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gravity, energy, and the support of the floor. In German the word for "learning by heart" is "auswendig lernen." The literal translation is something like "learning from the outside." But to learn by feeling from inside is completely different. [Unlike the German, the English expression "learning by heart" seems to encourage that. -Editors.]

It is important that we give this learning from inside a chance. When you feel what is, what occurs, what calls on you, your sensations, then you are in touch with life, which is always better, always deeper, always new. Wanting to know something is usually outside. Real experience is always surprising, is nothing which you know beforehand. And there is a difference between talking it – speaking from direct experience – and talking about it. When we speak about something we are not in it. It is important to feel what we say. Very much of our daily living is not experiencing, it is not this warm-blooded being there for what we are doing.

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**Love Letters as Diary**  
**News about the Charlotte Selver**  
**Oral History and Book Project**

*by Stefan Laeng-Gilliatt*



“Dear Heinrich, all these episodes, all these experiences I deposit with you. Some day I will get them and copy them. I will then have an overview of my days in Munich. You will not throw them away, yes?” Heinrich Selver didn’t and the letters to her first husband eventually found their way back to Charlotte. When and how we don’t know but Charlotte must have read them systematically because many that were originally not dated received a date later and they were carefully archived and preserved for many decades. Thanks to this care we too have now an idea not only of her days in Munich in 1921 but of much of her life in the 20s and early 30s.

Charlotte was a prolific writer. I am currently working my way through 1925. Of that year alone over 150 letters are preserved. By then Charlotte and Heinrich had been a couple for about five years but were not married yet. They had also never lived

together but nevertheless maintained a passionate relationship. Though the letters are certainly love letters in the first place, they read like a diary. At times Charlotte goes into much detail about her daily life, such as when she gives Heinrich her weekly, sometimes even daily, schedule.

By 1925 Charlotte was very busy teaching Body Gymnastik (or Expression-Gymnastics, as dubbed in the English translation of a book by founder Rudolf Bode). She was working for the Bode School for Physical Education in Berlin under Hinrich Medau. On most days she did not teach in Berlin, though. In the course of a week she gave lessons in a number of cities around Berlin, staying in a different place almost every night, traveling by train and sometimes using that time to write letters. Longer workshops in beautiful sea resorts were



*Charlotte as a young woman*

given in the summer. One is very much reminded of her later life, when Charlotte and Charles Brooks together went on teaching tours through the Americas and Europe.

In early 1925 one of the cities where Charlotte gave weekly classes was Potsdam, historically the military center of Prussia and home of its royalty. From there Charlotte writes: “We laughed so hard

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at Loeb's, I teach Bodegymnastik in Potsdam!! They said this is like eating Matzo with butter and ham!! But I continue to give my lessons without worry and sometimes I let these "Swastika guys" [Hakenkreuzler] practice to a Jewish tune!"

Such references both to the growing Nazi movement and to her Jewish identity are not many in the early letters but they are noticeable. Some of her encounters are outright bizarre and – read in the light of history – chilling. In the summer of 1924 Charlotte spent some weeks on the North Sea island of Sylt. From there she writes: "When the moon is low over the sea at night and the beach hard from the waters of the receding tide I walk with Astri on the beach. Astri is a weaver. She has lived on this deserted island for three years now, year-round. .... She loves me – why? 'I hate the Jews!', she told me on the first day after asking me if I was Jewish. Now she calls me Ruth and Rachel and says: 'In memory of the biblical figures', which she loves more than anything. One night I was invited to visit the weavers: beautiful German girls and boys, they sang merrily and beautifully old songs, I want to learn them too. They read tales from Oscar Wilde. I let myself drift with this pleasant current, the beauty of the room illuminated by ten burning candles, the beauty of these blond girls and of the slender boys. But I think: this is as far as they go. I thought of you, of us, and I loved us tremendously".

Studying Heinrich's letters to Charlotte is a task that still awaits me. Attempts to read his writing have been very frustrating and I am beginning to reach out for help. But as I look at them more and more, the letters gradually start to reveal their secrets.

I recently pulled out a letter from May 23, 1924 – quite randomly chosen – and suddenly the writing began to make sense. It happened to be a letter written on the day Heinrich joined a Zionist organization. He was very elated: "My Jewish girl, my heart's lover, sister to the blood of my people: give me your blessings for this journey ....." For quite some time he and Charlotte had nursed the idea of emigrating to Palestine. This was probably of more importance to Heinrich but Charlotte certainly went along with

the idea and partook in Zionist activities at least occasionally. In this letter Heinrich also writes: "In the evening I had a lively discussion with professor Schneider (he writes a book about these things). Never have I met a decent German who didn't say this: 'stay with us – we need you [Jews] and you need us even more. You cannot thrive on your own but here you are valuable and productive people....' You know how indeed we fear and anticipate just that, that the latter could be or become true. Schneider predicts my return after a few years and understands. But he regrets this detour of just about every decent Jew these days. And I say: per aspera ad astra (through the thorns to the stars).... And as of today I am openly, actively and documented: a Zionist!"

The plans of emigration to Palestine, however, never came to fruition, though Charlotte and Heinrich some years later went on a Mediterranean cruise to visit the place of their dreams. How this came about and why it was eventually the USA to which they emigrated I look forward to finding out over the next months. So my journey through Charlotte's life continues. It is a fascinating endeavor and I am very grateful for the support of the Sensory Awareness Foundation and many others along the way.

For more stories go to [www.CharlotteSelverBiography.org](http://www.CharlotteSelverBiography.org). There you can also find out how you can support the Charlotte Selver Oral History and Book Project.



Photo by Stefan Laeng-Gilliatt