

# Exploring Whole-Body Healing ~ A Two-Way Interview Between Milagros Paredes and Stefanie Cohen

(in which a Jewish woman from Brooklyn and Cambridge who became a Somatic Movement Educator engages with a Filipino-Spanish woman who grew up in Singapore and became a Shiatsu practitioner)



Photography by Joni Strickfaden

*In a mutual interview, two local professional healing artists —Stefanie Cohen and Milagros Paredes — demonstrate how sharing expertise with each other has significantly benefited them and their clients on numerous levels. In a relaxed back-and-forth question and answer session, Stefanie and Milagros discuss body knowledge and the physicality of being, healing, and life in a conversational exchange that mirrors the client sessions they trade with one another.*

*Milagros, 51, is a shiatsu practitioner and Certified Apprentice Integral Coach®. In her work, she seeks to facilitate the healing process through an integrated approach to shiatsu, incorporating touch, awareness, food, herbal medicine, and ongoing encouragement to clients to practice awareness and movement techniques. She sees clients out of her home in Chelsea, and also does housecalls. She and her son, Joseph, who is 13, live in Chelsea.*

*Stefanie, 45, is a Registered Somatic Movement Educator and a performing artist who facilitates group classes and conducts private, individual sessions. Her teaching approach centers on helping students develop keen physical awareness, mindful presence, respectful touch, and collaborative connection; she facilitates exploration of somatic movement practice as a means of self-discovery, artistic expression, and self-care. She owns and manages SOMA (Studio Of Movement Arts) in the Kerrytown area of downtown Ann Arbor. She and her partner, Corey Gearhart, and her two children, Shane, 13, and Billie, 9, live on the west side of Ann Arbor.*

**Stefanie Cohen:** Milagros, you and I have been trading client sessions with each other for the past four years, and we have found that it has had an effect both on our own well-being and on the way we conduct our work. We’ve gone through some similar life stages during this time — we’ve both participated in professional training programs, have been raising our children, and have each also gone through a divorce. Over the course of this time, through conversation, writing, and sharing some of the practice and theory behind the techniques we employ, we have grown to become more knowledgeable about each other’s work and appreciative of its value. This has supported both us and our clients. Within this context, you came up with the idea to write an article about our work and the processes we’ve been engaged in, in the form of a mutual interview. Thank you so much for inviting me to do this with you.

**Stefanie:** *First, how would you describe this cross-pollination, Milagros?*

**Milagros Parades:** I am interested in how the work we receive from one another informs and starts to get integrated into the way that we work with clients — the presence we bring. For me, one of the most interesting aspects of bodywork, and what I have benefited most from, is a greater awareness of my body. Increasing body awareness is what allows for ongoing healing — it’s what begins to help us see how we participate in our own suffering and what choices we have for altering habitual patterns that no longer serve us. Before I was engaged in Authentic Movement practice with you, I had wanted to find a way to strengthen this aspect of my work by inviting my clients to a more active awareness of their body, but I wasn’t sure how to do this. Through our work together in this practice, and through my recent work in Focusing Technique, I am learning how to do this.

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—Milagros Paredes

**Stefanie:** Within our trading with one another, I have appreciated the opportunity to receive regular, consistent bodywork and to barter for it during a time when money has been tight for me. In doing so, I have been able to self-tend through receiving not only skillful touch but herbal and nutritional guidance that has supported me through stress and distress. So often, this kind of self-care can go by the wayside when we are concerned about our finances. Creating a small-scale “barter economy” not only addresses these concerns but also, I believe, upholds a sense of value for the work that we each have to offer.

Beyond the economic exchange, however, I appreciate how actively you have participated in a conversation with me about somatic work, including both practical and theoretical aspects. I’ve been able to experiment with and expand upon ways I might work with my movement clients and students. You have been particularly forthcoming about the ways in which psychotherapy and somatic work complement each other, for example, which has made my research process more rich and interactive. Though the specific manner in which we work with clients is different, what you model for me in terms of your commitment to your practice influences and inspires me. This has been tremendously supportive.

For me, an interesting aspect of our process together, in our trading and even within this conversation, is how we seem to move fluidly between being the receiver of care and being the giver of care. What is it that we hold for ourselves to make that possible? With some of our clients, we would never choose to trade. Certainly, if we were traditional psychotherapists or physicians, we wouldn’t place ourselves in the role of receiver of care to our clients — we wouldn’t alter those relationships or share certain aspects of ourselves. But for some reason — likely a philosophical sense about this kind of work — you and I seem to be able to make those flips. I’m interested in this and am sure we will touch upon this in our conversation.

**Stefanie:** *To begin with, though, I’m curious to hear more about your background. Can you tell me a little about where you were born and about your cultural upbringing?*

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— Stefanie Cohen

**Milagros:** I was born in Manila, Philippines, in 1962. My parents were both Spanish-Filipino, what’s known as “mestizo” in the Philippines. I grew up with English, Spanish, and Tagalog, and I spoke English mixed with a few Tagalog words and expressions here and there. I have an older sister and brother and a younger sister.

In Manila we lived in a family compound consisting of four homes and a swing set. It was separated from the rest of the neighborhood by huge cement walls with broken glass rimming the top and large spiked green gates on each end. Because the extreme poverty of Manila made it a dangerous place, we were not allowed to leave the compound unless we were with an adult. Several members of my father’s family lived there with us so, in a sense, we lived in a co-housing situation.

My grandmother took me to ballet classes and to the country club where I learned to swim and, later, trained further in swimming with my brother several times a week. I loved that country club. It was one place we could roam freely outside of the compound.

**Stefanie:** *How old were you when your family left the Philippines?*

**Milagros:** When I was about nine, my father decided to emigrate to Canada, in anticipation of political unrest under the Marcos regime. My father had some savings, but very little really, and with this courageous and loving decision, he changed the course of our lives and opened up worlds of possibilities — for my whole family. After six months, during which time he found work and a home for me, my siblings, and my mother, we followed him. The rest of his family followed as well, while my mother’s family remained in the Philippines.

We lived in the suburbs of Toronto for a year and a half and then, as a result of my father’s job transfer — he was a salesman — we moved back to Asia, this time to live in Singapore. Life there was safe, secure, and full of opportunities. I lived in Singapore until I was seventeen, when I moved back to Canada for university. My parents stayed in Singapore for a few more years, so it remained a home base, and my brother and I would return there a couple of times a year during vacations.



**Milagros:** *I actually know very little about your childhood, Stefanie. Where were you born, and what were your early years like?*

**Stefanie:** I was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1967 to a culturally, though nonreligious, Jewish family and moved as a small child to Cambridge, Massachusetts. My parents were quite young when I was born — in their late teens and still in college — and they actively participated in the antiwar movement of the late 1960’s and early ’70s. I am told that I spent a good deal of my infancy in a stroller at demonstrations and rallies! We moved to Cambridge initially because of contacts and friends my parents had in the area and so my dad could go to graduate school; but we settled there, and I grew up there along with my younger sister, Gillian. My mother, Phyllis, has worked for the American Friends Service Committee, a peace and social justice organization, for more than thirty-five years. My father, Stu, was a journalist — initially with a newspaper called *The Real Paper*, which became *The Boston Phoenix*. He was a foreign affairs writer and arts critic and was also an artist — a musician and photographer. Certainly, my dad’s engagement as an artist and with the connections he made between art and social change was a great support to me. Over the years of his career, which sadly ended with his death in 1996, the focus of his writing shifted to public health and policy. My sister, who grew to become quite engaged with public policy herself, and who is particularly interested in educational needs of children, works for the U.S. Department of Education and lives in Washington, DC.

**Stefanie:** *Would you describe your work with shiatsu and say something about the other modalities you use?*



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**Milagros:** Shiatsu is a form of massage involving the application of pressure. I practice Zen Shiatsu, developed by Shizuto Masunaga. In this form of shiatsu, pressure is applied to all parts of the body along specific pathways called meridians.

In a session, I work on a mat on the floor and, using my weight in a relaxed manner, I apply deep, slow, perpendicular pressure to stimulate the body’s parasympathetic nervous system and support the body’s inherent impulse toward healing. In addition to touch, I often find it important to ask the client about his or her diet and to offer recommendations that seem relevant. I also integrate Focusing Technique wherever I think it will support release and, from a big-picture perspective, I allow the Integral Coaching® method to inform my approach.

**Stefanie:** *Restoring a balanced flow of energy seems key in your work. Can you say more about that?*

**Milagros:** The opposite of flow is stagnation and congestion. Everybody experiences this in one way or another. In Chinese medicine, disease results from stagnant energy, and in my work, my effort is toward promoting a smooth flow of energy. After a session, clients report experiences of profound relaxation, a clear mind, diminishment of symptoms, greater flexibility, a new sense of lengthening, and flexibility. These are the result of clearing stagnation, supporting deficiencies, and dispersing excess energy.

I have noticed and am excited about how people often also have a motivation to proactively care for their bodies and their health in new ways. I love to see this birthing of change and hope. The healing happens not only because I am facilitating a smoother flow of energy but because I have opened my body to receive their energy. This connection between us — I think this in itself is healing.

**Milagros:** *Stefanie, this aspect of connection is something that I experience powerfully in the movement work I do with you. Would you describe Authentic Movement and speak about this practice?*

**Stefanie:** Authentic Movement is a contemplative movement practice founded by Mary Starks Whitehouse, a modern dancer and pioneer in the field of dance therapy, in the 1950s. She investigated the ways in which people, rather than having movement imposed upon them, could have their bodies *lead them* into movement. When people allow themselves to listen deeply and to be moved by their bodies, a tremendous number of images and insights can come forth.

**Milagros:** *What do you mean by movement being imposed?*

**Stefanie:** For instance, in forms including our everyday, utilitarian tasks, sports, or dance choreography. I’d say that a big question the practice poses is this: “If left to its own devices, what does your body feel inclined to do? How do you feel drawn to move or rest?” When

people allow themselves to listen deeply and to be moved by their body’s impulses, a tremendous number of images, emotions, and insights can come forth.

Typically, the practice includes eyes-closed movers, listening for their body’s movement impulses — however subtle or expressive — attended by eyes-open witnesses who watch them compassionately. After a period of movement, the movers and witnesses may write or draw or otherwise further creatively explore the material or themes that have emerged in the session. Practitioners use Authentic Movement as a physical exploration, an artistic resource, a therapeutic modality, and as a form of movement meditation.

**Milagros:** *And what’s your role as a facilitator of Authentic Movement?*

**Stefanie:** I serve as an attentive witness to my clients, observing the sensations, feelings, images, and thoughts that I experience as I watch them move. Upon first hearing their own reflections on their movement experiences, I offer my responses to them. I do this in an attempt to provide other kinds of insights alongside those that they have found for themselves, but never as a way of overriding or rewriting them. I hold this role within my individual sessions and also often in my group classes; but in the groups, I facilitate others to learn to witness one another as well. Mary Whitehouse’s early students, Janet Adler and Joan Chodorow, contributed significantly to developing the role of the witness to be held not only by a teacher/facilitator but by peers within the practice as well. In my classes, we spend a lot of time considering the ways in which we see and all of the things we might project upon each other. We explore what it is we bring to and project on what we see.

**Stefanie:** *Milagros, you mentioned that you have begun to integrate some awareness practice into your sessions. How do you do this?*

**Milagros:** In general, I begin by guiding my clients to get a felt sense of their bodies. I then ask clients to check in to see what part of them wants attention. I ask questions that require them to pay close attention, to become intimate with the sensations they are having during the session. I believe that when clients participate in the session in this way, patterns can change more readily because the nervous system is consciously engaged. There is a kind of disconnect that can happen over time between muscles and nerves, and the muscles maintain a holding, contracted state, as if locked. The connection begins to get restored with attention to sensation. I learned this through some work I did in Hanna Somatics. I have found that when my clients participate in this way, the work takes on greater depth and meaning, for both of us.

**Stefanie:** Right. Yes. Thomas Hanna is the one who coined the term “somatic” as we use it today.

**Milagros:** *Say more about this, Stefanie.*

**Stefanie:** When we use the word “somatic” here, it derives from the term “soma,” which essentially means a *body conscious of itself in movement*. A “soma” is a living body, fully inhabited, inclusive of its physical anatomy, psyche, and spirit. Somatic movement educators and therapists work with people to support their well-being and invite them into the process of their own self-care. We help clients foster a sense of wholeness and of interconnection; of ease, presence, and vitality; and to gently repattern their bodies through physical exploration. Authentic Movement is one of a number of different disciplines that can be characterized as somatic movement education practices, and it is a key modality with which I work.



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**Milagros:** *How did you come to this practice?*

**Stefanie:** I studied theater through high school and college, majoring in it at Brandeis University and working a bit in Chicago. In my early adult years I worked as a director and stage manager. Toward the tail-end of college, though, I found had become passionately interested in movement. I took all of the classes available to me, and when I graduated I fell into the improvisational dance community in Boston. I took classes and workshops in Authentic Movement and also in Contact Improvisation (CI) — a dynamic form of dance partnering — as well as in performance improvisation, which is real-time composition of dances.



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*Milagros: What drew you to focus on this work?*

**Stefanie:** When I danced and performed, I got very positive feedback from others. The culture felt different to me than theater in many ways — especially when I was a young woman — and through working in these modes, I felt I got to develop a voice or find signature styles of movement that suited my body. Those kinds of approaches gave me an opportunity to find and develop ways of moving that felt unique to me instead of being in a class where I was trying to pattern my movement to the teacher’s. I was very self-conscious of having a body that was so unlike a more traditional image of a dancer’s body. But when I was able to find my own movement — not through looking at a mirror, imitating someone else — I found that my body had a lot to say.

**“I serve as an attentive witness to my clients, observing the sensations, feelings, images, and thoughts that I experience as I watch them move.”**  
— Stefanie Cohen

*Milagros: You have mentioned to me before that Authentic Movement also played a role in your hospice work....*

**Stefanie:** Yes. In addition to my artistic explorations, drawing upon Authentic Movement as a place to generate movement or text for performance, I also found it very supportive to me as a hospice worker. At the time — in my early- to mid-twenties — I worked hands-on as a home health aide with terminally ill patients, working in people’s homes and in a small hospice residence in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In my movement classes, I was able to literally *move with and through* some very intense parts of doing that work. For instance, in the movement sessions, I could sometimes try on or imitate the movements of people with whom I’d interacted during my workdays — this allowed me to abstract my experiences and see them aesthetically, from a greater distance. Also, importantly, I got to draw upon the model of witnessing in order to discern what the hospice clients or their loved ones really needed. I learned to try to differentiate what was mine — my *own* fear for their discomfort or my projections of grief — from what was actually being asked of me. In this way I could better learn to meet what was requested of me and to more truly serve.

*Milagros: You trained as an Authentic Movement facilitator many years ago, but you also recently completed a masters degree in somatic education. Can you say something about that?*

**Stefanie:** Yes. I studied Authentic Movement in 1998 in western Massachusetts through a program called Contemplative Dance. My masters program, which I attended in 2010, is called “Dance and Somatic Well-being: Connections to the Living Body,” offered through the University of Central Lancashire, in England. This particular program, in addition to its location in England, is offered in a U.S. branch through the studio Moving Body Resources in New York City. It’s a comprehensive masters, with theoretical, practical, and experiential aspects. It covers similarities among different somatic modalities as they are practiced throughout the world but primarily focused in Europe and the U.S. There’s quite a bit of activity, particularly in Great Britain, with regard to somatic education and somatic therapy.

As a Registered Somatic Movement Educator, (through International Somatic Movement Education and Therapy Association — ISMETA), I work not only with Authentic Movement within my practice, but also incorporate experience I have with Continuum Movement, experiential anatomy, and to a lesser degree, Body-Mind Centering® (BMC).

*Milagros: Can you describe what a session typically looks like?*

**Stefanie:** The individual sessions I conduct are co-created and improvisatory in nature, and they can follow many different structures; they generally last about 75 minutes. We usually begin with a verbal check-in with one another, followed by inquiries into my client’s felt-sense experience; moving directly to an investigation of sensation, I might ask, “What are the qualities of movement within your body that accompany what you describe of your experience? What does your state *feel* like?” How do you wish to feel? Further, what might support you to feel this way?”

I witness their movement throughout the session — sometimes from a still location at the periphery of the space or sometimes in close proximity. Moving, sounding, and breathing in unison with my clients can be surprisingly powerful for us both. Later I may offer reflective responses through my own movement gestures, and from time to time I can make specific suggestions with regard to movements, breath, or sound that they can experiment with both in and out of the studio. I may offer or respond to requests for supportive touch, and/or provide bolsters or blankets to my clients to increase their comfort during their movement investigations. Occasionally I serve as a scribe, writing down insights, images, or language that my clients voice and may wish to keep. I also make a range of art materials available with which they might further explore images that arise in the sessions. Our sessions then end with reflections on the process together.

*Stefanie: Milagros, what brought you to shiatsu?*

**Milagros:** I started receiving shiatsu when I was 26, for an eating disorder I had had for ten years. I was also seeing a psychiatrist who practiced hypnotherapy. Both therapists were gifted, and I continue to feel so blessed to have found them.

From that time on, shiatsu became a regular part of my therapy. My shiatsu therapist was someone who encouraged me to connect with my emotions during our sessions. She was very much inclined to working with people psychologically through bodywork. My eating disorder had a lot to do with not wanting to feel my emotions — I used food to avoid feeling emotions, both positive and negative. Therefore, the bodywork I did with her provided a safe structure for entering the world of my emotions. It was profoundly therapeutic on this psychological level. And it worked very well alongside the hypnotherapy I was doing. It allowed me to come back into my body and inhabit it more fully.

*Stefanie: This is during that time in your late twenties?*

**Milagros:** There was an intense period of about three years, from ages 26–29. The symptoms of the eating disorder gave way to deeper psychological issues quite quickly, and during this time I stayed engaged with shiatsu and hypnotherapy. I continued to receive bodywork after that more intense time, with shiatsu always being my preference because I love the way it clears, opens, and balances me on an energetic level, and I also love the way the deep pressure feels. It simply became an essential part of my process of healing, self-care, and self-discovery.

*Stefanie: That sounds so powerful. When, then, did you decide to study as a practitioner, yourself?*

**Milagros:** I was 32 years old. At the time I was doing community development work in Toronto, working with immigrant and refugee women. In the end, that work wasn't fulfilling to me.

*Stefanie: In what way was that so?*

**Milagros:** I didn’t feel that I was helping to lessen suffering in any significant way, and I really wanted to make a difference in people’s lives. From the time I was very young I have been interested in helping people suffer less. After the experience of being a community development worker and the experience of healing through shiatsu and psychotherapy, I reached a feeling of clarity about wanting to support people in the way I had been supported, from the inside out. I had learned so much by discovering myself through psychotherapy and shiatsu. I knew I had an affinity for bodywork, and since shiatsu had been so helpful to me, and since I believed in the effectiveness of Chinese medicine, I wanted to do bodywork within that modality.

I studied at the Shiatsu School of Canada, in ‘93–94. It was a 2,200 hour program that included both Western and Eastern modalities of health and healing.

*Stefanie: Much has happened, I know, with regard to your work since that time. I know lots of life has happened, including your having had a child. How do you think your work as a shiatsu practitioner affects your son?*

**Milagros:** That’s a good question, and I think the answer reveals a two-way street. Joseph came into the world with a set of needs, and the way I met him in these needs has a great

deal to do with my deep interest in holistic natural healing. From birth, my son suffered from severe constipation and abdominal pain. And from the beginning, I believed that children have the potential to be healthy and radiant. My son was not, but I was convinced that I just had to find the key to make that so. I was single-minded about that. From the very beginning of his infancy, I used my skills as a shiatsu practitioner to relieve pain, gas, and to facilitate bowel movements. Compression on specific acupressure points and energy work were significant tools I had, literally at my fingertips, for soothing him through many painful times. Homeopathy was also very helpful for treating symptoms. I sought help from a wide variety of natural health practitioners, most of whom were not able to help in any significant way.

After eight years, I eventually found the solution with critical help from Dr. Natasha Campbell-McBride. She was the one who was finally able to put all the pieces together and offer a systematic way through the healing process. The path was tolerable, though not easy; it was natural and, above all, effective. Essentially this path consisted of eating according to the GAPS™ (Gut and Psychology Syndrome) diet, beginning with a very simple, easily digestible “introductory” diet for a week and, in the case of my son, an extremely gradual expansion to include foods and ways of preparing /cooking food that were more challenging for the digestive system.

**“Somatic work holds the body as central, and movement seems to be a powerful way of enacting change within our lives. It’s a way to begin practicing a new way of being.”**  
—Milagros Paredes

*Stefanie: Is that when you started to research nutrition more?*

**Milagros:** Yes. While I had studied nutrition on my own for years before the birth of my son, and had struggled with weaker digestion myself, most of what I now know about gut healing and its relationship to the rest of the body comes from my work of healing Joseph. Working with and observing him 24 hours a day, and noticing how he responded to certain therapies



**"When I receive bodywork and nutritional support from you, I have a strong sense that I am actively engaged in a process of self-care rather than going to a practitioner to ‘be done to’ — healed or repaired. I bring my knowledge and experiences within my body and pair it with the insights you bring; I feel a genuine sense of respect from you for the intricacies of my self-knowledge."**  
— Stefanie Cohen (to Milagros Paredes)



and foods, showed me a lot. Today he is a thirteen-year-old, and he shows a lot more resistance to my medicine ways. He still welcomes foot massages, though!

**Stefanie:** As your client, I have to say that I have truly reaped benefits of the research that you have done. Your sensitive support around healing digestive issues has been so helpful to me — particularly in times of intense vulnerability and transition.

You have mentioned some of what exploring movement is bringing to your work with clients, principally having them take a more active role. Since my graduate studies in somatic movement education, my practice has expanded from facilitating Authentic Movement to including other elements of somatic work. For example, I now include more verbal interactions during the body of a session and also more touch. I worked with a client today, and I noticed myself bringing touch to his body in similar ways as you do with me with shiatsu — at least in terms of my posture and body mechanics. At the heart of the work with this client, I still frequently asked questions about his awareness of what he experienced and what he felt he needed at any given moment, but the touch proved integral to the session.

**“One of my teachers once said, ‘The reason we improvise is because we yearn to move on uneven ground.’ ...As humans, we use a great deal of energy trying to fix life so that it’s familiar and predictable; we want ground under our feet. But the reality is that everything is always changing, and life is simply uncertain.”**  
— Stefanie Cohen



**Milagros:** *It’s interesting to hear how we influence each other’s work. Can you describe your work with another client and some of the ways your practice has expanded?*

**Stefanie:** A client of mine — a psychotherapist who had been particularly interested in integrating more embodied approaches within his own work — came to a session with me a few years ago experiencing a high degree of limitation and discomfort in his shoulder. He had been having difficulty sleeping and had jolts of pain upon even slight movement. He felt quite vulnerable, unsure as to what would cause his pain at any given time, and was concerned about the extent to which he would be able to move, cook, garden, or do any of his other meaningful activities. Though our work together up until this point had been a more open-ended inquiry, serving as creative and emotional support to him in his work and family life, we chose to spend time on this day attending his injury and the accompanying trauma he seemed to experience.

As a way of initially taking some emotional pressure off, easing into the process during this particular session, we determined to focus primarily on his noninjured side. We looked for the support and insights it might offer in helping to care for his other, more fragile one. As the time unfolded — through movement and breathing together, my questions as to his felt-sense experiences, and some subtle, supportive touch — he reported feeling more freedom of movement, less tension, and what he termed an unexpected sense of “newness.” Through moving and speaking, he expressed his desire to invest that possibility of newness into his everyday activities. He also observed that, through focusing on the greater range of movement throughout other parts of his body, he had begun to feel more of a calm indifference toward his injured side; this made it possible to greet his sensations with more curiosity and less fear.

When he returned the following week, he noted that whenever he brought a sense of curiosity to his pain, it would diminish more quickly. He could more calmly and clearly begin to articulate the details of his discomfort (shooting pain versus throbbing; directions in which the sensations moved, etc.) and also connections between his activities and his pain.

**Milagros:** *Are there instances where you refer your clients for other complementary therapies?*

**Stefanie:** In this case, we actually did end up doing so. Together, he and I brainstormed about the other kinds of local therapists, such as Trager or Feldenkrais practitioners, who could further help to support his healing. I was then able to make some referrals. My sense was — and you talk about this with regard to your own clients, Milagros — he was then better supported to participate actively in his own healing. His ability to articulate his experience and needs and to identify and “peel back” some of the layers of emotional and physiological

tension he’d held made it possible for him to offer himself — and then to receive — more integrated and nuanced care.

Although some of the other somatic modalities take more of a systematic anatomical approach, aiding people structurally and correctively, Authentic Movement and the kind of work that I do with clients may be considered more cognitive in nature. By this I mean that, by and large, rather than engaging in more structural explorations, people often focus on personal narrative, identity, feeling states, and behaviors. While I believe that healing does not necessarily equate to “fixing” or “curing,” and that we have much that we can learn from injury and limitation — I have had these experiences many times throughout my life as a dancer— I’m aware that the support of a knowledgeable, thorough practitioner is invaluable. As a long-time CI dancer and movement teacher, and as a receiver of bodywork myself, I certainly have a lot of information about respectful and supportive touch, but the work I do is not from one particular modality or system. Though I have skills and anatomical knowledge, the touch that I offer may not directly serve a corrective function. I’m so glad to live in an area where there are so many gifted practitioners with whom to consult and cross-refer.

**Stefanie:** *Milagros, can you tell me about clients with whom you’ve worked, for whom shiatsu really made a difference beyond what traditional allopathic medicine was accomplishing?*

**Milagros:** I have a client who’s been seeing me on and off for about ten years. He worked as a lawyer and also did some farming, growing hay on his land. He started seeing me in his fifties and, like your client, came in with a shoulder injury — to the shoulder cuff muscles, which reduced his range of motion in that joint by at least half. He was on the verge of getting surgery but decided to try one last thing before doing so. After several shiatsu sessions, his range of motion improved by at least 90 percent. I had also made recommendations of foods to eat and to cut back on. Unlike most people, he was very open to making changes to his diet, and this led to an ongoing process of exploring different foods and their effects on his body. As a result of diet changes, blood tests showed a reduction in his cholesterol and blood pressure, and he lost weight. His flexibility and mobility are better now than they were ten years ago. Besides improvement in his health, he also became a food activist. He continues to see me — about every four weeks. He’s had a hip issue that is quite stubborn and, little by little, we are learning about it and how to work with it. Alongside shiatsu, he has been seeing a physiotherapist over the last several months, and he has been attending a Pilates class for years now. All of these modalities inform his growing awareness of his body and his knowledge of what exacerbates or relieves the pain.

**“People who come for a more integrated psychological and physical kind of support come more regularly and consistently. For these clients, bodywork tends to be included in their lifestyle as part of what they do to stay well, supporting them through the challenges and burdens that life brings.”**  
—Milagros Paredes



**Stefanie:** *What kind of support do your clients generally want?*

**Milagros:** While most people come to me presenting physical complaints, I have several clients who come to me wanting emotional support as well. Most of these clients already know that the physical and psychological are inextricable. They come to me knowing that bodywork will help them face life from a more grounded and clear place, that it can help them shift out of



# Exploring Whole-Body Healing

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stuck places and create more spaciousness in their thinking and feeling, and that it can strengthen and empower them. There can often be more conversation in their sessions but, even when conversation is minimal, these clients show an openness to expressing emotions as they surface during the session. It’s amazing to feel the energy suddenly flowing freely again in response to emotional energy being expressed.

Recently I trained in Focusing Technique because I have always had a keen interest in emotional healing through bodywork. Focusing technique is founded on the belief that the body knows and that we can access the body’s knowledge for emotional healing by listening to the body’s language of sensations. At first these sensations don’t have much meaning or are little understood, but with the warmth of attention, listening, and a gentle curiosity, these largely unconscious sensations blossom into awareness. I love being able to support clients in a fuller way as they face emotional pain.

A client might be expressing great frustration about a particular issue that feels like a dead end to them because they haven’t found a way to resolve it. I can take this as an opportunity to ask them to tune into and get a felt sense of the physical sensations that arise as they speak about the issue, and we go from there. As the client pays attention to the sensation, engaging it by being with it or by articulating in words what it’s like, the sensation changes and reveals itself. Very often, the essence of the frustration is revealed and the client finds a way through.

**“From the time I was very young I have been interested in helping people suffer less. After the experience of being a community development worker and the experience of healing through shiatsu and psychotherapy, I reached a feeling of clarity about wanting to support people in the way I had been supported, from the inside out. I had learned so much by discovering myself through psychotherapy and shiatsu.”**  
— Milagros Paredes

**Stefanie:** *Do people tend to come to you over years for regular sessions, for a few months at a time, or more sporadically, as needed?*

**Milagros:** Most clients come when pain hinders their ability to move in ways that are important for them. Naturally, they want the pain to go away and their range of motion restored. When they feel better, they tend to stop coming and use their resources for other things that are important to them. People who come for a more integrated psychological and physical kind of support come more regularly and consistently. For these clients, bodywork tends to be included in their lifestyle as part of what they do to stay well, supporting them through the challenges and burdens that life brings.

**Stefanie:** *What are some limitations of shiatsu, as you’ve observed? When might a client need a different approach to complement what you’re doing?*

**Milagros:** Shiatsu, based on Chinese medicine, uses a framework and language that is unfamiliar to the majority of people who see me. I find this limiting sometimes because some people want me to be able to explain what I sense is happening in anatomical terms. My training included the standard anatomy and pathology content as contained in a registered massage therapy program, and although I was successful in the study of these subjects, the actual *practice* of shiatsu does not use the same language and ideas with regard to body and health. We talk about “kyo” (“empty” in Japanese) and “jitsu” (“excess”), and these terms refer to the energetic state of meridians and areas of the body. It’s actually very simple! When energy is deficient or in excess in a particular area or along a meridian, people usually experience some kind of discomfort. By moving the energy and supporting *flow*, pain dissipates and healing occurs. Flow in energy is the basic, original, and well state of the body. The body has its own logic — it always tends towards healing — and in shiatsu, my work is to support this logic by encouraging a flow with my touch and my openness.

I have several clients who do other complementary therapies alongside shiatsu. One client has low back and hip pain, and she sees a chiropractor and does yoga regularly in addition to seeing me at about four-week intervals. Many of my clients use chiropractic therapy, either alongside shiatsu or alternating for periods of time, using one and then the other. I have often recommended clients for osteopathy as well. The other complementary modality that my clients frequently use is physiotherapy. Both chiropractic and physiotherapy tend to be covered by insurance, which makes them accessible forms of therapy.

**Milagros:** *Stefanie, I have done a lot of work with you and have benefited in a profound way, mostly emotionally. Are there clients for whom somatic work has really moved them beyond what they’ve be able to work on in more talk-only therapy?*

**Stefanie:** What comes to mind right now, specifically, are the ways in which several of my students and clients have attended to grief through the Authentic Movement work. There have been several instances in which people have done so both independently of and in conjunction with their talk therapy. For some, their grief has had to do with the deaths

of loved ones; for others, it’s been for jobs losses, relocations, or dramatic shifts they’ve experienced in their sense of identity as they have aged or become parents.

Some clients come to the movement work from talk therapy sessions in which they have felt validated, seen, and acknowledged for the strength they’ve demonstrated within challenging life circumstances, but are unsure of how to proceed beyond there. Within the movement work, then, they come equipped to experiment, to play, to listen to other possibilities beyond the meanings they have made of their experiences, and to practice — quite literally, taking other kinds of *stances*. They then sometimes return to talk therapy with new insights from their embodied investigations.

One particular experience I had with regard to support through grief had to do with a couple who, after attending classes with me for two years, suddenly and tragically lost a child. During the early weeks following the full-term stillbirth of their son, their respective families came to visit them and to lend them support. But of course the loss of this child — who was to have been the first grandchild and nephew on both sides — was felt acutely by all family members. As our movement work had been a key practice for this couple up until this point, they asked me to facilitate group sessions to which they invited their families. We conducted two sessions — one with the woman’s parents, siblings, and sister-in-law, and another, a couple of weeks later, with her husband’s father.

In my studio, on each of these mornings, the families received an introduction to the context of the Authentic Movement work and spent time individually sorting through a stack of postcard images that I often offer as part of the process. These postcards — evocative, sometimes iconographic photos and illustrations that include bodies in motion, landscapes, plant and animal life, and humans of a wide range of ages, races, and cultures — can serve as a means for identifying inner feeling and experience with imagery. I also use them to support my teaching of witnessing, in that each of us sees each image very differently from one

another on any given day. By drawing upon this particular tool, as well as opening up the time for movement sessions in which I served as witness to all of them, each family member had an opportunity to connect in unexpected ways with the feelings accompanying their loss. They could then share these with one another through both vivid and sometimes indirect means. I particularly remember having had the sense that they were each seen — both by me and by one another — for their own experiences, and free of a need to protect one another as they may have if they had simply been invited to sit and talk. I also recall witnessing the deep care and respect the family members seemed to express toward this couple for drawing on these creative resources as they sat with the rawness of their grief.

**Milagros:** I am moved to hear how effectively your work supports people through their lives and how you offered this exquisite container for that family to safely stay with their vulnerability of loss; to express their sorrow and pain freely, directly, and simply.

**Milagros:** *Stefanie, would also you speak about some of the limitations that you come up against in this work?*

**Stefanie:** The majority of the people with whom I work are highly engaged, high-functioning individuals. However, in terms of work with issues people might label as psychological disorders, such as complex responses to trauma, schizophrenia, and dissociative conditions, these — perhaps ironically — are conditions that can both be helped by the somatic work I do and are beyond its scope. When people are prone to disconnect from their experiences of their bodies, as someone might in response to rape or other violence, movement work that brings them gently back into relationship with their sensory selves can be of tremendous help. According to Colorado-based mental health professional Peter Levine, PhD, who has done quite a bit of research in this area, movement and physical action can help us to disrupt cycles and patterns of trauma that have us paralyzed in shock. When someone is in a state of profound dissociation or perhaps prone to frightening hallucinatory experiences, however, it may be more difficult to gauge the extent to

which this work may be reliably and safely done. Certainly, in these contexts I would need to work in very direct and consistent collaboration with other therapists and caregivers, and I have done so a bit in the past.

**“I would say something that the somatic modalities share is a deep belief in the self-authority of the people with whom they are working. The work that I do as a somatic movement educator is entirely co-created; I’m here to help people recover their own, sensual, self-authority.”**  
— Stefanie Cohen

**Milagros:** Somatic work holds the body as central, and movement seems to be a powerful way of enacting change within our lives. It’s a way to begin practicing a new way of being.

**Stefanie:** Yes. My sense is that when we move through something physically, we have already shifted. Our bodies have changed, and new possibilities, new behaviors, even new neural pathways have been created. Authentic Movement practice is based on the theory that all of



**“I’ve also frequently noticed how, after I do an Authentic Movement session with you, my awareness is heightened significantly, and I am able to meet my clients more fully.”**  
—Milagros Paredes (to Stefanie Cohen)



what we have experienced in our lives is stored in our bodies — all of it is mapped there. If we introduce a way of being that we would like to enforce and reinforce, that’s there too. The more we can cultivate that awareness, try that on, the more resourced we can be.

Again, this work is based philosophically on the sense that we *are* our bodies, no matter how much we operate from awareness of that or not. And all of our consciousness — our mind, our corporeality, our spirit — is all integrated. There are many different ways to connect with and support this. Sometimes people come to the work because they have a particular injury or illness that they’ve identified and, as with your clients, they might come because they want to develop more strength or range of motion. But more often than not, people want support in making decisions and consciously integrating significant life transitions such as pregnancies and new parenthood, endings or beginnings of relationships, leaving school, retirement, and losses of various kinds. They want inroads to connect with themselves as physical and creative beings.

**Milagros:** *Can you say something about ways of supporting people through transitions?*

**Stefanie:** Most importantly, through helping them cultivate interest in what is happening. Interest can help us to tolerate experiences that we might not think that we can; it can help to reduce the tension that we’re holding and see what else might contribute to the fear or discomfort that we experience.

**Milagros:** That reminds me of Pema Chodron’s teachings. She addresses the habit human beings have of creating stories about the strong emotions we are having. She shines light on how our meaning-making usually reinforces an old and negative story, causing us more suffering. The practice is to be curious about the sensations that are present, and she talks about seeing it, tasting it, smelling it. When we stay with the sensation of the experience, the discomfort, and we are curious about it, this takes us to an open place, a place of possibility.

**Stefanie:** Equally, I find it important to identify our experiences of pleasure and to draw upon them as resource. When we move, we can inquire into the experiences our bodies enjoy — stretching, pushing, rocking, self-massage; a balance of effort and ease. We need to draw on quite a number of resources that we have for self-care. This allows us to have stability, to have our nervous systems be in balance. We require quite a bit more rest and integration than any of us gives ourselves, for sure. When we don't give that to ourselves, we don't function well, draining our adrenals, among other effects.

**Milagros:** I have a very clear sense of how empowering it is to be able to comfort and soothe myself. I’ve also frequently noticed how, after I do an Authentic Movement session with you, my awareness is heightened significantly, and I am able to meet my clients more fully. This is an example of how my inner resources become more available to me.

**Stefanie:** For me, that calls up how important it is to be able to adapt to situations as they arise, to have a kind of fluidity in how we interact. One of my teachers once said, “The reason we improvise is because we yearn to move on uneven ground.”

**Milagros:** I am not sure that most humans are aware of that yearning for uneven ground, but I believe it. There’s this life force — what some refer to as Eros — that moves within us, that longs for that. As humans, we use a great deal of energy trying to fix life so that it’s familiar and predictable; we want ground under our feet. But the reality is that everything is always changing, and life is simply uncertain. We need to be adaptable as a species. We could instead use our energy to notice our yearning to be in the unknown, to stretch, evolve, and explore new territory — and we could use it to become more integrated and whole.

**Milagros:** *I’d love to talk about the somatic session we recently had together. I said that I wanted to explore a specific issue rather than having a more open-ended exploration, which is what I usually do. Can you describe your approach in this case?*

“...We can access the body’s knowledge for emotional healing by listening to the body’s language of sensations. At first these sensations don’t have much meaning or are little understood, but with the warmth of attention, listening, and a gentle curiosity, these largely unconscious sensations blossom into awareness.”  
—Milagros Paredes

**Stefanie:** I asked you what it was that you were feeling and how you wanted to feel. We figured out how to bring that into the present. Some of what you described you spoke of in particularly physical ways — you described specific sensations you were feeling through your legs, thighs, belly, and arms. You also used language such as *flighty*, not feeling *grounded*, and *running away*. I listened for these physical metaphors, and when I didn't hear them I asked for them. A key came for me when you started talking about feeling “wobbly.” I had the sense that sitting wasn't the way to continue to explore that. As I recall, I asked, “Do you feel wobbly sitting? Would you feel wobbly lying down?” You took my suggestion to try standing.

**Milagros:** Your facilitation today led me to identify an image — of a very tall tree. Rather than simply imitating, I found myself embodying it. This was very different for me, and it allowed me to move toward a more empowered stance in this issue.

**Stefanie:** You also had spoken about relationships to space and objects and others — you said, “I’m feeling clumsy. I'm bumping into things” and “I don't do that when I'm doing Contact Improvisation.” I felt curious about how you might take this really rooted image into your dancing, interacting with space and objects — so you could continue to be both stable and malleable. I was also curious about how you could allow your relationship to an image to have a fluidity about it.

**Milagros:** Yes, I did take my embodiment of the image into the next Contact Improv jam and found that I was effortlessly able to do things I was previously unable to do, like handstands.


**Stefanie:** I think it can be really powerful to take an image like that — a strong, green, vibrant, rooted tree — and draw upon it when we want to feel stable or hold a different perspective. There are ways in which we can hold too tightly to ideas, however. I’m sure you can relate to that as a meditator, Milagros — the need to cultivate a willingness to step into what is happening in this moment; not defining the experience one fixed way but allowing those images to remain in our consciousness as long as they do before transforming or falling away.

**Milagros:** In this work it seems important to create some space around the stories that people use to make meaning of themselves and their lives.

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**Stefanie:** One of the questions I want to hold is “What’s my role when I’m working with people?” It’s not my job to impose my desires and my opinions on my clients. So when I try to help someone reconsider a narrative, I want to do this really gently and humbly. In general, I would say something that the somatic modalities share is a deep belief in the self-authority of the people with whom they are working. The work that I do as a somatic movement educator is entirely co-created; I’m here to help people recover their own, sensual, self-authority.

This is a phenomenological approach, to say that our subjectivity holds tremendous value — to say, “This is *your* experience; *you* know your body; *you* live in your body; all of your experience and knowledge comes directly from your movement in the world.”

**Milagros:** This self-authority assumption is different from what you see in other therapies, where people are experiencing sensations in their bodies and look to an expert — the therapist or practitioner — to tell them what is happening. To a significant extent, there is an abdication of their knowledge in favor of what the expert tells them. I try to ask my clients how they are feeling and what changes they are noticing. It makes sense that I have a perspective that my role, training, and skills allow for, and I can share that — but I want their own perspective to hold equal weight as well. People are conditioned to believing that they don't know — that somebody else knows them better than they do. A process for reclaiming that self-authority is important.

**Stefanie:** Yes. When I receive bodywork and nutritional support from you, I have a strong sense that I am actively engaged in a process of self-care rather than going to a practitioner to “be done to” — healed or repaired. I bring my knowledge and experiences within my body and pair it with the insights you bring; I feel a genuine sense of respect from you for the intricacies of my self-knowledge.

**Milagros:** *As we talk about self-authority and phenomenology, here, I wonder if you make any connections between the political and social activism of your family and your work as a somatic educator?*

**Stefanie:** I think that I really struggled during my teen and college years and even early adulthood with feeling as though I could make a meaningful difference. Certainly, given my background, I felt an imperative to try. But my experience coming of age in the late 1980s rather than the more radical 1960s as my parents had, felt a bit less empowered to me. I felt overwhelmed and ineffectual and a bit cynical, I think. I have found as I’ve grown older, however, that the work that I do now does feel meaningfully political, and that it is something that I can contribute. It’s just in quieter, more intimate ways.

I have the sense, though, that the ripples that extend from spending time to truly hear and see people — from facilitating others to see one another and to hold their own experiences as meaningful — are farther reaching than we can know. The degree to which we can cultivate a sense of compassion and respect for ourselves and bring this to our interactions with others has an immediate and lasting effect on the kind of environmental and interpersonal choices we make and the kinds of opportunities we make available to one another.

The majority of the work I do is with adult students and clients. But I do some work as a teaching artist through Living Arts, an arts-infused education program for children in Detroit, as well. When I work with the kids, I make sure to close each class by asking them each what



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among the activities we did *felt good in their bodies*. I want them to know that their bodies contain the knowledge they need to navigate the world and that how and what they feel is worth listening to. There’s so much unlearning of habits many of us must do as adults — or relearning of ways of listening to ourselves — it feels important to me to provide a voice asking these small children to pay attention and respect themselves in these ways.

**Milagros:** I have my own experience of what you are talking about. I went to private, Catholic convent schools from kindergarten through third grade, and these schools had a huge impact on me, shutting me up and shutting me down. It was education by rote — students hardly spoke or moved. It took until my forties to find my voice and open up to the creative force in me. It’s clear to me that my early schooling shut me down at a time when I should have been encouraged to play and create. That’s why I went to great lengths to make sure my son went to a school that supported his creativity and why I myself have always supported him in this way. And the movement work I am doing now has been monumental in this regard; I feel like I am finding my soul again.

**Milagros:** *You introduced me to Contact Improv. You have spoken about how CI and Authentic Movement complement one another. For you, I imagine that the various somatic practices you engage in can merge and become integrated. I would like to know how these somatic practices, as a whole, serve you in your life as mother, teacher, artist, lover....*

**“Again, this work is based philosophically on the sense that we are our bodies, no matter how much we operate from awareness of that or not. And all of our consciousness — our mind, our corporeality, our spirit — is all integrated.”**  
—Stefanie Cohen

**Stefanie:** Certainly artistically, improvisational practices have been very much at the heart of the ways in which I have made my work, however that has manifested itself — whether as writing, drawing, dance, or performance. Embodiment is at the heart of each inquiry. Using sensation as a jumping-off point, dropping myself into the center of experience, also helps me to circumvent a self-critic — to generate material that I can go back to, to shape with more intention.

Interpersonally, I receive support in training myself as a witness, to come face to face with my projections and then to be able to stand back and really listen — to take a sense of ownership of what I am bringing to a situation. As a parent, I need to remind myself of this time and time again! Something I talk about a lot when I run workshops for other health practitioners, as with students at the Naturopathic School of the Healing Arts, for example, is how to listen for what our clients are really asking of us, instead of what we think they need or want.

**Milagros:** *Stefanie, how did you end up here in Ann Arbor?*

**Stefanie:** I moved to Ann Arbor from Boston in the summer of 2000 when my former husband, George, began teaching in the Romance Language Department at the University of Michigan. He had been a professor at Boston University and I had been dancing, performing, and teaching movement in Cambridge and Boston. We came here with our then six-month old son, Shane, our three cats and knowing really very few people here in town. It was more difficult than I had expected to leave the East Coast at that time, where all of my family and community resided — especially as a new mother.

**Milagros:** *I know that throughout the period of your raising your children you have continued to make art and cultivate yourself as an artist. This has been an essential aspect of your work and life. From what I know of you, it seems as though you have been able to create a satisfying life for yourself here.*

**“It’s amazing to feel the energy suddenly flowing freely again in response to emotional energy being expressed.”**  
—Milagros Paredes

**Stefanie:** Yes. Definitely. New opportunities also came with the challenges associated with moving, and I feel grateful for the support I have received. Over the last dozen years since coming here, I have met many kind and interesting people — fellow parents, friends, colleagues, students, and clients who have made Ann Arbor a warm and engaging place to live. During this time, I also traveled across the country to teach and perform; helped to found both a local and a regional community of Contact Improvisation dancers; gave birth to my daughter, Billie, in 2003; took on my studio, SOMA (Studio Of Movement Arts), above the People’s Food Co-op; commuted to graduate school in New York City; separated from my ex-husband, with whom I still actively co-parent; and began a new artistic collaboration and life partnership with Corey Gearhart.

**Milagros:** *You and Corey have been making performance work together for the last three years. Your company has an interesting name...*

**Stefanie:** Yes. The work we make is interdisciplinary and devised performance — meaning collaboratively conceived and created — and includes movement, sound, text, and often video or sculptural installations. We perform this work in site-specific installation events in academic institutions and performance festivals and in alternative performance venues. Our collaborative identity is *Upended Teacups* — the name both refers to the object-based nature of the work we make as well as to the fact that we manage to spill things a lot!

**Stefanie:** *How did you end up here in Ann Arbor, Milagros?*

In the late ‘90s, while living in Toronto, I was a member at the Toronto Zen Buddhist Temple. My son’s father was a member of the Ann Arbor Zen Buddhist Temple, which is sister to the Toronto temple, and he and I would attend many of the same intensive silent retreats. I ended up moving here to get married, and we had a son together. Although I had thought I was finally going to settle in one place after moving so often throughout my life, the decision to leave Canada came quite easily. Moving to Chelsea from Toronto was a radical change but, fortunately, my history of moving has made me adaptable in this way.

**Stefanie:** *Were you already a shiatsu practitioner when you came here?*

**Milagros:** I moved here shortly after I graduated from my training program.

**Stefanie:** *Can you say something about what keeps you here in Ann Arbor?*

**Milagros:** That’s a good question. After my divorce, this question surfaced a lot for a period of time, which is not something I had anticipated. I have always been grateful that my move to the U.S. landed me in a place that I enjoy and feel safe in. Here I have met many extraordinary people who share my desire for conscious community and who work passionately and sincerely in their various fields of healing, art, farming, and wilderness living. When I left Toronto, I was ready to leave the big city life and explore what it might be like to live in a quieter place with easy access to rural areas and wilderness. My connection with nature and to the source of my food — to farms and farmers — were birthed here. These are at the very heart of my life now, nourishing and enriching me deeply in every way. Ann Arbor and Chelsea, where my actual home is, are small enough that I can sense the contribution I make, and this matters to me.

**“Authentic Movement practice is based on the theory that all of what we have experienced in our lives is stored in our bodies — all of it is mapped there.”**  
—Stefanie Cohen

I sometimes get homesick for the diversity I grew accustomed to in Toronto and Singapore, yet I balance that with the belonging and intimacy I experience in the various communities I am a part of. The difficulties for me are the absence of any family and the loss of security afforded me by socialized health care, especially as a self-employed single mother. What the future holds — one never knows! I have decided to remain open about where home is or will be, at least in a geographical sense.

**Milagros:** *Stefanie, do you find Ann Arbor to be a good place for you as a movement educator and artist?*

**Stefanie:** It does feel as though this is a place rich in resources for complementary and alternative therapies; many of the people I come across also seem to have an openness and interest in including practices of mindfulness in their daily lives. I have been so privileged to have been able to work steadily with one group of students for the past five years and within my own Authentic Movement peer group for more than a dozen.

I didn’t necessarily make this connection before, but, interestingly, Ann Arbor has been a supportive place to expand artistically while also raising my kids. Both Corey and I had also lived in Chicago and other larger cities before moving here. He had done both his BFA and MFA in studio art and fine art-based performance art at the School of the Art Institute, and I’d made theater, dance, and performance work in Boston. In either of those metropolitan places our paths may not have crossed, or we simply may not have had the occasion to collaborate as intensively with someone outside our discipline. It may also have been much more difficult to have had access to the kind of studio space I have, which allows us the time and room to experiment.

Shane, like Joseph, is thirteen now, and Billie has just turned nine. I think that, ultimately, when they have grown and the most intensive time of co-parenting has passed, I will feel drawn to living in a more urban area again — I’m really a city girl at heart. I can imagine that the performance work that Corey and I make together may have a little more play in a bigger city and that having a larger pool of students and clients may potentially make it easier to continue to grow both my somatic and art-making practices. However, this feels like a good home base for now. Also, given our current economic climate — Michigan generally is in such an interesting (if desperate) place of reinvention, at the moment — I’m excited to see how I can participate as it develops in the next several years.

**Stefanie:** *Milagros, what further developments do you imagine exploring in your practice?*

**Milagros:** In March 2012, I graduated from the apprenticeship program of Integral Coaching Canada. One of my greatest passions is witnessing people succeed in what they love most. This method is a spectacular tool — so comprehensive and powerful for helping individuals manifest richer and fuller expressions of their potential. Facilitating this process makes me very happy. Practicing Integral Coaching® also balances me out as a human being so that I am using and developing not only my somatic/kinesthetic and intuitive skills but also my cognitive, analytical, and intellectual skills. I have the job now of reframing my practice to include Integral Coaching®. I will be creating an integrated wellness practice. I’m excited about this.

**Stefanie:** Thank you so much, Milagros, for starting this conversation and for helping to extend our exploration into this realm. It has felt so fruitful to me to get to articulate our practices in this way and to do so in such a collaborative manner.

**Milagros:** You are welcome, Stefanie. My gratitude also goes to you. In these last years I have realized my self more fully through our deep, intimate explorations of consciousness through the body; and in this conversation, we have used the fertile ground of our process to share our work and thinking with the broader community. I hope this work ripples outward to inspire and bless others.

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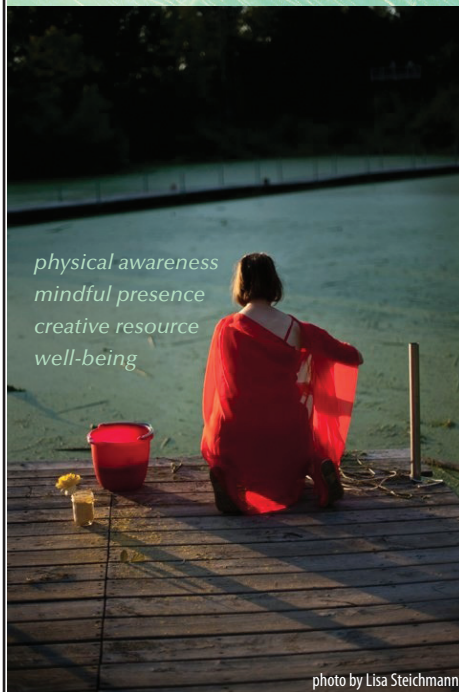
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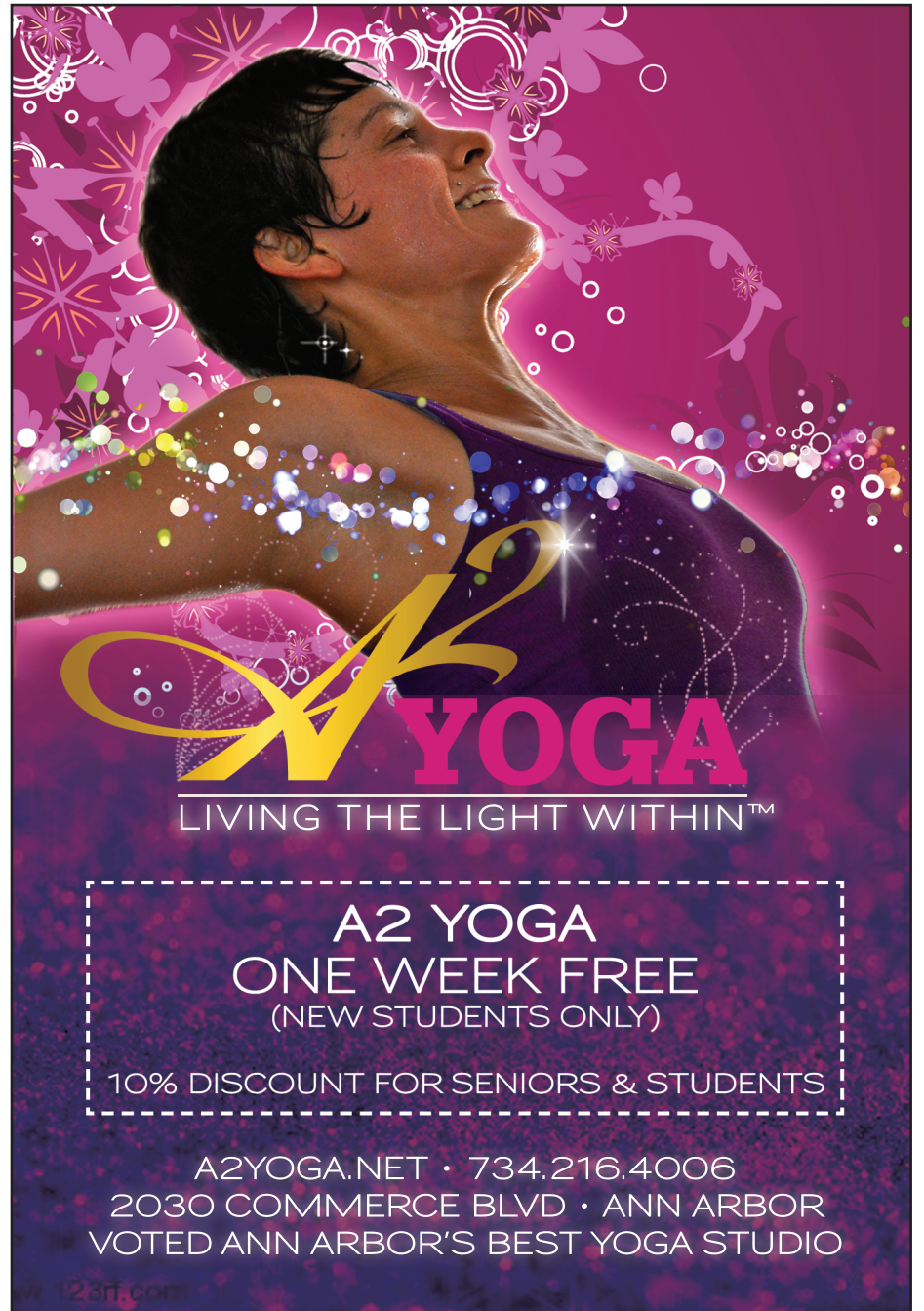


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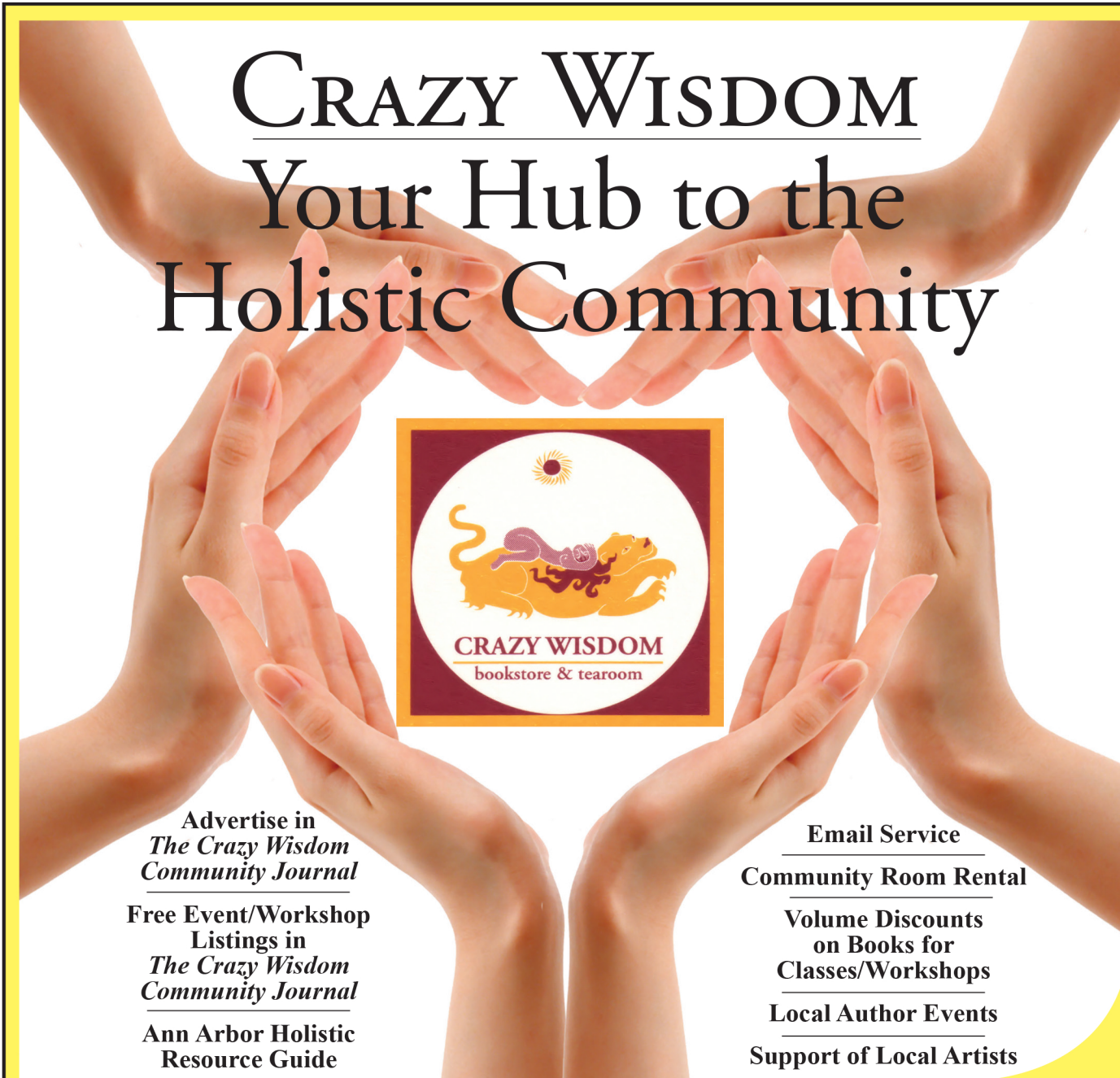


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