

Escaping Good Posture

By Annie Thoe, published in **Sensibility** 2002

“I want to have good posture,” is a request I get from many of my clients. One client, Glen, was a magician who wanted to improve his posture. He said his posture looked menacing to people and he wanted to appear more friendly to his audience. I asked him why he thought he appeared menacing. He said that because of his nearsightedness, he frowned a lot and his hunched shoulders added to this sinister impression.

I asked him to walk around my office. Glen kicked his heels out in front of him when he walked and pushed himself forward, rolling onto the balls of his feet in a defiant manner. I couldn't help but get the impression of a little boy when I looked at him. He appeared to be carrying some heavy weight on his back. I commented, “Gee Glen, it almost looks like you are carrying a backpack or something.”

He stopped in his tracks and said, “You know, my parents made me walk around the block with heavy rocks in my backpack to get in shape for Boy Scouts. I just hated it.” He went on to say how humiliating this was for him. The pack was too big for him and was quite painful to his shoulders. I could only imagine the physical and emotional pain he must have struggled with during that time in his life of being forced to do something he hated.

However, this was 10 to 15 years later, and he was still walking as if carrying this heavy backpack. I wondered what would give Glen the experience of walking without this imaginary weight? I tried a number of conventional lessons based on the *Feldenkrais Method*®. One day, Glen came in carrying a straight-jacket that he used in his magic show routines for demonstrating escaping in less than two minutes. He asked me if we could do a lesson to help him improve his timing.

I had never given a “straight-jacket” lesson before, but I thought, what a perfect tool to work with to “remove his backpack.” I asked Glen to get into the straight-jacket, sit on a chair, and we began exploring how he escaped from the jacket. I had Glen notice what movements he made with his pelvis, his rib cage, and his head. I would gently hold one area to see how he could involve different parts of himself to become free in the jacket.

The jacket was a wonderful tool to show where he was free to move and where he was stuck. After 40 minutes of exploration, Glen said, “Do you think I could get out of this now?” He looked a little concerned and said, “I'm starting to get the creeps being in here so long.”

“Of course,” I said, and he was out of the jacket in a minute. Glen's shoulders were very free and supple. I was so impressed with the lesson he had given himself with just a few little directions and constraints from me.

I had Glen walk, and he was so much looser, lighter and more confident. I told him how delighted I was with his straight-jacket and how effective this jacket would be with other clients. "Do you think I could get one of these?" I asked him. "Oh, Annie," he said, "I don't think that would be a good idea, you might scare off clients." "But look how great your posture is now," I remarked. "This is a fabulous tool!"

I agreed with Glen that the public would not understand me using a straight-jacket with clients, but I couldn't resist trying on his jacket and exploring a few of the movements we did together.

The improvement of Glen's posture was not about him learning to have a new fixed position of "better posture," but more importantly, his learning to escape from fixation. He was no longer physically tied to the backpack his parents had strapped on him. Not only could he learn to quickly escape from this fixed position of posture, but he could escape in many different ways.

Good posture is not the perfect fixed position, but the ability to move in any direction. One might notice Houdini himself had great posture.