

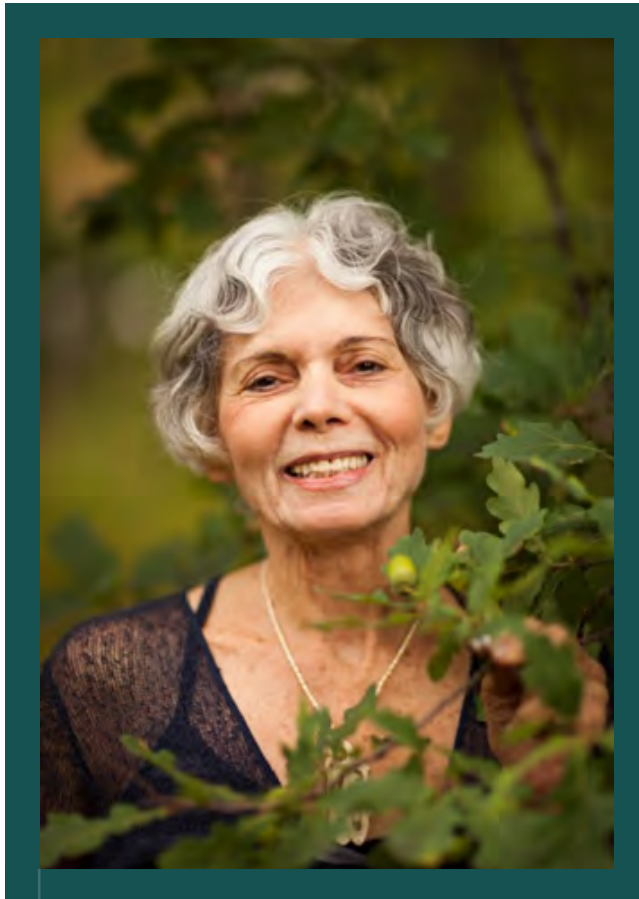


FeldenkraisFrance

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NEWSLETTER

Tribute to Ruthy Alon



Grateful Testimonials

Dear Ruthy, what else can I say other than a BIG THANK YOU from the bottom of my heart for everything you have taught us over the years.

Thank you for sharing with us this enriching learning experience that is the Feldenkrais Method. And thank you also for following up on this method so dear to Moshe, by creating Bones for Life[®], which offers simple movements that can be carried out by everyone and which have made it possible to find a solution to osteoporosis, a disease that can become very disabling for the elderly.

*— Monique van der Vorst
Feldenkrais Practitioner, Physiotherapist, Bones for Life Trainer*

I met Ruthy in 1997 when I started training Isabella. I remember being impressed by the beauty and harmony she exuded and I was lucky enough to receive an FI from her. I had bought the video cassette where she demonstrated some ATMs and where I had the impression that she was dancing.

I stopped training in Florence because I had difficulty understanding the American language of the guest trainers; I wanted to continue in Paris and there was the tragedy of Patrice's death, and at the same time I started training in osteopathy . . .

About ten years later, having established myself as an osteopath, I tried to reconnect and discovered the Bones for Life[®] training course, which I followed in Paris. I was lucky enough to follow the Chairs segments again with Ruthy, then Walk for Life and Eating for Life. I found that Ruthy had the ability to transmit her “knowledge” and her own discoveries without keeping the power for herself, and that in this way she was in the continuity of Moshe Feldenkrais who wanted to make us “experts in our own bodies” while having her own style of transmission.

I was very saddened by her death and deep down I wish that she had been able to join, somewhere, the loved ones who had left her in the last decade of her life.

Goodbye Ruthy and thank you for all the wonders I received during these trainings where you put all your heart.

— Alline, General Practitioner and Osteopath

In tribute to the memory of Ruthy (“disappearance” learned by Lara Liu):

I chose to follow the Bones for Life® program at a time when I was looking for a simpler, faster and more concrete application to offer to my students, in addition to the ATMs. I felt there was a strong demand for this. Being able to offer things to explore while sitting or standing, in a very short time, was of great interest to them.

Although I no longer directly teach Bones programs, I thank Ruthy for creating this specific perspective, which has allowed me to deepen my Feldenkrais experience. I still use it, occasionally, as a complement or auxiliary to ATM.

But the most vivid memories for me of this “Grande Dame” remains attached to the month of July 1987, during the 3rd year of Paris 1 . . . A precise, demanding and light teaching. The discovery of the rollers. The reference elements before and after the ATMs were always linked to the whole group, in its potential to communicate universally.

For those who knew Joy Sweet (colleague Paris 1), she said of Ruthy: “She has a way of disappearing, like the sun; it is natural and does not fail because it will return . . . ; her attention is diffuse and very present at the same time.” An original temperament (New Age spirituality, some would say . . .), like the organization, at the end of the segment, of a sort of ritual: To pass from one state to another . . . ”

— Joëlle Zammit

Feldenkrais Practitioner, Bones for Life® Trainer, Physiotherapist

What comes to mind first is the dynamism and youthfulness that emanated from her. An anecdote: during the first day of the chair training in Paris, two or three of us took the elevator to the work room and on the way up we came across a slim, elegant woman who was climbing the stairs happily. We were ashamed when we realized it was Ruthy, and especially so when we found out (roughly) her age! Unfortunately, my poor English didn’t allow me to communicate with her.”

— Marie-Jo Bouton

Feldenkrais Practitioner and Certified Bones for Life® Teacher

Tribute from Lara Liu

Writing a testimony about Ruthy Alon is a difficult task: she whom I knew and who trained me, with all her particularities, her qualities, her strengths and her weaknesses . . . In short, all the human complexity that we find as much in her, as in Moshe, you or me.

Ruthy was very generous, optimistic, fanciful, and creative. She was adventurous and also had a worldly side (her first husband was the Israeli ambassador to Italy). She was the first person to teach the Feldenkrais Method in the USA: one day, Moshe asked his group of 13 students: “The Esalen Institute wants me to send someone to teach my method. Who wants to go?” Ruthy was the first to respond positively.

She recounted that, living in Jerusalem, she often traveled abroad to teach first the Feldenkrais Method, and then various Movement Intelligence programs (“Bones for Life[®],” “Chairs,” “Walk for Life,” “Mindful Eating,” and “Solutions for Optimal Mobility”). She once spent 11 months outside of Israel for work!

She loved shopping. She said it refreshed her eyes. In Paris, during the “Chairs” program, she asked me twice to go shopping with her: the first time lasted maybe more than an hour in a single store, and the second time . . . we went to get a new suitcase because she bought so many things that one suitcase was no longer enough!

However, when it came time to pick up her new suitcase and take it to her apartment, she insisted on carrying it by herself, because it was “good for her bones and posture to practice carrying heavy loads.” (In 2010, she was 80 years old!) We traveled the entire way by subway, while she carried her suitcase!

Another time, in Holland, she wanted to go shopping after a day’s work. Among the students, there were some who knew her very well. They knew this could go on for a long time. Outside the door of the first store Ruthy wanted to enter, they told her: “Meet us in two hours at Café x!”

Ruthy was not very well known in France, except among those who were part of the first training sessions in Paris (Joëlle Zammit and Monique van der Vorst — Paris I; Christiane Michailat — Paris III). She taught mainly in Israel, Italy and the USA — where she had family ties.

During my training (Paris VII, 1998–2002), apart from Myriam, we had mostly trainers from the Amherst generation (Sabine, Yvan, Basil, etc.). From time to time we heard about the Israeli trainers (the 13 apostles, as they were called). We didn’t know them very well. Nevertheless, their names always evoked in us this impression of being closer to the source of the Method.

One of these people who remained active at the turn of the millennium was Ruthy Alon. The others were Chavah Shelhav (the youngest of all), Mia Segal (Moshe's assistant when he was training these 13 Israeli trainers), and Myriam Pfeiffer.

Isabella Turino, an Italian assistant we had in 4th year and whom we really liked, advised me to attend a BFL (Bones for Life) weekend with Ruthy, instead of a post-training course that she herself led.

A few years after completing my Feldenkrais training, I arrived in the city of Florence for a long weekend in May.

During this BFL segment, Ruthy had us do certain processes (she called her lessons "processes") on the exhale. When it came time for "Questions and Answers" I asked the reason for this clarification. She said that we could do it on the inhale as well as the exhale, but she knew that the exhale was optimal, so she guided us . . . Enough to make a Feldy (as she called us) jump immediately!

I came home from this weekend, a little perplexed about my BFL experience. The night train was approaching Paris and, as I was climbing down the ladder to my bunk, the ladder detached, and I fell and sprained my ankle! Just half an hour before the terminus.

Sitting, I tried in my imagination something I had learned that weekend. Miracle! At the station, I was walking at the speed of an astronaut on the moon, or, expressed less poetically, at the speed of a snail, but with the sole of my foot still rolling along the ground! I continued this work for 2 to 3 days. When I returned to teach at the Conservatory, my colleagues refused to believe that I had sprained my ankle!

I was in my early thirties and osteoporosis wasn't a big concern then for me. However, I could see the power of this work, and its speed. For someone who practices an artistic activity, it's easy to apply and to consciously integrate into their professional work. I also felt like I understood the Feldenkrais Method better (and I'm far from the only one who feels this way!)

Over the years, Ruthy's training took me to Germany, Austria, Holland, Israel, and Italy, and introduced me to other colleagues. Some of us still keep in touch today, despite the distance between us.

I only knew Ruthy through the programs she created later in life. More than once I have heard that she is even better at teaching the Feldenkrais Method than her own programs. Isabella (Italian) thinks so, too. According to Isabella, Ruthy knew perfectly well what she and some others were thinking, but she didn't care, because she was well aware that she had something unique to offer, beyond the Feldenkrais Method.

Ruthy played a lot with rhythm, emotion, and imagination, and her teaching was full of metaphors. Born from the Feldenkrais Method, the main objective of BFL (her first "baby") is strengthening of bone structure and the prevention of osteoporosis.

To stimulate the bones, we need to work vertically, sometimes carrying loads. Standing is a challenge, increased by the possible damage caused by carrying loads, so it is necessary that the lessons are short, and the movements easy to memorize. (The learning context is not fixed. It is rather a strategy to achieve what we want to do. Once we learn to perform these movements with an appropriate posture/acture, we must think about repeating them regularly, anywhere, so that their benefits can act on our body in a lasting way).

Ruthy also developed the frequent use of the wall, in an upright position, as a substitute for the floor, in a lying position. She kept these new characteristics in other programs she later created (Chairs, Walk for Life, Mindful Eating, Solutions) where the kinship with the Feldenkrais Method remains present, but less visible.

Ruthy felt the need to distinguish herself from Moshe Feldenkrais. Sometimes her reactions on this point could seem excessive, and one would be ready to believe that there was a distinct separation between these two modalities. That said, every time she mentioned Moshe, there was an intense silence in the air, and I could feel how much Moshe had influenced her programs, and her life!

Both Moshe and Ruthy held a deep conviction that the movement they taught could open a path to an autonomy of being which rests dormant, as if asleep, in each one of us, but remains available to those who desire it. Their greatest ambition: to restore the reliability of our internal authority (the wisdom and intelligence within ourselves) so that we become our own master, to fearlessly follow our own direction, instead of blindly obeying any external authority.

I would say that their language is common, but that their personalities differ . . . and, therefore, the final product is also different. Between Mozart and Beethoven, or between Debussy and Ravel, one can prefer one to the other, or like them both equally, or like neither. Everyone is free to choose.

I wanted to write a book about Ruthy; she told me she was flattered but that “the work is more important than the person.” So she advised me to write about her work, instead.

On this subject, the making of the French version of her book *Mindful Spontaneity* describes an incredible adventure, spanning more than 20 years! Ruthy first had it translated in Quebec. When she tried to have it published in France, she was made to understand that this French was too Quebecois. A few years later, she was introduced to two professional Israeli translators who did a second translation. Since the Israelis had no somatic notion, the translation was unpalatable.

After Ruthy had spoken to Christiane and me about her “bad luck,” I managed to find colleagues and students in Feldenkrais and BFL, each one / each group taking on one or more chapters to translate. Once the translation was complete, and the first proofreading was done, I learned that, in French, it normally takes 3 proofreadings before a book is published!!!

With just volunteer means at hand, perhaps we might be satisfied with only 2 re-readings??? We now had to finalize this project with the agreement of his daughter (for the moment I was, perhaps, still too optimistic). But it turned out to be a book of great value for both the “Feldenkraisian” and MI (Movement Intelligence) communities. So we went all the way!

In the meantime, my thanks go to Marie-Jo Bouton, Christine Connan, Valérie Fabre, Cyrille Odon, Blandine Wong and the group of Strasbourg practitioners — Cathie, Marie-Paule, Danielle, Claude, along with others I don’t know!

I would now like to recount some moments of life that Ruthy and I shared together. In one training session, by coincidence, there were many divorced people. During the discussions, there were moments of strong emotion; to encourage these students, Ruthy recounted having lived alone for a long time after her divorce, and having met her true love . . . at 70 years old!

“There is always hope!” she told them!

In the Pyrenees, during a segment of Walk for Life, we had a party the night before the last day. Everyone introduced themselves in a less formal and more intimate way. When it was her turn, Ruthy talked about her American beginnings, then suddenly asked if we wanted to hear gossip, or the truth? She started to cry, saying that she was doing everything she could to get over the death of her son a year ago, and that she couldn’t.

A few years later, in succession, she lost her first husband and then her second, Dan — who was a warm and enthusiastic gentleman. He spent his time helping to create democratic schools around the world. On the phone, Ruthy told me that she speaks to Dan’s photo every day, even though, according to Jewish tradition, we do not believe in life in the afterlife.

A person so powerful, intelligent, and capable, yet so fragile and real. This is the Ruthy Alon I knew, and who shaped me.

Thank you, Ruthy, for all these journeys and paths we’ve traveled together. Thank you for your teaching, your encouragement, and your trust. In turn, we continue to share your teachings and create projects as you have always known, and shown us how to do.

— Lara Liu
Pianist, Feldenkrais Practitioner, Senior Trainer of MI (Movement Intelligence)



Ruthy Alon in conversation with training students and Carl Ginsburg in Santa Fe, New Mexico (1994)