



Virginia Veach and Ray Fowler
with Connie Smith Siegel in the background

Report on the Leaders' Meetings at Mt. Madonna

By Virginia Veach, Guild President

Here are some highlights of the special Guild meetings which were held before the weekend workshop at Mt. Madonna this year.

We had a wonderful and full several days of sensing, talking and listening, thinking and partying, and getting to know one another. Too short for all we needed to take care of, but it was truly delicious to see so many friends and colleagues, and to get some very important decisions made.

This year's Guild meeting was well-rounded, with attendees from every region except Canada:

U.S. East Coast: Bob Smith, Penny Smith, Ray Fowler and John Vitell .

Midwest: Stefan Laeng-Gilliatt.

West Coast: Virginia Veach, Jill Harris, Richard Lowe, Connie Siegel, Lee Klinger and Julie Esterly.

Europe: Gloria Lerin Vilardell and Helga Hoenen.

Mexico: Mercedes Lopez.

Joining us were Sara Gordon and Eugene Tashima from the S.A.F. board.

We spent much of our time exploring important topics, but making sure we left time for different individuals to lead us in sensing. Much of our discussion time was spent

reviewing the important topic of how new leaders should be approved and what qualifications, if any, should there be for membership in the Guild. These had been questions the Guild membership has been grappling with for many years. Based on these discussions a proposal was drafted to be voted on by the Guild.

Among other discussion topics explored:

1) We asked the question, "What is the value of having a guild, and what do we want out of it?"

2) We discussed the issue of what we call ourselves "leaders", "teachers", "facilitators", "guides", or what. No conclusions were reached.

Other very hot topics which we did not have time to cover adequately were:

4) How can we communicate sensing to others more effectively? What words or language is more easily understood than "Sensory Awareness"? What about "mindfulness," "consciousness," "greater aliveness?" We agreed to continue this conversation as it is something we are all interested in and affected by.

5) How can we better support one another?

6) How do we improve communication between the guild members?

Happily the following people volunteered to be our new "communicators", to help us work as a tighter team, and to be real conduits of information flowing to and from the president, etc. I'm very happy and appreciative for their participation and willingness to all work together:

Helga Hoenen for the Europeans, except for Spain

Mercedes Lopez for the Spanish speaking members in Mexico and Spain.

Ray Fowler for the East Coast of U.S.

Paul Zweig for the Central States and Canada

Jane Vogel Riley will be the communicator for the U.S. West Coast

We reviewed our budget to understand where the Guild's money is going and how close we are to where we need to be. We agreed to offer \$1,500 to Stefan in order to show the Guild's support and enthusiasm for his project of documenting Charlotte's life and work. The \$1,500 comes out of the Publication Fund; it does not affect the General Fund. After deducting \$1,500, the Publication Fund now is: \$1,670.

Richard spoke for the Sensory Awareness Foundation. He expressed the Board's desire to support the members of the Guild in their work of continuing to bring Sensory Awareness to the world. Foundation help could come in the form of mailing lists, publicizing workshops on the website, help with brochures, etc.

Richard also asked leaders to send him news about their work in Sensory Awareness to be printed in future SAF newsletters, which come out twice a year.

The Foundation is looking into ways of offering

continuing education units (CEUs) as a way of attracting more professionals to workshops. The SAF would also like to help leaders by co-sponsoring Sensory Awareness workshops offered by leaders in their home areas.

In appreciation of my work as president, the Guild presented me with a very beautiful book entitled “Elder Grace-The Nobility of Aging” by Hester Higgins Jr. with a forward by Maya Angelou. It is truly extraordinary in its beauty, sensitivity, depth, and wisdom. I thank you all. It sits on my table in the living room for all to enjoy.

Many weeks after Mt.Madonna proposals were sent to the entire Guild membership for a vote and as a result we have passed two new By-law changes:

The first clarifies how new leaders will be approved and how new members will be invited into the SALG*. It also changes dues requirement to include timeliness in the payment of dues. The second adds a vice-president to the number of officers. (I am delighted to report that Seymour Carter has volunteered for this office!)

I feel so blessed to have been able to serve our Guild members thus far, and I look forward to the Guild growing and blooming in the future.

It was a wonderful conference; many, many thanks to the SAF Board for making it possible.

*Editor’s note: The vote determined that the guild will not be in the position of approving new leaders. Instead the voting defined a process for accepting new members, a process in which a candidate must first be sponsored by a current member who will collaborate with at least two other members. Working with these members and with the candidate the sponsor will then develop a plan of suggested additional experience or other steps needed prior to a nomination for membership.

Charlotte Selver and Suzuki Roshi

*Yvonne Rand, in an interview with Stefan Laeng-Gilliatt
An edited excerpt of an interview conducted as part of the
Charlotte Selver Oral History and Book Project.*

Yvonne: The first time Charlotte and Suzuki Roshi* taught together in North Beach was in San Francisco in 1967. It was the first time Suzuki Roshi had met Charlotte. He was right there doing everything with her. He led part of the day, and she led part of the day, and he was completely a participant.

His students noticed that. Oh, so this is a teacher we should pay attention to. There were also some of Charlotte’s students who felt a resonating with Suzuki Roshi and what he was teaching.

I remember one of Charlotte’s first workshops at Green Gulch where she had some big stones. She had us lie down on the floor and put the stones on different parts of the body as a way of bringing attention to the body. Suzuki Roshi was thrilled with all of that. Because for us as Americans, even to this day, we concentrate our attention very much from the neck up. So I think he was very glad to feel that kind of company and mutuality between what he was doing and what she was doing.

For Suzuki Roshi, who loved stones – he was mad for stones – to meet somebody like Charlotte who used stones in her teaching, and who would use stones as a way of introducing her students to a kind of awakening of sensing, and beginning to allow oneself to pay attention to what one experiences in a body-based, sense-based, way – it was clear to him that she could provide what was missing.

For a Japanese Zen priest here in the United States at that time, body-based work and practice would have been unusual. To find a Westerner who was doing the kind of work Charlotte was doing which resonated so strongly with Zen and with his own experience was rare. And I think there’s a way in which he sometimes felt rather lonely. He certainly had a very close connection with his students. But there was something different and reassuring about the kind of company that you have that’s collegial with another teacher.

Most American Zen students tended to dogmatism – it’s almost as though people had blinders on. If Zen practice is not strict and formal, it is not Zen. And yet if you look at the history of Zen in China and in Vietnam and Japan, there are all these eccentrics, and there are all the different forms that are recognized as the expression of Buddhism and in particular of Zen teachings.

My sense, from Suzuki Roshi, was that it was very clear to him that Charlotte’s practice was very much a spiritual practice, one that could give people experientially a sense of how to awaken from the neck down.

So there is a way in which Charlotte’s teaching, towards the latter part of her life, integrated into this community which was primarily focused on Buddhism and primarily focused on Suzuki Roshi’s teachings. There was some sense of resonating, I think both for her and her students and subsequently for the Zen students at the time.

I remember talking to Suzuki Roshi about his experience of teaching with Charlotte. That was when he made the comment about what she is doing is bringing in the elements that have to do with ceremony, a kind of ceremony that was body-based.

Stefan: It’s interesting that you point to the importance of ceremony and ritual, and how Sensory