Down and Up
by Charles V.W. Brooks

The following is an excerpt from Charles Brooks’ book Sensory Awareness – The Rediscovery of Experiencing Through Workshops with Charlotte Selver. The book is currently out of print and we are working on an new edition. To learn more about how you can help contact our administration or see the fund-raising letter on our website. The text you are about to read, chapter 21 in the book, continues explorations on gravity with the help of a stone.

What is it that we have discovered so far in working with our stone? Among other things, the stone had temperature, form, and weight, each of which was perceived according to our own condition. To each of these aspects of its existence we have corresponding modes of sensing, and the joints and muscles needed to bring us where our sensing is effective.

We have been working mainly with weight, and we found that when our attitude to the stone changed, the sensation of its weight changed correspondingly. But this was not true of the direction in which its weight led us. Whether the course we fol...
Down and Up (continued)

lowed seemed irregular or slanted to those who watched us, to us it always seemed down. If our sense of direction does not agree with that of others, there must somewhere be an impairment of perception. For if we let the stone drop, it is clear to everyone, including ourselves, that it falls in one direction only. Our impairment is evidently not visual, or in our sense of verticality, but must be in our kinesthetic sense, or ability to feel our own muscular activity and simply give to the weight of the stone. We are not sensitive enough to be able to tell just when we are yielding to gravity, and when we are exerting another force of our own.

Anything so ever-present as this pull of gravity, which leads the stone always to fall in the same direction, must be worth our study. I should more properly call it the pull of the earth, for that is all that concerns our personal experience. In its subtle ways, this pull is at work on us all the time. Furthermore, with a little reflection, we may realize that the direction of this pull, in which the stone falls, and in which, with more or less clarity, we can feel ourselves being drawn also, differs in this respect of constancy from all other directions whatsoever. Day or night, fog or sunshine, it is always there, independent of compass, or rising and setting sun, or north star. It is unrelated to any of our five senses at all and is perceptible to us only through that all-pervasive inner reactivity, the proprioceptive or kinesthetic senses, without which we could not stand erect or relate to anything around us. When we take time to come to more quiet and awareness, these senses begin to come to life within us everywhere.

We can be sure that every child and every animal reacts instinctively to the pull of the earth; we see that plants respond to a balance between the pull of the earth and the source of light. The direction of this pull is unequivocal. Indeed, it is the only direction in which there has always been something there for us to come to — something, in fact, that with sensitive adjustment we could come to rest on. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the earth has been called mother, and why something in me, at least, yearns to return to her. This basic direction, down, which always is ultimately down to earth, is where the stone would lead us, surely and truly, if we yielded to it.

But in working with the stone on our head, we have also discovered something else. When we began to approach the flexibility and balance needed simply to allow the weight of the stone down through us to the ground, we at the same time, of necessity, began to allow our own stature up. The inner passages that opened in response to the pull of the earth upon the stone opened also for the flow of energy needed to maintain the height and breadth and depth in us that our organs and tissues require for free functioning. Against our own acquired tendencies to control and constrict, we were obliged to yield upward and outward to our inner needs at the moment when we yielded downward to gravity. In this, we were no different from any healthy flower or any blade of grass.

Equilibrium, for human beings as for all other terrestrial creatures, is thus not just a lateral balancing, as of weighted scales, but involves an equally critical balancing of two forces in the vertical, a process which is entirely spontaneous when not impeded by illness or conditioning. What we must yield to, when we are borne upward involuntarily against the pull of the earth, is the spontaneous generation of energy in our own organism. Much of the working of this metabolism, as it is called, can be felt. It is what gives the sensation of lightness and well-being. Unless we are sick, the energy needed for standing is supplied automatically; we have only to sense and give up the efforts and constrictions that impede the natural circulation of this energy through arteries and veins. We stand as all animals stand, even elephants, with our full weight, yet freely and effortlessly, and to our full stature, yet with no straining upward. When we tell a child to stand up straight, or to stand taller, as in so many cases we were told ourselves, we are trying to impose voluntary processes upon the fully sufficient involuntary processes given us by nature. This is gilding the lily. Those of us with a military or “aristocratic” bearing, should they practice yielding, would lose none of their stature. All they would lose is their subservience to an image and their isolation from the world of actuality.

In standing, with or without a stone, all that is important is the sense of how our native energies can be allowed free circulation, and of the direction to which they must respond. With this, the stone on our head can be of help to us. As we become quiet and present for it, we feel its weight constantly pressing down through us, eliciting an equal and opposite energy of our own, bringing our limbs and inner masses into a natural alignment toward the earth, which at the same time pulls us toward itself and supports us against its own pull.

Knowing down, we know up. Knowing up, we freely stand: not otherwise. Sensing and allowing what is needed, we begin again to experience our deep inner capacity to relate to the world.
Dear Friends of the Sensory Awareness Foundation,

First of all, I would like to thank all of you who have responded so generously to our fund-raising letter. As of April 25th we received $30,123 in donations for the general fund (incl. membership contributions). In addition $3,826 was given to the journal fund, $1,570 to the reprinting of Charles Brooks' book (see article on front page), and $2,158 to the tape project. These figures include a tremendously generous donation of $29,000 and another very generous donation of $1,000, which was matched by the donor's employee. We were very surprised by these unexpected gifts and are very grateful for this much needed support.

Please remember that we do need your support to continue our work. If you have not yet renewed your membership or would like to learn more about how you can help, contact our administration or see the fund-raising letter on our website. Thank you very much for your support.

In the last newsletter you could read about our ‘shaping the future of the SAF.’ As this process is continuing we are looking for new board members with specific skills. It is a great joy for me to let you know that we have found two people so far who bring long-needed qualities to the board. Albert Moreno joined us last fall with a wealth of expertise and experience in legal affairs, coming from both his professional work as a lawyer for a big corporation and from his work for non-profit organizations. In the short time since he joined the board he has already been of tremendous help to us. Len Shemin just recently joined us with his expertise in marketing as the owner of a wholesale clothing company. Both Albert and Len do not only bring professional qualities to the board but also a great sensitivity and love for Sensory Awareness as both have been students of this practice for many years. I look forward to our working together.

We also had to let go of five board members in the last year. They have all contributed in many ways to our work. It is impossible for me to really comprehend how much they have given to this organization as they all have been part of the Sensory Awareness community since long before my time. I can only say that I am very grateful for all they have done to keep our practice alive.

Photographs

The photographs of Charlotte in this issue are by Michael Denny. They were taken on April 27, 2002, at an early birthday party for Charlotte at La Casa de Maria in Santa Barbara, CA.

Four of the leaving Board Members are from the East Coast. They resigned after we decided together to discontinue holding our meetings via speaker phone. It would not have been possible for them to join us in the Bay Area.

Peggy Wood has been a board member since the early years of the Foundation. She acted as treasurer for many years and at times also as the recording secretary. Her systematic and practical ways of working have been invaluable and I have always admired her loyalty to Charlotte and the work.

Sally Clarke has not technically been a board member for some time. She resigned many years ago but has continued to participate in board meetings as an advisor until now. I have always very much appreciated her participation as a – let me say both engaged and detached elder.

Penny Smith has also been a board member for many years since the mid-seventies. I will miss the warmth and enthusiasm she brought to the meetings. Her loyalty to our practice and her love for people are qualities I admire very much.

Carol Buck has been on the board for just a few years although she has been part of the greater community for much longer. Her personal and family situation has made it very difficult for her to participate in meetings. I know Carol as very dedicated to Sensory Awareness and I very much enjoy her down-to-earth presence whenever we have a chance to meet.

Judyth Weaver from Mill Valley has also resigned from the Board of Directors. She was a member for a number of years, first in the eighties and then again for the last six years or so. Judyth's contributions to the SAF arise from her many years of experience in offering the work. As a leader she has brought to the board the invaluable experience of working 'in the field.' She has also made much appreciated contributions through writing about Sensory Awareness and presenting this practice to the larger community of somatics practitioners. We are grateful to be able to share with you a beautiful example of her work in this newsletter.

It is a great comfort to know that these five women continue to be part of the Sensory Awareness community, although not as SAF Board Members, and I know that their commitment to our practice will continue to show in many ways. I am grateful for that.

Best wishes,

Stefan Laeng-Gilliatt
a naturalist and had done a lot of traveling, sailing, mountain climbing, and camping around the world. She was quiet, cheerful and amiable, and easily fit in as part of the group.

Those first weeks I was aware that she was trying to learn the movements of the t’ai chi ch’uan form. She was doing it in a scientific sort of way. She was technically efficient and very agile and limber, but the heart/soul/body connection seemed to be missing. Hilary has since told me that she decided to study t’ai chi ch’uan “to become less tense, less severe.” I was aware of the tension that she chronically carried around her shoulders and neck and head. I was amazed at her agility and balance and her ability to climb a tree like a monkey and at the same time I was aware that she was not grounded in a deep, physical, energetic way. I wondered about her “technical cheeriness.”

During that first workshop I also offered a session in Sensory Awareness. Hilary remembers: “… during an evening presentation by Judyth: The introduction was only an hour, but it was powerful. I don’t think I knew that what we were doing that evening was called Sensory Awareness! We were lying and having another person lift and gently move our heads. That in itself was an experience in trust! I couldn’t remember ever letting anyone hold my head. I had a lot of wondering about what the hands and the person might do. I know that I was not totally comfortable because it was so new and so close and I felt so at the mercy of the hands under my head. I can’t say much about my tensions then because I really wasn’t aware of them.

What I do remember vividly was when I sat up, how thick the air felt! It was so tangible. It was a momentary experience that I haven’t felt since but will always remember. It was like feeling the air like you feel the presence of water when submerged. It was a consciousness of the density of the air, not the usual feeling of nothingness in the space.

That same evening, I also remember having our eyes closed and Judyth asking us to put our hands where we could feel our breathing. That really confused me. Breathing? I think I went to the textbook place of the upper chest area. Somehow the question made me feel very unsure of myself and what I knew. I don’t even know if I could feel my breath in my lungs without doing it. I know now that I was confused because I really didn’t think about breathing, or my feelings for that matter. I just assumed they existed and did fine without me thinking about them.”

Hilary went back home changed a bit and with a lot to think about and feel out.

The second summer, after my annual t’ai chi ch’uan workshops, Hilary asked me if I had any suggestions for her January vacation. I suggested that she go to Mexico where Charlotte Selver was offering her winter workshops. She went.

Hilary: “Arriving back home my friends and family asked me what I had learned in my two week workshop. “To sit.” I would say, feeling a bit foolish because it sounded so odd. But for three months following that workshop I could not slouch while sitting! I sat entirely differently on the chair, upright, with no extra effort or holdings. Wonderful! It felt so natural and right.”

This began for Hilary a gradual and wonderful period of change, which is still continuing and growing.

At first I noticed that Hilary almost never spoke in sensory awareness classes, neither in my classes nor in Charlotte’s. That does not mean that a lot wasn’t going on in her. No, I could see that she was going through much, but that she chose not to speak. In the rare occasions when Hilary did speak she tilted her head to the right side and spoke with a voice that went more into her than out to the listeners and the look on her face was as if she were asking a question.

Hilary: “I love the work, but I am finding that the world is made very complicated by my past and present conditioning, and is not always a pleasant journey. As I become more aware, I make myself more vulnerable and my insecurities are more prominent. I have a greater realization of the immensity of who I am and my actions/reactions. And I think/know that the sensory awareness workshops help me to shed layers and make my holdings and habits comprehensible or noticeable to me.”

Hilary was making various changes in her life. One of the largest was that she took a year’s leave of absence from her teaching career. She said she wanted to explore her educational philosophy. At the end of that first year she felt impelled to request another year’s leave of absence.

This time allowed Hilary the opportunity to attend Charlotte’s workshops and also to participate in a month-long intensive that I called “Somatics, Community and the Soul.” My experimental theme for the month-long was for all of us participants to honestly, authentically live in community, in a sensorily aware community, paying clear attention to what was needed and finding the resources in ourselves to respond fully. My hope was that this would be done in a truly communal manner, that everything would be done in a consensual mode, meaning that I would not be the authority, the leader, except where it was absolutely appropriate, and even then we would all decide that that was the case. My charge to all the participants was that each person would learn, work, contribute, participate in all aspects of our life this month through close connection and communication with their senses. Eleven people in addition to myself were able to participate for the entire month, half of them had been students of mine in some sort of workshop and wanted more sensory awareness; the other half were completely unknown to me or others.

One of the first experiments I suggested early in the workshop was an activity that I do sometimes, in a course titled “BodyMind Practices East and West” that I have taught many times at CIIS. Knowing how often new students are requested...
to verbally introduce themselves at the beginning of a new class and how inured they become to it, I give them the assignment for the second week to introduce themselves non-verbally.

Hilary: “When we were beginning the month-long workshop at Hollyhock, she gave us this challenge. It was incredible the power of the introductions! When I felt it was time for me to go, I got up and walked around inside the circle, looking directly at everyone. Speeding up as I went, I broke through the circle and ran around the outside and sitting down, lay back and just breathed as my heart began to slow from its pounding. And then I sat up and was finished. I was surprised how my introduction just came to me and how it evolved as I did it and upon reflection, how it was so accurate and telling of my fear of connection.”

“In the month-long workshop, we were more of a community than a class. The whole concept of community was really a learning experience. I could see how, like breathing, we get in the way of true communing with ourselves and others because of our attitudes and schedules. Working in a group affected what each person brought to the group and how each person was accepted!”

We worked very simply in the month-long workshop that I soon came to call the “Somatics Community.” It was the work of everyday life. I offered the group times and places for experiencing and experimenting with all the simple, little details of life.

Hilary: “As I spent time working, experimenting, playing and sharing everyday for the month in Canada, I started to really become aware of all the incredible defenses I have that keep me from contacting and connecting with the world, with others, with myself. As I am becoming aware of them, I am also becoming able to choose differently when I begin to feel a certain habitual reaction coming. I can feel also what is triggering this reaction and I can look at it clearer and decide if I can choose a different response. The ability to respond rather than react is something I am working on. One of the biggest defensive reactions has been my light heartedness and excitement. I can feel the excitement take me out of touch with reality. I bounce around and run everywhere. I used to say I traveled along about 5 feet off the ground. Yes, that would be about where my head and shoulders are, where all my tension is that holds me off the ground, avoiding contact.”

And I could see changes in everyone. Hilary (and others as well) developed a sense that I could call “more grounded” or more in connection with themselves. An acknowledgment of self and resources that allowed them to grow, to be more who they were, and for the entire group to communicate and work together on a deeper level of contact and acceptance.

I very often direct students to their breath. Not to do anything to fix or alter it, but to become more aware of it and the various impacts and understandings it can open to us. I saw changes and softening as Hilary became more aware of her breath and what it was telling her.

Hilary: “In Charlotte’s study group I learned how complicated breathing is, or how complicated I make it; how much I do to interfere with this simple rejuvenating process. One morning we had been lying on our backs and I was, for once, just tuned into my breathing and not doing it. My breath went out and then there was this long, very long, pause of nothing. I wasn’t alarmed, I was curious perhaps, and maybe a bit scared that I would have to do something in order to stay alive. But then the breath came. I think that was the first time I really connected to my breathing.”

The above comment was from Hilary’s experience some years ago. Since then she has changed jobs, changed her place of living, and made many other changes in her life. All the while she has continued to explore in the work of sensory awareness. Here is a more current comment:

“Breathing. Beginnings. Birth. How about before birth? Changing jobs or beginning new careers. How about saying hello? These are all issues I am now looking at as a continuing question to myself of “Do I choose to exist?” These questions are becoming more important in my study of myself, the study of being aware. The question of where does my smile come from? A past “should” or habit or defense? Why can’t it come from the spark within me? How can I find that spark and allow it to grow?”

For five years Hilary has continued to study with both Charlotte and myself in sensory awareness and in t’ai chi ch’uan also with me for the past seven years.

Hilary: “Two summers ago, during the T’ai Chi workshops that Judyth teaches, I felt my feet get scared. I would never have believed feet could get scared before I came to this Sensory Awareness work. It is a strange feeling in my feet that comes from what is going on for me emotionally deep inside. Most of the time I am not aware of why they are scared. I started sitting down during breaks in the T’ai Chi workshop and holding the bottoms of my feet. When we would resume I could feel a difference in how I connected with the ground. I started holding my feet every morning and could feel an incredible difference when I didn’t have time to do that. It was a teeter-tottery feeling all day. Like walking on my tiptoes. That summer was the first time during the T’ai Chi workshops that I felt it was just like doing more Sensory Awareness.”

“My T’ai Chi practice is one of the ways I explore my fear connected with my feet and allowing connection with the

(continued on page 7)
I would like to speak about the main natural forces we are exposed to as we live on this planet. There is this force of gravity. Gravity is a very attractive force, and everybody is constantly exposed to its influence. The pull of this force makes us all stay on the ground. It even tries to pull us underground. But fortunately there is another force in us which does not permit that. That is energy. Each of us is able to allow energy to counteract the pull of gravity. So this would be the second very, very important force there is, to which we are constantly exposed. And then, of course, this energy manifests as breathing too. The possibility of constantly getting new air - can you feel it right now as you are reading? Are you open for this possibility of the energy source breathing to go through you or are you collapsing? Are you open to this coming and going of air and the possibility – whether we sit, or stand, or lie – to allow this exchange of air through us?

The third very important force, which we constantly are exposed to, is the support of the ground. That means, as you are sitting right now, there is something under you which supports you. Can you feel it? It is very solid and reliable; it is there at all times supporting us – the support underneath your feet, underneath your whole self; when you are lying, underneath your behind when you are sitting. You cannot go wrong trusting this support. Are you enjoying it? How wonderful that is!

Gravity, the support which the ground gives you, and energy – can you really experience these three forces?

– Can you feel that there is always something which invites you down?
– Can you feel something going through you which gives you the strength to stay upright?
– Is there really something which offers itself under you?

You may feel how easy it would be for gravity to become overwhelming, pulling you down to the ground and how the earth even wants to swallow you. But no, there is something under you which supports you – and something inside you which reconditions you from moment to moment. Could you be open in your bones and other tissues for that which supports you? Be grateful for that support – grateful in every cell, grateful in your skin, and in your bones!

Can you feel the air which goes through you? Can you feel how it comes into you and how it goes out of you? Could you become sensitive in your muscles and skin and all tissues for the air which goes through you and leaves you? Are your tissues awake enough to let the air through and receive what is needed and let out what needs to go out? Can more and more of your inner be open for this wonderful process? We call it breathing.

To talk about these forces is quite dangerous. We have to be very careful not to follow ideas about 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. slg). 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, is not this warm-blooded being there for what we are doing.

As old as I am, all these moments of a new reality, of a new experiencing make everything so alive and full. I feel how it affects me when I’m only in my head, with my thoughts, and when I really feel in my tissues, in my nerves, in my bones. When I am really sensitive from moment to moment I live a completely different life.
earth. Charlotte hates the word “exercise.” “We are not exercising here!” she says. Exercise is mindless work. She has a very critical opinion of any sort of exercise! I happen to practice my T’ai Chi everyday, but for me, after hearing Charlotte talk, I realize that my practice is not an exercise. It is more of a sensory awareness experiment. Every time I do the form, it is different. I am different every day and every minute. It is so wonderful to feel it and be aware of it.”

In the attention or practice of sensory awareness we are all working at our own levels, at our own pace, in our own manner, even though we are all together in a classroom, listening and responding to the leader of the class. No matter what the instruction or invitation, we each hear it and respond to it in our own very singular way.

Recently I received this from Hilary: “For me much of life has now become a sensory awareness exploration. In my teaching of out-of-school youth, I allow them to move at their own pace. In my pottery, I think my sensory awareness has had a lot to do with how my bowls and pots turn out. I surely can tell by the pot if I am not grounded that day! I love the feel when I am really connected to the clay! I have been playing with the question of what and when I want to eat. I no longer have a set routine, but feel out what is needed. The process of getting out of bed has been a wonderful exploration in the past 3 years. I’ve found that given time, I can feel when I am open to going from lying to sitting and when I am open to standing. If I get out of bed too fast, I usually spend a good part of the day in a propped up position, whether it is sitting or standing. I haven’t really gotten out of bed yet! Fascinating! I am learning to honor myself.”

I am overjoyed to hear Hilary write and speak as she now does. She has chosen a difficult population of young people with which to work. She has a challenging and important position, being with these youngsters who have dropped out of school. Her relationship with them as a teacher can make an immense difference in their lives. She has written me many times about her frustration regarding teaching and what she is expected to do with students. She now writes me about her convictions, many connected with her developments from sensory awareness, on how she is now able to “be there” for the students and allow them to learn if/as they want. She is very successful as a teacher for them. I am sure her influence and presence is very important to them.

The work continues, and it is basically each person working on themselves in their own way. That is why Charlotte Selver really does not like the use of the word “teach” for we practitioners of this work. She prefers to use the verb “lead.” For me, by this choice of language she emphasizes the true meaning of “educate,” which, as I understand it, comes from “educare” the definition of which is “to draw out.” That, to me, is the real mission for all of us in our related somatics work: to support our clients and students in finding their authentic impulses, their natural structure, their birthright of balance and well being, and to help them each draw it out and develop it as they wish, thereby expanding and strengthening their unique, true beings.

**Judyth O. Weaver, Ph.D., has studied Sensory Awareness for 35 years. She offers it regularly in California, and returns frequently to continue the work in Russia, Canada, India, and Japan. Sensory Awareness is the basis of her psychotherapeutic work that she calls “Somatic Reclaiming.” She has led a month-long workshop that was based on Sensory Awareness. She is professor at the California Institute of Integral Studies, co-founder of Santa Barbara Graduate Institute and creator of its Ph.D. program in somatic psychology. Judyth presents Sensory Awareness at many conferences.**

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**SAF Newsletter**

Editing & Design: Stefan Laeng-Gilliatt
Send your comments to: St. Laeng-Gilliatt, PO Box 701, Tesuque, NM 87574; e-mail: stelaeng@att.net
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955 Vernal Ave., Mill Valley, CA 94941
www.sensoryawareness.org
Sensory Awareness Leaders Guild

The following is a list of members of the SALG who are currently offering regular classes, seasonal workshops, and private sessions in Sensory Awareness. For more information about leaders and their schedules, please contact the leaders or visit our web site: www.sensoryawareness.org

US West Coast
Norbert Boehmner
San Anselmo, CA (415) 482-7590
BerlinBayArea@aol.com

Ginger Clark
Venice, CA (310) 281-6059
gintuck@mediaone.net

Julia Estery
Santa Cruz CA (831) 454-9701
jilani@juno.com

Jill Harris
Palo Alto, CA (650) 322-4580
leeless1@aol.com

Richard Lowe
San Rafael, CA (415) 485-5457
richlowe44@aol.com

Jane Vogel Riley & Ron Riley
Rohnert Park, CA (707) 794-8496
jilani@juno.com

Charlotte Selver
Muir Beach, CA (415) 388-3219
CharlotteSelver@att.net

Connie Smith Siegel
Woodacre, CA (415) 488-4497

Judith 0. Weaver
Mill Valley, CA (415) 388-3151
www.judithweaver.com

US East Coast
Louise Boedeker
New York, NY (212) 675-5730
LouiseBoedeker@aol.com

Carol Buck
Brooklyn, NY (718) 693-7671
carolcello@aol.com

Athenasia Chronis
Cambridge, MA (617) 576-2735

Ray Fowler
Winchester, VA (540) 667-3245
rfowler@su.edu

Susan Henning & Hans Henning
Pittsboro, NC (919) 542-6060
hmshenning@intrex.net

Andrew Hudson
Washington DC (202)265-9405

Betty Keane
New York, NY (212) 397-7829

Robert Kest
Montpelier, VT (802) 229-6989

Laurie Latner
Princeton, NJ (609) 497-3232

Pat Meyer
Charlottesville, VA (434) 823-4276

Bettina Mueller
Tivoli, NY (914) 757-5436

Lilith Pincus
North Kingston, RI (401)294-4458

Mary Alice Roche
Caldwell, NJ (973) 226-2202

Sophia Rosoff
New York, NY (212) 744-6048

Penni Nickels Smith
smith445@aol.com & Robert Smith
smithlink@aol.com

Bernard Weitzman
New York, NY (212) 222-8384

Sima Weitzman
New York, NY (212) 874-1215
simasw@aol.com

Marsha Wolf & Sever Wolf
St. Cloud, FL (407) 892-5190

US Central
Natalie Ednie
Sandpoint, ID (208) 263-0714
ednie@coldreams.com

Stefan Laeng-Gilliatt
Santa Fe, NM (505) 995-9920
www.livingresponsively.com

Terry Ray
Boulder, CO (303) 444-4228
tr@nilenet.com

Marlene Zweig & Paul Zweig
Denver, CO (303) 758-3866
pahzw@mindspring.com

Canada & Mexico
Mary Connelly
Sackville, NB (506) 536-0757

Leslie French
Toronto, ON (416) 603-4044

Mercedes Lopez
Mexico, DF (52) 5-652-4682

Europe
Monika Zitta
Bregenz, Austria (43) 5574-4828

Krista Sattler
Frastanz, Austria (43) 5522-38653

SAF Publications

1) A TASTE OF SENSORY AWARENESS, By Charlotte Selver. An overview of the work, with an edited transcript of a session from the 1987 NY Open Center workshop. 38 pages.

3) SENSORY AWARENESS, THE REDISCOVERY OF EXPERIENCING, by Charles Brooks describes workshops of his wife and colleague, Charlotte Selver. 244 pages, with photos. *(currently out of print)

5) ELSA GINDLER, Vol. 1. Memorial to the originator of the work we know as Sensory Awareness. Excerpts from Gindler’s letters, an article by her, and reports from her students; including Ch. Selver. 44 pages, photos (1978). *

6) ELSA GINDLER, Vol. 2. Memories from Gindler students and an article about Heinrich Jacoby, innovative educator and colleague of Gindler. 44 pages, photos. *

8) ELFRIEDE HENGSTENBERG. This issue embraces her own studies with Gindler and Jacoby, her work with children, and biographical notes. She was closely involved with Emmi Pikler’s discoveries. 48 pages, with photos.

9) HEINRICH, JACOBY. The Work and influence of Gindler’s longtime collaborator. Summaries of his books. Interviews with his students, including his editor and colleague Sophie Ludwig. 46 pages with photos.

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