



Maureen A. McHugh

Feldenkrais Practitioner

FALL 2013

SEPTEMBER – DECEMBER

The reason for doing them

I have been listening this summer to a recording by my senior colleague Sheryl Field. A native of north Jersey and New York, she was speaking last September at our annual conference in San Francisco. Deep into her workshop titled “A View from the Beginning” she said,

“The lessons point to relationships, and that is the reason to do them.”

For me, this is a stunning distillation of our work. It summarizes so many of my own hours of nonverbal exploration and also of more hours trying to bring the experience into words.

For Sheryl, the statement reflects those things, and also a personal layer. What comes next is gory! When Sheryl was twelve, she was with her family at the Jersey shore. One morning while walking along the beach and looking out across the water, she felt something brush against her leg. She looked down. There at the water line, with its mouth open, was a shark. Her left foot was just about to step into its mouth. Although she saw it coming, there was no time to change. She stepped; the shark closed its mouth over her foot, dug its teeth in and ripped; then it let go and receded into the ocean. The flesh was left shredded and hanging from her foot. Later, she learned this type of injury is called degloving.

Sheryl was taken to the emergency room and later had operations to put everything back in place. Although no bones were broken and the nerve connections were mostly restored, in subsequent years she walked a little oddly, protecting the foot.

Unusually, four years later Sheryl met Moshe Feldenkrais. There had been a notice in her north Jersey public library that he would be speaking in New York City. She went, was totally inspired and has been with him and his teaching ever since.

During a set of lessons with Feldenkrais shortly after their meeting, Sheryl came to a new understanding. She realized that she had put the injured leg in a nest. She said “I realized that I myself had done it.” But Feldenkrais didn’t do that. “He didn’t fracture me. He was not looking at any one part. Instead he was looking at me the way he looked at everyone: at the whole way a person feels, thinks, acts, breathes, senses and imagines.”

By consistently calling attention to the whole of herself, Feldenkrais gradually “created the conditions” under which Sheryl, too, saw herself again as whole and moved again as whole.

Through the lessons that Feldenkrais created, this pathway is open to us all.



A small shark has grabbed this man's thumb. It must have been a larger one that got Sheryl's foot.