
Letter from the incoming SAF President



I first learned about Sensory Awareness in 1970 from Jeannie, a San Francisco Zen student. She told me how she became freed from the chronic back pain which she suffered in sitting meditation after she'd attended a two week workshop in something called Sensory Awareness which was held in a small school house on an island off the coast of Maine. She went on to say how the small elderly couple who gave the workshop, Charlotte Selver and Charles Brooks, almost always dressed in white or beige and that all they did was to get students to do simple "experiments", such as lifting their arms up in the air, or skipping around the room or just sitting. She explained that through this way of working she was amazed to discover that her breathing was supporting her sitting so she didn't have to work to make herself sit up straight. She said it was western Zen.

As someone with a collapsed posture and subsequent back pain I was intrigued, particularly since she reported how she could sit comfortably on the floor without any supports or cushions for over an hour. That seemed impossible.

This was a time my life and the world itself seemed upside down. Living through the 60's in San Francisco with all the chaos of a shameful war, national riots and assassinations, the sexual revolution, experimentation with drugs, many young people like myself were drawn to ways for finding a more authentic sense of reality, for rediscovering some truer ground of being.

I had tried Bio-energetic therapy for a few years, and although it had helped me feel more real and alive I had grown wary of its authoritarian and directive style. Something was missing and it seemed to have to do with breathing. This led me to study with Magda Proskauer, a wonderful, supportive Jung oriented teacher who had been strongly influenced by the work of Elsa Gindler, Charlotte Selver's teacher. Magda told me this after I asked her about Charlotte and said their work had much in common. I worked with Magda for a little over four years.

Thus in 1970 I took my first workshop with Charlotte and Charles in Berkeley. During this workshop I was impressed by the scope and variety of experiments in which I felt support not only from my breathing but from the ground, from my partner's hands, from my giving support to others, from eye contact as we walked through the room, from the air around me. It was a very existential, living experience. It was a kind of western Zen. I was hooked.

But more impressive was the generous contact and support shown by Charlotte and Charles. They seemed to genuinely try to relate to me as a person. At one point during a lunch break as I sat alone in the courtyard Charlotte came over to me and asked if she could sit down. I said yes. She then said something that touched me to the core, "You seem to be carrying such a heavy load that bends you over... Do you know what it is?" I said I did not. She paused a long time smiling and then she said, "Have you noticed how you seem a bit more upright than you were this morning? Perhaps by and by you can feel what it needs and it can give itself up". She smiled again and got up and left. I had been too shut down to tell her my best friend had killed himself two months earlier and my live-in girlfriend of four years had just broken up with me for good. I felt totally seen and respected.

Then after five years of taking many workshops with Charlotte and Charles in California, Mexico and Maine I joined the second nine month study group at Zen Center's Green Gulch Farm. This was intense and challenging and out of it I became clear that I wanted to go back to college.

When in Graduate school I was in a start up program in Dance/Movement Therapy at John F. Kennedy University. To me this seemed the kind of graduate level training most closely related to Sensory Awareness. Unfortunately, the program was not very well managed and so after two and a half years I transferred into the Clinical Psychology Program of which my program had been a part. After graduating and with the support of many long time students of Sensory Awareness, I helped create the Sensory Awareness Leaders Guild and became its first President. At the time this was no easy task, believe me. Long-term students of Sensory Awareness tend to be independent spirits and suspicious of organization. It helped a lot that Charlotte supported the idea.

A few years later I became licensed as a Marriage and Family Therapist and in addition to maintaining an ongoing part time private practice I worked as a therapist for an agency for abused children, served on the SAF Board, managed a large face-to-face counseling center for seven years, served as a program supervisor and therapist at a day treatment program for emotionally disturbed children and served as the president of the local Marriage and Family Therapist Association. My private practice working with adults, couples and children continues. Recently, I had the good fortune to work with Stefan in editing the new book *Reclaiming Vitality and Presence: Sensory Awareness as a Practice for Life*.

About two years ago I rejoined the SAF Board and have been quite pleased with its energy, focus and effectiveness. Great thanks go to Stefan who has done a monumental job for many years as SAF's Executive Director and Board President. He will be a hard act to follow. His vision, impressive skills and good humor are an inspiration. Thank God that he has agreed to help mentor me as I step into his shoes and to act as my advisor through the next year.

My hope for next year is that we continue the good work of ensuring that Charlotte's legacy takes root. To do this, I believe the SAF Board of Directors needs to:

- ♦ Substantially improve our fund-raising ability.
- ♦ Continue to organize and sponsor yearly conferences that bring leaders together, attract new students, and inspire and energize our community.

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- ♦ Set a two-year goal for establishing a practice center or centers where ongoing classes can be offered year-round on a collaborative basis by Guild Leaders.
 - ♦ Find more ways to familiarize new people with the work.
 - ♦ Actively support and encourage the members of the Leaders Guild

I look forward to working with the Board and the Sensory Awareness community on facing the challenges ahead.

Sincerely,

Richard Lowe

Letter from the outgoing SAF President

Dear Friends of the Sensory Awareness Foundation,

After 12 years as President and Executive Manager of the Sensory Awareness Foundation, I will step down from my position in June. Richard Lowe will then take over the leadership of the SAF and over the next 6 months I will support him in the transition.

At the same time, Tai Sheridan, who has shared the presidency with me for the past two years, is also stepping down. He has been of invaluable help to the Foundation in the years past with his keen nose for what is rotten, his bold ideas and his irresistible laughter. We are very glad to know that he will continue to be available to us as a consultant. Thank you, Tai!

Many of you know Richard Lowe as a longtime student and leader of Sensory Awareness and as a dedicated advocate of our work for many years. I am delighted that he will be my successor and I very much look forward to working with him over the next months – and beyond. As Richard mentions in his letter, we have already worked very closely - and very well - together for some time, both on the SAF Board of Directors and as editors of Reclaiming Vitality and Presence. I got to know him not only as someone with whom it is a pleasure to work but also as a very diligent, dedicated, passionate man who I know will give his utmost to the foundation in the time to come. I am very confident that under his leadership and with the support of our wonderful Sara Gordon and a great board of directors, the future of the foundation – and with that of Sensory Awareness – will be most prosperous.

I will not immediately leave the foundation, as mentioned above. Over the next months I will still be very active, preparing for the conference, promoting our new book and helping Richard ease into the position in which I have been immersed for all these years. After the end of this year I will still be available to the SAF in some way and will probably continue to edit the newsletter and maintain the website.

To step down from my position in the Foundation is a big step and it was not an easy decision. But the time is ripe for change, as I want to dedicate myself more fully to offering Sensory Awareness through workshops, classes and individual sessions. My work at this time is informed by grave concerns about the health of the earth and the wish to contribute to a new living connection with nature that is not limited by individuals' desires but responsive to life in all its awesome forms. I will dedicate a big part of my work to a project I call "Breathing Earth", in which I plan to explore our interconnectedness with all of nature with groups and individuals through Sensory Awareness.

Side by side with offering the work I am also planning to write about Charlotte Selver's life. In preparation for that I will collect stories about her. I was fortunate to be very close to Charlotte in the last years of her life and together we spent many hours recording her own memories and going through her archives. This material has been waiting to be worked with for some years now and I feel a great urgency to get to work on this project and talk with as many of her long-time students, friends and family members as I can. Over the next months I will work out a plan for this project and I look forward to sharing more about this with you later this year and to hear your stories.

"In other words," as Charlotte would say, I look forward to continued work with many of you in new ways.

Sincerely,

Stefan Laeng-Gilliatt

SAF Newsletter

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