An Interview with Janet Adler

Neala Haze and Tina Stromsted

Janet Adler, Ph.D., ADTR, has been a dance/movement therapist since 1963 when she trained with Marian Chace at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, D.C. She documented her work with autistic children in the award winning film "Looking For Me," in 1968. A student of Mary Whitehouse, the first person to describe Authentic Movement, Janet further developed the work and, in 1981 founded and directed the Mary Starks Whitehouse Institute, the first school for Authentic Movement. Since moving to Northern California in 1985, she has been leading training groups in the study and practice of Authentic Movement. In 1988, she created a film about Authentic Movement called "Still Looking," and completed her doctoral degree in mystical studies in 1992. She currently lectures, offers groups in the United States, Europe, and teaches in the Authentic Movement Institute in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Janet's early work stresses the development of a psychological understanding of the therapeutic relationship in the mover/witness dyad. As her work develops, her understanding of the role of the witness deepens and the spiritual aspect of the practice expands. Janet brings a remarkable capacity for seeing, listening, and reflecting her students' experience as well as a willingness to take important and creative risks in further developing her work. Her warmth and clarity of presence have been a gift to colleagues and students alike. Her respect for life's mysteries and courage in following her vision is a source of inspiration to many.

On a beautiful spring day the three of us gathered under a canopy of roses in the garden outside of Janet's studio in Bodega, California. She had prepared a beautiful array of fruits, nuts, and cheeses held in a
I: What childhood experiences influenced your becoming a dance/movement therapist?

JA: I loved to move. Dancing lessons throughout my childhood offered not only great pleasure in just the sensation of moving, but also I can see in retrospect that they offered a form within which my energy could expand, become visible, and be contained. Those lessons fed my imagination as a small child, my need for mastery in latency, and my love of beauty as an adolescent. When I was old enough, my parents arranged for me to travel alone on the bus to the city and study privately with a prominent dancer in the Sadler Wells Ballet Company.

I: What was that like?

JA: I lived for those lessons, yet left each one wondering "when will she let me dance?" Each time I arrived for a lesson, no one was there. Once inside the old building, I walked up the many wooden steps in a narrow, cold and gray stairwell. I waited at the top of the steps on an uncomfortable, wooden bench outside the studio. Eventually, my heart would leap as the door opened downstairs and I could hear her pink spike heels...