

Touching Me, Touching You

By Anneli Rufus

Born in the East Bay, the Rosen Method fosters body awareness.

Do you feel as if you carry the world on your shoulders? As if you're always dragging your feet? Have you felt that way for so long that a quirky little metaphor has managed to manifest in your posture, your walk, your aches and pains?

Our bodies obey our emotions. Years spent in denial, say, or spoiling for a fight can make us chronically tense or even ill, according to adherents of the Rosen Method, a form of bodywork that uses gentle touch and simple movements to learn where tension lodges in bodies, and why.

"People go into holding patterns," says Sara Webb, executive director of the Berkeley Rosen Method Center (835 Bancroft Way, Berkeley), where a September 26 open house features a free class and \$25 sessions. (Preregistration is required for these sessions.)

Now 95 and living in Berkeley, Marion Rosen was a physical therapist in Germany before immigrating to the United States during World War II. She was leading exercise classes in Oakland, with no plans to launch a global enterprise, when Webb contacted her in 1971.

"I was looking for something in the realm of mind-body connection. I had started doing yoga, I had been through a crisis year, and I was getting all wound up and couldn't feel anything," Webb remembers now. "I had figured out that the body was a pathway," and wanted to take it farther. On the advice of her mother, who knew Rosen, Webb requested lessons: "But Marion said no. She said she wasn't a teacher. Then she called me back and said she was willing to give it a try.

"I realized right away that she was a pipeline, a treasure trove of knowledge about psychosomatic connections that I'd never heard anyone else talking about."

Today, over a dozen Rosen Method Centers thrive around the world.

In a typical session, the practitioner touches various parts of the client's body — usually skin-to-skin. Amid long periods of silence, the practitioner asks occasional questions and points out tense areas.

"We're trained to listen for the body's responses, to watch the breath and feel for whether muscles tighten or relax. Sometimes a back might be bowed; then you'll see it flatten out" as awareness and relaxation set in. "Even with just a few millimeters' difference, the whole aspect changes," Webb asserts.

The body takes the mind literally. Ankles become painfully tight in those who perpetually "dig in

their heels," Webb says. Fear and defensiveness can cause rigidity, "cutting off the natural way the body is built to move. When your diaphragm doesn't swing fully, your organs can't function properly, which reduces and constricts blood flow," which can lead to arthritis, colitis, and other illnesses, she says.

Some seek Rosenwork simply in order to feel okay while being touched — say, after having survived assault or abuse. "Yes, touch can be threatening," Webb affirms. "But in general we're very touch-deprived in our society. We need to find safe ways to allow touch back into our lives."

While Rosenwork serves some of the same purposes as yoga, it requires no effort on the client's part "because someone's touching you, and you're being held up by a massage table. Awareness is reached," Webb beams, "but with two people instead of just one sitting on a mountaintop." 12 p.m.-5:15 p.m. RosenMethod.com

For article with photo go to:

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Bio:

Anneli Rufus is the author of five critically acclaimed books, including *Party of One: The Loners' Manifesto* and *Stuck: Why We Can't (or Won't) Move On*. She also writes for *AlterNet*, the *Daily Beast*, *Psychology Today*, the *Huffington Post*, and other venues. She has experienced the benefits of the Rosen Method.