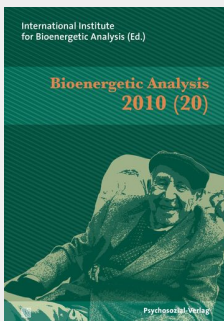


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Memorial Notes about Alexander Lowen



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Memorial Notes about Alexander Lowen

The following are reflections on the personal and professional legacy of our founder, Dr. Alexander Lowen. Three are written for this volume, while the rest are excerpts from speeches given at Dr. Lowen's Memorial, April, 2009, in New York.



Alexander Lowen, May 2005, © Heiner Steckel

Tribute to Alexander Lowen

“Never let anybody make you doubt about what you feel!”

Guy Tonella

The first workshop I did with Dr. A. Lowen had such impact on me that I decided to initiate my bioenergetic training and travel to New York to start a therapy with him. That was in 1979, exactly 30 years ago, when I was in the bosom of psychoanalysis. This experience was a turning point in my life and my personal life.

What did Alexander Lowen have that was so special?

He was a therapist fully identified with its own conviction that the energy sequestered in bodily tensions depleted the ability to be alive, to love, to create. He drew from his acting conviction an impressive force, a presence of warrior that my resistances and defenses could never damage. He was demanding, he never compounded, he provoked me every time to express my fears, my anger, and my vitality to the limit of bearable. His penetrating blue eyes, sometimes challenging, sometimes tender, remained focused on my body expressiveness: the only reliable truth. He provoked me to perceive, feel, understand and change. I am deeply grateful.

One day, making me doubt during a session about what I was feeling, him perhaps having a different impression than mine, he saw my distress and said: “Guy, never let anybody make you doubt about what you feel when your feeling forces itself upon you!” He was just proposing to me that I trust in myself. I owe him since that day that constant search for deep identification with myself, with my own experience, my own perceptions and my own convictions.

I have rarely seen someone identified as much with himself and not with external events or people passing. I remember this Christmas, 1979, invited to stay at his home with his family: Leslie, his wife and Fred, his son. I remember that Al was the same there as in his office in New York. He was with this

permanent concern of being oneself. He was not perfect but it was rooted in his being himself. This has been for me and forever an ethical model of life.

Lowen was a modern man, an observer of great intelligence and vision. I think he founded bioenergetic analysis around two central paradigms: 1) body-mind continuity builds from a basic, fundamental bodily identity, and 2) physical exercise combined with emotional expression provides sources of vitality, and continuously repairs and revitalizes somatic tissues and neurobiological circuits. Neuroscience now scientifically legitimizes this approach. I work today, as many of us do, to build on the invaluable legacy he left us. My gratitude to him is immense, and my thoughts are constantly inspired by the experience that he made me live and the invaluable work he wrote.

Of course, my own history, my own personality, and my own culture commit me to developing and practicing bioenergetic analysis with my personal convictions and style, coherent with who I am. I also owe Alexander Lowen for what he said to me: “Make your own way, not trying to imitate me. If you stay grounded in your body, you will do your own discoveries.”

Committing me today and for the future years in a mission backed by the United Nations Organization towards the peoples who suffer, I take my bioenergetic practice in my suit-case and I think to you, Al, to my heart you opened which can now receive the others and give, share and love. Thank you.

Al Lowen Memorial, May 2009

Helen Resneck-Sannes

The reason we are here today is that a great man, Al Lowen, died. He was charismatic, intelligent, passionate, a truly great thinker and writer, and attracted a group of intelligent and creative followers, some of whom you see here today. And the bottom line is that Al Lowen practiced and lived his ideas. He was as they say: “the real deal”.

He accomplished something that had never been done before, and even though it looks simple, the brilliance of his theory is in its simplicity. By describing the functional unity of the body/mind, he provided operational definitions for such abstract concepts like grounding, energy, aliveness, depression, and gave them a physical description that matched their imagistic, metaphorical, and cognitive counterparts. In this sense he was a true behavioral psychologist. In *The Language of the Body* he described the muscular and energetic components (color, breath, contact, warmth) of different emotions and emotional defenses.

He also outlined the developmental relational environment in which these processes occurred, emphasizing the first three years of life. Many of his theories and descriptions of various attachment styles and consequences are now being validated by neuroscientific research. His analysis of the body's defense responses have been elaborated and developed in theories of trauma and therapeutic interventions for the treatment of trauma. Also, somatic schools of psychotherapy have been developed in the United States, i.e. Hakomi, Family Systems Therapy, without ever acknowledging that the theoretical basis for their systems is straight out of bioenergetics.

Al's passing generated many reactions, some of which you have heard today. I had a series of intense e-mail communication with Bob Lewis recently, and in the process of those interchanges, I began to remember the few times that I spent with Al. Let me tell you about such a time. I think like many of us, I like to feel in control of my reactions, which is why I especially like grounding because it calms me and I feel more in control. During one session with Al, he did everything he could to unground me, kicking my feet out from under me, and aggressively charging at me. It was at dinner after that session, in which I was having a difficult time managing the intense sexual charge and longing that had opened, he sat down next to me, looked me in the eyes and said: you can't control this through "will". My thought at the time, although I didn't say it to him, was that if I don't control this with my "will" I'll end up in jail for having too much fun, for being lewd and lascivious, arrogant and manipulative, and downright obnoxious. I couldn't imagine any other possibility than control.

Now, I think that we live in a synchronous universe, especially when something significant happens which affects your mind/body in it's core. Just after being invited to speak on this panel, a client e-mailed me this quote. He said that what Lowen wrote about the concept of "will" struck him deeply. Now, listen to these words. Lowen gives concrete references to abstract terms, such that we are impacted and know their deepest meaning.

Here is the quote:

"Every painful situation is an emergency to which a person reacts via the sympathetic-adrenal system by increasing his state of tension and of hypertonicity in the muscles as they prepare to act ... the heightened consciousness involves an active engagement of the 'will'. In an emergency an individual doesn't act spontaneously; every action is a calculated move designed to remove the danger" (p. 57).

This quote came out of the book, Pleasure, and not until my client brought me this quote, did I really understand what Al was trying to tell me that evening. We can't truly be open to the streaming of energy, and I have had the experience of surrendering to that wonderful sensation, albeit for brief times (but then again, they are always way too brief). But my real point is that "will" is not an abstract fuzzy concept. He explains how "will" appears in the body as hypertonicity in the muscles, a heightened consciousness, and I would include, self consciousness.

Al showed the way by writing in such clear, embodied, operational, knowable terms how to find our selves. Hopefully, his work will not vanish into "The Mists of Avalon", a heroic legend talked about as just that a myth, but it's true impact, long forgotten. That is my fear, so I continue to expand my knowledge and practice of Bioenergetics, bringing in the relational aspects and the new information from trauma theories, but never forgetting Al's gift, to reach and extend, to ground what we know and do in the physical world, that can be experienced and known in the concrete reality of our body/selves.

I thank you all.

Excerpts from speeches given in April, 2009, at the Memorial for Alexander Lowen, in New York

Bob Lewis

Al set an example for us all in how he both remained deeply true to his Reichian roots and still found his own way. He was both deeply loyal to Reich and yet did not canonize/mummify his teachings, but rather infused them with his own inspiration, and his own creative center: Al systematized character analysis, extending Reich's theories to all the different character types. He further delineated the character dynamics psychologically and physically and described their libidinal connections. Al developed expressive exercises, and got his patients onto their feet, developing the basic Bioenergetic concept of grounding.

I am suggesting that, as an institute, we can best honor Al Lowen by following his example. That is, to engage in the ongoing challenge of remaining true to our Bioenergetic roots, without rigidifying the truths they hold such that we are no longer a living body of artisans. As Al modeled for us, we can reach for a Bioenergetic institute that moves from and is inspired both by what Al inherited from Reich, what he added to the Bioenergetic work in progress and what we each in turn bring to it.

In this room today, and in our institute at large, I thank God that we do not all see things the same way. There may be those who feel that they practice a version of bioenergetics that is truer and more loyal, to Al's fundamental vision. Others, like myself, still believe we are true members of the guild, even though we incorporate into our clinical work ways of understanding and being with patients which were not Al's ways. What I do hope that we all share, and what Scott Baum described as foundational in his recent inaugural presidential message to us, is a commitment to keeping our patients' (and our own) somatopsychic unity or lack of it, at the heart of our clinical encounters. This was Reich's enduring gift to us: the functional identity of a person's character and his bodily attitude. It will not go out of style.

Looking back, I want to bear witness to the tremendous vitality and hope that Al inspired in those of us in his presence. His sparking blue eyes, a resonant timber in his voice, and the sureness of his touch and his words ... his was the stuff of psychosomatic charisma – his inner fire burned bright. Add to this the loving synergy that moved between Al and John Pierrakos at the informal Tuesday night clinical seminars, and it was indeed a special time in the young life of bioenergetics.

There has also been something about Al's tolerance of our contributions that has made possible the vitality of our Institute. Forgive me for mentioning only three among many examples of this vitality – First, our revised, state of the art 2005 Bioenergetic training curriculum put together by Violaine de Clerck, Guy Tonella and Odila Weigand – Second, the clinical treasures in the Bioenergetic Reader (2008) put together under Vita Heinrich's leadership and Third, the exciting work that continues to come out in our Journal, edited by Vincentia Schroeter, Margit Koemeda-Lutz and Maê Nascimento. We are indeed a worldwide Bioenergetic community that lives, breathes and pulsates.

I believe Al's teaching, his wisdom and legacy to us were about what he did for most of his life. His central passion was about healing the mind-body split, and his chosen path to this goal was his own self-exploration. In the process, he gave us the gift of a passionate exploration of and brilliant illumination of the endless facets of the mind-body's unity and duality of function. He did this, arguably as not even Reich had done, and, less arguably, as no one after him will likely do.

It is possible, but not likely, that someone will emerge from among us post-Lowenian bioenergeticists who will be able to lead us with the force of certainty about his truth that emanated from Freud, Reich and Lowen himself. It is not likely that anyone will soon match Al's passion for and genius at knowing a person in and from the pulse of their body. It will be interesting to see what kind of therapeutic outcomes and unforeseen partnerships may arise as our patients sense that, even though we do the best we can to read in their psyche-soma the person that they are, we cannot see into their deepest recesses with the same conviction in the clarity

of our vision. Sensing that we need help to unveil (unravel) the mystery that they are, they may have to engage with us in a slow, implicit, mutual process of discovery.

Vivian Guze

Al Lowen's life spanned most of the 20th century, and he died just short of his 98th birthday toward the end of 2008. His life passion was sparked when he heard Wilhelm Reich lecture at the New School for Social Research in 1940. These lectures shook him to his bones and set the tone for his entire career. He was about 30 years old. He started his practice of therapy in New York in 1951. The decade of the 1950's was a very repressive time in this country. The fear of being non conformist or being called a communist by Senator McCarthy hung like a dark cloud over the intellectual community of the U.S. Yet, at the same time, in isolated pockets, individual psychotherapists were incubating new ideas and ways of doing therapy that erupted in the next decade.

Al Lowen was a man of his time. His seminal work "*The Physical Dynamic of Character Structure*" was published in 1958.

I had worked in a mental hospital during the 1950's, when psychotherapy with psychotics was considered impossible. I began doing things like – squeezing a person's hand as I spoke, so I could hold her attention a few seconds longer. But I had no colleagues to talk with about it. Then I got a flyer announcing open professional Bioenergetic demonstrations in Dr. Alexander Lowen's office. I went. And, here I am.

As I said, Al Lowen was a man of his time. His work jarred with mainstream inhibitions about sex and strong emotional expression. During the 60's, Al went out to speak to many groups – always embattled by hecklers and negative mainstream discussants. Then he'd go out and do it, and again and again meet a wall of negativity. Those of us who watched, felt that it took heroic dedication and energy in the service of the Right as he experienced his Mission. He was a hero, a genuine hero, a warrior. A warrior fights fiercely for what he believes, and, at his best, fights for the

help, protection and healing of those he cares about. All said he was not a revolutionary, the way Reich was, but in his own way he was. He was not afraid to be different, and unlike Reich, his focus was not to change society but to stay within the arena of character analysis and physical work to recover the aliveness and dignity of the individual. This was his mission. I took courage from his battles, and my battles were easier, because of him. For this I am deeply, deeply grateful.

In later years, when Al Lowen felt that some of his followers were not doing Bioenergetic Analysis the way he wanted them to, he forgot something he had told me early on. I had complained that I couldn't do something in therapy the way he did. His reply was: "Bioenergetics moves through each person's body in a unique way. So of course, your way of doing therapy won't be like mine." I have held on to this statement through the years, no matter what he said later. I have felt secure in the knowledge that whatever moves through my body is bioenergetics.

In 1971, at the end of a workshop, I was sitting next to Al when he said, "come with me". I followed him into the next room, where there were a group of people assembled, and there I learned that we were going to teach in a formal program. Since I had never been his patient, I couldn't tell how he felt about me, and was surprised when he invited me in. As more and more people became involved in Bioenergetics, through the training programs, Al became uneasy, since he mainly trusted only what he could touch. And like Reich he had little faith in organizations of any kind. 1972-73 was a very difficult year for Al and those of us in the inner group who met monthly in his office. That was the year John Pierrakos, his long term office partner, started to push for adding a spiritual dimension to the Bioenergetic work. Al was opposed to moving in any direction away from the physical body. Within a year, John left the Bioenergetic Institute and formed what he called, Core Energetics. Al was deeply hurt and angry at the defection. As a warrior he was so convinced of the rightness of his own position that he became infuriated whenever he was challenged. And here it was his own partner who challenged him. It took over 20 years before he allowed a rapprochement to take place.

Over time, Bioenergetics spread from the U.S. to Europe and then to South America. By the middle 90's, the warrior had started to feel ungrounded in his life. It was time to withdraw from the fray, to rest and recover his strength, so he resigned as Director of the IIBA, at age 86, but continued his practice and to give workshops.

In the course of things, I was disappointed that he disregarded women's issues. But I was used to that. I come from a generation of women who, if we wanted something, went to where it was, absorbed what we could and threw away the rest. One time, Al was holding forth our group of seven psychiatrists and me. He looked as if he was in a movie version of a 19 century surgical arena, the big professor dispensing knowledge and wisdom to the doctors and medical students. As he strode up and down, he intoned, "Gentlemen", and continued with his talk. John Bellis quickly glanced at me. I, of course, didn't move a muscle. I shall always cherish the memory of John Bellis for that involuntary movement. On the other hand, Al was always respectful of me on a personal level, as he was respectful of all his women patients with whom I have spoken.

What I have appreciated most about Al Lowen was the clarity of his thinking, the carefulness of his boundaries, his courage in pursuing his mission, his gracefulness on the dance floor, and his unwillingness to engage in disputes and controversy about other systems of therapy. I admired the physicalness in his spirituality. While he responded with awe at the vastness of nature and the mystery of the life force, he also insisted that Grace consisted of resilience and harmony in the form and movement of the body. He never achieved the softness he aspired to, as part of his concept of Grace, and he never achieved the grand influence in the medical community that he originally fancied. Yet, he succeeded in living his life according to his principles. His teachings gave legitimacy to the field of body psychotherapy, he gave people like me a place to be, where I could feel at home as a therapist who used her hands and her breath as tools. To almost the end of his life, Al kept his own tools honed, thinking up new ways of working energetically, like the Samurai of old, whose first duty was to keep their swords sharpened.

In conclusion, Al Lowen fulfilled his nature. He lived his life with honour and integrity, and left us with some clues about how we might live ours, hopefully, with a deeper, though imperfect understanding along whatever paths we take from the road he carved out.

Heiner Steckel

To be able to feel your feelings, to express them and to be able to contain – was the triad Al Lowen claimed for a solid body based identity. And that is, what his work was about ...

Over a period of 30 years I saw Al Lowen in individual sessions and workshops – and later travelling with him, when he had asked me to help him at international Conferences. And I remember waking up in the morning by these dull rhythmic beats, when Al was kicking in the hotel-room next door. ... Al practiced what he was suggesting to others ... helping me and others experience and understand our selves deeper.

A therapeutic moment: Here I was on the stool – and my chest wasn't moving too much. He: "You need to cry" ... me: "I know" and he: "So why don't you cry then; to whom you don't want to show your tears?" and here was the experienced patient: "To my mother" ... Al: "I don't see your mother in this room – and I am asking myself how long you want to bring her here, in order not to be alive." So, he did relate and he understood transference ... he deeply understood how relational experiences of our childhood left the marks in our physiology, shaped our body and can rule and ruin our relationships here and now. These incorporations are the base for negative self-concepts and became the base for repetition patterns and transference hang-ups. As Al liked to say, the protective castle of the child turns into the prison of the adult. I always found this such a simple and true metaphor for the concept of character structure. ... I am so grateful having experienced Al Lowen many times – relating to me and others from his deep faith in the biological resources of the human animal, from his deep understanding of the vulnerable wounded human animal, from his deep conviction in life and

passion for life, and from his trust in the energetic processes, with which we can restore our bodily-self and heal. You must find and re-connect to your animal nature to be fully human. This was his credo I heard many times. And for him this was at the core of humanity. And for me this is at the core of my Bioenergetics understanding and practice.

I was also with him in very difficult moments, when he suffered from the disrespect he felt from his own school, when he witnessed a movement away from what he considered the center and base of Bioenergetic work. He himself had the courage to question the characterology he had developed as in danger of being misused to categorize people instead of being seen as a tool for deeper understanding of the individual's dynamic ... At the same time many colleagues in the Institute felt the need to integrate more of a psychodynamic point of view. This was not an easy moat to bridge. Probably because of personal issues involved on both sides, it seemed incompatible. It certainly became a wound to him – not easy to heal. I witnessed that Al could see and own his part in it. He expressed this in several personal conversations we had. In certain moments he even regretted that he had founded a school and organization. I disagreed, because I wouldn't be here today, if there hadn't been a school. And I wish for us, engaged in this school, that in our maturation and differentiation, we can stay deeply connected to the roots and honouring them, no matter on which branches of the Bioenergetics tree we may be.

Let us have a look at a very material part of the legacy. I look to Al's writings, from where we can make a seamless connection to the findings of modern neurobiology, emotion and trauma research. He still reaches people in the way he wrote, touches human bodies and becomes personally very meaningful for many of them. I personally look into the books again and again, finding them stimulating, enriching and convincing. This heritage is a treasure, a gold mine, which has not yet been fully exploited (explored).

Al Lowen trusted that we can take care of ourselves, when we reconnect and refer to our organismic being and by this to our self-healing forces and capacities. This is also in the core of my Bioenergetics understanding and practice.

Al loved Greece, Greek wine, Metaxa, its music and dance. And the last very special dance we had was when I was sitting next to him, – the last time I saw him – and Monica and Fred put on Greek music and his vitality and joy was there with the rhythm and the movements, which were still possible.

Dear Al, I miss you with all I have mentioned and more ... Thank you.

Alice Ladas

While I say a few words about my 55 year connection with Dr Alexander Lowen and his work, I would like you to stand. The purpose is to honor one of Al's major contributions to the field of psychotherapy: getting clients to stand on their feet. Al was the very first therapist in the west to use the words "bio-energy" to describe his work. 60 plus years later, energy psychology and energy medicine are just beginning to emerge.

In 1955, Al was speaking at a facility and I was introducing him and suggested to Al and John Pierrakos that becoming a non-profit institute might be useful. In 1956, at their request, I hired lawyer Robert Sturz, to help us form the Institute for Bioenergetic Analysis. In 1957 I introduced Al to publisher Henry Stratton. The result was the publication in 1958 of "*The Physical Dynamics of Character Structure*", Al's first book.

Working with Al set the course for the remainder of my professional and personal life, and for this I am profoundly grateful. It may sound self serving to mention the projects that grew out of my work with Al, but what students do because of their mentors is, in my opinion, the greatest tribute to the mentor. So I am going to take that risk.

Graduating from the second training group, I began work as a Bioenergetic therapist and continue that today. But I was also inspired to help women reclaim the right to use their bodies as they wish to. Reich and Al convinced me of the importance of the birth experience for infant and mother, so I studied and then taught the first Lamaze course in the USA.

My doctoral dissertation, “*Breastfeeding, the Less Available Option*”, was inspired, in part, by Al’s emphasis on the importance of breastfeeding. With the help of 1100 members of the *La Leche League* and publication in 4 peer reviewed journals, the study helped to turn the tide back towards breastfeeding in the USA. And of course I breastfed our daughters for the three years Al prescribed! We quit by verbal agreement.

In 1982, I helped create a synthesis of the work of the Freudians and the sex researchers in the book, “*The G Spot and Other Discoveries About Human Sexuality*”. Appendix B contains a synopsis of “*Women and Bioenergetic Analysis*”. This research, done with my late husband, Harold Ladas, was inspired by women Bioenergetic analysts who, in 1977, began meeting separately from the men. As a result, some information about Bioenergetic Analysis has reached over a million people in 19 languages and 28 countries. Getting the Bioenergetic research included in “*The G Spot*” book was a personal struggle.

Today I lead the research committee on the board of the U.S. Association for Body Psychotherapy because one of the initial stated purposes of the IIBA was research. Cheerleading for research is also a tribute to another Bioenergetic mentor, the late Dr John Bellis, the first Bioenergetic trainer to suggest including a research project in the training of CBTs. The research prizes awarded by the USABP have been won by several Bioenergetic therapists, including Christa Ventling, Margit Koemeda-Lutz, Martin Kaschke, Dirk Revenstorf, Thomas Scherrmann, Halko Weiss and Ulrich Soeder.

If Al was, at times, somewhat patriarchal and less focused on the relational, he should be given lots of slack. His acceptance of the work of other therapists, his listening to his patients, was far in advance of anything done by his mentor, Reich. If Al was not enthusiastic about research, it was because our culture was already too focused on the intellect while suppressing feelings.

I believe Al was a genius at reading our way of being from our bodies. It is another of the major things he taught us and while he was a good teacher, he was the genius and we mere students.

George Downing

Summarized here are four suggestions for the future proposed in my Memorial weekend talk.

1. Continued systematic development of new ideas. To take just one example, the new thinking about the therapeutic relationship, developed by trainers other than Al (Bob Hilton, Bob Lewis, and others), seems to me today one of the Institute's important strengths. Even this strand alone needs further reflection. In all current psychotherapy, relational psychoanalysis included, we are probably just at the beginning of understanding what really takes place in the therapeutic exchange.

2. Preservation of the core teachings. Al had his own way to work and his own way to conceptualize it. Different in different periods, yet with substantial underlying continuity. This legacy remains precious, in my opinion.

Naturally any practitioner is going to pick and choose. She will adopt some elements of this repertoire and forego others. But the repertoire itself needs to be recognized as such and conscientiously transmitted. Arguments about "hard bioenergetics" and "soft bioenergetics" and all the rest will never stop, nor should they. At the same time the innovations put into place by Al himself merit to be passed on with respect and care.

3. Better communication of the "complex model". Al was a forceful and extremely successful spokesperson for bioenergetics for years upon years and the task was not easy.

How do you convey to persons who have never worked with the body, and never seen such work, what it is like and what it can bring? Al's solution, and probably the right one given the circumstances, was to simplify and condense. He delivered a stripped-down "simplified model". Whereas what we, in the Institute, know and appreciate might be called a "complex model", much more sophisticated with regard to both theory and practice.

The result, as I described at length in my talk, is that we now face a paradox. In one sense bioenergetics is widely known. And many of its components have been taken on board by other schools. On the other hand, those who have borrowed some elements tend to have an image of

the Bioenergetic approach limited to the simplified model. Often they have little grasp of the more sophisticated framework, little sense that it even exists. The coming years might therefore be the right time to better convey the complex model to interested outsiders.

4. Archeology of the textual heritage, of Al's texts, I mean. Al wrote in different modes. Frequently he expressed himself in pithy, somewhat repetitive (to the Bioenergetic reader) statements. But at other times he let his thinking be more searching. It was more messy, in a good sense.

Some of these "implicit" probings, as Bob Lewis called them in his Memorial talk, or anyway half implicit, arguably deserve renewed attention. They merit discussion, explication, dismantling, reassemblage. Heiner Steckel in his Memorial contribution has made a similar comment. Again to take one example, The Language of the Body contains highly interesting perspectives on early parent-infant and parent-child interaction. And this was back in the fifties! It was at a time when almost no one else in psychotherapy was attempting to describe early transactions on so concrete a level! This was admirable, and much more could be said about it in the light of current developmental research. Other examples abound.

Bob Hilton

In 1968, when he delivered the William Alanson White Institute lectures (these lectures appear in the wonderful little book, Psychoanalytic Theory, Therapy and the Self), Harry Guntrip said in his introduction, "There is something wrong with us if our theoretical ideals remain stagnant and impervious to change for too long. Theory is simply the best we can do to date to conceptualize the experiences of our patients present with us." He also states, "To care for people is more important than to care for ideas, which can be good servants but bad masters."

Freud broke away from his contemporaries. Reich did this with Freud and Lowen with Reich. Part of the creative genius of an innovator is the passion he has about his work, which is fueled by his own personality needs.

The followers of any great leader always face the problem of ferreting out the universal principles for which the leader stands over, against the leader's own personal idiosyncrasies. When individual personality needs and cultural influences are not considered and an attempt is made to hold on to what is conceived as an "original truth", then orthodoxy and fundamentalism develop, where doctrine and theory become more important than people.

So what does this say about the future of Bioenergetics? I see our task as supporting the legacy of the principles for which Lowen stood which apply to us all, and our future is in having room for discussion and presentation of those aspects of Bioenergetics that we have needed to change in order to address our personal needs and those of our clients. Lowen said he was drawn to Reich because he represented a therapy with a body/mind connection. He also said that Reich's tragedy was that he wasn't oriented toward grounding. As we are all aware, grounding became a major emphasis in Bioenergetic therapy. Just as Lowen added grounding to his Reichian therapy we as Bioenergetic therapists today are faced with how to integrate our current understanding of the healing process of the mind/body split with the basic Bioenergetic principles we have been taught. Our future lies in the success of that process of integration.

But I must ask the question, "What might keep us from embodying, and realizing that future?" Part of the answer to that question comes from the nature of our contributions. Since our insights come out of our need for intimacy and attachment, which were not provided for in our original theories, we now have a narcissistic investment in maintaining our system of interpretation. Our theories, as well as those of Freud, Reich and Lowen, can function as a narcissistic defense against the feelings of shame, humiliation and impotence. To have our theories challenged or to have them fall on deaf ears may be to open up the wounds from which these theories sprang.

I have had, as have you, many powerful energetic experiences with Al. But one of the most profound experiences came from a simple comment he made one day while working with me. I was sitting on the floor in his office having just exhausted myself with expressions of terror and grief from my early childhood, when he said, "Bob, this never should have happened

to you.” We know today through the study of neurobiology why hearing these words was such a powerful Bioenergetic experience. But apart from the explanation of how his limbic brain was talking to my limbic brain, I then knew that I was a person, not my character or my problem, but I, as Bob, impacted him in such a way that he would share the pain and love of his heart with me at that moment. It has been my experience that when such a confirming love is given and received, a spontaneous movement begins in our bodies that leads us back toward recovering our lost identity and vitality. For me, the Bioenergetic grounding exercises did not hold up until I found grounding in the gracious and heartfelt relationships I have had with my therapists over the years. For me, this makes Bioenergetic therapy less about going from the outside in and more about coming from the inside out.

The future of Bioenergetics is already here in this room. The embodiment of that future is in our hands or, I should rather say, in our hearts. It lies in our capacity to put aside our commitment to a theory and embrace the life from which the theory sprang. In his autobiography, Al says, “Bioenergetics aims to help a person open his heart and love. But if the objective is not gained, the result is tragic.” I want to thank Al for his acknowledging that in the gracious sharing of an open heart is the future of Bioenergetics.

Memorial Note

Eleanor Greenlee

Alexander Lowen was an incredible man! His contribution to the concept of how the body affects the mind and the mind affects the body was revolutionary and expanded psychotherapy into psycho-somatic psychotherapy. In my opinion, he brought into psychology the awareness of the body, the body’s correlations to our mental problems and how to work with the physical aspects of our emotional problems.

I first met Al when he came to California in the early 1970’s to my training program. He was powerful in his presence and in his work. He showed

us how the body revealed its areas of chronic muscular tension and how to work with it. Right then and there I said, “We are going to invite this man to come and train for us every time he can” and he did come often. We found out that he liked skiing in the winter and warm climates in the summer. We arranged every possible training that would appeal to him so we could benefit from his genius. Most of all he helped us start a walk on our path to health and well-being.

For me working with Al was not easy, but created transformation into an existence of truly living my body without most of the restrictions of my past traumatic experiences.

Anyone who worked with him knows he demanded you give your all, but painful as it was, the journey was worth the trip. Initially, he scared the heck out of me but not in the same way that negative experiences of my past life had affected me. It was a feeling of being “scared to move into the unknown”, but the outcome was worth the journey.

Al demanded a lot and he gave a lot! I remember the last time I worked with him, this time both of us sharing the responsibility of working with people. I thank the powers that be that made it possible and for the gift of Al’s acceptance of me. God Bless Him, and I hope the angels up in heaven are ready for him.

I love him dearly.

A Key Therapeutic Experience with Alexander Lowen

Phil M. Helfaer

I experienced Al as a healing presence during the period I saw him for therapy. In one particular session, I made the unexpected discovery of the experience of self-respect. I no longer remember the content of the session. I remember suddenly becoming quiet, just standing in the room with Al, who was sitting in the chair beside me. Probably I had been on the stool, maybe

crying. I was aware of Al's supportive and unobtrusive presence. Then I got it. I was me, just myself. All the terrible self-judgments and shameful self-attributions fell away, and for a moment disappeared. Here I was, "just" in my body, with all my sorrows, faults, and pain, but I had myself with – and, in my mind, there is only one word for it– self-respect.

I was never inclined to use the term "self-esteem", which has a psychological cast to it, as if I were, in my mind, esteeming my-self mentally as another object. What I experienced felt like a simpler state and a deeper one, a bodily way of being. In that state of being I could tolerate the terrible affects that had assailed me, the shame, the humiliation, and the deep agonies of loss and abandonment. A year or so later (1984), I "found myself" giving a paper on "Sex and Self-Respect" at one of the conferences, and, never suspecting the concept of self-respect would become a life-long companion, published a book some years later using the term in the title (Helfaer 1998, 2006, Bioenergetics Press).

How was I able to reach this healing experience in my work with Al at this particular moment? I found it in myself, of course; it emerged from my work. I believe, however, the experience was enabled by Al's presence. If he were not somehow in a state to enable or be with it, I doubt that it would have happened. For one thing, he didn't get too busy with me too quickly to allow for the time for the feeling experience to emerge and form. I felt from him an empathy for my suffering, I felt seen by him, and I experienced him as a positive presence, a companion in my aloneness.

I believe there was also another more specific element in his way of being with me which I would identify as a kind of *respect for me as a living body*. I feel that this kind of respect and feel for the living body is quite rare. For him, "I am my body", had a real meaning. That meaning and that respect had registered within me, and at that moment I had my own experience of those states of being, and that experience fostered my healing path.