

### **Liberation is not doing it right: A Follow-up Study.**

It has been 5 years since Louise participated in our ATM research project for people with MS. She is still excited about what she learned. I talked to her on the phone yesterday to ask if she would come and talk to my students about living with multiple sclerosis. She uses a power chair now to get around the house and cannot move her legs much at all. Spontaneously she told me, "When I did your study there were 4 of us in the class. You would ask us to try doing a movement and each of us did something different. You said that was OK. That we didn't have to do it right. I thought, OK! This is very liberating."

In the summer of 1997, I planned a series of 10 weekly, 2-hour, lessons and advertised in the local MS Society newsletter for people to participate in the study. Louise was the last to call. In our first conversation, she told us she had been diagnosed with MS 7 years before when she was 39. She had weakness and mild spasticity in her left leg and used a walking stick for balance and fatigue. She worked part time as a nurse and was the primary caregiver for her family. She lived with her husband and 3 kids: a daughter 19, another 13 and a boy 6. They were upset with her because she couldn't do all they wanted and demanded help from them. She was upset too. She dreamed of being able to do things more easily, travelling again with her husband and having less tension with her kids.

In the first 3 lessons, we worked lying down and sitting in a chair, and explored breathing, weight, effort and movements of the pelvis and legs. Other lessons involved getting up from a chair, getting up from the floor, standing and walking. Louise became more aware of where her feet were in relation to her pelvis, began to move her pelvis and make less effort with her movements. She observed that she was always pushing too fast so she slowed down and took smaller, more controlled steps and was more stable. When she discovered that she could get up from the floor easily she called out to us like a child, "Look at me. Look how I can get up from the floor."

A year later, Louise talked about how she used the ideas from the class. "I use the ideas all the time now. I use (them) with my children... It has really stimulated my creativity. I feel better emotionally and mentally and I work better. I have the attitude now that I can do things. Friends and family don't see much physical progress, but they see this attitude and appreciate it." She went on, "I found that I could do things that I didn't believe I could do. I could get that little toe to move. I could calm down and breathe and just feel the movement. It was very empowering.... I had an exacerbation. The doctor wanted to put me in the hospital for a Solumedrol treatment but my husband had planned a 25th anniversary trip to Hawaii.... I went to Hawaii and went snorkling. The water was amazing. I never would have attempted it if I didn't have the confidence that I knew how to move."

Recently she talked about how the ATM classes had prepared her to face her future with more confidence. Despite increasing limitations in mobility she has been on a sailing trip and now is planning another.