

# 2: RIB CASE

## Anatomical Fact

Today's focus is rib case mobility (rib case is Barbara Clark's lovely rephrasing of rib cage). The diaphragm action we looked at in #1 expanded the lung fields by extending the lung cavity downward; that downward action pairs with mobility in the ribs, adding to the expansion.

We have two main lines of attention today: first to the idea of the ribs as jointed and lightly articulating. In the front of the body, the ribs connect to the sternum flexibly through a small extension of cartilage. The first seven ribs run directly into the sternum through these cartilage extensions, the next three merge their extensions to join into the rib arch that we looked at last pop-up (the bottom two ("floating ribs") articulate only with the spine, and not the front of the body). The images we'll linger on vivify the soft, tensile strength of this cartilaginous link in the front body.

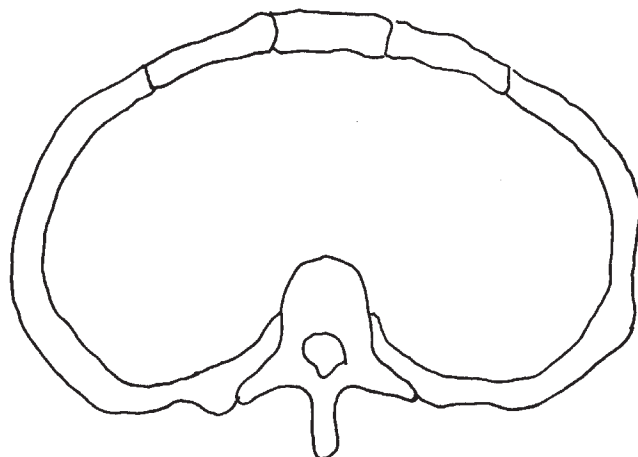
In the back of the body, each rib circle articulates with the spine. We'll use images that emphasize this back-body articulation, focusing on the strength of an easy inward compression into the spine in the exhale, and work with Barbara Clark's image of "cross patterning" in the rib circles — an understanding of the strength and flexibility of the structure, as well as its depth in space, as arising through a dynamic crossing of lines (directions) of movement.

What we take into writing from this is the idea of a case that gently articulates in its front and back, making a protective cavity for vital organs, the heart and lungs. We'll call the case Thorax and let it-them show up in the prompts, embodied, as a protector.

As with installment one, these images are expanded in the audio guide.

## Images

Trace or freehand copy the rib circle in this image, copied from a drawing by Barbara Clark. Even just tracing the shape of the rib circle with your finger on your desk will do something. Let your hand teach you something. Tactic tracing guides can be found in the audio guide (see back pages for URL). (The script of the audio guide follows.)



## Visualization Script

*Begin lying on the floor on your back, limbs extended.*

*Bring your attention to the places your body makes contact with the floor, and in your mind's eye, follow the curving places where it does not.*

*Imagine that the floor is a giant ink pad for a stamp, and you are trying to ink the surface of your body. Allow yourself to gently and slowly roll and press to ink your body surface. As you do, give extra attention to the perception of the roundness of the body's bony bowls:*

*the pelvis*

*the ribs*

*the skull*

*Move yourself onto your belly now, resting your head and arms in any position that's comfortable for your neck. Allow the soft space in the front of your body to rest on the floor. As you breath, feel the belly against the floor, your first mouth, when you were umbilically fed.*

*Without hurry, shift onto one side and then scooch around to your back. Bring your knees up toward the ceiling and let them rest in on each other, feet wider than the hips and feet turning slightly in to help balance the legs.*

*Before we begin tracing the ribs in our mind's eyes, let's trace with our fingers.*

*Bring a hand to the top of your sternum, finding the depression where the collarbones meet the sternum, and then using a fair but comfortable amount of pressure with the pads of your fingers, try to find the shape of the bone. Switch hands as needed through this next section. Look for the sternum's extension toward your belly. Find the nubby place it ends, the xiphoid process, like a little promontory. Feel for the sternum's flatness. With a fair amount of pressure, see if you can find locate the spaces between the ribs. Depending on how much flesh and boob you have up front, this is easier or harder to find with your fingers. But find out as much as you can through touch about how much space your sternum occupies. Then trace the rib arch, above the softness of the belly, down one side and then the other, seeing if you can locate the places where the different cartilage extensions join and branch.*

*Now drop the touch, and let your arms drape across your chest so the elbows point diagonally skyward. Let them fall partway toward your face so that you're not doing too much work to hold them there. Adjust yourself as needed so that you are comfortable and doing a minimum amount of muscular work.*

*Try to visualize the network of cartilage that connects the bones of the rib to the sternum. See the cartilage as soft and flexible. Perhaps let it glow a pleasing color in your mind's eye. See the socket where the rib bones meets the cartilage, and the socket where the cartilage meets the sternum. Imagine these places as soft, open meeting places. Yawn and watch them expand as you inhale.*

*Now travel your mind's eye around to the back of the body, where the ribs meet the spine. Try to see your ribs from behind.*

*Now imagine that your rib cage is a giant ripe plum, centered around the spine. And watch it slowly, gently dry into a prune. Easily compressing toward the spinal column. You can watch this over one slow breath, or let the image happen over a series of normal breaths. The important thing is to see the convergence of the material around the spine, as if the spine were the pit of plum, the pit of the prune.*

*Let it expand back up into a plum. And watch it compress again to prune.*

*Now let's switch the image. In your mind's eye, watch your ribs meet the spine, the width of the joint overlapping both bone and spinal disc. Imagine that the discs are pillows that have been squashed a little. Now watch a pair of ribs heading in toward the pillow, working together on right and left side of the spine, to plump the pillow back up. Try to focus on one elevation in the spine and then another.*

*Now relax your arms at your side, and use one hand to feel for the place where the opposite collarbone meets the sternum, finding its sternal socket. Then move your finger down a bit and locate the sternal socket of the first rib, which sits right under the collarbone. Picture a circle moving around the first rib circle. The movement will go under the collarbone, up the front of the rib, over the top, passing across the spine at the base of the neck, back around the other side, under the collarbone, to meet the sternum. Watch this circle a few more times, track something moving the circular pathway in your mind's eye.*

*Watching this circle as if it's a lit pathway, gently roll to one side and bring yourself up to sitting. Sit on the sits bones with legs crossed or extended. Now we're going to start at the fourth rib circle, which is as high in the chest as mid shoulder blades. Start by picturing the left fourth rib going into its spinal socket on the left side of the spine. Then in your mind's eye, draw a diagonal line connecting the left spinal socket to the front right side, where the fourth rib meets the sternum. Note the depth from back to front along this diagonal.*

*Follow the curved line of the bone now around the right rib as it moves around to meet the spine. And then take a diagonal pathway from the right spinal socket of the rib, around the height of your mid-shoulder blade, to the front left side where the fourth rib meets the sternum.*

*Trace this path a few more times, like a blissed-out race car learning a course in slow motion.*

*Now move up to the third rib, in your mind's eye, and repeat, starting from the left spinal socket, drawing a diagonal toward the right front, around the rib to the right side of the spine, drawing a diagonal line toward the left front, and around.*

*Take this pattern now at the second rib circle.*

*Take this pattern now at the first rib circle.*

*Take the next few minutes to feel the easy circling of all the ribs as you slowly shift positions. As you breath, notice an easy expansion at each of the four sockets of each rib circle. Take a walk, feeling the easy depth of the ribs from front to back. Their gentle enclosure of the heart and lungs within.*

## Writing Prompt

Retell a borrowed story. As you do, allow a figure, call it a thorax, to appear in your writing, either within the story itself, or within the way you tell it. Attributes of the thorax are: a strong but flexible offering of protection; an ability to create a little extra space for the vital functions of the story to continue, a mood of happy enclosure. Part of the thorax's strength comes from creating easy areas of movement and articulation. An equal part of thorax's strength comes from its ability to continuously balance the forces of opening and closing, its circular, peripheral, continuous holding of a life-giving circumference.