it, the lecturing on or during every session. I mean at age 40 it was exhausting for me. So I think that a 79 year old, doing a six week training. WOW! I don't even know how she managed to do that. It must have half killed her every time. So maybe it was just plain conservation of energy. Maybe she had the feeling of..."I'm going to demonstrate it. I'm going to give you the theory. You're gonna have to touch a lot of bodies before you get this. So why waste my breath running around trying to articulate it for people who learn very differently anyway."

SW: I think she experimented with the people she chose train.

AH: Meaning what?

SW: Well she chose people with different backgrounds, people with different abilities, people with different orientations.

AH: Because she'd already had her experiment with chiropractors and osteopaths and that didn't go the way she wanted right?

SW: Well they said it was lovely but it took too long



AH: Yes, so they didn't do Rolfing. They took bits and pieces but they didn't honor what she had created.

GR: So it is interesting that this group of "nere do wells" who didn't have college degrees, were the ones that became so passionate about it. It gave them/us a platform. It gave us a place to be in the world and a livelihood. They were the ones that took it and ran with it. She courted those psychiatrists like crazy.

SW: Oh she was always trying to get somebody with credentials, but Esalen put her on the map and she knew it.

GR: yes

SW: There was one time I was in Boulder and she was talking to us, holding court. We were all sitting around listening to her and this interviewer from - oh I don't know, some big health journal...had finally come around. He wanted to interview her, but she didn't want to talk to him. She said something like "oh you don't want to talk to me I'm an old lady I'm going to die soon. See that nice young man over there. He's going to be one of my teachers. Why don't you go talk to him." So she dumps this guy off. Then she tells us this story of the last interview she'd done with one of these people. It was somebody who had heard the phrase "she was a Victorian and proud of it". Then she gave us the little aside; what she meant by that is that she could stick to it and she worked hard....but the guy interviewing her thought Victorian meant she was prudish. So there she is, the Victorian prude, at Esalen with these naked baths, because that's how you think of Esalen - right? The interviewer kept trying to get this angle that she halfway disapproved of all of us crazy people and she kept dodging it, trying to say something she wanted to say. Finally he got frustrated to the point that he just blurted out "well Dr.Rolf how do you feel about Esalen?" And her reply was "well young man how do you feel about your mother?"

AH: OH!

SW: Wasn't that great? Because she knew that Esalen put her on the map, and what we did, my crew, people that I was associated with at Esalen, Hector Pretera, Al Drucker, Seymore Carter and all those other people that were in that tier. She was invited to walk into group after group and do a lecture /demo. They didn't have a choice (laughter). We just did it to everyone. We did it on a Wednesday when there wasn't anything else happening. We wouldn't take time from the leaders group, but every single group that went through Esalen for about 3 years got a lecture/demo of Rolfing. We didn't do it for business. We weren't interested in Rolfing people. We had more than enough to do. It was that we wanted people to know it was possible to change structure like that if they had interest in it. So that's what we did.

AH: So every group that came in...

SW: we did a lecture/demo

GR: Also Esalen was about the human potential movement, meaning: can a person who is functional enough, not a person who is having breakdowns but someone who is functioning,

can they evolve into a person with greater order and more potential than who they are at this moment? In other words, can you take what you've been given and take the problems out of the way enough in order to become more truly who you are?

SW: So it was so perfect for us.

GR: Yes, and her theory also was also more psychological in a certain way. These days, we've been shunted into the world of physical manipulation by the culture. That sort of compartmentalizing and specialization in our culture has kept that part of her vision out. And then our own institute, in a way, has cooperated with that because

SW: mechanics...

GR: the mechanics of standardizing in order to become a recognized school of body work. We didn't have the leeway. We didn't have the time. We kept putting more students in the program and the whole curriculum got standardized. So, chuuka chuuka chuk, it became like putting people through like a freight train. It was one of the frustrations for me in teaching. It was one of the reasons why I started to step back. For me it was painful to see this burgeoning something which often shows as tears or emotion right close to the surface, but the class structure would demand stuffing it, containing it. We would be too busy trying to move the class through, like OMG we have to end in 15 minutes. We've got to get all these people off the table. So the value of that aspect of the process was de-emphasized.

AH: I'm curious about that in terms of Ida Rolf herself though, because from what I've heard she herself was not that, she was interested in human evolution but in her clients and in her classes what did she do when something like that happened? Because I've heard that she wasn't that interested, but maybe I've heard wrong.

GR: Well I want you to answer this too (SW) but I would say the sparks flew with her work and this was a very particular quality of her work. We can conjecture what was she seeing in there? I believe that she was seeing something more than just the physical. She was seeing the dark places in the psyche and part of her work burst the bubble with that. It would come up over and over again. When she worked with me it would be in my dream life, my emotional life. It would come up on the table or it would get me two days later, I knew it was the Rolfing though.

AH: Ok, so she wasn't addressing it explicitly verbally with you but she was reaching for something in you, so talk about that

GR: Yes, and she would say things that were very evocative...

SW: She was transforming people....and she knew it.

AH: Yes well talk about that...

GR: I often think about Peter Levine and wonder how much of his theories got stimulated from what happened in those classes. Because people would often get activated and some of them would get stuck in there too. It's just interesting to think how much of that collective

experience might have influenced his thinking. So go ahead Sharon. You were on to something.....

SW: yes I just wanted to say that Dr. Rolf was interested in turning out practitioners who not only could take you over to those “outer space places” but could bring the development of the person along. But she was also interested in having people work on the other leg. You could not get way off on something when it started to open up. She wanted you to go for it. But at the same time, you wouldn’t dwell in there forever because you had the responsibility of balancing the body. A lot of Esalen people, that’s what we lived for, those places where things would open up, because not only was it obvious that you could move through your personal history and your emotional history, but you came out physically different, emotionally different, you WERE different. That’s the thing. There was no question about Roling changing you down through every aspect of you so this was what was so wonderful about it. I remember in the second practitioner class I did, we were doing 4th hours. Somebody had had a shoestring football tackle where his lower leg was all wrecked and they did a bunch of work on him. He was a very muscular man and he stands up at the end and Dr. Rolf said “there! There’s no such thing as psychology...there’s only physiology”. It was kind of a dope slap for the Esalen people in the room. (there were always a few) and this was a class at Esalen. Well the next session that we did on this person - OMG it hit the fan .The brother had caused the problem and his mother had always let him get away with everything and all the family dynamics come out...there were tears. There was anger. There was rage and all kinds of emotion flying all over the place in that session. Then at the end of the session he stands up and Dr. Rolf said to the group in this little voice....that there was no such thing as physiology there was only psychology. (Lots of laughter)

AH: and this was the same client for both of those?

SW: yes and in the same period of time. Then she went on to say it was important for the person to get the understanding of the history because with the understanding of the history coming to consciousness, it changed the physical structure. So it wasn’t that she was against having the psychological reaction, it’s that she was trying to train people to finish the job and not get stuck in there. Because at that time, all we were interested in was the process. Wee! It’s such fun to go back and be two years old, and it is, it is great fun to re-live things. But you also have the other aspect of the responsibility of building a decent body and I think that’s what she was trying to get across more than anything else

AH: Umm...that’s great. So I’m curious for the both of you to talk about, you mentioned in the class today, Gael, that she had this amazing gift to hone in and see something and to go right there. But then at the same time she also developed this recipe. So what do you think?

GR: In class, she said the work came first, 40 years worth, and the theory came after that. She would tell these little anecdotes in class and it was interesting, they just popped up as she would work and she would be talking about little chapters in her life. It was very interesting. They weren’t pulled together coherently. Even in books about her there is some part of her life that was, I don’t want to say secretive, but very private and very deliberately held back. She would also say that Reich had gotten put away for thinking and experimenting in the directions

that she was thinking and experimenting. This was a very different era. I often have wondered why we never asked or why she never told more of the story of how it started for her. I would have liked to hear that.

This is where it took me next, and this is what developed next and I never heard that history from her.

AH: you know when I lived on Maui I had a woman client and in the first session she was talking about she was Ida Rolf's astrologer, and I'm like what! She said "yah, I knew Ida Rolf toward the last years, I met her in New York, went to somebody's house and I did astrology". (her name is Diane something. it's starting to come to me) I interviewed her at one point for the journal, it was some years back. But she said that Ida Rolf said to her that Rolfig came in from ancient Egypt

GR yes...

AH: so like who knows where she felt it came from but maby, like you said with the whole thing with Reich and everything else and being a scientist, maby she just didn't want to talk about things that were in that area.

SW: she said in one of her classes that the reason she didn't tell anybody about her personal history, and people would ask, was that she didn't want to become a cult figure. She didn't want people knowing about her early history and her early days and how she figured it all out. But she did tell a couple stories..

GR: yes...she did tell stories

SW: She'd tell stories and she taught by telling stories. She didn't really speak anatomy and physiology, that's the truth. She taught by stories and by example.

GR: Little Johnnie, that would often start her stories. So little Johnny really liked his father and he's going to walk like his father-and that's how the story would go...

SW: very homey, very kitchen table kind of stuff, nothing that was out of reach. She didn't try to snow you with words.

AH: So that's how she was presenting, but from your observations of her, what do you think she was actually seeing and doing herself?

GR: Do you mean when she would hone in like that?

AH: Yes, when she would hone in or those stories about her seeing things from across the room?

SW: Oh she'd do that all the time....

GR: Sharon you should talk more about this because you mentioned in class today her sense of "seeing" an event carved into the tissue....

SW: She could see the age that it happened. She could pretty much tell what the accident was, and it was amazing. She'd just go over to someone that she didn't really know, didn't know the history, and she'd say, "Tell me about the bicycle accident you had when you were 5 years old". And they would.

AH: hummm

SW: She knew things...she was interesting. I've come to understand more and more how she did that because there are only a certain number of things it could be. Particularly in her generation, there were bicycles, you know, bicycles, horses, and cars. Those were fairly typical activities that people would get into trouble with, so I can understand that.

GR: But I'm going to interject with another story. There was this guy who got into the process of catharting. He was carrying on in the style of that era of Esalen. He crying and carrying on about his father or somebody who had either strangled him or shook him as a crying baby. She (Dr. Rolf) said "Well, any baby that cries for that many hours straight deserves what he gets". (Gasps and noises from all) Where did that come from? It was not exactly a sympathetic response.

SW: chuckle...Well she wasn't all warm and fuzzy all the time

GR: No, but there was also that sense of - if you're going to carry on and carry on and exhaust us all...

SW: She shut you down.

GR: But where did that comment come from, a comment about that many years ago and his history or story? And then there was a playful side of her, like that first time she worked on my feet she sort of slapped them. She said, "These feet look like they were bound". But, you know, I was a kid who wore the big Buster Brown shoes. I hated to have my feet squeezed in anyway. But as I lay on the table I had this, I don't know what, but it felt like a past life recall or a lucid dream: the quality of the light, who I was, where I was in society. I don't know where that stuff came from but it came up when she was working on me and not really much since. Here is another little anecdote about. I think this was Roselyn Brierre who was on her table. I think it was her, not sure. But Ida was Rolfig her and Roselyn said "I remember you. You were the torturer that worked for the palace in China." And Ida said "Right, and you were the empress I worked for". (Pearly laughter from everyone)

GR: And you know, while it was light and playful there was a sense of other carnations, of other Karma coming in. Did you have any indications of that from her?

SW: ...Not personally but I remember one episode in the last class she did back in Philadelphia. Mary Staggs was standing up and we were using her as an example for looking at something. Ida was asking this psychic fellow if he saw anything around her and she (Dr Rolf) went over and grabbed Mary from the ribcage and shook her and said "here". Poor Mary's going all over the place because Dr. Rolf had her at the center of something important. Turns out that that particular spot was, from Mary's perspective, a past life where she had been stabbed. So you

just never know what would come out and these kinds of things would come up and Dr. Rolf would just roll right with it.

AH: She had no way to guide you, as students, into that?

SW: No, but she did it all the time. She did those kinds of things all the time. She would just get down to the bottom of whatever episode was in your life and there you'd be.

AH: Ok...so she would see something, but then it sounds like...tell me what you would think was going on? She would see something and then she would do this triangulation. I'm trying to get a much understanding as I can about how she worked.

GR: Triangulating?

AH: Yes she would triangulate into the tissue...

SW: She would give these little shoves and stuff.

AH: like once she had a general area she knew something was there then would she triangulate?

SW: She'd see it first, then she would go over and put her hand on it and then she'd give the body a little shove to see which way it went and then she'd line herself up and work.

AH: OK SW: And then when it gave, she'd give it another little shove and look at it and she'd say "ok,now there", and then she'd work over there.

AH: So the triangulation was less about where to work than the direction of how to work?

SW: The triangulation is like exactly where to work, it's absolutely the direct vector in.

AH: But ok she would see the general area but the triangulation was how to

SW: It was how to line it up...how to get to what she was seeing. She would make it so that she could get to what she saw, as opposed to just taking the first thing under your hand. Like Gael was showing you: A touch that shows the whole pattern and then working with the whole pattern, as opposed to working locally. Whatever she grabbed a hold of it went everywhere.

GR: There was another other aspect that was different about how she worked that we don't tend to do anymore. When she got on, let's say, the apex of something, she hung in there. She was like a dog on a bone. And she didn't care if you were squirming and protesting. You know during my first session I think she went up to her third knuckle around my solar plexus, right into my diaphragm. I was like the pinned bug. Just like eahhhh... I felt like I couldn't breathe and she didn't care....

SW: didn't phase her in the least..

GR: It didn't phase her in the least. She was on it. She knew she was on it. She knew what she was going for. There was no uncertainty, and she didn't care if you were going to be

uncomfortable in the process. Then she'd be done and she'd take her fingers out and there'd be these floods of relief, floods of information would come through. So we in this work, in our field have gotten a little more, how would you say it - we don't push people that way.

SW: No we don't at all.

AH: Do you think it's because we don't have the same certainty?

GR: In part not the same certainty. But I also think we want the sense of keeping people feeling safe and I think we have more trepidation about pushing people over edges. I'm not sure. I really don't know, I haven't thought about it.

SW: I have people who go there. I have clients who go into those spaces on a regular basis. I do. Then I've got people who, well it just doesn't feel good over here can you do something about that. I'll take them both on but I really love working with the people who will go sort of into crisis.

AH: Do you have the same certainty?

SW: yep

AH: humm talk about that

SW: I know when I've got it, and people don't care what the sensation is when you have it.

AH: How do you know when you have it?

SW: You just have the whole body in your hand. You've got control of everything from that spot. You've got everything. You give it a little shake and the entire system responds. That's how you really know you are on something very very key, something fundamental and foundational in that body that will transform that person all the way through. Because that's what she (Dr. Rolf) was after.

GR: So you're saying that when you feel that you hang in there and even if they're starting to sweat and..?

SW: It's ok with me...if it's ok with them. Now it's ok with these people, to go there. They want to go there. They're looking for me to go there and not to back off. They say don't give up and I don't give up. I stay with them and take them through until it goes somehow. You know what Ida said "If you allow them to outwait you, holding on, waiting for you to go away. If you quit before you get it, then they'll just wait for you to go away because they know they can outlast you. So you've got to let them know that you're not going to quit. "

GR: OK so this is really interesting for me to listen to. I realize that, as I said, I haven't really thought about it. I took Peter Levine's training and I love that map. I think it's really elegant. But what I've learned here, (and it was also shaped by being in Rolfing classes) was not to "go there" when you are on the clock. I'm just thinking about the session I did with Clair. I saw her

face getting redder and ah um it was all coming up to a head. I backed off and I gave her space in order to let her calm back down again, That's very much the influence of the trauma map.

AH: and there were 10 minutes before she had to leave

GR: and it was 10 minutes before she had to leave, so I was on the clock again. Still, it's evocative for me to hear you say that, Sharon, because I realize that is not always my situation. Yet that has become my habit, like "oooh it's heating up here-we're getting into high ranges of activation." And just by habit now I start to slow down and back off. Maybe I need to rethink that sometimes in terms of who am I working with, what are they after, what do they want?

SW: Because for some people that's what they're there for.

AH: How do you know that Sharon? Is it from the conversation you've had with them about why they are in your office or is it from something else? Or is it in the moment you can ask them, or they can tell you, or you can feel it?

SW: When you go in and you hit those levels, people let you know that that's really a good place for you to be. It really hurts but they really want you in there-right?-and what they don't want. They try to communicate with you that they are uncomfortable but don't stop. "Don't give up on that. You need to get that for me." And I need to be free to do whatever I need to do to be able to go there. So they want me in there and it's the bargain we make. I put them thru it but they want to go through it because that's what gives them the freedom and release on the other side and that's what they're really after. They say "I don't care how much you hurt me" and I say "yeah well I care". I care so, you know, I'm not going to just, you know, be crazy. I'll be reasonable about it, but at the same time I don't back off because that's why they're there.

AH: This is again something where societally there's been a shift. Where probably if you were working a Esalen back in the day you could count on that expectation from pretty much anyone who walked in your door, by the fact that they were there...

GR: yes

SW: But that was the nature of what people were exploring. It's like when I get work, I go back to being whatever the heck age it was. I re-live things. I see things in living color. I can feel the sunlight on my skin. I can hear what was said again, even if I was 2 months old, I get this replay. It's incredible, I love going there, but there's very very very few people who do that...very few. Usually they get a little flash, a little something but they don't re-live like I do in color. It's like being in the movie and watching at the same time. That's how vivid it is for me and it transports me to another state of consciousness.

GR: Well it is interesting, because that happened for me a whole lot in the first 10 series. It happened for me I'd say for 15 years or maybe two decades that my sessions had, a potential for a journey in there. And, something did shift. It felt like something shifted in the culture at the same time. So there was a period of time in the late 70's, for example, that every fourth woman on my table was recalling some kind of sexual abuse. It was all over the place, and then it stopped happening. And it's not as if I don't get women who've had sexual abuse. it's just



that they are more likely to say, "that happened, I've handled it, I'm not interested in it let's do the session." It does feel like a cultural shift rather than the style or intent of my work. It feels as if there was a context that shifted away from going through those journeys to see what was in it.

AH: Well you see that in so many other fields now too. Like so many psychologists don't even say they're psychologists anymore. They say they are coaches. They can't find clients who want to do psychology or want to do psycho-analysis. They get people who want to do behavioral modification, brief therapy, or who want to be coached. You know there's something in the culture; not as many people want to dive as deeply. That's what it looks like to me. I wasn't there in the 60's but I kind of felt the tail end of the wave crest and I'm like - something big happened there. And I missed that wave. It receded away from the culture. There's still people who go there, but it's not one of the main...

GR: No, and also, there was a learning curve in that. When all these cathartic therapies came and went, the primal scream and the pounding on everything. Now we're in a different model of unwinding, titrating, and not reliving an event. In the culture, it gets passed on, even if you weren't there or even if you didn't study it. Back in those days at Esalen it was considered kind of cool to have a psychotic break...

AH: laughing

SW: No it's true.

GR: I remember my husband at the time was fasting on mushroom tea, you know, psychedelic mushroom tea. There were people having these psychotic breaks and I remember telling him "You are not going there! I'm not going to baby sit you while you go down that road." But you remember, Sharon? People were being baby sat while they were having their psychotic breaks...

SW: And we were the ones babysitting....Hector was a doctor.

GR: The experiment was: let's push the edge and let's fall apart and let's pick up the pieces on the other side. And there was leeway to do it. People had the leisure. I think we are way off topic...

SW: Esalen was not as expensive as it is now....

GR: right. That's right

AH: So something was learned about edges that was important but maybe at the same time the culture as a whole backed away from interest in it...

GR: Or, or was it you today? Somebody in class was just saying that people are too much at a survival level, making their lives fit together and working to make enough money and get all the pieces....

SW: There are no longer families where one guy can make enough to keep everyone going. Both parents have to work. The kid has to go to work. I mean seriously, there's no disposable income and leisure and Esalen itself is ridiculously expensive..

GR: So yeah, I think this tempers where people are willing to go inside of our work.

SW: You use to be able to go to Esalen, room and board and your workshop, and you'd pay about the same price as you would pay for just a hotel, a medium priced hotel. And you'd get everything food, lodging, the best kind of workshop. It was fantastic. It was quite an experience. That's why everyone called it experiencing Esalen because it was for everyone. You could go there with nothing, like Gael came, a lot of people just showed up at Esalen and stayed and there was room for them. There was housing and there was a way to fit into the whole thing. Now, good Lord, there's hardly any staff housing at Esalen. Everybody's up on the top of the mountain. You have to commute but still you don't get paid. It's crazy. Gawd almighty the place where I used to live now rents for \$1000 a nite! You gotta be kidding me...who can go to Esalen?

GR: I think we're coming up on an hour?

AH: Yeah. Let's just wind down. Let's go back to, I want to hear a little more about how Ida worked and how you work from what you imbibed from her. In this class people were hungry for that. People have done all the classes on different particulars, different other modalities that we're bringing in and integrating. But in the opening circle of this class, I really felt that people are hungry for this integrated fascia piece that incorporates the particulars; what you call the local issues being seen within the context of the whole pattern. And (Gael) you're doing that with your spirals. It sounds like you are saying that's what Ida Rolf could see, the local that includes the whole in the grasp of it?

GR: Yes.

SW: Ida only messed with things that went global. She didn't mess with the local too much.

AH: yeah yeah you were talking about local touch that snags the fabric.

GR: One of the things that's been rich in this class for me has been watching Sharon work. I can see Ida's work in Sharon's work very very much. And yet, I express it differently some how.

SW: I can see Ida Rolf's hands in you too. Ed Maupin's hands.... I can see Ida Rolf in his hands. It's so cool. There she is...

GR: I hope they're not all knarly

SW: No no, not that. It's good.

GR: The expression of Sharon in her work is fairly different than me, but we're both really cut from the same cloth. As you said, Sharon, how Peter worked and how that looks different than Jan, how that's different than Jim and different than Emmett etc. It's just interesting that we all carry a piece of her and it comes through our personality when it comes through. And it's

touching for me because I'm living now with Emilie Conrad's death in our community. I am feeling acutely that there isn't any one of us that can replicate Emilie. It's in the collaboration that we carry the breadth of the work. And for whatever reason I'm feeling a resurgence of that desire, not just to go back to the basics, but to collaborate. How can we take this wisdom and take the whole conversation up a level through the experience that we share, but that comes through us very differently?

AH: Humm [pause] and what had to get out of the way?

GR: Ida's shadow, which this organization has dealt with for a very long time. That sense of never quite being good enough, never quite arriving. Rolfing as a competitive art. I mean that was in her classes. There was a hierarchy. It was not easy to feel empowered -to be empowered by her. She didn't hand out a lot of praise.

SW: She did to me

GR: She did to you? So then you should say something about that because that was unusual.

SW: It was very unusual not to make you go sit down and have somebody else come take over, she did that to almost everybody. She never did it to me. Not ever, not once. She always let me have extra time. You know in my sense of what Ida Rolf was, she was probably the kindest person I ever knew. Because who else is going to jump down in there with you in the garbage and pull you out. She would do that for you, and nobody else could or would. You know she was amazing.

GR: And she saw something in you and she brought it forward and that's such a gift

SW: She could have crushed me with one word. I was that fragile, I really think so. She could have just completely derailed me and I'd have been in the corner crying. I would have just fallen apart if she'd done that, I think. But she never did.

GR: And she called me the mouse and she didn't give me a lot of praise but she also didn't squash me, so...

SW: But she was very very kind to me, and you don't hear people saying that. But I loved her dearly and what I did to try to repay her was to try to make the environment nice. I cleaned the classrooms, I cleaned the refrigerator, I straightened up all the sheets. She hated the sheets being crooked so I would straighten the sheets for her. I made it go as smoothly as possible. I guarded her nap times and NOBODY could get in there, no one could wake her up. So I took care of her that way and she talked to me occasionally about how she was feeling and what was going on for her. I felt very privileged.

GR: Yeah, it's beautiful.

SW: But you know, I really loved her.

GR: I regret that I didn't go find her five years into the work, ten years into the work when I had a chance. What would I have seen then? I was hiding out, afraid of her criticism. So that was my own chicken. I owe it to Peter Melchior and Tom Wing, who invited me in.

SW: To me it was a grand adventure. You sort of jumped off the cliff and you didn't know where you would come down, but you knew you'd come down someplace. But it was, in a sense, the act of jumping. The leap of faith into this world.

AH: That's a good ending.

GR: (softly/wistfully) yes.

SW: yes, that's fine

AH: Thank you both.