

# Memories of an Exceptional Pioneer

By Richard Demmerle Ph.D., D.C., D.N.

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**B**efore I begin this trip down memory lane, it is important to note that Ida Pauline Rolf was born in Bronx, New York on May 19, 1896. She attended public school in New York. She was an exceptional student, being accepted by Barnard College for Women in her late teens.

After she graduated Cum Laude with a Ph.D. in Biochemistry in 1921, she accepted a position with the Rockefeller Institute for Biological Research, working herself up to the position of assistant. She also undertook studies at the Eidgenossiches Technical Hochschule in Zürich, Switzerland, and studied homeopathy in Geneva. She continued studies at the University of Heidelberg in Germany, and also the Pasteur Institute in Paris. The main thrust of her research was in the field of polysaccharides and proteins. This covers her academic studies.

Many people have asked me just how I became involved with the healing profession. I seriously doubt if they can understand my answer. I was literally hand-picked and groomed for it. I had other yearnings, however, and these were not taken seriously, hence they were not fulfilled.

As a child I was exposed to a highly intuitive osteopathic healer. He was blind; therefore his touch was exceptionally sensitive. During my formative years, I was never exposed to the orthodox medical profession. For Ida Rolf, it was clear that homeopathy was the approach of choice, so this was what I have been raised on.

It seems as I look back, I was somehow chosen to bring a certain "incurable" situation into the world. Now the term "incurable", is the word I use, to designate the fact that it could not be fully understood by the then "medical world". They were quick to give it a label called "hyperkinesis". This describes the fact that all activities that require fine balance tend to be avoided or ruled out.

This was evidenced in gymnastics in elementary school. I avoided such activities simply because I felt extremely ungainly, uncoordinated and very unsafe. I was often singled out, becoming the recipient of very painful jesting and ridicule.

My mother, Ida Rolf, took me here and there searching for a resolution to this most unpleasant burden. She investigated many approaches, the manipulative form of osteopathy, nutrition, exercise systems, etc. However their promises were not fulfilled. It is certain that she spent many a sleepless night over my condition. I am almost certain that this was the motivation to look to creating some form of treatment which was up to then unavailable.

In her quest, her attention was focused on the subtle movements of the body. What could be the disturbing factor? This situation dragged on for years, until I was fourteen or so. We traveled to California for a year, so that she could study with Amy Cochran, who had a system called "Physio-synthesis". This was a system of exercises. While here, we went on weekend excursions to the mountains, and the canyons, the shore, and of course the desert. It was an exciting time. She spent days under the tutelage of this white-haired woman, and evenings she went to The Los Angeles Chiropractic School, studying anatomy with a very astute teacher Dr. Arthur Nilson. It is amusing that I studied under him also in the late 1950s.

We returned East in 1944. She had at this time begun to work with clients at home. I can almost hear her now, the voice which could not be ignored. I was usually busy with school work. The command was very direct: "Come, I need your help!" I was to offer her my strength in order to complete the necessary work on her client.

And so began my tutelage in the field of

Structural Dynamics, later changed to Structural Integration, and which underwent a further metamorphosis to be known now as "Rolfing"<sup>®</sup>.

Of course back in the 40s and 50s, it was known as Structural Dynamics. My tutelage continued all through high school. I graduated and then I took an extensive massage course, lasting one year. After my military service I entered the Los Angeles College of Chiropractic (LACC).

Dr. Rolf stood behind the idea of my being a healer, and naturally, she was hoping that I would be accepted into medical school. I was absolutely convinced that the manipulative profession was for me. I chose freely to enter chiropractic school. I obtained my degree from LACC, as well as a degree in the field of natural medicine from Sierra States University in Los Angeles. I am sure that she had a hard time coming to terms with the fact that her son was a chiropractor, and not a D.O. or M.D.

I accompanied her on many of her teaching trips. The first class that I attended was while I was stationed in Los Angeles in 1953. I was called on numerous times to show the physicians what she perceived. I felt very awkward, for here I was, with only a massage diploma, showing these highly trained physicians how to "see", as well as get in manually to get the job done. It was an interesting time.

One of the instances which convinced me of the manipulative profession of Rolfing<sup>®</sup> was the case of a man who had plummeted ten stories down an elevator shaft, coming away with only compressed joints. He walked away from his treatments able to resume his profession as a steelworker. This was an eye opener to all the physicians in the class. I recall a case of an elderly man, whose hobby was trap shooting. The results of the recoil of the shotgun were hard to

miss. His chest was caved in, resulting in the appearance of a man considerably older. He walked out much more erect, and needless to say his structure was more capable of supporting him.

I had just graduated from LACC, when I received a call from New York, telling me I should return, to manage her practice while she was away. So, her obedient son returned, and remained on the East Coast until 1979.

I attended many classes as co-instructor, the first being in London in 1957. Our teaching methods differed, and she found it difficult to understand my approach. I also conducted classes on the East Coast, New Jersey, Florida, as well as in Big Sur, California and Boulder, Colorado.

As I have said, she made many trips, throughout the U.S. and regularly to England during the hot summer months. She had a very difficult time dealing with the sweltering streets of New York. Her unsung saving grace was minding her practice. At her request, I was called upon to restore balance to her physical system, which had been sacrificed during her classes. She was teaching classes in Kansas City, Nebraska, when an architect visited her with a specific problem with walking. He followed her around the country, to each city where she conducted classes. He wrote a testimonial in which he stated, "It is odd that a man of fifty years should have to learn to walk all over again!"

Ida Rolf spent an incredible number of hours reading journals, books and all sorts of unorthodox material concerning healing. She had memberships with many fringe groups, i.e. psychic organizations, etc.

There are two very special events to which I owe her my sincere gratitude. I attended a seminar at Columbia University given by a Dr. Myers, a neurologist and semanticist. He was able to clear some of the confusion in my mind remaining from my chiropractic training. The second seminar was given by the General Semantics Society, having to do with the basics of communication. All was not easy with this demanding genius, searching for recognition. I pleaded with her many times to let me take over some of her pet research projects in California. I was flatly turned down, with the excuse I had a small family to raise, and this hit me very hard.

However, I was a staunch supporter of

the underlying principles of Rolfing then, and even though I am no longer in active practice, my belief is still as strong, if not stronger. I conducted two projects, which served to validate these principles, one was with a group of Brain Injured Children<sup>1</sup>, and the second was with an industrial management group. The results were astounding to those participating, however not to me, so strong was my conviction of the premises. I thank my mother, for being who she was, and – in spite of some inner resistance on my part – for grooming me for her work, even though it was incredibly taxing at times. She was one of those people who would not accept "it can't be done", she always found a way. This characteristic is one which I still truly appreciate.

Both my brother Alan and I feel honored to be participating in this Fascial Congress. It truly is a milestone for understanding scientifically the basis for the technique known as Rolfing. This symposium is the epitome, in my mind, as far as official recognition of Ida Rolf's work is concerned.

### NOTES

1. Project Breakthrough. Foundation for Brain Injured Children, NYC, 1963.