

ALEXANDER NEWSLETTER JUNE 2004

THIS NEWSLETTER IS FOR PEOPLE - AND HORSES - EVERYWHERE WHO ARE WILLING TO LEARN THROUGH NEW EXPERIENCES.

WE GROW THROUGH YOUR RECOMMENDATION - PLEASE FORWARD THIS NEWSLETTER TO A FEW FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES.

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1. Celebrating the Centenary of the Alexander Technique

This month marks the Centenary of the Alexander Technique being taught in the UK. Neither STAT, the AT governing body, nor the majority of AT teachers favour the notion of thinking of balloons attached to a pupil's head to somehow lengthen their spine, yet all of us teachers have been issued with 2 balloons each and 2 badges, with which to promote the Technique.

Madelene and Annie have spent long hours agonising over how we can make the most capital from these awesome marketing tools. Should we bungee jump down the so-called 'Gherkin' in the City with a balloon attached to each ear? Should we streak through Euro 2004 and/or Wimbledon matches clad only in two (purple) balloons and a couple of badges -probably best attached to our trainers? All (kindly) suggestions will be welcome.

Until we come up with some truly arresting idea, we have decided that the best way that we can promote the Alexander Technique is to offer discounted £10 introductory lessons to people who contact us to book between June 7 and June 13. (Contact details are: Madelene: madelene.webb@virgin.net, Mobile: 07939 347099; Annie: email@annie-kaszina.com, Mobile 07712 924124.

The actual lesson can be taken any time before September 2004. So, please notify friends and colleagues who have been thinking about trying the Alexander Technique that there will never be a better time.

Who knows, your energetic advocacy of the AT could even win you an historic purple balloon and a collector's item badge?

2. An Alexander Learning Curve

This week saw a new pupil accompanied to her first lesson with Alexander teacher X (name withheld in the interest of confidentiality) by her partner. Now this happens not uncommonly, although there tends not to be anywhere to 'put' a partner in the average teaching room, nor a great deal of action for them to observe.

In this case the surprise was that the partner was a spectacularly macho looking gentleman, with reflecting shades, shaven head, combats, biker's boots and the unmistakable upper body development of the body builder. He looked like he could stride into any bar, however rough, and a hush would instantly fall.

Well, Alexander teacher X's habitual professional calm was initially ruffled, but the lesson proceeded. What transpired was a series of small revelations. The gentleman in question stood as he did because of severe back pain of his own. A very keen observer of what went on, he was impressed at how non-invasive Alexander work is and quick to notice the immediate benefits to his partner. He also showed exceptional care and consideration towards her and regard towards the teacher.

The moral of this story? The hackneyed one is obviously: you can't tell a book by looking at its cover. Nor can you.

The Alexander learning to be taken from it was more about how ill we serve ourselves by relying on what we think we know. Our 'knowledge' is a partial affair, often a ragbag of ideas, experiences and notions picked up along the way - which may well be true, as far as they go, but incomplete. So not only do we keep doing things and thinking about things the way we always have, we assume, on the strength of experience, that that is all there is.

In his book 'Selling the Invisible', Harry Beckwith observes: 'What does experience really prove? Usually, far less than you thought.... Have a healthy distrust of what experience has taught you.' As Alexander teacher X found, yet again, it's too easy to let what you 'know' keep you from finding out all the profoundly useful and inspiring things you have yet to learn.

F.M. Alexander had a healthy distrust of what experience had taught both him and his medical advisors. Over the last 100 years, tens of thousands of people have cause to be grateful that he had.

3. The experience of a lifetime.

A travel agent looked up from his desk to see an older lady and an older gentleman peering in the shop window at the posters showing the glamorous destinations around the world.

The agent had had a good week and the dejected couple looking in the window gave him a rare feeling of generosity. He called them into his shop and said, "I know that on your pension you could never hope to have a holiday, so I am sending you off to a fabulous resort at my expense, and I won't take no for an answer."

He took them inside and asked his secretary to write two flight tickets and book a room in a five star hotel. Every time the couple tried to say something, the travel agent hushed them and said no thanks was necessary. He just wanted to do something nice for them.

About a month later the little lady came in to his shop. "And how did you like your holiday?" he asked eagerly.

"The flight was exciting and the room was lovely," she said. "I've come to thank you. But, one thing puzzled me. Who was that old guy I had to share the room with?"

In the Coaching world they're called 'tolerations'. How many tolerations are you putting up with firstly because you didn't know that's what they were, and secondly, because you didn't know you didn't need to.

4. The Alexander Technique for riders by Karena Gomez

A passionate horsewoman, Karena has kindly contributed an article about the enormous difference the AT has made to her riding and her horses.

The first step on my riding career was when a friend asked me to ride out on an elderly ex-hunter with her, this was about 6 years ago now! I became totally hooked and zoomed around the countryside on Hector and a couple of other horses, culminating in the purchase of my own horse, Flicka two and a half years ago.

Flicka had a very severe ligament strain four weeks after I bought her. Apparently this is not uncommon when a horse is sold, especially if the horse has sussed out that you will love and care for them even through the bad times! Flicka came to me for a well-deserved rest and recuperation after being used to play polocrosse for the past 10 years.

Not to take too long over the story of how I got into the Alexander technique in the first place, which is kind of the story as to why it has helped me immensely too. **Flicka's injury caused me to spend a lot of time understanding how and why lameness is caused. This led me to the point where I began to understand that the way a horse is ridden, how the rider sits etc. has a huge impact on the horse. If things aren't working as well as they should, then the horse finds it more difficult to stay sound and injury-free.**

I was introduced to a fantastic riding instructor who trains with Mary Wanless, inventor of the Ride With Your Mind, (RWYM) technique. Mary has spent years researching how we as riders impact on our horses positively and negatively and how we can modify this negative impact by changing how we ride. So, I started to have lessons and quickly realised that I had a hollow back, a wobbly

middle, and that I also looked as if I 'had no bones'! After getting over the shock that my mount and I looked more like the Thelwell cartoons than Kyra Kurklund, I started to make improvements with my riding. Another Mary Wanless instructor suggested that with some Alexander lessons, I could make changes much faster and more effectively. Hence my visit to Annie.

Six months later, what is the difference? I would very much like to show you before and after photos as I look very, very different. I now also have two horses, the original Flicka and a youngster, Molly, and Molly and I look like a 'grown-up' Thelwell together! I have a straighter back- and I use my stomach, my bottom has muscles and I can use my hands, elbows, shoulders, knees, ankles and thighs pretty much independently of each other. The situation before was that giving my hand meant that my whole body came too!

What is most amazing though is that both Molly, and now Flicka, mirror these improvements in me! As my body awareness and actions have improved, so have theirs.

Safety has also been a key concern since I got Molly, who didn't realise that the rider was meant to stay on, even if she disagreed with their instructions! The Alexander Technique, combined with my RWYM lessons, has helped me to develop a much more secure seat. When you are riding a young horse that wants to test the limits of your ability this can be life saving. It has also helped Molly to learn that she can voice her opinion, but I'm not always going to listen to it!

Which brings me full circle to the reason why I started to consider the impact my riding - and the riding of others over the years - had on Flicka. She had a severe injury, which could have been prevented if she had been ridden more efficiently from the start. There were other mitigating factors, a badly fitting saddle, and poor conformation, but the riding played a big part.

Now, with the Alexander Technique and some effective riding lessons, I have got to the point where my riding isn't putting more strain on Flicka. Indeed it is starting to help her to lift her back up and to use her topline rather than carrying me in the hollow of her back.

My horses are very precious to me, and unlike most people I spent a lot of time considering whether riding was actually the 'right thing to do'. Horses after all are not bio-mechanically designed to be ridden. However I believe they do enjoy it - especially when you are doing fun things! For me knowing that my riding was not contributing to future strains, pain and injury for my horses was a really important goal.

Becky Chapman, my riding instructor uses the term 'ethical riding', which I think is so true, and the Alexander technique complements this ideally. The concept of balance, 'connectivity' and economy of activity, as well as the physical embodiment of the technique has added immense satisfaction and enjoyment to my riding.

5. Forthcoming events

Madelene will be running an Alexander Technique Introductory class on Saturday June 12 from 3pm until 6pm at Shine Holistic, 52 Stoke Newington Church Street, N16. Call 07939 347099 or Shine on 7241 5033 for more information.

Have a great June and spare a thought for FM Alexander's discovery: 'We can throw away the habit of a lifetime in a few minutes if we use our brains.'

Annie and Madelene

To receive 50 Top Alexander Tips or to subscribe to this free e-newsletter email:

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