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Scoliosis: First Person Accounts

Bess from Arlington

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Scoliosis and the emotional life

Feldenkrais has been a miracle in my life. It has provided me with a lot of clarity and insight into some of my perceptions of my body. This in turn has raised my self-esteem and improved other areas of my life.

I was diagnosed with scoliosis when I was 12 years old. Spinal fusion surgery could have stabilized the curvature at that time, but instead the surgery was not performed until I was 16 when the curvature had worsened to 72 degrees, which is classified as severe. The surgeon attached a rod to my spine and then fused it from the 2nd thoracic to the 1st lumbar vertebra.

Prior to this, at age 10, I discovered a tumor on a rib which grew large enough that it fractured the two adjacent ribs. I had to have surgery. The 3 affected ribs were removed and replaced with a surgical mesh to maintain chest wall integrity. Right away, I felt it was obvious that I had a deformity. In addition, the asymmetry in the rib cage was a likely cause of the scoliosis. Beginning with this period in my life, my main perception of myself was as a deformed individual. After this first surgery, I was often teased by classmates. Then, after the scoliosis appeared, the teasing became worse. My siblings teased me, classmates whispered behind my back, my self-esteem

plummeted, and I became totally withdrawn, with a poor body image and a serious lack of trust. The lack of self-esteem was pervasive.

I had always been curious about the Feldenkrais Method after reading about it in Life magazine many years ago. At that time I was young and had no idea if it would apply to me or how it would be beneficial. Many years later, as a resident of Arlington County, I saw that group classes were available to residents, so I enrolled and have accumulated the benefits for the past two years.

Has it been the passage of decades, or Feldenkrais, that has led to my improved self-esteem? For the first time in many, many years, I feel like my body is more integrated within itself and not two different bodies inhabiting one physical container. Because of dual asymmetry from the rib resection surgery and the scoliosis, I sometimes felt like my right and left halves were two different people instead of two sides of the same person, the left half being normal and the right half being obviously deformed. Now I feel as though I stand taller and what I have always perceived as extreme deformities are neither as noticeable nor as important in how I feel I am perceived by others.