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## A Book about Charlotte Selver

Stefan Laeng-Gilliatt will be undertaking the challenging process of writing a book on the life and work of Charlotte Selver. He estimates it will involve about two years of research, interviews and reviewing past transcripts and audio recordings. The SAF is pleased to support this important effort and is currently looking into a way that tax-deductible donations can be made to the SAF earmarked for this specific project. We will be sending you more information about this soon.

Richard Lowe (for the SAF Board of Directors)

## Charlotte Selver Oral History and Book Project

By Stefan Laeng-Gilliatt

I have had the desire to write about Charlotte Selver's life for years, certainly since the late 90s, when Charlotte and I spent much time going through her archival materials. That is also when I interviewed her extensively as well as a few longtime students.

It seems to me that collecting memories from Charlotte and her students is important and that the time to do this is now. Charlotte's path was inspiring for so many and her life story deserves to be told and preserved. She had an incredible life and there are many memories about her that should not get lost. As a first step I am planning to interview longtime students and family. This "Oral History" part of the project will not only be a vital source of information for the book; it will be a collection of stories in its own right, by people who have been deeply touched by her and her work.

Over the next months I will also transcribe about 25 hours of conversations I taped when working with Charlotte on her archival materials. Only very little has been transcribed so far. What follows below is a taste of this "raw material" that will build the base for research on Charlotte's life. This is from a conversation I had with Charlotte in Barra de Navidad, Mexico, in January of 1999. The interview has been slightly edited to make it more readable.

### *From "Zen and Psychoanalysis" to Barra de Navidad*

SLG: I was hoping that you would tell me a little bit about your work in Mexico. How it came about and – also how you discovered Barra.

CS: I don't remember the year in which Erich Fromm and Daisetz Suzuki, the old scientist of Buddhism, had together a seminar in Cuernavaca, Mexico, which a great deal of psychotherapists attended\*. At that time Erich Fromm was very interested in Sensory Awareness and he invited me to join him and give a talk about our work. So, I went to Mexico and it was for me a very significant and beautiful occasion. The relationship between Erich from Daisetz Suzuki was a very beautiful and close one. Erich Fromm felt of Daisetz Suzuki as the wise father of knowing.

For me, a great moment in the conference was when Erich Fromm began to explain what he wanted to offer during this time and then gave the word to Daisetz Suzuki. Suzuki was at that time already near eighty and had spent his entire life digging deeply into Buddhist knowledge and Buddhist beliefs. He raised his eyes to the audience and said: "I want to introduce myself. I am a student of Zen." – after which all the doctors and professors [who

had previously introduced themselves with all their titles and credentials] nearly crawled under their chairs with shame. As they so proudly sat there in the audience . . . "I'm a student of Zen." I will never forget this. This is very similar to what Elsa Gindler meant when she said, "I want not to teach, I want to find out, and want to go as deep as possible into the forces which move the human being." I was greatly impressed by this statement. It's also very similar to that what Shunriu Suzuki said in the book titled: *Zen Mind – Beginners Mind*. So, we all are in the same boat.



I was asked to give a lecture [at this conference] and I did so with the help of slides. The conference attendees were very interested. After the lecture two leading psychiatrists in Mexico, Dr. Dias and Dr. Chavez asked me if I would be willing to give a longer course in Mexico. This then later on took place. I don't know whether I should mention my own attempts at speaking Spanish. It was very difficult for me because I thought, "All the Mexican people. How can I possibly work with them, not being able to speak Spanish? So, I took a dictionary and wanted at least to know with what I would work [in the first session]. I looked into