

# Parkinson's Disease, Janet Hamburg and ... Dance



*The following feature about Janet Hamburg, her work with Parkinson's disease and use of dance is compiled from a number of things that became available to us. It just so happened that we had put aside for publication an article about Janet, and some information about her award winning DVD Motivating Moves for People with Parkinson's, made by the Parkinson's Disease Foundation. While in the process of putting these together for this issue of Moving On, Janet communicated to the Certified Movement Analysts (CMA) listserv via email, with her views on the subject then under discussion – which was Parkinson's disease. For the benefit of all she also attached a document of a conference presentation she had made.*

*We are delighted that we have her permission to print this as part of this feature on her work, preceded with some information about Parkinson's disease.*

## Parkinson's Disease

Wikipedia, the free on-line encyclopaedia, informs us that Parkinson's disease is a degenerative disorder of the central nervous system and one that often impairs the sufferer's motor skills, speech, and/or other functions. It belongs to a group of conditions called movement disorders. Those of us who know about it can recognise it by its characteristic muscle rigidity, tremor, and slowing of physical movement, sometimes leading to secondary symptoms (that could be caused by toxicity from medication) that could include high level cognitive dysfunction or language difficulties.

Again according to Wikipedia, it is both chronic and progressive and the symptoms are brought about by a decrease in the "stimulation of the motor cortex by the basal ganglia, normally caused by the insufficient formation and action of dopamine, which is produced in the dopaminergic neurons of the brain. It is named after English physician James Parkinson who made a detailed description of it in his essay: *An Essay on the Shaking Palsy* written as long ago as 1817.

Based on my own experience of working in physical rehabilitation over very many years, like all other nervous diseases, Parkinson's is an unpleasant condition for anyone to contend with - with a body that stops being fully under the person's control. Certainly medical management in the form of medications and procedures are much better than they used to be years ago, but the condition is still progressive and the battle to maintain mobility and muscle control, ongoing.

Working as a young physiotherapist, prior to also becoming a dmt, with people with this condition and other movement disorders caused by neurological problems, I did what I was taught many years ago, concentrating on rotational movements to ease out the rigidity, balance and coordination work to counter the problems that developed from the decreased motor control and slowing of responses, with specific exercises such as encouraging the lifting of feet (to address the shuffle) over a variety of obstacles. Also, providing many strategies to encourage initiation and release of the 'freezing' and hesitant movement that occur – the 'getting stuck'. But it was not until I had started to work with dance movement and of course, very importantly, the music that so often goes with it, that I started to feel more satisfied in what I was delivering. It was a more holistic approach and, at the same time, more successful in addressing the symptoms. It was satisfying from the perspective of its ability to lift the mood, and provide enjoyment and social interaction between those participating, whilst at the same time addressing their physical needs.

Having been reminded of my own past experiences with this distressing disease by reading the following I am left feeling quite inspired to reconnect with this work and seek a local Parkinson's disease support group and return to providing dance movement as a way of addressing the full spectrum of issues. **(Jane G.)**.

## Janet Hamburg

*Janet is a Certified Laban Movement Analyst and a Registered Somatic Movement Therapist, who received the Laban/Bartenieff Institute's first Laban Award for Creative Achievement by an artist or researcher in 2004. She is a professor of dance and an Associate of the Gerontology Center at the University of Kansas. She is also a Senior Research Associate for the Laban/Bartenieff Institute of Movement Studies, has taught in the New Mexico Laban Certification Program and was a guest faculty member in Berlin and New York certification programs.*

*Her research on Parkinson's disease resulted in the award-winning exercise DVD/video, *Motivating Moves for People with Parkinson's*, co-produced and distributed by the Parkinson's Disease Foundation. Her work with athletes has been featured on NBC national television and the U.S. Information Agency's international program *Science World*. Her research has been published in refereed journals such as *Activities*, *Adaptation and Aging* and *the Journal of Music Therapy*.*

### 'Hamburg close-up'

## Dancer helps those with Parkinson's rediscover everyday movement

Story by Ann Whitcher-Gentzk

*Ann is editor of the University of Buffalo's Online Alumni Magazine - Ubtoday, who published this profile of Janet (Winter 2008). Janet apparently graduated from the University of Buffalo with a science degree (BS) in 1973. We are grateful to Ann and the University of Buffalo for allowing us to reprint the following short article.*

For Janet Hamburg, movement and healing are intimately connected.



'Finger Talking'

In *Motivating Moves for People with Parkinson's*, her DVD/video of seated exercises co-produced by the Parkinson's Disease Foundation, Hamburg demonstrates techniques to help those with Parkinson's improve their breathing, flexibility, balance and vocal range. "Feel as though your head were a helium balloon floating up, up," Hamburg tells participants in the taped exercise class, as they gently rotate their necks to a Debussy-like accompaniment. The original piano music by Robert Abramson—a faculty member at the Juilliard School—mixes blues, jazz, classical and more to match the lunging, pressing, punching and other exercises.

*Motivating Moves* stems from her late mother's experiences with Parkinson's and also from many years working with Parkinson's support groups. The exercises do more than strengthen and stretch muscles, however. "They allow people who have been robbed of their unique sense of rhythm, timing and phrasing to feel pleasure in moving again," says Hamburg. The overall approach is based on the work of dance theorist Rudolf Laban (1879–1958) and his protégée, Irmgard Bartenieff (1900–1981), a dance researcher who also trained as a physical therapist.

Now a professor of dance at the University of Kansas and a certified Laban Movement Analyst, Hamburg has been interested in "moving bodies through space" since her college days at UB. With no dance major available and not enough time to implement one herself, she opted

for a special major in social and urban systems engineering; urban mass transportation planning

was her particular focus. "I thought it would give me a quantitative edge," she says of her studies that included mentoring by both civil engineering and architecture faculty. Meanwhile, she continued to study dance at UB.

In 1973 came a pivotal moment. With her parents in town for graduation weekend and a cap and gown purchased, Hamburg skipped the ceremony rather than miss performing in choreographer Merce Cunningham's *Field Dances*. The production was being staged outdoors at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery by company member Valda Setterfield and

couldn't be missed. "I had been focusing on what I thought was my career path for the past four years, yet denying how important dance was in my life." Hamburg later earned an MA in dance from Mills College, while absorbing her earlier training at UB. "UB served me well," she says. "It taught me to be interdisciplinary, applying movement theory and principles of anatomy and kinesiology to the everyday movement challenges we all face."

**Photographs: Janet Hamburg, and Janet with client in 'Finger Talking' - Earl Richardson**

## Communication to the CMA Listserve – January 2009

Janet responded to the discussion on Parkinson's disease and in particular a message posted by Oliver Bandel on the use of Effort work with this population.

Oliver had apparently just been reading a book about the environment and activation of Parkinson disease patients in helping them to do "normal" movements. He stated, "The problem of that disease is caused by 'less chaos' in the brain: ... less activation of some parts in the brain yields to the problems. When there is too much ordered activity, and too less noise/chaos, then this causes the problems", and "Activation by visual patterns as well as emotional demands can yield to 'normal'/'healthy' movements". He said that when he read the "part about the emotional activation", he thought that "effort-based work ... could be a good way to activate... going into emotional themes and effort work that might help the patients".

This drew the following response from Janet:

"Irmgard Bartenieff successfully worked with people with Parkinson's disease. For more than two decades, Eileen Jones and I have, too. I suggest that you read Irmgard Bartenieff's 1974 article, "Space, Effort and the Brain." It was published in the September-October issue of "Main Currents in Modern Thought" Vol. 31, No. 1. Here is an excerpt in which she discusses Effort and Parkinson's:

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"The various lesions of specific midbrain loci strike the Labananalyst as disturbances of the intent aspect of what we call Effort. By 'intent' we mean the regulative or determinative aspects of movement which organize an action, such as direction, timing or degree of force. Disturbances of intent cause failure of control over space, force and time, and

thereby frequently produce an inability to order Effort and spatial patterns into consistent sequences.

As examples, we will describe syndromes which arise from damage to a specific basal ganglion locus. In Parkinson's disease, a number of disturbances can be enumerated: there seems to be a disturbance in the continuity of the flow factor of Effort, causing a characteristic difficulty to initiate, to vary, and to maintain an action. The movement flow tends to get increasingly bound, and may stop in the midst of the action. There is also no range in controlling acceleration-deceleration: acceleration may increase to the point of uncontrolled stumbling-shuffling, or after starting a movement with 'sustainment' it stops gradually, becoming rigid non-movement. In all of these, it is the flow factor which is disorganized. Loss of balance is also frequently associated with loss in degree of verticality and a sense of where the person is going.

Observing these disabilities in Laban's terms, we notice that the factors, which fail in each of these syndromes, represent just those that Laban has identified as the space-weight or force-time and flow elements in his phenomenology of movement. Thus, these neurophysiological deficits give strong if preliminary indications that Laban's Effort factors have been embedded in the biological substrate of the human brain."

Janet added for the benefit of those interested, "I also thought you might like to read a brief summary of my research that I presented at the recent Beyond Body Language International Symposium. 'A Laban/Bartenieff-based Exercise Program to Improve Physical Function and Quality of Life Measures for People with Parkinson's'." which she attached to the email – see next page.