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## “I Wish I Could Write Myself To Death Or To Life..”

by Felicitas Voigt

Felicitas Voigt studied with Elsa Gindler – who was also Charlotte Selver’s teacher – from 1949 through 1957. In the following we reprint brief excerpts from Voigt’s reports, written during that time. Such reports were an integral part of working with Gindler. Her students were asked to reflect on their experiences in class and everyday life in these journal-like writings, which were then submitted to Gindler.

These reports were almost forgotten after Voigt stopped studying with Gindler. Voigt never read them again until she was approached by a group of people interested in Gindler’s work. Together, they spent a number of years studying and editing these papers. The result is a moving collection of very personal reflections by Voigt about her own ‘attitude towards life’ and her work with Gindler.

The following excerpts offer a glimpse into these rich writings. Voigt’s style of writing is very spontaneous, much as in a diary, and one can almost hear her talking to Gindler. In the translation from the German, some of that voice may have gotten lost. Many thanks go to Felicitas Voigt as well as Petra Möhrke and the group of editors who generously let us reprint these excerpts.

(Translation by Stefan Laeng-Gilliatt)

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Felicitas Voigt in 1997

### December 14, 1949

. . . Gindler explained that, because the faculties of the body have for years been used unskillfully, we have to go about the regeneration process slowly. She said that this is related to



the question of natural endowment: We claim that scoliosis prevents us from lying – and later a participant added heart defects to the list of incurable conditions. In both cases Gindler once mentioned: Do you realize how everyone holds on to their “conditions”? We defend them as though they were our possessions. That was important to me. Isn’t it strange that we can hardly conceive of the possibility of outgrowing our “conditions”, that we don’t remember our own abilities to challenge them?

Gindler mentioned two examples: 1. She used to call Heinrich Jacoby a radish, because his chest was so inflated and with one rib sticking out, with the lower half of his trunk and legs becoming ever slimmer. He is now fine, the rib is in its place and he can cross his legs and lift them up. None of us could do that. 2. She herself had a severe heart condition and would certainly have had angina pectoris by now, but on the contrary she hopes to heal completely. One student said he believed that would be possible, while another was still doubtful. Gindler: “You believe too much of what I say. You have to check if it is true and you have to experience for yourself how it is true. Ladies and Gentlemen, dear children (*‘Herrschaften und Kinder’* – a way of addressing us that I have always felt comfortable with), isn’t God that makes us well, that’s what common sense and reason are for, if applied skillfully.” No God will help us if we neglect our faculties, if we don’t make use of our strengths and if we are unconscious of our behavior.

[...]

Gindler made clear that we study matter in motion, that matter is not immovable, and that there is no movement without matter. . . .

### May 5, 1950

. . . An attempt to describe the effects of the workshops and experiments and to sort them: I would say that the most wonderful change is that of clarity in my head or – to say it more carefully – a head that is *becoming* clearer. The optical sense of fog is almost completely gone and when it appears, it is not as impenetrable and I can feel how it fades. The dull feeling in my head, the pressure and strain, is also often completely gone and if it is there I am able to regulate it by becoming quiet and aligned. This happens almost on its own but I am conscious of what happens and that it happens. I trace all the effects back to

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a willingness to experience (Erfahrungsbereitschaft). [...] With this clarity in my head I can suddenly think, or I can at least get a glimpse of how thinking starts and works. This clod of speechlessness, which has been physically painful, is slowly dissolving – it is still there but there's also something new – as I generally feel renewed.

I experience as very positive that I am not as automatic in my reactions as I used to be. I'm more able to implement insights into my daily life and thinking. I actually enjoy living – even though the circumstances are quite difficult.

I also am more present and not always “occupied” and busy with the past or the future. I have not as many wishes and dreams, they are not eating me up as much and when I find myself dreaming and wishing for something, I can laugh at myself a bit and I don't find it as intriguing but somehow useless and more like a flight from suddenly pressing tasks.

Being less automatic in my responses also means that I don't feel like smoking as much. The urge to eat has also lessened and is now more limited to a real need for food.

I had a particularly strong experience of presence when I went to a concert. Never before had I heard and experienced music like this before. I arrived very tired and I was also depressed again but after the concert I felt renewed and transformed. This was confirmed by different people. Everybody who spoke with me, commended me for how good and lively I look. (.....) As a result of this evening I experienced the next day at work very differently. We had our internal political training. This is an event which usually bores me to death and I usually feel irritated and annoyed all day. But this time I felt alive, interested, receptive. I felt like participating and wanting to process and adapt what I heard. I also observed a lot. I noticed the presenters appearance and delivery, I asked myself questions and thought about what I heard. Suddenly, I was processing everything instead of merely being a victim of circumstances.

I generally feel pleasantly quiet and still. I am stronger and I feel more capable and receptive. I am not as fearful, if still quit insecure. I suddenly am more interested in everything and most of all notice that I am thinking and there isn't this terrible stagnation and pressure. I don't feel driven and chased but notice the quiet flow of the day, in which I am almost always present and awake. Even if the quiet flow is at times disturbed by eddies I surrender and don't drown but instead resurface quite gaily. I have also been noticing changes in my voice, depending on my condition and the person I talk to. . . .

### May 22, 1951

. . . It is furthermore remarkable that, when I am in the city, I see all that's happening around me as social phenomena: people walking on the street; stepping into a streetcar; reaching for

the telephone receiver; entering the post office; [...] the workers on the street [...] – I see all of this for the first time as processes and social phenomena – I see figures, movement and hear people speak.

Suddenly I recognize the connections, the interdependence, the necessity of it all and I become suspicious of everything that is artificial and performed. I get glimpses of what I would call “realism”, I see it in a new context. It's not just people I see differently now but things – a table, the pavement, train tracks, screws, hinges, barrels, feathers, shoes, and so forth without an end. All these products tell a story of their pro-



ducer, of the process and the necessity of creativity – if indeed it is creativity – and not just wanting to get something done.

### February 11, 1957

... Gindler did not disapprove of “exercising”. She said that there is a place for that too [...] But exercising does not go to the root of our problems. For that, changes in our behavior need to happen, so that we do not constantly interfere with our own functioning; so that we are not killed over and over again, because we have become strangers to ourselves. . . .

Felicitas Voigt's selected protocols and reports are available in German only. The book *“Ich wünschte, ich könnte mich zu Tode oder lebendig schreiben...”*

can be ordered through Petra Möhrke, Mommsenstr. 3, 10629 Berlin, Germany; email: [petra.moehrke@web.de](mailto:petra.moehrke@web.de).