

HEALTHY LIVING

METHOD CURES BODY, SOUL

Program such a success for York resident, she's studying to become Feldenkrais instructor

BY KRISTIN MACKEY

Special to the Economist & Sun/Tribune

After more than 17 years of battling bulimia and anorexia, Friederike Bental is finally comfortable with her body. And she credits much of her willpower to the Feldenkrais method.

"It has really deepened my faith in a higher being," Ms Bental said. "How mind, body and spirit all work together and how tremendously powerful the human nervous system and skeleton is."

The Whitchurch-Stouffville resident was first introduced to the Feldenkrais method in 1995. It was a life-changing experience.

The method, which has about 1,000 practitioners in North America, is not about strengthening, stretching, or flexing. Instead, it teaches the brain to reorganize stiffened body parts for easier movement and then integrates them back into full use.

Usually performed lying down, the method explores other forms of movement to minimize pain and discomfort while forcing the participant to be aware of his or her body.

"Whatever we do in Feldenkrais, we anticipate the reaction of the nervous system," said Ms Bental, 52. "Everything is generated by the nervous system."

The method helped her become more connected with her body. It also helped her recover from a sports-related shoulder injury.

Ms Bental was so moved by her experience that in 2000 she began a four-year training program to become a Feldenkrais practitioner.

Strict guidelines limit students to what and how they instruct. All movements can be taught only when the training program is completed.

Now in her second year of study, Ms Bental recently began teaching a limited number of movements where she can assist or touch students.

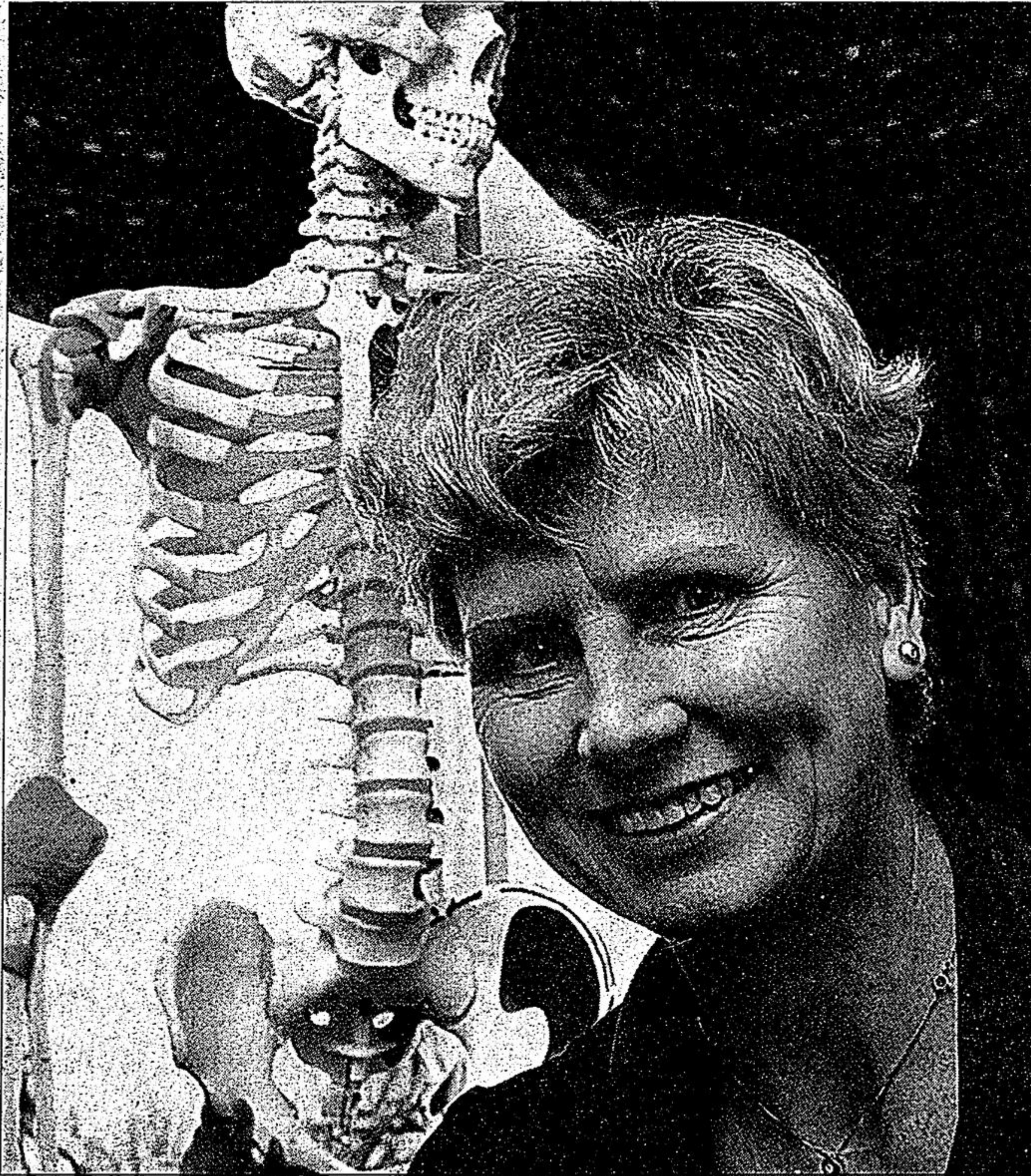
While laying on mats, she teaches specific movements and instructs students to keep their eyes closed to prevent any influence by their neighbours.

The process can be frustrating, with some students lashing out or crying, but when the position is achieved, the result is usually gratifying.

"I am not really one to meditate," explained beginner student Bev Gordon-Freeman. "But Feldenkrais puts you in a different state of mind because you are paying attention while blocking exterior stimuli."

Whitchurch-Stouffville resident Lisa McGill, 39, has been attending Ms Bental's sessions for four years. She has chronic pain from fibromyalgia — an incurable form of arthritis.

"We are made to look at how our bodies are lying on the ground," Ms McGill said. "And at



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Friederike Bental of Whitchurch-Stouffville helps pain sufferers overcome their affliction by helping them practice the Fendelkrais method.

the end of the session, we see how it has shifted and how things are balanced. I find you come away feeling better."

After trying massage, yoga, tai chi and chiropractic work to alleviate pain, she has noticed a "huge difference" since learning the Feldenkrais method.

"My body self-consciously desires to do this. It knows this is the right thing to be doing," said Ms McGill, who practises many of the movements at home.

But Ms Bental says the Feldenkrais method is more than just pain relief.

"We learn to cope with everything around

us," she said.

"Weight control comes beautifully without any power struggle. Feldenkrais makes you want to eat better and there are less cravings."

Leona Ronco agrees. During a recent visit to the doctor, she was surprised to hear she had lost two pounds.

"I had quit smoking after more than 30 years and thought, 'Well, I can eat to get through this,'" said the 53-year-old Whitchurch-Stouffville resident.

She credits the method with sticking to her ban on cigarettes and says she couldn't have done it otherwise.

Dogs help woman deal with seizures

BY LISA QUEEN

Staff Writer

Preying on the vulnerable doesn't get much lower than this.

Twice while Susan Hoffman was having a severe epileptic seizure, she was robbed.

The first time, a thief stole her purse while she convulsed on the sidewalk near the corner of Finch Avenue and Yonge Street in North York.

The second time, an offender made off with her purse and a package after she fell to the floor at Markville Shopping Centre in Markham.

It wasn't just the robberies that made Ms Hoffman fearful of leaving home.

'People were becoming afraid of me and afraid to be with me anywhere in public.'

During seizures over the years, the 42-year-old has fallen down stairs, broken her foot and been hit by a car.

Friends and family, nervous about how to react during a seizure, were becoming increasingly leery about going out in public with her.

But since Ms Hoffman got an epilepsy service dog — first Seiko and now Cherokee — she has the confidence to venture out again.

The Bolton woman, who now helps train dogs to assist people with seizure disorders, will talk about how her dogs have helped her cope with her illness at an Epilepsy York Region meeting Wednesday night.

Ms Hoffman originally began having seizures at age 12.

The first time, she had just received a vaccine at school. She did not experience convulsions but seemed to go into some kind of trance.

At first, the vaccination was blamed for the seizures but eventually her disorder was traced back to a fall off a playground slide when she was four year old.

The tumble on to concrete left the

See AGENCY, page 17.



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