

S U G G E S S S T O R I E S

# STAND-UP DOCTOR

## EXERCISE PHYSIOLOGIST BY BRUCE MORGAN

THIS IS A REPRODUCTION OF AN ARTICLE PUBLISHED IN THE  
BOSTON COLLEGE ALUMNI MAGAZINE

When Vance Bonner was waiting back-stage at one of the morning talk shows in New York City recently, preparing to go on the air to promote her new book, she *almost* broke into a sweat. "Gee, this is a national TV. Shouldn't I be nervous?" she remembers thinking. Then, after a quick beat: "Naaaah."

That upbeat tone has carried the Newton College graduate a long way, from a childhood as a military brat based mostly around Washington, D.C.; through a dozen years of Sacred Heart schooling sweetly capped off at Newton; and across the continent to her present domiciles in Idaho and California, where she advances her heartfelt message of the therapeutic effects of proper body alignment.

Lately, with the publication of *The Vance Stance*, that world is reaching wider audiences. Issued as a large-format trade paperback in late 1993, *The Vance Stance* (Workman) has sold some 40,000 copies to date. In her clear, logical prose, and in person at her clinics in Sun Valley and Malibu, Bonner teaches people how to stand up straight - balanced, poised, with the knees slightly bent - for greater grace and power. Bonner (who has a doctorate in health sciences) maintains that many body problems thought to be untreatable lifelong conditions - bowleggedness, for example, or scoliosis - can be fixed through her regimen of 34 stretching and flexing exercises.

Age is no impediment. Bonner's oldest client, a wheelchair-bound 102-year-old Sacred Heart nun, had become partly disabled in one arm after suffering a stroke. Bonner got the woman doing exercises and watched her regain some use of the arm.

The client's religious affiliation was significant to Bonner, who credits practically everything she has been able to achieve in life to the nuns' tutelage. "The Sacred Heart nuns taught me how to think and enabled me to create this new system of body alignment," Bonner insists.

For Bonner, the muscular and the spiritual entwine. In her book's first chapter, she raises the question: "If we were born perfect, what happened?" We locked our knees; we hunched our shoulders; we fell from grace, she argues. Is this physical fitness or theology? "I don't think God makes a mistake with our bodies," Bonner says. "You know - 'Oh, that back, I never did get that right.' We are innately perfect."

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A rock-climbing, roller-blading, karate-chopping, polo-playing dynamo, the 44-year-old Bonner seems a burning bright tiger for her cause. Yet she transcends the dizzy California stereotype. She can drop Teilhard de Chardin's name into a conversation without a splash. "In his hierarchy, he describes how we move from the animal to the angelic," Bonner says. "In the same way, we can move from physical balance toward spiritual harmony."

Some cover that ground easily. "If you look at Michelangelo's *David*," suggest Bonner, "you can see he didn't have back pain."