

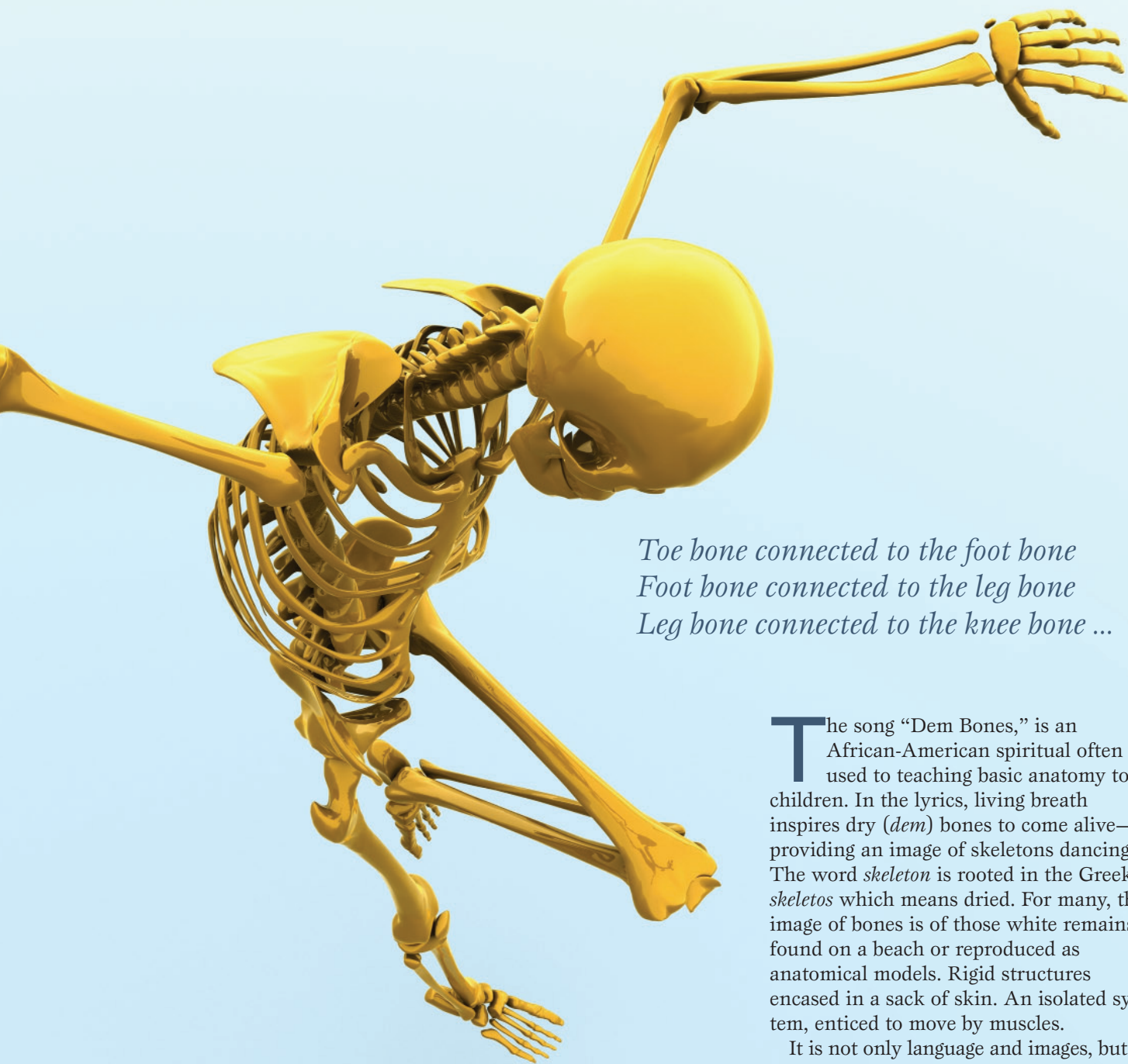


Dem Bones

By Liz Koch

Author's Note: This article is meant to simply evoke a conversation about how we as a culture think about our bones. It is not meant in any way to suggest or recommend manipulation of bones or the skeletal structure. As massage and bodywork practitioners, professional training and licensing determine the parameters of your work. However, your mind and heart are free to venture into rethinking bones in new and exciting ways and to realize that tissues—whether they innovate into bone, muscle, tendon, or ligament—all share a common cellular level of expression.

Emilie Conrad, pioneer and founder of Continuum Movement, and I combine fluid movement with energetic core awareness to awaken and inspire dem bones to jump up and dance. This article is about our approach.



*Toe bone connected to the foot bone
Foot bone connected to the leg bone
Leg bone connected to the knee bone ...*

The song “Dem Bones,” is an African-American spiritual often used to teaching basic anatomy to children. In the lyrics, living breath inspires dry (*dem*) bones to come alive—providing an image of skeletons dancing. The word *skeleton* is rooted in the Greek *skeletos* which means dried. For many, the image of bones is of those white remains found on a beach or reproduced as anatomical models. Rigid structures encased in a sack of skin. An isolated system, enticed to move by muscles.

It is not only language and images, but our mass media’s health warnings, that feed the cultural misperception of bones. Nutritional support and pharmaceuticals are often the only major recommendations for the silent killer osteoporosis. Curvatures of bone such as scoliosis, in the allopathic tradition, demand surgical correction. Yet bones are wildly alive; regenerative, malleable, dynamic, and responsive. Bone is living tissue; expressive of our genetic tendencies, ancient origins, and emotional wellness. Bones tell us about who we are, what we do, and what we stand for.

Origins of Bones

Why we have bones is as controversial as the origins of life itself and is beyond the scope of this article albeit full of fascinating and dynamic suppositions. But for the sake of stirring up new ways of thinking, it is worth mentioning science writer Carl Zimmer. In his book *At The Water's Edge* he tells a story of bones developing in water. Bones may have developed as a means of storing minerals as fish swam from salt to fresh water. It's also worth mentioning Michael Levine, professor of genetics and development in the Department of Molecular & Cellular Biology at the University of California, Berkeley. His studies include what may be the first evidence of the spine originating in a tiny animal called the "sea squirt," whose anatomical arrangement exhibits a major nerve axis, the notochord or first backbone.

Whether one considers the research fact or metaphor, water is our connection to the ocean and still remains within us. Fluid movement is a vital channel for accessing healthy bones. Shifting our perception from dry bone models to dynamic bone metaphors alters our way of communicating, touching, and working toward optimal health.

The Fluid System

Dancer turned human potential explorer Emilie Conrad developed much of her present method through her inquisitive approach to spinal cord injuries. She came to believe that what is called paralysis might in fact be inherent in the medical model, not actually in the spine of the human being. Making a distinction between what is called *functional movement*, which implies a *body*, and *biological movement*, in which the body is not a designated object and does not maintain a specificity of form, Conrad has let go of the biomechanical definition of movement. Instead, her exploration is an open engagement with the dynamic energies of a living process. From this perspective, paralysis is a compromise in function, but not in movement. She discovered that fluid bio-intelligent movement innovates new functions, including building resilient, healthy bone.

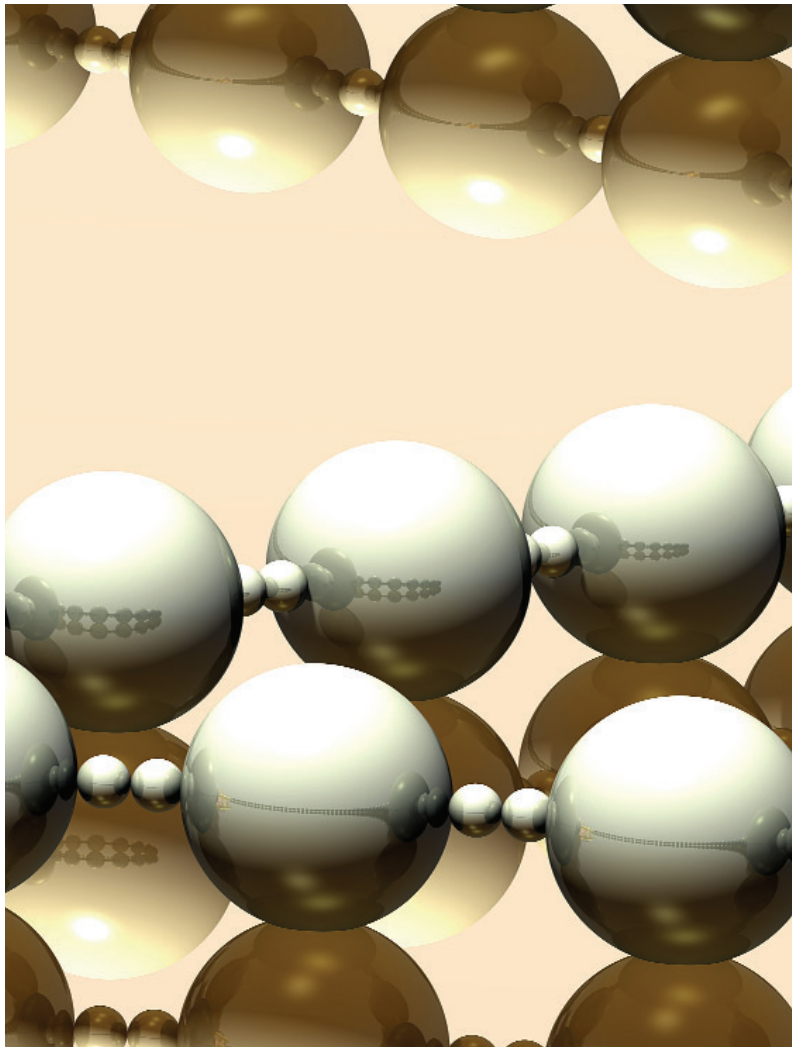
Using sound, breath, and micro- (maybe even nano-) movements, Conrad saw tissue move in far distant limbs. Fluid evokes waves, spirals, undulating swirls, and—like all water, having no boundary—flows into many systems simultaneously. Just as water moves form, fluid movement dissolves scar tissue, invigorates

circulation, and innovates new pathways, stimulating flesh, blood, and bone.

The hard compact substance associated with bone has minute passageways filled with blood vessels that oxygenate and carry living nutrients; the top thin white skin layer is full of blood vessels and nerves; the deepest layer is a juicy living marrow forming white blood cells for fighting infection, platelets to stop bleeding, and red blood cells carrying oxygen. All three layers of living bone tissue reverberate to the tempo of oceanic movement.

What Conrad discovered was that the health of all connective tissue, no matter what function it serves, is enriched by the movement of fluid. Movement, sound, and breath are powerful forces for activating this ancient source.

All living processes
owe their lineage to the
movement of water.
—Emilie Conrad





Recommended Reading

Conrad, Emile. 2007. *Life on Land: The Story of Continuum, the World Renowned Self-Discovery and Movement Method*. Berkeley, California: North Atlantic.

McHose, Caryn and Frank, Kevin. 2006. *How Life Moves: Explorations in Meaning and Body Awareness*. Berkeley, California: North Atlantic.

Schwenk, Theodor. 1990. *Sensitive Chaos: The Creation of Flowing Forms in Water and Air*. London, England: Rudolf Steiner Press.

Suzuki, David and McConnell, Amanda. 2006. *The Sacred Balance: Rediscovering Our Place in Nature*. Vancouver, British Columbia: Greystone Books.

when we are right side up or upside down. We orient through proprioceptive perception.

Like a pearl necklace, all 230 joints create a perceptual network that forms a continuum. Every joint, like the individual pearl, is vitally important in creating this sense of wholeness. When one joint is hypertonic, another will be hypotonic. Metaphorically the string represents our energetic, electrical magnetic life force. When either the string (energy) or pearl (joint) is damaged or disrupted, dissonance echoes throughout all systems.

Core Disharmony

When proprioception is disrupted, we feel out of tune. We may try to rely on muscular proprioception to guide us back to harmony, but muscles alone can not offer what bones and joints are capable of providing.

A simple example of disruption can often be found in the shoe a client is wearing. A stiff-soled shoe, for example, limits movement within the toe joints, muffling the sense of the earth's rebounding support. Rather than sensing weight passing through bones into the earth and rebounding (like a ball bouncing) back up through a buoyant arch, a compromised system compensates by depending upon eyes and external muscles for support. External armoring, rather than vital fluid energetic communication, results in inap-

propriate muscle tension that cascades inward to deeper layers of dysfunction. Tight muscles yank on sensitive organs, viscera, joints, and bones.

Tension in the core, such as the psoas muscle, can be traced back to the midline and disruption in proprioceptive awareness. As primal messenger of the central nervous system, the psoas muscle conveys survival instincts of safety or fear, coherency or disconnect. Rather than focus on psoas as the problem or attempt to over-stabilize the core through muscular control, an effective course of action is to return to the midline by reactivating proprioception. Many therapeutic and educational programs offer strategies for awakening proprioception—Ortho-Bionomy, Feldenkrais Method, Alexander Technique, Brain Gym, Continuum Movement, and Core Awareness to name a few.

Working with the fluid system is a quick, effective method for generating congruency that reverberates harmony throughout all systems. It can moisten and invigorate an exhausted psoas muscle freeing the spine to again hum and vibrate with life's juicy song.

The Diary Of A Struggling Massage Therapist....

....*SOUND LIKE ANYBODY YOU KNOW?*

"How To Make 75 to 100 K Per Year Going From High Quality Client To Client In Your Brand New Range Rover!"

Dear Massage Therapist Business Diary:
January 1, 2006

Another year gone by-another year, just like the years before. Gosh, I really wish I knew what I was doing wrong. I truly wish things would make a change for the better!

It nearly tears me apart to think of getting up and dragging myself through another grind-it-out day with clients. It seems like each new one is exactly like the last one, or worse! Each day cloudier than the last.

Maybe the worse thing of all is that nobody seems to care what happens to me. SometimesI wonder if I care myself.

I know this is wrong thinking but, at this point, I just can't help it. Right now I feel as if life is having a party and I wasn't invited. **Why did I ever go to massage school?** Oh Diary, please wave your magic wand to help me make some real money, or just simply make things better for me, *quick!*

January 3, 2006

Well, today things certainly stunk! I had 3 new clients scheduled. One called and told me she could not make it and she could not reschedule on the spot, but she'd call me soon to reschedule. Hmm, *sure!* Each time I hear that, I know I'll never see them again. Another never showed, and when I called her, the number she'd left me was disconnected. Oh, and the 3rd client actually did arrive, 20 minutes late, and literally announced on the spot, "Well, I don't even know why I am here because I don't have any money." Naturally, I am going to take care of her, even though I can hardly afford to.

January 28, 2006

Diary, I hate to be so negative, but I've more trouble to report. I can't make my kid's daycare payment, and I am afraid to look at my checking account because I think I may be in the negative! Tomorrow I have to take a cash advance on my credit card just to make my payments. **Worse, I have to spend my entire weekend at the supermarket doing free chair massages!** Remember the last time I did this? You know, how I ran into my ex-spouse? It was humiliating. I mean, my ex didn't even want a complimentary massage... just wanted to ask who was with the kids, and, oh, yes, how did I like building my massage practice this way. I said that I liked it and things were going great in practice for me because of it. I got that suspect look always given to me when we were married. You

know, the one where it was easy to see I was pulling someone's leg!. I really thought that moving to supermarkets from schools doing free chair sessions would help me get more clients **-but things are getting worse!**

February 4, 2006

Today was a decent day. I got 2 new clients-*don't know how-*, did 6 sessions, and collected **\$180.00!** Better than usual, anyway.

I also got this month's "**Massage & Bodywork**" Magazine. I opened it to hopefully find my solution or at least what others are doing. Maybe I'll hire one of these marketers I read about. I really can't afford their products just to get all pumped-up or to memorize scripts that only serve to make me squirm in my pants as I deliver them. According to another therapist from across town, they are really big on theory and technique, but do little to help teach therapists to attract the kind of quality clients who are capable of and want to pay the cash fees I want. Isn't there a way to attract quality clients who will pay me, stay with me and refer clients to me?

Well, maybe this month will be different. *Its only the 4th, and I've already collected \$475.00!*

February 27, 2006

Tomorrow's the last day of the month and I've only collected \$1,130! That won't even cover my business and personal overhead, let alone new shoes for the kids. *I hope I have some life left in my credit cards!*

I have never thought this way before, but I have been considering what would happen to me if I simply packed it in and walked away. **I am really scared!** What will my parents, my kids, my friends, all think? I just hope I make it through the week.

This weekend I need to make a *decision* to either trudge on as I have, get a part-time waitressing or bartending job, or seek the aid of someone who can really help me.

March 3, 2006

Today I got another issue of "**Massage & Bodywork**" Magazine in the mail. I opened it up, hoping against all odds that my salvation lie within its pages.

Diary, you must have finally heard my words because I read a story about a once-struggling massage therapist who was actually worse off than me! She actually became ill from practice stress, and now she is the area's **#1 massage therapist!**

The story explained how, on barely a shoestring budget, this massage therapist discovered how to get quality clients to call her

first...without doing *any* health fairs, free chair massages, windshield fliers, or any expensive advertising. In it was an offer for a "**Free, Confidential Report**" that was supposed to explain all the details. I called the recorded message and ordered it and I should get it in a couple of days. Diary, wish me luck-I am still skeptical. You know I will keep you posted!

September 20, 2006

Diary, I apologize for neglecting you for over 6 months, but I have been busy having so much **fun** at the office and driving my new, white, 2007 Range Rover I just bought. **My life has totally changed for the better!** If it wasn't for that **free report** that I requested that revealed what 99% of the profession is doing wrong, I'd still be struggling and borrowing money from mom and dad to feed my kids!

Get this: I am now working only Monday through Thursday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., with **every Friday off**, and **I am charging double** what I used to! I have more time for my kids, and never miss their school plays or ballgames.

Best of all, I met this wonderful man named Steve. We've been going out now for over 3 months and all my friends are jealous-he's fantastic! Everywhere we go people stare at us-we make a great couple! Best of all, I can't see how my life could get any better. In the last three weeks, I sold 16 new clients a one year series of 50 therapy sessions for \$2,250...that's **\$36,000.00!** **I am now making as much money or more than some physical therapists, chiropractors, and M.D.'s!**

Diary, upon my next entry, I will have closed on my brand new house with the three car garage and great big yard!

Wouldn't you, too, like to have more time and more money to spend on enjoying life rather than stressing out at the office? Wouldn't you like to discover how to attract an endless stream of clients like a ten-ton magnet who don't make an issue out of paying your full fee for your entire treatment series without you having to feel like a high-pressured, charismatic salesperson? Call the **24 Hour, Toll-Free, Recorded Message at 1-800-651-6840** or visit **www.massageriches.com** to receive a copy of the **Free Report** that Guarantees to be very relevant to your practice!

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Enhancing Bone Health

Choosing the bio-intelligent paradigm where *body* is perceived as a living process imbedded in the larger *body* of earth's ever-changing process, moves both practitioner and client to an inclusive way of approaching tissue and healthy bone, empowering both human beings. As a bio-intelligent therapist, your awareness is a vital instructor; the exploration begins within.

Begin by exploring what it means to you to work with sound, movement, and breath. Determine how vital bones and vibrant proprioception can help relax muscles. Remember we are not attempting any form of manipulation. This is a change in perception and sensitivity that encourages an inclusive systems way of thinking about optimal health. Here are seven ways to begin stimulating healthy bone within you and, when applicable, within your clients.

1. Jacques/Zagues—Continuum works with a variety of sounds to stimulate tissue; the Jacques-Zagues sounds specifically stimulate and restore the resiliency of bone. Experiment with yourself. Place your fingers on any bone (the clavicles for example), and begin making the following sound: “Jacques-Zagues.” The French *Jacques* is the sound of “juh.” The alternate sound is a “zuh.” When put together, there is a random shift from “juh” to “zuh,” a bit like this: jjjjjjzzzzjjjjjj zzzzzjjjjzzzz jjjjzzzzjjjjjj zzzzzjjjjzzzz. When making the sound, bring teeth together (which also helps the bones of the mouth and jaw-freeing muscles to relax) and visualize sending the sound into the specific bone being touched. Every time you take a breath, that is one round; repeat for six rounds. The rounds are important as it takes inundation to accumulate enough fluid activity within the bone to actually alter its character. The simplicity of the Jacques-Zagues exercise makes it easy to teach your clients how to work with themselves.

2. Applying Sound—To apply sound to a specific area, it works best when that area is being touched while inundated with sound. Individuals with a fragile skeletal structure or one that is excessively hard and dense both benefit from the Jacques-Zagues homework. (It's truly amazing how restorative this sound is for bringing about healthy bone.) The Jacques-Zagues exercise can also be beneficial for arthritic clients; again, it works best if they practice the sounds on a daily basis to maintain skeletal resiliency. For example, holding his or her own fingers, a client can direct sound into an arthritic joint, sending the sound and imagination into the irritated joint.

3. Tapping Bone—Used in trauma recovery work throughout Europe, simple tapping of large bones (a light drumming vibration—up, down, and around) invigorates proprioception and bone health. Try it on your own leg or thigh bones.

4. Awakening Feet and Ankles—With twenty-six bones, the foot has an abundance of proprioceptors. Shoes often interfere with this sense of resilient bones. Simple massage helps awaken proprioception, gaining flexibly in the feet and full range of motion in the ankle joint.

5. Massage—Gentle touch is a powerful tool for softening armor, fear, and defenses associated with disorientation, trauma, and skeletal dysfunctions. Sensitive touch provides a feeling of protection, value, and awareness essential for resolving trauma often associated with skeletal deformities. A gentle, small wave motion or rocking motion of the leg is much more beneficial than deep invasive techniques for bringing about resolution. Here, it is important to differentiate *release* (cathartic letting go and reactivation) and *resolution* (coherency, completion, and harmony). For real resolution and healing to occur, safety and integrity are essential.

6. Voicing—It is a very serious issue for clients with osteoporosis who may be facing life-threatening medications and who have no voice. The secret to their bone health is to actually say the words of healing (whatever they may be). Although you may not be skilled in emotional processing, you can simply witness a client speaking whatever needs saying or letting their voice be heard. This encouragement and simple recognition is very powerful. Do not respond with anything but a resounding yes.

7. Supporting Activities—Acting classes for men and women who have muffled their voices is a powerful recommendation for bone health. Working with a good acting teacher or coach can offer a safe alternative. Through the voice of the character, a person can ultimately give voice to the imploded forbidden territory so that the bones no longer hold the energetic inhibition and dem bones can move, possibly for the first time, with total abandonment. **M&B**

Liz Koch is an international teacher, writer, and author of The Psoas Book; Core Awareness: Enhancing Yoga, Pilates, Exercise & Dance; and Unraveling Scoliosis (CD). With three decades of experience working with the core muscle, she is an authority on the dynamic and emotionally expressive iliopsoas. Find more information on the psoas and Core Awareness by visiting www.coreawareness.com. Koch and Emilie Conrad (www.continuummovement.com) will be co-teaching a Dem Bones workshop January 2008.

A special acknowledgement is made to Emilie Conrad for her contributions to this article.