

Conversations across the Pacific:

Marcia B. Leventhal's dance therapy journey

Jane Guthrie

Dr. Leventhal, PhD, BC-DMT, CMA and NCC, has received awards and grants for her innovative and healing training programs and theoretical contributions to the field of dance therapy. The models she developed are holistic and humanistic and allow for the delivery of developmentally appropriate dance therapy treatment to both clinical and non-clinical populations. Her personal journey is followed from child dancer and actor, to become an internationally known dance therapist and dance therapy teacher. This is set against a background of the development of dance therapy mainly in the USA. Throughout her journey, she has had two sides of her life to consider – the performance side and the intellectual one, driven by a personal thirst for knowledge. The difficulties she had juggling between the two are highlighted, people who influenced her identified, as are the decisions she made and factors that helped her to develop her theoretical concepts. Jane's words and comments are in italics throughout.

Conversational considerations relevant to Dr Leventhal's journey include: Dance therapy; acting; performance; influences; Five Part Session; Quantum and Newtonian

Despite the mundane surroundings of computer hardware, and the vagaries of video connections during our conversations, talking to Marcia was totally absorbing. Her journey to become a revered US second generation dance therapy pioneer, was fascinating, as slowly revealed by her extraordinary recall. One thing led quite seamlessly on to another, as she talked, almost without drawing a breath, at great speed. There were only very occasional hesitations with names, places, or events. A recall to be envied of her very full and exciting life.

The start of the journey

Marcia – I think there have been two sides of your life and journey into dance therapy¹?

MBL: Well yes, there were always the two sides – the performance and the academic and intellectual. I loved dance from the moment I had my first lesson, aged three. Experimenting with moving my body was exciting, then doing all the dance lessons so many kids do. I found an amazing ballet teacher when I was about ten. Ballet is strict, a beautiful way to organise, but it wasn't enough to keep my spirit occupied. So, after school I would organise the neighbourhood kids with their bicycles and teach them circus tricks. We didn't wear helmets in those days! So, goodness knows how I am still alive!



Child actress and dancer

¹ Dance therapy became dance movement therapy, but dance therapy has been used throughout to avoid any confusion.

I discovered jazz and modern when I was about sixteen and then felt I could really dance. I studied with Eugene Loring² and with Roland Dupree³, who asked me to join a dance troupe to travel but of course it wasn't OK to quit school and do that. But this is still where I found part of my essence and love of performing. I was also acting in children's theatre, and in one at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), so I was involved in tons of plays in which I danced, acted and sang. I remember organising everyone to do the Cancan in my senior show (we were called "The Parisians") My first big musical was dancing in 'Good News', as a 10th grader.

It sounds like you started to develop your organisational skills at a very early stage in your life?

MBL. Well, I did. After graduation I attended UCLA for a year, then Brandeis University, back East, where I learnt more about the craft of acting as well as continuing with my dancing. It was an erudite school, bringing in people quite famous like Merce Cunningham⁴. I had already met him in California when I was sixteen and wanted to continue on and study dance with him in Boston - but I wasn't my own person in that respect, so, I returned to California - knowing I wanted to go to Europe, and that I would have to work to get the money. So, I got a job as a recreation director running a playground in California and following doing well in a city test about practical things like running groups, somehow got the number one choice of playground in the city, where I was able to direct, choreograph, teach all levels of dance and do all the other things a recreation director would do in running a major center in Los Angeles.

How old were you then?

MBL: I was twenty one and probably too dumb to be scared of all the responsibilities I had I started to do big choreographed playground productions and was happy that I didn't have to be working in an ordinary day job as so many of my friends did. I was able to use my talent and creativity and starting to get accolades for it. I saved up enough money to go to Europe, but stayed a year, before going to see the world and do all the things I wanted to do.

The emergence of Dance Therapy

Were you still involved with acting when you went overseas? And when did dance therapy start to emerge and what spurred you on to transition from one to the other?

MBL: In Paris, I was acting and doing as much as I could. I studied Pantomime, with Jacques Lecoq⁵, and international law, but still had this urge to do more - but didn't know what? I also knew that there was a great dance department at UCLA. I had already met Alma Hawkins⁶ and Valerie Hunt⁷ who were there when I was in high school, so I applied to do a Masters. At that time, everything had to be done by

² Eugene Loring (1911-1982), "film, stage, television choreographer."

<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100115218>

³ Roland Dupree (1925-2015), dancer, actor, choreographer. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roland_Dupree

⁴ Merce Cunningham (1919–2009): Dancer/choreographer.

<https://www.biography.com/people/merce-cunningham-9263457>

⁵ Jacques Lecoq (1921-1999). Known for his teaching methods in physical theatre, movement and mime. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacques_Lecoq

⁶ Alma Hawkins (1904-1998): Pioneer dance movement therapist. See: Leventhal, M.B. (1984).

⁷ Valerie Hunt (1916-2014): Former Professor in Physiological Science, UCLA. Researcher Bioenergy. See: Leventhal, M.B. (1991).

letter, which took forever, but I got accepted, then met the man I fell in love with who later became my husband. Naturally I then didn't want to move back to the US and ended up getting to graduate school very late with a paper due the next day – so just as I did as an undergraduate – I wrote all night! Then suddenly things started to happen. Dr Hawkins was beginning a new program at the Neuropsychiatric institute and needed a teaching assistant. She asked if I would like to do that? I didn't know what it meant, thinking as a dance major I would teach PE or modern dance, but I said yes, even though my soul and psyche was still in Europe. I found out later that Dr J. Alfred Cannon, the chief Psychiatrist at this Institute, had approached Dr Hawkins, after hearing about her amazing dance department, saying he knew that dance could help his patients (children and adults in a short-term facility for psychiatric illnesses).

What a wonderful opportunity! To be able to use your dancing in a therapy situation?

MBL: I came along when Alma had just started, I was marking time with graduate school, was very young and trying to figure out what I was going to do with my life - and ended up writing the first Masters thesis in dance therapy in the world! At UCLA the thesis was usually a choreographic one, but Dr Hawkins and Dr Cannon decided I should do a research one to see if dance worked with psychiatric patients.

I worked with four schizophrenic children 1:1 who had never had dance before. Dr Cannon made sure everything was open to me: patient's charts, everyone's support, but although I had all of this, I still had no idea what I was doing! I knew a lot about movement and dance but didn't know anything about psychology. But things started to happen with connecting with the children on a deep level – it was like an improvisation. Being Alma's assistant, changed my whole life!

I did a lot of research and had an incredible team. Dr Valerie Hunt, a brilliant kinesiologist who taught the dance majors kinesiology, joined Dr Cannon and Dr Hawkins as my thesis advisers. The hypothesis was 'A change in body image will result in a self- concept change which will affect a child's ability to learn and their ability to socialise'. I gave all types of tests, pre and post for body image and self-concept and Dr Hunt who had just come back from England where she had worked with Marion North⁸ taught me Effort/Shape. All the sessions were filmed and I spent hundreds of hours observing them and analysing the children's movement to see if it had changed---using an effort/shape model. I also went through all the Institution's charts to see what else was happening in terms of comments of the Psychologists, Social Workers, Nurses, Psychiatrists, etc. So all kinds of comparisons were made. When I finished, from a background of only moving, dancing and creative arts, they had to hire a statistician to analyse all the data from the research!

What was happening with dance therapy at this time in the West and where were the influences on you coming from?

MBL: There was really no one for me to learn from, but I was influenced by many people and many things. Mary Whitehouse⁹ became a teacher and mentor to me. Mary worked with Alma's dance majors.

⁸ Marion North (1925-2012), key figure in Rudolf Laban's work and British contemporary dance.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/9285582/Marion-North.html>

⁹ Mary Starks Whitehouse (1911-1979). Dance movement therapy pioneer. Created Authentic Movement.

<https://adta.org/2015/08/18/what-is-authentic-movement/>

Moving with Mary influenced me deeply. We went to a deep place together. It wasn't moving to a beautiful position or anything like that, it was finding something deep inside which eventually we called an authentic place. She was working with normal urban neurotic (NUN)¹⁰ people like us and young kids in college.

Trudi Schoop¹¹ and Jeri Salkin¹² had developed their Body Ego Techniques (Salkin, J. & May, P. (1967). Trudi and Jeri were developing their theory at Camarillo State hospital where they worked with Schizophrenic patients. They were the only people doing anything remotely resembling dance therapy. Alma Hawkins was involved in the experiment of using dance with the hospitalized psychiatric patients. Also, she had an amazing teaching style using the creative process with technique, taking people who were awkward as freshman, to be choreographing and brilliant dancers by the time they were seniors. As her assistant, it was all new for me. I used some of it but in retrospect, there were some things that worked for me and some things that didn't. We were very different and a lot of things she did I wouldn't do. Such as, wear leotards and dance skirts. But I learnt a lot from her – that place where she could get to and lead people's creativity - maybe bringing in a picture - saying what does this remind you of? and getting the students to dance it. It was similar to the way Blanche Evan¹³ worked to bring out the



Marcia with Valerie Hunt and Alma Hawkins

personal dance. Blanche was also one of my mentors, but much later on, after I was already living in New York and teaching at New York University (NYU).

Then, Valerie, who understood the body, and how it moved, but also understood dancers and the creative process. At the time I was doing my thesis, she started a program at the Dubnoff¹⁴ school for seriously disturbed children. She asked me to be her assistant and she created the research and I did the movement. So, I had this experience with her school as well.

But there were still very few people and nobody who knew what dance therapy was. Elizabeth Rosen had written a book – the first book about dance and psychotherapy (Rosen, E., 1957). Nothing was computerized. For information you had to go into a library and search through every book for what you wanted. So, I interviewed people who were using dance instead, wrote about their methods and together with my work with the children and my research results, it all became my Masters thesis – ‘A Dance Movement Experience as Therapy with Psychotic Children’.¹⁵

¹⁰ The term ‘NUNS’ came from Blanche Evans who used it to describe ‘all of the rest of us’ as we all have some form of neuroses. (Personal communication from Leventhal, M.B., 2019)

¹¹ Trudi Schoop (1903-1999). Swiss-born comic dancer and pioneer in the use of dance movement to treat mental illness. <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/07/23/arts/trudi-schoop-95-pioneer-in-therapy-using-dance.html>

¹² Jeri Salkin (1916 - 2005), pioneered Body Ego Technique with psychiatric patients. <https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/latimes/obituary.aspx?n=geraldine-salkin&pid=3006021&fhid=10622>

¹³ Blanche Evan dancer, choreographer, writer, pioneer DMT. https://en.everybodywiki.com/Blanche_Evan

¹⁴ The Dubnoff School: Nurtures children with developmental, emotional, and /or behavioural challenges.

<http://www.dubnoffcenter.org/>

¹⁵ Leventhal, M. B., (1965) Dept. of Dance. University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).

Return to Europe

What happened to your performance work? And did you go back to Europe then, or stay in California after your Masters thesis?

MBL: I did a lot of acting, touring and working with other students, some who become quite famous, while I was at UCLA. This was ongoing while I was doing my Masters. In fact, I was in a Blake Edwards's film¹⁶, "What did you do in the war daddy", as the lead dancer and chosen to become the girlfriend of the male lead. All the extras were saying "oh my god you have been discovered by Blake Edwards and now you will become a big star". So that was a big deal for me!

When I returned to Europe to see my boy- friend I did a lot of performing and helped to start a theatre company called 'The Action Theatre of Paris' and ended up in Rome auditioning for a Fellini¹⁷ film. I had seen a couple of his movies and thought he was a genius and hearing he was casting Satyricon, a film in Rome and that he was a very human guy, I hopped on a streetcar and went to his studio (Cine-Citta) armed with my actor's book of photos and resume. Hearing he didn't speak much English and thinking my French was pretty good, when his secretary said he would see me, I said "Bon jour," to him and he replied, also in French, with - was I American - which led to "so why are we speaking in French?" I responded with "because you don't speak English" and he said "and where did you read that from"! This funny exchange led us into becoming buddies. He was delightful, looked at my portfolio and said "I have a good part for you coming up - come back and see me in about 2 weeks." I went to see him every two weeks for 6 or 7 months! Meantime getting cast in a whole lot of other films. This included 'Catch 22', as one of the women of the night, when I was told not to open my mouth, unless it was to speak Italian, for if it was found out that I was American I would never be cast again! The casting team was supposed only to cast upcoming European starlets for those roles. But apparently I had the look they wanted, so voila! I did a few other really big films and big parts and became good friends with Fellini!



A 'lady of the night'. Catch 22, 1970

How fantastic – the great Fellini – no less!

MBL. Yes, he was fantastic and when I left to return to the US, I went to say goodbye to him. He was cutting the film and he asked my opinion, do you like this or that scene and do you think it should be longer or shorter. I can't believe he was asking my advice! He was an amazing person, really incredible.

Return to New York - New York University – opportunities and transitions

I believe that on your return to New York you auditioned for many shows on Broadway?

¹⁶ Blake Edwards (1922 – 2010), US film director, producer, and screenwriter best known for Breakfast at Tiffany's and The Pink Panther series. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Blake-Edwards>.

¹⁷ Federico Fellini. (1920 – 1993), Italian film director and screenwriter ... recognized as one of the greatest and most influential filmmakers of all time. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federico_Fellini

MBL: Yes, that's right, but I also had my Masters thesis, so I looked for schools for autistic children, choosing one near where I was living in Greenwich village. I called them and said I had completed a Masters in dance therapy and they said "Come and see us right now!" I wasn't quite ready, but I walked over and got the job.

How incredible - another opportunity pulling you towards therapy and away from performance. Where was the job?

MBL: The 'Manhattan school for seriously disturbed children', an elite place that worked with autistic children, on 5th Avenue. I came along at just the right time and was hired on the spot because of my work with Effort/Shape and my friendship with Valerie Hunt. I also saw Irmgard Bartenieff¹⁸, when I first got to New York, who asked me to be her assistant. Then a further opportunity came about with someone who had a job at a Brooklyn School with special needs children. So, in a couple of days, I had more work than I could handle. And I was still being auditioned for parts and getting cast in shows on and off Broadway and having to juggle everything to fit it all in. This now included a whole school of special needs children. And there was still nobody I could go to for dance therapy – I was starting from scratch. It was both unbelievable and daunting.

I know you created the highly successful New York University (NYU), dance therapy program. How did this start?

MBL: It was while all this was happening. Someone from NYU who had heard about the dance work in Brooklyn, came to see me. She told the head of the dance department about me who asked "Are you doing this thing called dance therapy?" and I said – "I think so". She said "Why don't you come and teach us what dance therapy is". So, I am teaching myself to be a dance therapist – whatever that meant - and then had to teach a class at university about dance therapy? I thought - what am I going to be teaching these people as I barely knew what I was doing. Then NYU had a position come open and there was a nationwide search for someone to become a professor of dance therapy in the dance department. I



Teaching at NYU

was one of the people who applied out of about 13, which included people from the Marian Chace group from New York – but to cut a long story short – I got the job. And in the 3 years up to this, I had developed a huge amount of experience with all kinds of children, across four or five different settings. I tried to hold on to as many sessions as I could, especially the ones in Greenwich village, because they were close to NYU and as I was going to be training people to take classes, I could use them for the students. And, at the same time, help the teachers to do things with the children.

The head of the special education department at NYU liked having his teachers assist me, and me assisting his teachers. And I had learnt a lot from listening to what

the special ed teachers said. I would check out things like sensory motor re-education that came up in their discussions, then compare what they had been doing with the kids with what I was doing – to see

¹⁸ Irmgard Bartenieff (1900–1981), dancer, physical therapist, pioneer in dance/movement therapy, promoted Laban's work in the US. Founded LIMS®, NYC. <https://labaninstitute.org/about/irmgard-bartenieff/>

what would and wouldn't, work and integrate it. So little by little, I had been building a repertoire of what and how to teach. And what dance therapy really was!

It seems that you were really transitioned by opportunities that arose, often putting you into on-the-job training situations?

MBL: Well yes, and a lot of things were taking place in the 60's and 70's to allow me to evolve and develop through dance and movement. I was just a part and parcel of it and open to many experiences through my various jobs and assistantships. Another assistantship I had was in the Institute of Industrial Relations when I was at UCLA, where I was asked to take groups of executives from big companies through movement experiences that would blow them away. So, I created a huge 'happening' that became extremely controversial, because we were interrupted by the police, thinking that an orgy was taking place. It was a big scandal at the time.

But I had to find ways to make it work for the many populations I had, which led to the development of the 'Integrative Treatment Model'. I was doing lots of things, but how could I call it dance therapy? I always have to ask myself that question. I was serious and committed and worked very hard, and gradually gave up acting and dancing. When I got the job at NYU I was offered a part in a play that became a great hit in NY, then went to California with everybody in it becoming quite famous on various television series and sitcoms. The director wanted me to take a lead role and I had to say "I really have to focus on one thing at a time, so I am going to have to turn it down". That was a big crossroads for me. It was the difference of me becoming a star or sticking to developing the role of professor and dance therapist.

And you chose dance therapy? It must have been difficult for you to turn that acting opportunity down?

MBL: Yes it was, even though I had to create a program out of nothing, I felt committed to the job and remember being on Fire Island in the summer and every morning, running on the beach, talking to myself and looking at the waves, then I would go back to the place where I was staying and write - creating the course from nothing. Tricia Capello was my first assistant and Robyn Cruz, and Theresa Jackson, who you know, was a student in my first class.

I have no doubt it was very hard work, but it must have been so satisfying to start a program and watch it flourish?

MBL: Oh my gosh it was, I miss all that so much so much. I mean we were all about the same age – it was so amazing. Marian Chace was doing her work in the East while Mary Whitehouse was doing hers in the West. I was the first one who came from the West to work with all these other people, the only one who hadn't worked with Marian Chace. And the Chace people I am sure were thinking I didn't know anything about dance therapy. Whereas in fact I had already done this massive Masters thesis and all this research and had more jobs than I could handle throughout New York. I was grateful for what I was learning and very excited about it. But still remembering having to turn down that part. It was a really very big deal for me.

I bet it was. It was a big life's choice that you had to make.

MBL: But you don't know that at the time.

A thirst for knowledge

You have undertaken so much further study. Did you feel it was necessary for your career?



Marcia with Husband

MBL: Well yes. When I became a professor, I started to be interviewed by the big magazines, wanting me to talk about dance therapy and be on television. I just felt I needed more substance. This was beside me taking every single workshop from every person that came to New York, including a couple of years of study in Gestalt with Laura Perls¹⁹, psychosynthesis training in Canada, developed by Roberto Assagioli²⁰ and psychoanalytic training as well. I was studying everything, and I don't know when I ever slept. I just felt I had to have a doctorate. I heard about a new program starting in Lugano in Switzerland that sounded so creative. So, I applied for the program, got in and loved it. I got to study with some great minds who came from Stanford, Princeton and Harvard, as well as some wonderful professors from Europe. I had special permission to take the

summer off to go to Switzerland and my work with all kinds of populations for almost ten years was accepted by my committee as my internship. My colleagues at NYU said that PhD dissertations don't have to be the greatest thing in the world— so just write it and get it done. So, I did – I would wake up in the morning, jog for about an hour and then go home and write a Chapter. My husband, the guy I met in Paris, Dr Merle Atwood, an American physicist, would take it to his secretary, who had it ready for me to correct that night. I wrote my dissertation in three weeks. People said “How could you write it in three weeks?” and I said “Because I had 10 years of experience!” In the same year I did my CMA and was getting my Tenure at NYU. God – where did one get the energy! I sent my dissertation to the committee and I was waiting for it to be ripped apart, but it came back with only one correction wanted!

That is amazing - that was all you had to do?

MBL: Yes, but with the other courses, as well as having to complete the doctoral comprehensive examination, it was five years of very, very hard work. But the stars were shining on me, and it was accepted. But my Masters thesis is probably better than my doctoral one!

Return to acting and leaving NYU

I was going to ask if you returned to acting and why? And why did you leave NYU?

MBL: Yes, I did return to acting. When I was teaching at NYU, there was a notice on the board for an audition from the famous Eastern Films. So, I went and met the director who cast me as the lead in a film which went to all the festivals. Then, through more films, and an agent, I did a Woody Allen film.

¹⁹ Laura Perls, married to Frederick Perls, co-founded the Gestalt school of psychotherapy. www.gestalttheory.com/persons/lauraperls/

²⁰ Roberto Assagioli (1888–1974), doctor, psychologist, founder psychosynthesis. Introduced Freud's ideas to Italy. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315799399_Roberto_Assagioli_A_Man_of_Peaceful_Action

And when I left NYU and came back to California as my base, I did a lot of plays, more films and television.

I returned to acting because I just needed to have a creative outlet. I had been with Margie Beals'²¹ fabulous improvisation group, going religiously every week. It had people who had been professional dancer's like myself in it, all getting older and overweight, but it was fantastic for me and we performed once every year. I was doing that throughout everything else and also part of Judy Scott's improv troupe²² that performed in outdoor spaces all over NY. I was used to doing things that were kind of weird and out of the box and making anything a performance space through my experiences working with Anna Halprin and her 'happenings' and previously with a group in Paris.



The actress

I started the training overseas before I left NYU, although it was still part of the reason I left. But also, because I watched three of my good friends from NYU, also professors, who were only forty or fifty, die. And I thought, if it is so wonderful to have tenure, why are they dying so young? It was a big decision, because it meant giving up my tenure, which assured me of a lifetime job, lifetime health insurance and lifetime everything.

That was a big step to take – to leave security behind and move on?

MBL: It was a huge, huge, step. But life is too short and I did what I said I was going to do for NYU. And when I was in Los Angeles, I could act. I was thinking today about the time I was cast as one of the leads in a play due to open the week after I was to get back from teaching in Australia - I couldn't memorise those lines and do justice to it. I begged them to postpone the opening by a week, but they couldn't. Then I got a very good Pizza Hut commercial when I was going to Greece again to teach, which I had been doing for many years and my agent said "Give up Greece! It's no big deal!" I said "You don't understand; I have been going for 10 or 15 years. People show up and I show up. I can't now not show up just because of this commercial." And again, I had to give that up, which was a big deal as commercials are shown nationally. It became a real choice over these last few years to give things up. I have a clear conscience in the sense that my moral compass is very strong.

Evolvement of the Five- part Session

How did your theoretical concepts evolve and transition from one to another and how does the very well-known and used Five Part Session fit in?

MBL: The Five Part Session was something I evolved early on knowing I needed a holding environment. It was a part of a changing model. Coming from dance choreography, I learnt very early on you have a beginning, a middle and an end. You can go back to the beginning and the middle, but you always have to have an end. But I knew there were five parts. I was constantly looking for

²¹ Margaret Beals, dancer, choreographer, pioneer art of dance improvisation and theatrical performer. www.margaretbeals.org/press/

²² Judith Scott Dance Company, performed pieces throughout the NYC metropolitan area (1969-1975). <http://archives.nysl.org/dan/24000>.

organicity and connections. I did not want to make more fragmentation, or over stimulate, because there was so much stimulation that wasn't being filtered as it was within clinical populations.

It didn't happen overnight. But I started to think a lot about that incident years ago at UCLA— where I choreographed a 'happening' for the company executives and the police came. That moment is frozen in time for me. The men were starting a sensitivity training - big in the 60's, 70's and 80's, where CEO's of companies were trained to be able to relate better and be more creative. So, they were willing to do all kinds of experiments. At the time of the incident when the police came, the men were dancing and jumping around. I was aware of what was going on and that I would have to bring them back to some sort of centered place, but when the police arrived, it stopped the men in their tracks when they were really only getting into the space and dancing. Fortunately, the whole team, Dr Cannon, and head of Industrial Relations at UCLA, who were there, said to the police that it was outrageous and explained that it was a planned event. But I really got that it shut people down, as if they were being punished for moving out of the box, so to speak, when they were really only getting into a deep place of release.

We did a lot of processing and debriefing with the men as a team. And eventually I understood what I was trying to do in New York with all those different programs I had. I knew you had to warm people up, to have some sort of beginning. It could take hours, days, weeks, because I remember the men didn't just open up on that day. I had been working with them for several months, taking them on retreats and giving them all types of movement experiences. But once I realised release was very important, I also realised catharsis was not enough (Freud originally said this). Those men were really just letting go, but letting go of what? The 'cultural clamps' that tell us we should do this or that, in a certain way, and that you could, you should, or you mustn't? 'Cultural clamps' shut down our deep creative place, our authentic selves – what these men had been releasing. When the police came, their presence said it was a bad thing you are doing, on a deep unconscious level. It undid months of process that said that it was a healthy place to be. It is where we start to get to the deep parts of ourselves where our themes exist. Themes of who we really are - our essence. I am working now with incarcerated men - some who have committed the worst crimes you can think of, but they know we are going to that deep place where they can express what they feel and be connected. So, to me after release we've let go of the 'cultural clamps' in a way. But not quite all of them, as obviously we have some sort of defensive mode. We have to have that in order to exist. But that place allows us to go into a deeper one I call our trends towards themes.

Can you explain more about that?

ML: I say there are only two or three major themes in the universe that we express in individual ways. They are acceptance and rejection, opening and closing, and when you start to work in the body there are themes of gathering and scattering. It comes from the agrarian societies where they throw out the seeds and then they have to bring them back as a harvest. Then it becomes opening and closing. That is probably the main theme, once you get into the body, as well as active and passive. Our major early pre-verbal experiences become our themes, or our trends, as we are evolving ourselves. Each of us relate to them differently. It's how we are handled from birth. How much we're loved and cared for and /or neglected, or ignored, or abused. It's what brings us to feeling connected to a group or a society. Nowadays bullying is a big thing. If a child is slightly different, they're bullied. Nobody wants anybody to be different from themselves. It allowed me to realise once you release something you are just getting to the nitty gritty of the person being able to express themselves in a deep place.

We have to have a way to re-centre and, of course, that was what all of our months of debriefing with the men was about following that incident. And then once centered, what you've discovered can be organised and owned; that became my closure. So, the warm-up and closure are bookends. When I work with other colleagues they say "Well, of course, I have a three-part session; it's the same thing", but it is not. The five parts are really so important and can be done with anybody – in a wheelchair, with someone who doesn't have hearing, or sight, or with normal neurotics, but you must be aware that you are holding someone going to a deeper place and afterwards you have to help people to reorganize, to come back to a centered place, physically, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually. And then own what they've done, so it's organic. Owning and accepting leads one to a deeper place in the "higher self"—possible to their essence, authentic self, soul-self.

Also, when I was doing the research project with the schizophrenic children, I'd get to what I'd called a zone where the child and I would be moving together in a very deep way. Once, the accompanist (working with us) changed the flow of the music and the child 'went off'. That was another thing that struck me. What we were doing was so connected, so how did that break it? What did it mean to have something broken like that? Both of those things were going around in my psycho-physical being as I was thinking this through and creating theory to be able to teach people at the university, as well as do my work. It evolved over time, with a lot of thought and experience of seeing what happens when you don't hold the space in a certain way. I also knew that I was trying to create something organic for individuals who had a lot of fragmentation in their lives. Where there were bits and pieces of wholeness, of connection, of understanding, love, of being accepted, but were fragmented. But I knew that I could create the 'space', although we didn't have that word then, or 'holding' it. When we started the program at NYU, that was one of the things we looked for from applicants. It's common now, but at the beginning of an audition, when a movement may be passed around a circle, most people would get the movement, change it and not let it evolve and develop to find their own connection to it and let it become something else. When we saw that we knew we could have a problem working with that individual, that it would take time to get to that deeper place where they understand. To my mind, that's where much of the healing happens, in that organic place where things are integrated and they flow. Organic flow is so important.

It is very clear to me now that we have to warm up physically and psychologically and get into some kind of release of residual tension. I studied with Jacobson²³ and his work for a long time and the whole relaxation response. He was another discovery of Alma Hawkins, by the way. It was amazing what she did to get rid of that residual tension or those perseverated thoughts. Perseveration is one of the problems you have when working with exceptional children, a lot will perseverate. "Hello, Hello. Hello". It goes on and on. They can't stop, but we all have perseverative thoughts. They go around and around and we have to try and get out of that rut. That's why we have to release - to get us out of it – even if only for a second. As a therapist you are grabbing for what that theme might be the moment it opens up.

You believe in this process very deeply Marcia.

MBL: I feel it really gets to the heart of how our work creates healing. I meet many people around the world who have worked with me at different times, who use the five- part session and say it has made such a difference to their lives.

²³ Edmund Jacobson: (1888-1983). Founder Scientific Relaxation. www.progressiverelaxation.org/

People seem to either get it or they don't. I worked very hard to find answers knowing intuitively that I was going somewhere, because I had had enough experiences where there were connections, or depth, or something that happened, that was very profound.

What about 'The Integrative Treatment Model'. I believe that was your first model?

MBL: I first started to write about it in one of those early articles²⁴. I was always trying to be clear about what is dance and what is dance therapy? What is therapeutic and what is therapy? I spent years studying with many theorists of the time, including Dr. Judith Kestenberg²⁵ when she was beginning to codify and develop her work. There was a group of us who used to meet with her, Penny Bernstein²⁶ (who became Penny Lewis), Claire Schmais²⁷, about six or seven of us, to discuss her work with her. So, Flow and the Pre-Efforts were just a part and parcel of what was going on in my body, as it was for the others in the group as well. At the same time, we were working with Irmgard. I told you I was her assistant for a year or two. This was before LMA and CMA were codified, so it was an interesting time to be around as it was all evolving. From this, I knew that when I touched a child I would touch him in a very particular way, so the touch would somehow move through the skin into their kinesthesia to give them the experiences of Flow needed for their next step, to become Pre Efforts, then Efforts and then gross motor activities. All of that was going on for some time in my head, right? (laughs). And that's a piece of how the model started to evolve.

Conscious healing dance

You described how the Five Part Session evolved, and your early days 'Integrated Treatment Model' - how did this change?

MBL: It changed to the 'Quantum Healing Dance'. Then I got into the whole idea of the two paradigms – the Newtonian and the Quantum. It was getting deeper and deeper and as I was working a lot with people around the world, it wasn't just being applied to special needs populations, but with normal urban neurotics as well. I was able to watch the change and depth of what was happening, asking how do we deepen this process and allow it to be expressed and in the expression evolve ourselves. But at the same time there needed to be the practical. And it was when I was struggling with this idea of the practical and reading a little physics about the Newtonian world, where the atom is the bottom line, the medical model, not the unfolding of the person, that my husband casually said, "but they exist simultaneously". It was like an explosion went off in my head! It's where you focus, so now it wasn't that you had to go from one to the other, but that you use one as a gateway to the other. The 'Conscious Healing Dance' was what I was seeing happen in everyone – the things people would write about and places they would go.

Before I left to do a workshop in Leeds (UK) for Jabadao²⁸, (where I taught for several years), I read an article in the NY Times about string theory, etc. three things connected with Quantum Theory, so we explored that in the workshop. I didn't have to do much other than hold the space and it was like the

²⁴ See: Leventhal, M.B. (1974).

²⁵ Dr Judith Kestenberg (1910-1999). <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1023%2FA%3A1022890629390>

²⁶ Penny Bernstein (Parker Lewis): (1946 – 2003). DMT pioneer and one of the most prolific writers. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2004-15531-002>

²⁷ Claire Schmais: (1928 – 2015). Pioneer DMT. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10465-015-9204-y>

²⁸ Jabadao's movement practitioners use 'movement play', for people of all ages. <https://www.jabadao.org/jabadao-approach>

people went to a primordial place they almost didn't have words to describe. That evening a few of us went out to dinner and talked about that experience. Two men next to us kept listening to our conversation and finally, one said "I'm really sorry. We don't mean to be eavesdropping but are you women physicists?" And I said, "No, we're dance therapists." And they said, "You're talking about the Quantum world" and we said "No, just about this experience we had today." It was so interesting to find our descriptions of our experiences being picked up by listeners as coming from the Quantum world. That kind of thing brought me into the 'Conscious Healing Dance' that we find difficult to describe. I have an alter where people can look up inspirational things, to help them connect and ground what they discover. But how do you incorporate something like that with a body that doesn't have the ability to move that way? When you have to help people understand that this is an arm, or hand and that you can stretch beyond that. Up can be way up and developing range, on and on. That door takes us to the Quantum world. But you can't be totally in this world, as you have to be grounded and connected to the body. So, it becomes the art of connecting the two, being aware of, and knowing, that the real profound healing comes on a cellular level if I can get people into that world. This year I have seen this with my own sister's healing path and people who have come to my private practice. With all the talk about mirror neurons now, we know that this can happen and that there is neurophysiological change - the things we have done in dance forever - but just didn't have the language to describe.

It was then I started to understand what intent was. I talked with Fred Allen Wolf²⁹, and his quote is so brilliant: "When we have intent, doors open where you wouldn't even expect, but without intent there's chaos". So, that just came together for me. To evolve, to have a way to describe what was happening in the deep places people went to. As well, you are going back to the Integrated Treatment Model that is essentially the Newtonian world. We're standing on two feet. We're breathing. We do bits and pieces of things that we teach people, which become part of the therapeutic process.

With the Conscious Healing Dance, you've got the Integrated Treatment Model and the Quantum and Newtonian. Is that going to become another model?

MBL: I don't think so. Not now we know so much more. Dance therapy is trying to prove different things. For years we were trying to change body image. But what does it mean when we change the body image? We're growing on a cellular level, we're changing and now that's what all the researchers try to talk about and show, but I think that we're becoming less connected to the body and more connected again to the intellect. When we're really deeply into this authentic place I think we have a connection to the body, mind, spirit and soul - they connect together.

Do you remember my 'Seven parts: The Seven Chambers'?³⁰ Helping us know the different parts of ourselves. Often people come to me individually and having some specific issue. I'll just have them look at mind, body, spirit and soul and give it a rating. How much are they involved in it. There's going to be a part that isn't working. I know that when I had cancer I was neglecting my spiritual for sure. That's why it was very easy for me not to do the medical model for the first three years that I was doing healing. Because I knew that it was my lack of connection to my spiritual essence that most probably caused my illness. Just being connected to all that in some way.

²⁹ Fred Alan Wolf: World-renowned physicist, writer, and lecturer; researcher of relationship of quantum physics to consciousness. www.fredalanwolf.com/

³⁰ The Seven Chambers. Personal communications – Leventhal, M. B., 1988-1994. Audio recording at IDTIA.

Choosing the right words

You mentioned words we didn't have years ago and search for language to describe things in connection with the Five Part Session. Is this something you had to work at to get it right?

MBL: I spent years trying to discover what our language is, not the psychoanalytic or sensory motor, but our language when we go into a deep movement place and hold it in a very healing way to be able to keep an organic flow. I started by not having the words for what I knew intuitively and now the language holds the space, keeps the energy in it and helps me understand what is held within. There are many layers, but it's a lovely way to structure. I have always been searching for a language and hated having to borrow from other fields. We have to talk psychoanalytically. Why should we talk in sensory-motor terms? I was seeing things I thought were really terrible. And I know I have given this example before, but putting children in front of mirrors and pointing to the nose and saying "nose, nose" made me keep thinking, well it could be called anything - brain, or apple, or tulip! What does nose have to do



In Greece, with Dina Glouberman, co-founder Skyros Centre

with anything unless you've experienced it?

Kinesthetically there has to be some deep connection to the movement. It didn't make sense to put a label on something if the label didn't connect in some way deeply to the person. And later when I was in countries where the language was much closer to the experience, like Greek, Sanskrit and Hebrew, all very old languages – I learnt that with them you are experiencing the feeling behind it. English is a made-up language with bits and pieces from many others, so we learn it by rote.

I discovered that from working in Greece for many years, where I would marvel at how the groups would understand very complicated concepts. Until one day I realised the complicated concepts that we would describe

in English had words in them that came from Greek. Words like psychoanalysis, even the word inspiration. The words that come from the Greek language are in their bodies and souls. Do you know what I mean by that?

I do and I think it is a great observation. You have some wonderful words, virtually unique to your way of working. And I suppose that this could also have something to do with your extensive acting experience - picking up on what is emerging or changing around you?

MBL: When I'm leading a group. I pick up on cues and lead from them. I might see two people reaching for the sky and two people rolling on the floor and I'll say "Now allow yourself to do whatever feels right for you, whether it's reaching for the sky or rolling on the floor." So, whoever is doing these movements feels seen and recognised at that moment. This makes them feel OK to do what they are doing and helps them to go to a deeper place. The cues I pick up are essentially in my language - I'm not going to mirror people moving because that bothers me. I'll do it with populations where I'm talking about alter ego - where you have to essentially become the organized ego of the person until such time as their ego actually develops or emerges. But not with normal urban neurotics, because I want them to find their own way to move.

What happens when you are teaching in different cultures and you are using phrases like 'release the judge'. How do you modify things from one culture to another?

MBL: Certain things are cross culturally the same - we all have that inner critic. I've learned that it didn't matter if I was working in China, Turkey, Greece, or Australia. I might say it in a slightly different way – then look around and see if people are responding to it, but I think that certain things are fundamental to human beings. It has very little to do with culture.

Somewhere along the way I realised that less words were better. Less words didn't confuse people where a long sentence would. I started to use my voice a lot to give energy to what we were doing. So, it would accompany an idea. This came about because of those years I spent studying with Kestenberg. If I say a word the word has got something to do with what we are doing at that moment, using the energy that I am trying to get that person to express. I learnt to get the Flow and the Pre Efforts into my voice.

Training programs and teaching after NYU

You started to develop overseas training programs in the mid 1980's. Really amazing at that time! Now many dance therapists travel to teach but mainly in established programs, not to pioneer them as you did then.

MBL: Teaching internationally started when I was at NYU. I got a grant to run a summer program in Sweden, then I started a program at Roehampton University in England. These were the first two dance therapy programs outside of the US. People couldn't afford to come to NYU – it was getting more and more expensive. I worked with Gabrielle Parker at Roehampton, and following a lot of interest in the workshops, Gabrielle said "Should we try and get a program started?" I wrote a brief outline in long hand for her committee and was only back in the US for a week before she contacted me to say they wanted to go ahead with the program! I said "Are you kidding me? – I barely outlined it!"

The program was up and running within a few months and well established within 2 or 3 years. I slowly eased out and Gabrielle and Penelope Best ran the program. Helen Payne was one of my students there. The program I started in Greece, at the same time, worked in cooperation with the one in Australia. Australia has been by far the most consistent and well developed. Now there is a lot happening in China where I taught for 3 or 4 years, and then in Turkey. Ilene Serlin and I were invited to Nigeria to start a program but were advised that it was too dangerous. So, there is a lot of widespread influence.

Your teaching is so much about self- realisation for the participants. How do you separate taking therapy-oriented groups and / or training students to be therapists? Or is it drawn out from the reflections and discussions that follow?



In China

MBL: I think that depends on how you define therapy and I define it very, very broadly. I've got a vision in mind, like Pitbull's³¹ saying "long vision, short steps". I always think of that now and have a vision in mind. Where am I taking the students? Where are they going to go? How can I facilitate and hold for them while they evolve and develop? I have the view that you can't learn dance therapy through a book. You have to be moving yourself. I used to have discussions with Marion North about this. I thought range was very important and she didn't. I said "Marion you must have the range to be working with people". The range can be very small but if you are going to be uncomfortable moving out of your comfort zone, you are not going to be able to perceive what they do. This was reinforced for me by my training with Valerie Hunt who used to say that you can only "perceive what you have experienced and you can only experience what you have perceived". It almost sounds like a paradox. But it means that you have to go back to the beginning and that is why all that reading and studying I did when I first started to work in special education brought me back to the sensory motor and perceptual motor material, which is part of my underpinnings. In training students there has to be a personal growth experience which you can then separate. You have to be clear about which point of view you are learning something from - student, therapist, or client, and that is going to change how you take information in and the difference between therapeutic and therapy. Therapeutic is wonderful and makes you feel good, but it doesn't last. Therapy is the deep work where you change and we now know this change is on a cellular level. We didn't use that language then, but I use that language now.

The presence of an actor

It occurred to me when you talked about giving up acting, that there is still a great part of it in you. When you are leading, talking to people, telling a story, explaining, there is something that makes people pay attention. I don't know whether you're aware of that?

MBL: I don't know. That's me. I'm a performer. (Laughs). Whatever that means? Maybe it's the passion, maybe it's caring. I remember earlier on when I was evolving things like non-verbal



With Gerry Harrison in the UK

communication, I got invited to work with a group of executives and realised that in order to get people to listen that I had to dress like them. Otherwise they would be turned off. I have always been aware I can be all sorts of things, a hippy, an executive woman. I can be whatever, I need to be if it's going to make somebody pay attention. Does that mean that I never get to be my authentic self? No because I think that's just being smart. You want them to get what you're talking about. Once you're connected soul-to-soul it doesn't matter. But you have to get people through their fear first. We're all scared. We don't like change. I say to the guys (in the prison), "I'm not going to say get outside of your comfort zone any more. Because it's really not your comfort zone, it's your regular zone.

And your regular zone may be very uncomfortable, just because we're in it – it doesn't mean that it feels good. It's what we're used to. It's what we're not used to that scares us." That's why that unfolding model from David Bohm³², the physicist, is so

³¹ Pitbull – singer/entertainer. www.americansnippets.com/pitbull-on-entrepreneurship-short-steps-long-vision/

³² David Bohm (1917-1992). Quantum physicist who made significant contributions to theoretical physics, philosophy and neuropsychology. https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/David_Bohm

extraordinary. You unfold to a greater knowing and you take what was with you going forward, knowing there is going to be something else there, which we haven't even begun to understand. That's when we're in a state of enlightened discomfort. I don't know if that really answers your question, but maybe it's just that thing about being passionate.

I think it's bound up in your strong beliefs, but all that performance experience must be a part of it as well? The ability to hold the space in different ways, the timing of delivery of the word, the stage presence It is something you are passionate about and believe in, in every possible way.

MBL: Yes, I do. I think that I said it's my authenticity. I'm involved and integrated. There's no hesitation. I know I told you the story of Alma finishing my sentence for me when I was in doubt following a session with the children. I just said "Oh Alma" and didn't know what to say next. She finished my sentence, with "doubted dance, never". Maybe that was what I was going to say - that I was lost, scared, didn't know what I was doing, but her words freed me. It was a profound moment. So maybe that's what comes across too. She was such a strong presence and that affected me deeply.



The performer's presence

You've had some incredible influences in your life. You've worked with and known so many people who have been involved in Dance and Dance Therapy for a very long time.

MBL: That's why I created that panel. 'The embodied protégé (ADTA Conference, San Diego, 2015. See: Leventhal et al, 2016; Guthrie, J., 2016). We all have a body of people who have affected us. I thought that would be a very interesting panel to have some of those second generation embodied people on. Everybody I called said yes immediately. Nobody wanted to do the improvisation at the end at first, and everyone was complaining, because all of us have problems with parts of the body which aren't working anymore, but when I said "fine just sit down and move your hands" "No, no", they said "I'm going to move" (laughs). Everybody was up!

It was interesting because I knew that once we started to move, people in the audience would be connected to one or other of us, just as we had been connected to our mentors. And it was that connection I was trying to have people understand without having to put it into words. That which you take with you - because I felt that so strongly. I don't know whether that came across to the panel?

It came across to everyone present. The room was packed, an electricity in the air, people hanging on every word spoken. I don't know whether it had something to do with the recent loss of a precious embodied protégée, Claire Schmais? That may have brought home the realisation that there is now one less to pass on the legacies of their mentors. And as well, to pass on what they formed themselves from that embodiment - their own very precious, ways of working. The embodied dances were just beautiful, with different sections of people in the room moving in unison. It was very powerful.

Looking to the future

Where do you see dance therapy going in the future?

MBL: It's an interesting question because I have been so privileged to work and plant a seed in so many



Delivering the Marian Chace address, 2007

countries and see dance therapy evolve. It seems to get stuck in the same place everywhere I've been. And I am not sure what that means or why it happens, but on a meta psychological realm, there's something that hasn't been worked through or dealt with. I have seen it become a split that's almost not healable. Like the split between the Democrats and the Republicans (laughs) or the Liberals and Conservatives. I think it gets to a deep internal place of disrespect and envy that actually needs to be worked on. Two factions start to fight and what for? Why? There's enough for all of us. I remember saying that in my keynote speech for the Marian Chace Foundation (Leventhal,

M. B., 2008). As we move from adjunctive to primary therapists, we have to realise that we are the change agents in our communities and are desperately needed now. I guess somehow it comes down to movement versus dance. When we were first getting a foothold in the United States and particularly on the East coast, that was when I'd already become a professor, Claire Schmais was at Hunter, Penny Bernstein at Antioch and Dianne Dulicai³³ at Hahnemann and we had started to open up internships in hospitals all over. Then a year or two into this process, we started to get feedback from some of the hospitals that: "We want real dancers, we don't want this dance therapy." They were threatened because the dance therapists were getting Masters and having some understanding of the psychodynamic process, along with the psychiatrists and psychologists. The backlash was: "Oh no, we want real dance."

And I thought "We are real dancers and we are expanding and developing it." We had a lot of meetings about that. Most of us were women. There were very few men. So, there was that fear of women being too powerful. Then Claire Schmais got this social work and dance therapy dual course at Hunter and once they did the social work, it seems that many forgot about the dance therapy!

So, when you ask where do I see it going? I want to see people like the early pioneers, the passion that they had, that understanding. There was a power there, inherent in the dance. I think I told you that Mary Whitehouse, said "You girls know so much more than I ever knew." That was because we were having to make theory, develop and discover it, to be able to articulate what was happening and then put it into a context. Mary didn't have to do that, or Trudi. Alma kind of did because she was a professor for so many years, but it was our generation that had to find that theory and way to move forward and sustain it, so that it became not just the dance that is healing, the dance that connects communities, dance that causes release, but go beyond that. So, I hoped that we would come back to that.

A lot of people that come to my workshops I trained twenty/thirty years ago. They are hungry to move and know that they will. I go back to the Conscious Healing Dance and hold the space for them. So, it's conscious from the therapist and from the person doing the dance, you have that intent. Which brings

³³ Dianne Dulicai (1937-2017). First director dance therapy program, Hahnemann Medical College and Hospital, which became Drexel University. <https://adta.wildapricot.org/page-1424013>

me back to Fred Allan Wolf again and intent. It is so important. It creates that energetic field. You either believe in energy or you don't.

Dancing is a wonderful first step to healing and as far as I'm concerned, that healing is for those deep rifts in our personality that start very young. Dancing provides a release, a connection back to self. But unless it's focused, directed, interpreted and developed, that's as far as it goes. Freud said catharsis, that's release, is not enough. So, coming back to my five-part-session, you have got to get into your theme. We have to be educated to hold many things simultaneously through all of this. Ask, am I working on the movement? Am I working on the psychodynamic issue? You are thinking all of these things while that person is moving, trusting the instinct, as the suggestion you make to them is the next step. That is what is so thrilling about this profession. I would like to see more people have that kind of passion.

With all the students we train, you wonder how many have got the sensitivity or instinct to jump in when it's necessary. Not everybody has that.

MBL: No, everybody doesn't have the wherewithal, or the will, or the motivation, to do the extra thinking and studying. I always say "We're going to move outside of our comfort zone, out of our regular patterns and move into the unknown." And as I have said, I was very influenced by David Bohm's unfolding which is a part of the language I use, together with Valerie Hunt's words about perceiving, which I use over and over again with the students. You have to start at the beginning again to learn to experience with the sensory motor underpinnings - to rebuild the whole body ego from the beginning in some instances. The potential of dance therapy is amazing!

You stepped right out of your comfort zone when you gave up the University.

MBL: Yeah, I did. I was very scared. I just kept saying: "Life is too short to settle for security." Even though there are hard times here and there which I have had. It would be nice to have that security now (laughs). I had my tenured professorship and couldn't be fired. But that's not what life is about. It's really not.

It is amazing that you remember everything so clearly and hard to believe that you could come forward so spontaneously with all that you have. But I suppose that it is about something that you have lived and breathed.

MBL: Well I guess that it is in my kinesthesia and profoundly held inside me. And as we have talked, I have been very moved by recalling the things that I had to give-up along the way - that is my acting career. I had to let it go. I was aware that I couldn't do both. I just couldn't.

I think that the performer and the academic are blended in your 'presence' and you take this with you wherever you are - you haven't really let it go.

MBL: I have certainly been privileged to go to so many places and watch the work evolve with hundreds of people. I didn't have to do the same thing over and over again. I wouldn't have been able to do that if I had stayed at NYU. I intuited that. It was a big risk - trust me, I wish I had some of that security now.

You did take a huge risk - but you would have missed out on so much if you hadn't. And thank you for our conversations. I feel honoured to have been a part of them.

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Jane Guthrie, DTAA (Prof. DMT); APAM; CMA, is also a physiotherapist who has used dance therapy extensively in physical rehabilitation. She is a former president of the DTAA and first met Marcia in 1986 and became part of the first group that worked with her in those 'early years' in what was to become the foundation of the International Dance Therapy Institute of Australia (IDTIA). Marcia is still Director of this Institute. Coming from a background that is more physical than psychotherapeutic, Jane will always be grateful for being led into using a psychodynamic approach, encouraging working more intuitively in the moment.