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## Babette Wills (1912 - 2009)

By Stefan Laeng-Gilliatt

(Editor's note: Babette Wills who recently passed away has endeared herself to hundreds of sensing students through her enthusiastic warmth and hospitality. For many years she and her husband, Michael, would invite Charlotte Selver and Charles Brooks to offer weekend Sensory Awareness workshops in their lovely owner designed home in Portola Valley. Among other things Babette was a highly regarded teacher of French country cuisine. Often surpassing the workshops themselves were Babette's amazing home prepared lunches and snacks served in their beautiful garden.)

Babette Wills was one of Charlotte's closest friends and a longtime student. She was a wonderful, lovely and lively woman. I interviewed her last year but the interview hasn't been transcribed yet. I briefly listened to the beginning and Babette starts out saying: "Charlotte taught me many things. But one of the most important things she taught me is how to disobey."

I also found this on my web site from the memorial service for Charlotte. Babette couldn't attend but she wrote a letter. Jill read it. Here is just a brief note about it:

Babette wrote about her first meeting with Charlotte: It was in a studio in San Francisco's China Town, where she had gone with some friends to one of Charlotte's classes. When Babette first saw Charlotte, she had a look on her face that made her seek a far corner of the room. There she stayed for the rest of the class, trying to comprehend what was going on and wondering if all these people were perhaps a bit "coocoo." When the class was over Charlotte walked over to Babette with a beautiful smile, both hands reaching out to her and asked: "Hello, what is your name?" – Babette came back to take the class the very next day, and has been doing so every since – for forty years. She wrote how much Sensory Awareness enriched her life and that she will be grateful to Charlotte until her very last breath.

I last saw Babette earlier this year after she had been moved from her very beautiful home in Portola Valley to a nursing home in San Rafael, CA. She was very frail and bedridden but in good spirits and as always we opened a bottle of French wine together and had some French goat cheese and crackers. Babette was French.

I feel very fortunate to have known her. I will miss her.

PS: There is a fascinating biography which tells of Babette's life (*Babette: Elisabeth Ullman Wills* by Constance Crawford)

Here is an excerpt from a review of it:

*"As we quickly learn from Constance Crawford's perceptive and engaging memoir, it was in Babette's nature, in the genes and circumstances she inherited from both her mother and her father, to go against the grain of the high French bourgeoisie into which she was born. Once free to choose, she chose a far richer world of painters, writers, and musicians. 'We were not hippies,' she says of the circle of impecunious friends she shared with her first husband, Paul Ullman, in Montparnasse, in the 1930s. 'We were Bohemians.'*

*The difference, of course, was—and is—style. Everything about Babette, including her generosity of spirit, her hospitality, and her gift for friendship, is infused with style. Sartre wrote: 'Life is nothing until it is lived.' And Babette has lived hers to the full, with courage, imagination, and elegance. By way of that modest Paris atelier followed by several gilded and cosseted years in New York and Connecticut, it has taken her from the band-stand and fishing boats of Sanary-sur-Mer to the virtually organic house in Portola Valley so familiar to her friends, so much a part of the texture of our own lives, that we all seem to live there, too. And, in a way, we do."*

— From a review by Gerald Asher

(Editor's note: To see many pages and photographs from this book go to Google books and type Babette Wills into the search window.)

*"The distinction between spontaneous and habitual behavior is one of the main topics of our work in general. How a person lives --is he habitual, or is he reactive in everyday living? --is the great question upon which our work turns. Many people do not make a distinction between spontaneous and habitual breathing. They have a notion that when they are just as they always are, this is being spontaneous, just as people who are very pushy, or very lazy, say, 'This is my nature: it's the way I am,' while it is only a habit --a deviation from their true nature."*

-- Charlotte Selver

From Reclaiming Vitality and Presence