



# Discovering the Alexander Technique

By Daphne Chamberlain  
I studied my shoulders in the full-length mirror. They curved round even after years of trying to pull them back.

One hour later, after my first Alexander Technique lesson, I looked in the mirror again and for the first time ever saw my back was straight. It felt like a miracle.

In succeeding lessons, I discovered that other bits of me were unbalanced or scrunched-up, that these mis-used bits connected with each other, and they could be put right together. As my AT teacher remarked, "You're beginning to look like a joined-up person!"

## Alignment

Friends asked, "What exactly do you do?" It was difficult to explain lying on the floor for 20 minutes every day, doing nothing. Physically, that is. My mind was giving my body directions. Directions to undo a lifetime's bad habits, to allow my neck to release and my back to lengthen and widen. It works because the mind and the body are joined up too.

Alexander believed that if the body is not properly aligned exercises are harmful.

Teachers give hands-on direction, guiding but not imposing. They are there to lead pupils into a better understanding of their own bodies. At the end of each lesson, a pupil should understand why changes have been achieved, and how to keep up the good work.

The Technique teaches proper "use of the self" so you can be correctly aligned for whatever you are doing cleaning your teeth, wheeling the supermarket trolley, typing, or playing the guitar. The psychological bonus is a real "feel-good" sensation.



FM Alexander

## One to one

So who was Alexander, and what is his 'Technique'? Grossly over-simplifying, he was a Tasmanian actor, born in 1869, who kept losing his voice in performance. Doctors were baffled, but after studying himself in a mirror he realised that his problem stemmed from faulty alignment of the head and neck. Eventually doctors took lessons from him. Now his Technique is practised worldwide, and used in business, drama, dance and sport.

Because he was long-lived, many teachers were themselves taught by Alexander's own pupils. Lessons are usually one-to-one, and compatibility is important.

I would love to recommend my own teacher, but she is limiting the number of her clients. However, the Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique has a list of professionally qualified practitioners. For details, contact 020 7284 3338 or <http://www.stat.org.uk>

## Have a heart!

(A) The Japanese eat very little fat and suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans.

(B) On the other hand, the French eat a lot of fat and also suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans.

(C) The Japanese drink very little red wine and suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans.

(D) The Italians drink excessive amounts of red wine and also suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans.

(E) Conclusion: Eat & drink what you like. It's speaking English that kills you.

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## THE ARCHER SHOWCASE

Featuring work from members of local writing-groups

Daphne Chamberlain introduces Lilian Chavert  
This month we feature a piece of family history. Most of us, reading My Grandmother's Knickers, would imagine that Lilian was first told this story as a child. In fact, she heard it from an aunt only a few years ago. She says, "It's when you get older that you can piece together family stories and put things in context".



Lilian Chavert photo by Femke van Iperen

She has the same Hebrew name as this great-grandmother she never knew - Riva Leah. Vitebsk, by the way, is in Belarus, north-east of Minsk, and was the birthplace of the artist, Marc Chagall.

Lilian has had short stories published in magazines and read on the radio. Last year, one was included in Worldwide Writers. Her favourite writing time is in the early morning, "when everyone else is asleep". By 6am, she is tapping out another story on her computer.

It's not necessary, though, to be either published or an early riser to join East Finchley Writers. They meet at 6.30pm every Wednesday at the Old White Lion. Lilian is a founder member, and she will be happy to supply more details on 020 8444 1793.

## My Grandmother's Knickers

Lilian Chavert

I recently visited Beth Shalom, that amazing place in the Midlands which is the centre for Holocaust studies. The museum was grim and heart-breaking. We walked round in silence. In everybody's mind, the question. Why them? Why not me?

I looked at the photographs of women and young girls. I was that age when it happened. It could have happened to me, and had it not been for my great-grandmother, almost surely it would have happened to me.

At the end of the nineteenth century, my great-grandparents came from Vitebsk, planning to settle in Germany. They were not wealthy, but not of the poorest. They brought with them cases and boxes full of clothes, books and household possessions.

At the German border they were, like all other immigrants, stopped, questioned and searched. Their cases stood around them.

"That one!" An official pointed to a certain trunk. It was opened, the lid flung back. He might have been a young man, that official, haughty and rude. He might have been old, tired, ugly. Who knows? He began to rummage in the trunk that contained my great-grandmother's clothes.

Out came her garments, one by one, to be flung on the ground. First her warm shawl, then her beaded jacket. She stood stony-faced. Then out came her underwear. Her knickers, four pairs, clean and ironed. I like to think that her husband intervened at this point, but that she gestured to him to remain silent.

Then the worst. Out came

her scheitel, the wig worn by all Jewish women of her time and background. It was brushed and braided, ready to put on when she reached her new home.

Somebody laughed. Perhaps the official put it on his own head and made fun. Perhaps. But at that moment we were all saved.

"Close that case! We are not staying here!"

This has already been published in a magazine of The Jewish Association of Cultural Societies.

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