

## The Alexander Affair

by Kim Peavey

### The Romance

I was being wooed. First an hour-long introduction in a private room at a local food co-op. Then a note in the mail with a picture illustrating semi-supine position. Then a phone call, with an invitation for a free half-hour lesson.

Here I was, 42 years old, with chronic tail bone pain, getting stiffer all over, rather than looser, and wondering how long I would be able to keep on with the digging, lifting, weeding, and other chores that are part of my farming life—let alone attract a suitor. But lo and behold!

His mysterious initials: FM.

### The Honeymoon

And A. For Alexander. Oh yes, I was intrigued! I was more than intrigued. In fact, when I heard, “This is about having new experiences of your body. And when you have new experiences of your body, there are new possibilities,” I nearly swooned. Could it be so? It could—with the help of my go-between, Tova.

“Tova,” I whispered, “You know FM really well. Tell him my back hurts from picking apples. Tell him it hurts from digging beds in the greenhouse. Tell him it’s going to hurt even more when I have to start shoveling snow away from the greenhouse.”

“I’ll tell him,” Tova whispered back. “Don’t you worry.”

I feel a quiet, slow excitement building. Does this mean I don’t just have to suffer the same old stiffness and discomfort I’ve had for years? I’ve tried massage, chiropractic, and craniosacral work: all wonderful, useful, good methods. But I return again and again to the same pain.

Now I have new hope. I practice diligently the semi-supine position. Then I learn a new one: the strange yet alluring prone. And then! the “position of mechanical advantage.” Oh, I am gently guided. I am moving effortlessly: I am moving with ease and lightness. Me and FM together.

### The First Fight

“Just inhibit. It’s so simple,” one of us says loftily.

“You’re the one who’s inhibited!” the other shouts.

“Oh, yeah? Well, all you do is end-gain! It’s the process, buster, not the result!”

“Why can’t you ever just use normal words, in a normal way, anyway!”

“Monkey! Monkey! Monkey! You’re a monkey! How’s that, huh? Eeee eeee eee, ya’ big monkey!”

### The Wise Counsel

Tova steps quietly in. It is she, after all, who has recently given me the manuals: Missy Vineyard and her attic. Marjory Barlow and her examined life. Michael Gelb, that jugglin’ fool. Huh. I’ve had enough of examination. I’ve had enough of FM and all his friends, messing up the house, leaving books in

precise little piles adjusted to some mysterious height all over; lunging here, there, and everywhere; wanting everyone to be on the floor instead of the comfy bed.

“Sit,” Tova invites me.

“Sit regular?” Laughter, surprise.

“Yes, you know how to sit.” Smiling. Nice, kind, wise Tova.

I sit. I tell my troubles with FM and all his friends to Tova. “I don’t want to work this hard,” I whimper. “They’re always using all these big words, and I can’t remember what they mean—neocortex, temporal lobe, amygdala. I don’t get it. I’m frustrated. How the heck can you do and not do it at the same time?”

“Ah,” says Tova gently, wisely. “Cognitive dissonance, that is called. Oh, it is very good, very good. You know, I have been acquainted with FM, and his friends, too, for many years, my dear. Now let’s just let it all rest a little. It’ll all come around again. You just keep practicing semi-supine. You know how good that feels.”

It does feel good. I set my semi-supine timer. I get out my dictionary.

### Making Up

I am ecstatic. I have driven seven hours in one day and my tail bone doesn’t hurt! I also have an exquisite moment in my daily qi gong practice of feeling that my awareness is everywhere, and that I don’t have to make my body do the thing I want it to do. My body is just doing it. Oh bliss! Oh paradise!

Not only that, FM’s friend Missy has taken me aside, confidentially, and given me a whole new way to look at the situation. “I was having trouble with him, too,” she said. “But finally I realized it was more about me than him!” She opens her book, whispers a phrase: “I was released from my tendency to work too hard, trying to be right.”<sup>1</sup>

Oh! Working too hard. Trying to be right. Trying to be perfect. I had forgotten that lovely suggestion FM had made in the very beginning: “When we stop doing the wrong thing, the right thing does itself.” I don’t have to force it, fix it, or even nix it in my frustration.

Instead, I can gradually let this relationship seep into my life. I can allow myself to simply notice things, not turn them into something I’m doing wrong or right. First, I can let my awareness, and then my growing understanding of FM and his ways, expand to other areas of my life: not just the lesson, not just the floor or the bed, but also walking down the stairs, washing the dishes, even something as un-romantic and human as sitting down on the toilet.



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"Yes," says Tova, when I next visit her. "Yes. Wonderful. Excellent. It's really about awareness of the whole body, in all aspects of our lives. And awareness of the space, the light, the sound, everything around you. Yes. Yes. Yes."

### Settling In

I come in to my lesson achy. Been digging those greenhouse beds again. "Oof," I say, on the table. We switch to prone position. Much better. I feel myself beginning to relax after all my hard work at home, both with and without FM.

After the not-working work on the table, we lunge while not lunging. We start by experimenting with shifting weight from foot to foot. I am doing very well at not shifting while shifting. In fact, I am not moving at all. Nothing happens at all. Tova and I have a good giggle.

"Let's try some walking," she says. "You know how to sit. You also know how to walk." Oh, Tova knows how to encourage a person!

I walk successfully back and forth across the room. Tova notes that I have shifted my weight back and forth several times in rapid succession. Ding! goes the little realization bell. I have, haven't I? We lunge and not-lunge some more.

Then we try something else new. I am walking and Tova is walking with me, her hand lightly on my neck. It feels very strange. "Oh," I say, "Oh oh oh, I feel so up!"

Tova laughs, pleased. "That was a very different walk. You felt it?"

"Yes," I say, "But I don't know what I'm doing! I don't know how I'm doing it." More laughing. More doing and not doing.

Tova says another interesting thing this day: "When we want to discover something new about ourselves, there is a part of us that must agree to not know, agree to take risks, agree to make mistakes."

Oh, Tova. Oh, FM I am figuring some things out about this relationship between me, you, and our bodies, and minds, and even spirits. In fact, just yesterday I walked down an entire flight of stairs without letting the enormous weight of my head

drop down on my breastbone. Stairs have always been fearsome on some level for me. Maybe I fell down some as a little girl? I have the feeling even now that if I don't fix each one in place with my powerful eye, the step will disappear and I will be falling, falling, falling.

"Okay, FM," I said nervously to myself all the way down, "I am going to just trust that the next one is going to be there." And it is.

### The Long Haul

A week later, at the end of the next lesson, Tova says, "Take care of yourself."

"I didn't dig at all yesterday," I say.

"It doesn't mean not digging," Tova answers.

And then I understand again. Taking care of yourself doesn't mean not digging. It doesn't mean restricting, narrowing, limiting your activities. It doesn't mean not living.

It means living, with lightness and ease, with love, one might even say, and

for the long haul.

### Endnotes:

1. Missy Vineyard, *How You Stand, How You Move, How You Live* (New York: Avalon, 2007), 122.

### References:

- Barlow, Marjory. *An Examined Life. In conversation with Trevor Allan Davies*. Berkeley: Mornum Time Press, 2002.
- Gelb, Michael. *Body Learning*. New York: New York, Henry Holt, 1994.
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*Kim Peavey farms and writes in Westmoreland, New Hampshire and studies the Alexander Technique with teacher Tova Malin of Brattleboro, Vermont.*

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