

At 55 years old I still have some of the old traits I did as a toddler. I'm graceless, uncoordinated, a perfectly splendid klutz. And not surprisingly, I have a myriad of physical aches and pains. Tendonitis. Herniated discs. Lyme Disease. Multiple Sclerosis. So you can imagine the high hopes I had for Alexander Technique. Together with Mary, I would not only become as lithe and athletic as a ballerina, but my aches and pains would disappear and I would be magically cured of all my diseases.

I wasn't totally ignorant of the technique. Many of my friends in the dance and theater worlds spoke of it reverently. I even had a session once about a decade ago with an instructor who told me my posture was "incorrect." But when she twisted me into the proper position I felt like a pretzel.

This time it was different. Mary explained to me that we don't "naturally" know how to walk and sit, but rather, we need to be taught. She shared articles with me, pulled out little figures of different animals and in general made me believe that I too, one day with intention and practice, could walk and sit and move without pain or damaging my body. And whenever I felt doubtful about her claim, I reminded myself that Mary lived with a broken back and Alexander Technique had helped her live with minimal pain.

So what were my take aways? First I had an hour every week just for me. There are no words to describe the beauty of that. I came into a soothingly simple and peaceful room just to work on myself. I learned that I did not have to be an athlete or remain a klutz. I learned that simple movements requiring deep thought, could over time, change the health of my body. I learned that even though I longed to close my eyes when I was doing "table work" I had to stay wakeful, which I hated, but agreed to. And I learned the much bigger picture of Alexander, which is the connection I feel it has to uncovering the real "me."

Mary explained that there were no wrongs, no mistakes no perfection no "I'm sorrys" needed when I didn't move the way I wanted. I learned to rearrange my working surfaces so that my desk bended to my will, rather than the other way around. And even though I am typing this now, in a "bad for me" position, at least I know that's the reason I'm experiencing a twinge in my neck.

So here's the bottom line: Alexander Technique has made me more intentional, more aware and more peaceful. It also reminds me that I don't necessarily need surgery or medicine to feel better.

And it reaffirmed what I always suspected: Mary Padilla is a lot more than a vet. I will continue to practice the gift she gave me.

—Meredith Berlin