

My name is Jonathan Pierce. I am a Structural Integrator. I help people make friends with gravity. It feels like magic. There is something special about this process that has people transform so much more than just the way their bodies move and feel.

When my son, Ernest, was born, he had a bit of a traumatic entrance into the world. He had complications that prevented him from taking his first breath for several minutes. He was then put into a cooling table treatment and kept in hypothermic temperatures for 72 hours to mitigate or reverse the potential damage created by such a long period of hypoxia. It was a scary time full of unknowns.

After he was warmed back to a normal temperature, we kept getting good news every day. He had an EEG test that showed no signs of seizures and a brain MRI that showed no evidence of injury or damage, and after 9 days in the NICU, he was able to come home with a clean bill of health! He was also born with contractures in his wrists and hands. The doctors call it arthrogryposis, a Greek term meaning bent joint.

It feels somewhat serendipitous to be a structural integrator and have a child who needs special attention paid to his neuromuscular development. His hands were swollen and rigid, his elbows didn't look like they had ever been bent. Upon learning that arthrogryposis is non-progressive and primarily affects soft tissue, I knew I had to use my skills to help him get the best start possible, but I work with adults. I had never done any bodywork with children, much less a newborn.

So, I contacted Robert Toporek, and he graciously spent time and energy on coaching me in bringing Ernie through the Rolfing series through Zoom sessions

According to my quick research, a couple of the markers of arthrogryposis include internally rotated shoulders, elbows locked and unable to bend, and bent wrists and fingers with a very limited range of motion. When he was born, he seemed to have all of these, and in the first few days, he did not move his arms at all. After a little palpation of his shoulders and arms, his arms started to wake up.

Throughout the series, his hands and arms have improved markedly. His tight hamstrings relaxed, and his shoulders and chest became more open. Some of the things I was surprised by were his alert, cheery demeanor. He started smiling at 4 weeks old and hasn't stopped since. He has frequent appointments with occupational therapists, and they have commented that he is the most alert and happy baby they have ever seen. I'm also surprised by the rapid evolution of my touch and approach to working with adults. I have learned so much and become a much better practitioner throughout this process. We are so excited to see how he will continue to develop and grow.

We are so grateful to Mr. Toporek for his time and expertise in helping us set up Ernie to reach his highest potential.

Here's a link to a Google Drive folder with each of the recordings inside.

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/116do1VTj7Vcjy5XXQuLOGYTWRWooPSbN>

Thanks again for all of your help. You have been kind and generous. I hope we can meet you someday soon and give you a hug!

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