

## Moving in Spite of Post-Polio Syndrome

Being a polio survivor and self-propelling a wheelchair for 40-plus years can leave one with lots of shoulder problems. Add to that a job in a library requiring lifting and carrying books and we get a recipe for over-worked and painful arms.

Carole contracted polio when she was 6 years old. The doctors diagnosed bulbar and spinal infantile paralysis. Her respiratory system returned with some weakness but she was paralyzed from the waist down. Her right arm was impaired so that while she could write and do delicate manipulation, she could not raise it above her chest. Thus she used her left arm for all the power movements of lifting, reaching and, of course, propelling her wheel chair. Through her adult life, Carole had thought that everything was fine. Then about four years ago her left shoulder and arm muscles became so painful she could not lift anything of weight. The doctor called it 'post polio syndrome'.

"My doctor tried several methods to ease the pain they all worked for a while but the pain returned and always worse." During his research for geriatric patients the doctor found a reference to the *Feldenkrais Method*® and suggested she try it.

Carole contacted Sharon S. de Moyano of San Diego. Sharon was very receptive to Carole's situation. In the first session, Sharon perceived that underlying the pain was a pattern of extreme overuse. Carole's strong left arm, for years her resource for mobility, strength and support, was lacking functional support. Sharon knew there must be another way for Carole to learn to use the rest of herself in new ways that supported the left arm. Further, there might be new ways for the left arm to move - without pain.

Sharon found that Carole's left arm, shoulder and shoulder blade were painful to touch, even with the gentle way of a *Feldenkrais*® practitioner. She looked beyond the arm to the natural sources of support in the muscles in the spine, ribs and pelvis. Observing the pattern of constant strain, Sharon began working with them. The balance of tensions between Carole's left arm and the rest of the body was very precarious. Initially, as Sharon demonstrated gentle alternate ways that these parts could move together, Carole felt more pain.

Carole and Sharon discussed the situation. Sharon explained to Carole several possibilities why she was experiencing pain and talked to Carole in depth about the process of learning new ways of moving and how this would change her experience of pain. From their discussion Carole felt informed and very positive about continuing to work with Sharon. In addition, Carole could sense new relationships developing among her parts.

Carole recently wrote, "I have seen Sharon for less than a year but the improvement has been steady and satisfying. The pain is gone and Sharon has taught me methods to strengthen and increase the mobility of both arms. I have learned to see my body movements as a whole." Now she doesn't only use a shoulder muscle to move her arm. She has become aware of using muscles in the torso to assist that movement.